INTERNET
The Votes and Proceedings for the House of Representatives are available at

Proof and Official Hansards for the House of Representatives,
the Senate and committee hearings are available at

For searching purposes use
http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au

SITTING DAYS—2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 10, 11, 15, 16, 17, 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 21, 22, 23, 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>28, 29, 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>18, 19, 20, 21, 25, 26, 27, 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>15, 16, 17, 18, 22, 23, 24, 25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RADIO BROADCASTS
Broadcasts of proceedings of the Parliament can be heard on ABC NewsRadio in the capital cities on:

- ADELAIDE 972AM
- BRISBANE 936AM
- CANBERRA 103.9FM
- DARWIN 102.5FM
- HOBART 747AM
- MELBOURNE 1026AM
- PERTH 585AM
- SYDNEY 630AM

For information regarding frequencies in other locations please visit
http://www.abc.net.au/newsradio/listen/frequencies.htm
FORTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION—FIRST 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—Hon. Peter Neil Slipper MP
Second Deputy Speaker—Hon. Bruce Craig Scott MP

Members of the Speaker’s Panel—Ms Anna Elizabeth Burke MP; Hon. Dick Godfrey Harry Adams MP; Ms Sharon Leah Bird MP; Mrs Yvette Maree D’Ath MP; Mr Steven Georganas MP; Kirsten Fiona Livermore MP; Mr John Paul Murphy MP; Mr Peter Sid Sidebottom MP; Mr Kelvin John Thomson MP; Ms Maria Vanvakinou 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. Julia Eileen Gillard MP
Deputy Leader—Hon. Wayne Maxwell Swan MP
Chief Government Whip—Hon. Joel Andrew Fitzgibbon 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. Warren George Entsch MP
Opposition Whips—Mr Patrick Damien Secker MP and Ms Nola Bethwyn Marino MP

The Nationals
Leader—Hon. Warren Errol Truss MP
Chief Whip—Mr Mark Maclean Coulton MP
Whip—Mr Paul Christopher Neville MP

Printed by authority of the House of Representatives
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Party</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abbott, Hon. Anthony John</td>
<td>Warringah, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adams, Hon. Dick Godfrey Harry</td>
<td>Lyons, TAS</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albanese, Hon. Anthony Norman</td>
<td>Grayndler, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexander, John Gilbert</td>
<td>Bennelong, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrews, Hon. Kevin James</td>
<td>Menzies, VIC</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrews, Karen Lesley</td>
<td>McPherson, QLD</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baldwin, Hon. Robert Charles</td>
<td>Paterson, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bandt, Adam Paul</td>
<td>Melbourne, VIC</td>
<td>AG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Billson, Hon. Bruce Fredrick</td>
<td>Dunkley, VIC</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bird, Sharon Leah</td>
<td>Cunningham, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bishop, Hon. Bronwyn Kathleen</td>
<td>Mackellar, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bishop, Hon. Julie Isabel</td>
<td>Curtin, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bowen, Hon. Christopher Eyles</td>
<td>McMahon, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bradbury, Hon. David John</td>
<td>Lindsay, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Briggs, Jamie Edward</td>
<td>Mayo, SA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broadbent, Russell Evan</td>
<td>McMillan, VIC</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brodtmann, Gai Marie</td>
<td>Canberra, ACT</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buchholz, Scott Andrew</td>
<td>Wright, QLD</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burke, Anna Elizabeth</td>
<td>Chisholm, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burke, Hon. Anthony Stephen</td>
<td>Watson, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butler, Hon. Mark Christopher</td>
<td>Port Adelaide, SA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Byrne, Hon. Anthony Michael</td>
<td>Holt, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Champion, Nicholas David</td>
<td>Wakefield, SA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheeseman, Darren Leicester</td>
<td>Corangamite, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chester, Darren</td>
<td>Gippsland, VIC</td>
<td>Nats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christensen, George Robert</td>
<td>Dawson, QLD</td>
<td>Nats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ciobo, Steven Michele</td>
<td>Moncrieff, QLD</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clare, Hon. Jason Dean</td>
<td>Blaxland, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cobb, Hon. John Kenneth</td>
<td>Calare, NSW</td>
<td>Nats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collins, Hon. Julie Maree</td>
<td>Franklin, TAS</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combet, Hon. Greg Ivan, AM</td>
<td>Charlton, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coulton, Mark Maclean</td>
<td>Parkes, NSW</td>
<td>Nats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crean, Hon. Simon Findlay</td>
<td>Hotham, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crook, Anthony John</td>
<td>O’Connor, WA</td>
<td>NWA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danby, Michael David</td>
<td>Melbourne Ports, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D’Ath, Yvette Maree</td>
<td>Petrie, QLD</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dreyfus, Hon. Mark Alfred, QC</td>
<td>Isaacs, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutton, Hon. Peter Craig</td>
<td>Dickson, QLD</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elliot, Hon. Maria Justine</td>
<td>Richmond, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellis, Hon. Katherine Margaret</td>
<td>Adelaide, SA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emerson, Hon. Craig Anthony</td>
<td>Rankin, QLD</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entsch, Warren George</td>
<td>Leichhardt, QLD</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ferguson, Hon. Laurie Donald Thomas</td>
<td>Werriwa, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ferguson, Hon. Martin John, AM</td>
<td>Batman, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitzgibbon, Hon. Joel Andrew</td>
<td>Hunter, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fletcher, Paul William</td>
<td>Bradfield, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forrest, John Alexander</td>
<td>Mallee, VIC</td>
<td>Nats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frydenberg, Joshua Anthony</td>
<td>Kooyong, VIC</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Members of the House of Representatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Party</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gambaro, Hon. Teresa</td>
<td>Brisbane, QLD</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garrett, Hon. Peter Robert, AM</td>
<td>Kingsford Smith, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gash, Joanna</td>
<td>Gilmore, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georganas, Steve</td>
<td>Hindmarsh, SA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gibbons, Stephen William</td>
<td>Bendigo, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gillard, Hon. Julia Eileen</td>
<td>Lalor, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gray, Hon. Gary, AO</td>
<td>Brand, WA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grierson, Sharon Joy</td>
<td>Newcastle, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Griffin, Hon. Alan Peter</td>
<td>Bruce, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Griggs, Natasha Louise</td>
<td>Solomon, NT</td>
<td>CLP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haase, Barry Wayne</td>
<td>Durack, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hall, Jill</td>
<td>Shortland, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hartseyker, Luke</td>
<td>Cowper, NSW</td>
<td>Nats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawke, Alexander George</td>
<td>Mitchell, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hayes, Christopher Patrick</td>
<td>Fowler, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hockey, Hon. Joseph Benedict</td>
<td>North Sydney, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunt, Hon. Gregory Andrew</td>
<td>Flinders, VIC</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husic, Edham Nurreddin</td>
<td>Chifley, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irons, Stephen James</td>
<td>Swan, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenkins, Harry Alfred</td>
<td>Scullin, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jensen, Dennis Geoffrey</td>
<td>Tangney, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jones, Stephen Patrick</td>
<td>Throsby, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jones, Ewen Thomas</td>
<td>Herbert, QLD</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katter, Hon. Robert Carl</td>
<td>Kennedy, QLD</td>
<td>Ind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keenan, Michael Fayat</td>
<td>Stirling, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelly, Hon. Michael Joseph, AM</td>
<td>Eden-Monaro, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelly, Craig</td>
<td>Hughes, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King, Hon. Catherine Fiona</td>
<td>Ballarat, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laming, Andrew Charles</td>
<td>Bowman, QLD</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leigh, Andrew Keith</td>
<td>Fraser, ACT</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ley, Hon. Sussan Penelope</td>
<td>Farrer, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Livermore, Kirsten Fiona</td>
<td>Capricornia, QLD</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lyons, Geoffrey Raymond</td>
<td>Bass, TAS</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McClelland, Hon. Robert Bruce</td>
<td>Barton, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macfarlane, Hon. Ian Elgin</td>
<td>Groom, QLD</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macklin, Hon. Jennifer Louise</td>
<td>Jagajaga, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marino, Nola Bethwyn</td>
<td>Forrest, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Markus, Louise Elizabeth</td>
<td>Macquarie, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marles, Hon. Richard Donald</td>
<td>Corio, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matheson, Russell Glenn</td>
<td>Macarthur, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McCormack, Michael</td>
<td>Riverina, NSW</td>
<td>Nats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melham, Daryl</td>
<td>Banks, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mirabella, Sophie</td>
<td>Indi, VIC</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitchell, Robert George</td>
<td>McEwen, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morrison, Scott John</td>
<td>Cook, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moylan, Hon. Judith Eleanor</td>
<td>Pearce, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murphy, Hon. John Paul</td>
<td>Reid, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neumann, Shayne Kenneth</td>
<td>Blair, QLD</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neville, Paul Christopher</td>
<td>Hinkler, QLD</td>
<td>Nats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members</td>
<td>Division</td>
<td>Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oakeshott, Robert James Murray</td>
<td>Lyne, NSW</td>
<td>Ind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O’Connor, Hon. Brendan Patrick</td>
<td>Gorton, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O’Dowd, Kenneth Desmond</td>
<td>Flynn, QLD</td>
<td>Nats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O’Dwyer, Kelly Megan</td>
<td>Higgins, VIC</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O’Neill, Deborah Mary</td>
<td>Robertson, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owens, Julie Ann</td>
<td>Parramatta, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parke, Melissa</td>
<td>Fremantle, WA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perrett, Graham Douglas</td>
<td>Moreton, QLD</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plibersek, Hon. Tanya Joan</td>
<td>Sydney, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prentice, Jane</td>
<td>Ryan, QLD</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pyne, Hon. Christopher Maurice</td>
<td>Sturt, SA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramsey, Rowan Eric</td>
<td>Grey, SA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randall, Don James</td>
<td>Canning, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ripoll, Bernard Fernand</td>
<td>Oxley, QLD</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rishworth, Amanda Louise</td>
<td>Kingston, SA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robb, Hon. Andrew John, AO</td>
<td>Goldstein, VIC</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert, Stuart Rowland</td>
<td>Fadden, QLD</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rowland, Michelle</td>
<td>Greenway, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roxon, Hon. Nicola Louise</td>
<td>Gellibrand, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roy, Wyatt Beau</td>
<td>Longman, QLD</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rudd, Hon. Kevin Michael</td>
<td>Griffith, QLD</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruddock, Hon. Philip Maxwell</td>
<td>Berowra, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saffin, Janelle Anne</td>
<td>Page, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schultz, Albert John</td>
<td>Hume, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scott, Hon. Bruce Craig</td>
<td>Maranoa, QLD</td>
<td>Nats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secker, Patrick Damien</td>
<td>Barker, SA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shorten, Hon. William Richard</td>
<td>Maribyrnong, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sidbottom, Peter Sid</td>
<td>Braddon, TAS</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simpkins, Luke Xavier Linton</td>
<td>Cowan, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slipper, Hon. Peter Neil</td>
<td>Fisher, QLD</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smith, Hon. Anthony David Hawthorn</td>
<td>Casey, VIC</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smith, Hon. Stephen Francis</td>
<td>Perth, WA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smyth, Laura Mary</td>
<td>La Trobe, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snowden, Hon. Warren Edward</td>
<td>Lingiari, NT</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somlyay, Hon. Alexander Michael</td>
<td>Fairfax, QLD</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southcott, Andrew John</td>
<td>Boothby, SA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stone, Hon. Sharman Nancy</td>
<td>Murray, VIC</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swan, Hon. Wayne Maxwell</td>
<td>Lilley, QLD</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symon, Michael Stuart</td>
<td>Deakin, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tehan, Daniel Thomas</td>
<td>Wannon, VIC</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomson, Craig Robert</td>
<td>Dobell, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomson, Kelvin John</td>
<td>Wills, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truss, Hon. Warren Errol</td>
<td>Wide Bay, QLD</td>
<td>Nats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tudge, Alan Edward</td>
<td>Aston, VIC</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turnbull, Hon. Malcom Bligh</td>
<td>Wentworth, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vamvakou, Maria</td>
<td>Calwell, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Van Manen, Albertus Johannes</td>
<td>Forde, QLD</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vasta, Ross Xavier</td>
<td>Bonner, QLD</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washer, Malcom James</td>
<td>Moore, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Members of the House of Representatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Party</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wilkie, Andrew Damien</td>
<td>Denison, TAS</td>
<td>Ind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windsor, Anthony Harold Curties</td>
<td>New England, NSW</td>
<td>Ind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyatt, Kenneth George</td>
<td>Hasluck, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zappia, Tony</td>
<td>Makin, SA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PARTY ABBREVIATIONS
ALP—Australian Labor Party; LP—Liberal Party of Australia; LNP—Liberal National Party;
CLP—Country Liberal Party; Nats—The Nationals; NWA—The Nationals WA; Ind—Independent;
AG—Australian Greens

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
GILLARD MINISTRY

Prime Minister
Deputy Prime Minister, Treasurer
Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government
Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Jobs and Workplace Relations and Leader of the Government in the Senate
Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth
Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy and Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate
Minister for Foreign Affairs
Minister for Trade
Minister for Defence and Deputy Leader of the House
Minister for Immigration and Citizenship
Minister for Infrastructure and Transport and Leader of the House
Minister for Health and Ageing
Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities
Minister for Finance and Deregulation
Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research
Attorney-General and Vice President of the Executive Council
Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and Manager of Government Business in the Senate
Minister for Resources and Energy and Minister for Tourism
Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency

Hon. Julia Gillard MP
Hon. Wayne Swan MP
Hon. Simon Crean MP
Senator Hon. Chris Evans
Hon. Peter Garrett AM, MP
Senator Hon. Stephen Conroy
Hon. Kevin Rudd MP
Hon. Dr Craig Emerson MP
Hon. Stephen Smith MP
Hon. Chris Bowen MP
Hon. Anthony Albanese MP
Hon. Nicola Roxon MP
Hon. Jenny Macklin MP
Hon. Tony Burke MP
Senator Hon. Penny Wong
Senator Hon. Kim Carr
Hon. Robert McClelland MP
Senator Hon. Joe Ludwig
Hon. Martin Ferguson AM, MP
Hon. Greg Combet AM, MP

[The above ministers constitute the cabinet]
**GILLARD MINISTRY—continued**

- **Minister for the Arts**: Hon. Simon Crean MP
- **Minister for Social Inclusion**: Hon. Tanya Plibersek MP
- **Minister for Privacy and Freedom of Information**: Hon. Brendan O’Connor MP
- **Minister for Sport**: Senator Hon. Mark Arbib
- **Special Minister of State for the Public Service and Integrity**: Hon. Gary Gray AO, MP
- **Assistant Minister to the Treasurer and Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation**: Hon. Bill Shorten MP
- **Minister for Employment Participation and Childcare**: Hon. Kate Ellis MP
- **Minister for Indigenous Employment and Economic Development**: Senator Hon. Mark Arbib
- **Minister for Veterans’ Affairs and Minister for Defence Science and Personnel**: Hon. Warren Snowdon MP
- **Minister for Defence Materiel**: Hon. Jason Clare MP
- **Minister for Indigenous Health**: Hon. Warren Snowdon MP
- **Minister for Mental Health and Ageing**: Hon. Mark Butler MP
- **Minister for the Status of Women**: Hon. Kate Ellis MP
- **Minister for Social Housing and Homelessness**: Senator Hon. Mark Arbib
- **Special Minister of State**: Hon. Gary Gray AO, MP
- **Minister for Small Business**: Senator Hon. Nick Sherry
- **Minister for Home Affairs and Minister for Justice**: Hon. Brendan O’Connor MP
- **Minister for Human Services**: Hon. Tanya Plibersek MP
- **Cabinet Secretary**: Hon. Mark Dreyfus QC, MP
- **Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister**: Senator Hon. Kate Lundy
- **Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer**: Hon. David Bradbury MP
- **Parliamentary Secretary for School Education and Workplace Relations**: Senator Hon. Jacinta Collins
- **Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on Digital Productivity**: Senator Hon. Stephen Conroy
- **Parliamentary Secretary for Trade**: Hon. Justine Elliot MP
- **Parliamentary Secretary for Pacific Island Affairs**: Hon. Richard Marles MP
- **Parliamentary Secretary for Defence**: Senator Hon. David Feeney
- **Parliamentary Secretary for Immigration and Citizenship**: Senator Hon. Kate Lundy
- **Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure and Transport and Parliamentary Secretary for Health and Ageing**: Hon. Catherine King MP
- **Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Carers**: Senator Hon. Jan McLucas
- **Parliamentary Secretary for Community Services**: Hon. Julie Collins MP
- **Parliamentary Secretary for Sustainability and Urban Water**: Senator Hon. Don Farrell
- **Minister Assisting on Deregulation**: Senator Hon. Nick Sherry
- **Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**: Hon. Dr Mike Kelly AM, MP
- **Minister Assisting the Minister for Tourism**: Senator Hon. Nick Sherry
- **Parliamentary Secretary for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency**: Hon. Mark Dreyfus QC, MP
SHADOW MINISTRY

Leader of the Opposition
Deputy Leader of the Opposition and Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs and Shadow Minister for Trade
Leader of the Nationals and Shadow Minister for Infrastructure and Transport
Leader of the Opposition in the Senate and Shadow Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations
Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate and Shadow Attorney-General and Shadow Minister for the Arts
Shadow Treasurer
Shadow Minister for Education, Apprenticeships and Training and Manager of Opposition Business in the House
Shadow Minister for Indigenous Affairs and Deputy Leader of the Nationals
Shadow Minister for Regional Development, Local Government and Water and Leader of the Nationals in the Senate
Shadow Minister for Finance, Deregulation and Debt Reduction and Chairman, Coalition Policy Development Committee
Shadow Minister for Energy and Resources
Shadow Minister for Defence
Shadow Minister for Communications and Broadband
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 Productivity and Population and Shadow Minister for Immigration and Citizenship
Shadow Minister for Innovation, Industry and Science
Shadow Minister for Agriculture and Food Security
Shadow Minister for Small Business, Competition Policy and Consumer Affairs

Hon. Tony Abbott MP
Hon. Julie Bishop MP
Hon. Warren Truss MP
Senator Hon. Eric Abetz
Senator Hon. George Brandis SC
Hon. Joe Hockey MP
Hon. Christopher Pyne MP
Senator Hon. Nigel Scullion
Senator Barnaby Joyce
Hon. Andrew Robb AO, MP
Hon. Ian Macfarlane MP
Senator Hon. David Johnston
Hon. Malcolm Turnbull MP
Hon. Peter Dutton MP
Hon. Kevin Andrews MP
Hon. Greg Hunt MP
Mr Scott Morrison MP
Mrs Sophie Mirabella MP
Hon. John Cobb MP
Hon. Bruce Billson MP

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

Shadow Minister for Employment Participation
Hon. Sussan Ley MP
Shadow Minister for Justice, Customs and Border Protection
Mr Michael Keenan MP
Shadow Assistant Treasurer and Shadow Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation
Senator Mathias Cormann
Shadow Minister for Childcare and Early Childhood Learning
Hon. Sussan Ley MP
Shadow Minister for Universities and Research
Senator Hon. Brett Mason
Shadow Minister for Youth and Sport and Deputy Manager of Opposition Business in the House
Mr Luke Hartsuyker MP
Shadow Minister for Indigenous Development and Employment
Senator Marise Payne
Shadow Minister for Regional Development
Hon. Bob Baldwin MP
Shadow Special Minister of State
Hon. Bronwyn Bishop MP
Shadow Minister for COAG
Senator Marise Payne
Shadow Minister for Tourism
Hon. Bob Baldwin MP
Shadow Minister for Defence Science, Technology and Personnel
Mr Stuart Robert MP
Shadow Minister for Veterans’ Affairs
Senator Hon. Michael Ronaldson
Shadow Minister for Regional Communications
Mr Luke Hartsuyker MP
Shadow Minister for Ageing and Shadow Minister for Mental Health
Senator Concetta Fierravanti-Wells
Shadow Minister for Seniors
Hon. Bronwyn Bishop MP
Shadow Minister for Disabilities, Carers and the Voluntary Sector and Manager of Opposition Business in the Senate
Senator Mitch Fifield
Shadow Minister for Housing
Senator Marise Payne
Chairman, Scrutiny of Government Waste Committee
Mr Jamie Briggs MP
Shadow Cabinet Secretary
Hon. Philip Ruddock MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary Assisting the Leader of the Opposition
Senator Cory Bernardi
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance
Hon. Teresa Gambaro MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Roads and Regional Transport
Mr Darren Chester MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary to the Shadow Attorney-General
Senator Gary Humphries
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Tax Reform and Deputy Chairman, Coalition Policy Development Committee
Hon. Tony Smith MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Education
Senator Fiona Nash
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Northern and Remote Australia
Senator Hon. Ian Macdonald
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Local Government
Mr Don Randall MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for the Murray-Darling Basin
Senator Simon Birmingham
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Materiel
Senator Gary Humphries
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for the Defence Force and Defence Support
Senator Hon. Ian Macdonald
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Primary Healthcare
Dr Andrew Southcott MP

SHADOW MINISTRY—continued
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Health Services and Indigenous Health</td>
<td>Mr Andrew Laming MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Supporting Families</td>
<td>Senator Cory Bernardi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for the Status of Women</td>
<td>Senator Michaelia Cash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Environment</td>
<td>Senator Simon Birmingham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Citizenship and Settlement</td>
<td>Hon. Teresa Gambaro MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Immigration</td>
<td>Senator Michaelia Cash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Innovation, Industry, and Science</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Richard Colbeck</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Fisheries and Forestry</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Richard Colbeck</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Fair Competition</td>
<td>Senator Scott Ryan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CONTENTS

THURSDAY, 21 OCTOBER

Chamber
National Radioactive Waste Management Bill 2010—
    First Reading ................................................................. 1063
    Second Reading ............................................................. 1063
Veterans’ Affairs Legislation Amendment (Weekly Payments) Bill 2010—
    First Reading ................................................................. 1066
    Second Reading ............................................................. 1066
Social Security Legislation Amendment (Connecting People with Jobs) Bill 2010—
    First Reading ................................................................. 1067
    Second Reading ............................................................. 1067
Ministerial Statements—
    Afghanistan ........................................................................ 1069
Governor-General’s Speech—
    Address-in-Reply ........................................................... 1108
Constituency Statements—
    Aged Care ........................................................................... 1134
    Volunteers: Mrs Gwen Braga ................................................ 1134
    Chisholm Electorate: Mr Mark Beovich ............................... 1135
    Hinkler Electorate: Isis River Bridge .................................... 1135
    Sustainable Living ............................................................. 1136
    Banking Policy ................................................................. 1136
    Cafe Ink .............................................................................. 1136
    Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust ........................................... 1137
    Clifford Craig Medical Research Trust ............................. 1137
    Mr Fabrice Lapierre ............................................................. 1137
    Farrer Electorate: Floods ..................................................... 1138
Questions Without Notice—
    Mining .............................................................................. 1138
    Economy ........................................................................... 1139
    Government Advertising ................................................ 1140
    Interest Rates ................................................................. 1140
    Murray-Darling Basin ..................................................... 1142
    Economy ........................................................................... 1142
    Cost of Living ................................................................. 1143
    Economy ........................................................................... 1144
    Asylum Seekers ............................................................... 1145
    National Broadband Network .......................................... 1146
    Interest Rates ................................................................. 1147
    Workplace Relations ....................................................... 1148
    Lyne Electorate: Roads .................................................... 1150
    St Mary of the Cross ....................................................... 1150
    Mr Robert Rice ............................................................... 1152
    National Security ............................................................ 1152
    Home Insulation Program .............................................. 1153
    Indigenous Affairs ......................................................... 1154
Personal Explanations .......................................................... 1155
Committees—
    Selection Committee—Report No. 3 ............................... 1156
    Department of the House of Representatives .................. 1159
CONTENTS—continued

Parliamentary Service Commissioner—
  Annual Reports ...............................................................................................................1159
  Documents ......................................................................................................................1159
Committees—
  Joint Select Committee on Gambling Reform—Membership ..........................................1160
Carer Recognition Bill 2010—
  Report from Main Committee .........................................................................................1160
  Third Reading .................................................................................................................1160
Matters of Public Importance—
  Australian Industry ..........................................................................................................1160
Adjournment—
  Barker Electorate: Keith Hospital ....................................................................................1174
  St Mary of the Cross .......................................................................................................1174
  Shortland Electorate: East Lake Macquarie Respite Centre ...........................................1175
  Australian Competition and Consumer Commission ......................................................1176
  Werriwa Electorate: Community Events ........................................................................1178
  Pearce Electorate: Mount Helena Primary School ..........................................................1179
  Reid Electorate: Carers Week .........................................................................................1180
Notices .................................................................................................................................1181
Main Committee
Constituency Statements—
  McMillan Electorate: Long Jetty ....................................................................................1184
  Calwell Electorate: Fiji-Australia Day ...........................................................................1184
  Maranoa Electorate: Health Services ...........................................................................1185
  Lindsay Electorate: Anti-Poverty Week .........................................................................1186
  Hasluck Electorate: Maddington Trades College ............................................................1187
  Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation .......................................................................1188
  Cook Electorate: Sydney Airport ...................................................................................1188
  Mrs Eva Marks .................................................................................................................1189
  Farrer Electorate: Floods .................................................................................................1190
  Mr Ian Castles .................................................................................................................1191
Carer Recognition Bill 2010—
  Second Reading .............................................................................................................1192
Business ..............................................................................................................................1222
Adjournment—
  Agriculture .....................................................................................................................1222
  Forestry ..........................................................................................................................1224
  Mental Health Services ..................................................................................................1225
  Dobell Electorate: Water ...............................................................................................1226
  Higher Education ...........................................................................................................1228
  Tourism ...........................................................................................................................1229
  Holdfast Bay Bowling Club ............................................................................................1229
Thursday, 21 October 2010

The SPEAKER (Mr Harry Jenkins) took the chair at 9 am, made an acknowledgement of country and read prayers.

NATIONAL RADIOACTIVE WASTE MANAGEMENT BILL 2010

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Martin Ferguson.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON (Batman—Minister for Resources and Energy and Minister for Tourism) (9.01 am)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Introduction

The purpose of this bill is to establish a facility for managing, at a single site, radioactive waste currently stored at a host of locations across the country.

This will ensure the safe and responsible management of waste arising from medical, industrial and research uses of radioactive material in Australia.


This new legislative framework is based on volunteerism.

Under the bill, no site can be considered as a potential location for a facility without a voluntary nomination and agreement from persons with the relevant rights and interests.

A facility will be conditional on comprehensive environmental and regulatory approval processes. These will be conducted independently of the bill and ensure Australia adheres to international best practice.

Decisions to select a site for a national facility will be guided by procedural fairness.

The Administrative Decisions (Judicial Review) Act 1977 will also ensure a higher level of accountability for decisions than is currently available.

Transparency in this process is important. For this reason, a regional consultative committee must be established under the bill. The committee will raise awareness and inform local communities through each stage of the process from site selection to construction and operation of the facility.

Radioactive waste

Australia produces low level and intermediate level waste through its use of radioactive materials.

Low level waste includes lightly contaminated light laboratory waste such as paper, plastic, glassware and protective clothing, contaminated soil, smoke detectors and emergency exit signs.

Intermediate level waste arises from the production of nuclear medicines, from overseas reprocessing of spent research reactor fuel and from disused medical and industrial sources such as radiotherapy sources and soil moisture meters.

During the last 50 years, about 4,000 cubic metres of low level and short-lived intermediate level radioactive waste has accumulated in Australia.

It is currently stored at interim facilities located in suburban and regional areas across Australia, in some cases under less than ideal management arrangements.

By comparison, Britain and France annually produce around 25,000 cubic metres of low and short-lived intermediate level waste. But unlike the current situation in Australia, Britain and France dispose of such waste in purpose-built repositories.

Beneficial uses of radioactive materials

Radioactive materials have a variety of important uses in medicine, industry, agricul-
ture, environmental science, sterilisation, computers and mobile phones as well as in our homes.

The Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation (ANSTO) is a public research organisation responsible for delivering specialised advice, scientific services and products to government, industry, universities and other research organisations.

ANSTO provides around 85 per cent of the nuclear medicines to Australian hospitals that help doctors diagnose and treat a range of diseases, including cancer.

Around 500,000 patients annually benefit from radioisotopes in medical procedures such as cancer diagnosis and treatment.

Accepting these benefits means also accepting the responsibility to safely manage the resulting radioactive waste. This benefit and responsibility go hand in hand.

**Responsible management of radioactive waste**

Australia needs to comply with its international obligations under the Joint Convention on the Safety of Spent Fuel Management and on the Safety of Radioactive Waste Management.

In addition to providing proper disposal of Australia's low level and short-lived intermediate level radioactive waste, the facility will store approximately 32 cubic metres of long-lived intermediate level nuclear waste arising from reprocessing ANSTO’s spent research reactor fuel.

This material will return to Australia from France and the United Kingdom in 2015 and 2016.

We need a long-term solution to this unavoidable, but manageable, issue.

**Senate Committee Report**

The bill includes changes recommended by the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee in May 2010.

In summary, the Senate report recommended:

- The minister undertake consultations with all parties with an interest in, or who would be affected by a decision to select the Muckaty Station site as the location for a facility;
- The bill be amended to make the establishment of a regional consultative committee mandatory, immediately following the selection of a site for a facility;
- The bill be amended to require the minister to respond in writing to comments received in accordance with procedural fairness requirements;
- The explanatory memorandum be amended to include a detailed rationale for the minister’s absolute discretion in relation to decision making under the bill;
- The bill be amended to include an objects clause; and
- Subject to consideration of the preceding recommendations, the Senate pass the bill.

The bill and explanatory memorandum have been amended to incorporate all of these recommendations, other than recommendation 3.

Given the possibility of a large number of submissions being received at various decision-making points, the intent of recommendation 3 will be met by posting, online, detailed reasons for key decisions as they are made, in line with requirements of the Administrative Decisions (Judicial Review) Act 1977.
National Radioactive Waste Management Bill 2010

Schedule 1


The repeal of the current act meets a 2007 ALP platform commitment.

Key decisions under the current act are not susceptible to review under the Administrative Decisions (Judicial Review) Act 1977.

Decisions under this bill will be reviewable.

Schedule 2

In 2007, the Lauder branch of the Ngapa clan volunteered a site on Muckaty Station as a potential location for a facility.

This community has a right to be heard and for their nomination to be considered under the bill.

This government will honour those commitments.

Accordingly, schedule 2 contains a saving provision to ensure that the nomination can continue to be considered as a potential site for a facility.

Procedural fairness requirements will apply if this site is selected under the bill.

Part 2—Nomination of sites

The current act allows a facility to be established only in the Northern Territory.

The bill will allow the minister to make a declaration allowing people to make voluntary, nation-wide nominations.

In deciding whether to make a declaration, the minister must first consider whether a facility can be constructed and operated on Aboriginal land that has been nominated by a land council in the Northern Territory.

Importantly, procedural fairness requirements will apply to any decision to approve any site and to open the nation-wide volunteer site nomination process.

In accordance with the 2007 Australian Labor Party platform, three sites on defence land in the Northern Territory identified by the former government have been removed from further consideration as potential sites.

A facility cannot be forced on a community.

Part 3—Selecting the site for a facility

A decision to select a site should not be taken lightly.

Comprehensive evaluations are necessary to verify whether a site is suitable.

Flora and fauna samples need to be collected, geological and hydrological conditions must be evaluated and heritage investigations must take place.

These activities have a minor impact on land but could lead to significant delays if they are not undertaken.

Part 3 of the bill authorises these activities for the purpose of selecting a site.

Certain state, territory and Commonwealth laws which attempt to regulate, hinder or prevent these activities, will have no affect.

A declaration selecting the site will not guarantee the final location of the facility.

This will be determined by separate environmental and regulatory approvals.

Part 4—Acquisition or extinguishment of rights and interests

Part 4 of the bill allows the minister to select a site and to identify land required for an access road to the site.
Procedural fairness requirements will apply to these decisions.

Part 4 of the bill authorises the acquisition or extinguishment of rights and interests in relation to the selected site and land required for an access road.

The minister must also establish a regional consultative committee once a site has been selected.

The government is committed to ensuring community input and an open dialogue with regional interests on this important project.

**Part 5—Conducting activities in relation to selected site**

Part 5 of the bill authorises certain persons to conduct activities on the selected site for the purposes of constructing a facility.

Australian government facilities are regulated through the Commonwealth.

In conducting these activities the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999, the Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Act 1998 and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation (Safeguards) Act 1987 must be complied with in order to construct and operate a national radioactive waste management facility.

State and territory laws will not apply to the extent that these laws may regulate, hinder or prevent certain activities from taking place.

One effect of permitting state and territory laws to apply would be to permit legislation that has been enacted by most states and the Northern Territory and prohibits siting a facility and transporting waste.

**Part 6—Granting of rights and interests in land to original owners**

Part 6 of the bill preserves rules in the current act allowing the minister to grant certain acquired rights and interests back to the original owners.

This refers to land that was nominated by a land council, before the opening of the national volunteer site nomination process.

**Part 7—Miscellaneous**

Part 7 provides that affected parties must be compensated on just terms, where land is acquired for a facility.

Full details of the measures in the bill are contained in the explanatory memorandum that has been circulated to honourable members.

I commend the bill to the House.

Debate (on motion by Mr Chester) adjourned.

**VETERANS’ AFFAIRS LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (WEEKLY PAYMENTS) BILL 2010**

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Snowdon.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr SNOWDON (Lingiari—Minister for Veterans’ Affairs, Minister for Defence Science and Personnel and Minister for Indigenous Health) (9.15 am)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I am pleased to present legislation that will implement an important element of the Government’s strategy to address homelessness. The Veterans’ Affairs Legislation Amendment (Weekly Payments) Bill 2010 will implement, in the repatriation system, a key reform of the white paper *The Road Home: a national approach to reducing homelessness*.

As part of the government’s initiative, the Department of Veterans’ Affairs will introduce an option of weekly payments to those who are homeless or at risk. Weekly payments for Centrelink clients became available in April this year and this bill will enable weekly payments to also be made avail-
able to those Veterans’ Affairs clients who will benefit from a shorter payment interval and who want to receive their payments on a weekly basis. Existing legislation requires pensions to be paid fortnightly in arrears. Amendments in this bill will allow for weekly payments in a move that is more responsive and personalised to the needs of the most vulnerable.

While this change does not affect the total amount of pension a person can receive, a weekly payment regime will be one element of assistance to those more vulnerable clients to help them better manage their money and will provide an opportunity to stabilise and improve their circumstances. This is another change that is a clear demonstration of the government's leadership and commitment to review, update and improve support that is provided to those who serve, or have served, in the defence of our nation.

Debate (on motion by Mr Chester) adjourned.

SOCIAL SECURITY LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (CONNECTING PEOPLE WITH JOBS) BILL 2010

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Ms Kate Ellis.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Ms KATE ELLIS (Adelaide—Minister for Employment Participation and Childcare and Minister for the Status of Women) (9.17 am)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Social Security Legislation Amendment (Connecting People with Jobs) Bill 2010 that I now introduce will honour the government’s election commitment ‘Connecting People with Jobs’ to provide 2,000 places for long-term unemployed job seekers living in areas with high unemployment rates to be assisted to relocate and take up a full-time job.

We understand the dignity and purpose that comes with employment. The Prime Minister has outlined her own deeply held view that we must end the corrosive impact and the aimlessness of unnecessarily prolonged welfare and bring more Australians into mainstream economic and social life.

That is why this government has done everything within its power to tackle unemployment during our time in office and through difficult worldwide economic circumstances. We took quick and decisive action when the global financial crisis hit. While 16 million jobs have been lost in other advanced economies, Australia has created more than 300,000 jobs since the global financial crisis began almost two years ago.

We have strengthened Australia’s employment services, with the creation of Jobs Services Australia and Disability Employment Services, in order to provide unemployed Australians with the opportunity to train and the opportunity to work.

The results of these actions can be seen in the fact that unemployment in Australia is 5.1 per cent, almost half that of the United States.

Since Jobs Services Australia has been operating, I am proud that more than 400,000 Australians have been placed into jobs. Of these, 33 per cent were jobs for the most disadvantaged job seekers.

We have also uncapped employment services for the first time for people with disability. But of course we remain active and vigilant.

Whilst the national unemployment rate currently sits at 5.1 per cent, down from 5.7 per cent a year ago, the truth is that the employment situation across Australia varies greatly.
In this modern age, there is a need for greater labour mobility, and relocating parts of the workforce to meet employers’ demand is an effective method of achieving this. The Connecting People with Jobs trial will enhance the flexibility of the labour market by encouraging additional relocation activity, and helping to better match labour supply with demand.

The funds for relocation will provide job seekers with assistance for things such as:

- airfares,
- removalists,
- temporary accommodation and
- post-placement support and mentoring.

This trial will get people off income support and into sustainable jobs.

This relocation assistance trial will help connect job seekers with jobs in other parts of Australia. Job seekers who relocate to take up an ongoing full-time position or apprenticeship will be reimbursed up to $9,000 for relocation expenses.

The trial is targeted at the long-term unemployed—those who have been out of work for 12 months or more. Job seekers will be eligible for reimbursement of up to $3,000 for relocating to a metropolitan area, or $6,000 for a regional area. They will be eligible for an additional $3,000 if they are relocating with dependent children.

Relocation often has high costs, especially when it involves moving interstate or even across the country. These job seekers have sought employment in their current location for at least 12 months, but they may lack the resources to move to broaden their employment options. That is why in August the Prime Minister announced the relocation trial as part of ‘Modernising of Australia’s Welfare System’, helping the long-term unemployed overcome costs to take up meaningful work in a new location.

As part of Labor’s election commitment, employers will also be eligible for a wage subsidy of $2,500 to create an incentive to employ these job seekers. This is in recognition of the additional support and assistance that individuals will need in the early stages of their employment in a new location.

**Job seeker compliance**

While we will encourage the long-term unemployed to relocate for work, this bill will also create an incentive for individuals to stay in their new location, and keep them in sustainable employment. Where job seekers have received additional support through the Connecting People with Jobs trial, this bill will extend the non-payment period penalty that may apply for leaving a job.

This bill, the Social Security Amendment (Connecting People with Jobs) Bill 2010, amends the Social Security (Administration) Act 1999 to extend to 12 weeks the period of non-payment of income support should a relocating job seeker voluntarily leave their job within the first six months.

Should a job seeker leave a job due to misconduct, they will also be subject to this compliance measure.

Previously a job seeker was subject to an eight week non-payment period. Under this measure, where supported by the Connecting People with Jobs trial, they may be subject to a 12 week non-payment period.

While job seeker compliance is important, Centrelink will also have the discretion to reduce or not impose this 12 week unemployment non-payment period on a case by case basis, such as when it would place a vulnerable job seeker in great financial hardship.

**Conclusion**

We know long-term unemployed people are particularly vulnerable in the current economic environment.
We know there are businesses and industries out there experiencing labour shortages in parts of the country.

We know some of our long-term unemployed live in areas with very limited job prospects.

This legislation will assist the long-term unemployed find sustainable work.

It will provide employers with the workers they need to grow their businesses.

I commend the bill to the House.

Debate (on motion by Mr Chester) adjourned.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Afghanistan

Debate resumed from 20 October, on motion by Mr Stephen Smith:

That the House take note of the document.

Mr Rudd (Griffith—Minister for Foreign Affairs) (9.24 am)—Last Friday I met with 15 foreign ministers from around the world to discuss and to make decisions on our future support for Pakistan. A few days later special envoys from around the world, including Australia, gathered in Rome to deliberate on future policy towards both Afghanistan and Pakistan. From these and other nations, we now have a combined coalition force in the field of some 120,000 troops from 47 nations—some 80,000 Americans; nearly 10,000 Brits; 4,500 from Germany; 4,000 from France; 3,500 from Italy; 2,500 from both Canada and Poland, and 1,500 or more from Turkey, Spain and Australia. Of these troops from these nations, more than 2,000 now lie dead—21 of them Australians. Many more brave Afghan soldiers and police have also died serving alongside their coalition allies.

I say this at the outset because the debate we are having today in this parliament is a debate being held in democracies around the world asking: why are our troops, police and civilians in Afghanistan? Is the current international strategy on Afghanistan effective? Are our national contributions to that strategy capable of measurable success? It is right that democracies have this debate but my starting point is that, in doing so, we are by no means alone for we are all in this together. How we resolve this debate in Australia affects other contributing nations, many of whom are watching our deliberations very closely. Already in the course of the debate this week, a number of questions have been raised by members about our effort in Afghanistan and the rationale for it. I intend to work to provide candid and measured comments in response to those questions.

After nine years into this hard war, and six years of continuous Australian military engagement, what is our national mission in Afghanistan today? Put simply, it is to help protect innocent people, including innocent Australians, from being murdered by terrorists. Put simply, it is to support our friends and our allies in achieving that mission. Put simply, it is to work with them to defend, maintain and strengthen an international order that does not tolerate terrorism. All other purposes associated with our mission in Afghanistan—including, for example, helping the Afghan people to develop a viable Afghan state—flow from these three primary purposes. These primary purposes are also alive in the international legal instruments which underpin our presence there. Following terrorist attacks in Washington and New York on September 11, UN Security Council resolution 1386 of December 2001 authorises the establishment of an international security force in Afghanistan. In the Australian parliament a unanimous resolution of this House formally invoked articles IV and V of the ANZUS Treaty and the commitment of Australian forces in support of United
States-led action against those responsible for those terrorist attacks.

Australia’s actions in Afghanistan since then have been anchored in these two resolutions, bringing together the full moral legitimacy of the UN system with the enduring commitment Australia has under the US alliance. Some have argued that there has been mission creep in Afghanistan since those earliest days or at least that the mission has become confused in relation to its original purpose. If that were so, then it is difficult to explain why such a fractious international community would have so consistently renewed the mandate for our continued military operations in Afghanistan. At a more practical rather than legal level, others have argued that with the defeat of the Taliban regime in Kabul in early 2002, and subsequently in major centres in the south and in the west, the mission was then complete. Again, we would disagree because the Taliban insurgency, while repressed for a period, returned with a vengeance following the flawed decision of 2003-04 to provide an insufficient troop presence in Afghanistan while the United States, United Kingdom and Australia undertook the invasion of Iraq. In other words, a violent Taliban insurgency rebounded, the same Taliban that had given succour and support to the terrorists who had launched their murderous attacks on innocent civilians in 2001.

A further argument which is now advanced by some is that our continued and collective military presence in Afghanistan is in fact inciting the insurgency rather than effectively combating it. But this argument fails to deal with the counterfactual—that if coalition military operations in Afghanistan were now to cease the Afghan government’s authority and reach would be undermined. Were that to occur, the ability of a successful Taliban insurgency to again offer support for global terrorist organisations would increase. The costs to the Afghan people themselves, who have already endured 30 years of conflict, would also be great.

Still another argument is that all that has been achieved is a bubbling out of al-Qaeda and related terrorist organisations to new operational bases in other countries. But, once again, that argument does not deal with the counterfactual of what would happen in the event of a premature international departure. It would most likely precipitate the erosion of the Afghan government’s authority and reach and once again add Afghanistan to the list of states around the world where terrorist organisations have a high level of freedom of operation.

There is, however, a more important point to make about the argument and its assumption that no effort is being made by allied governments to monitor, contain and, wherever possible, interdict terrorist operations in other centres around the world. The truth is that massive intelligence and security assets are being invested on a daily basis in multiple centres around the world—across the Horn of Africa, the wider Middle East, South and South-East Asia, as well as within the domestic populations of target countries, including Australia.

This in turn leads to a further question raised in this debate which put simply is as follows: is the world a safer or more dangerous place from terrorist threat than was the case nine years ago? Again, it is important to engage in an analysis of the counterfactual. Had we not toppled the Taliban regime and had we failed to then prevent it from returning to power, what would have then occurred across the border as terrorists sought to perpetuate and perpetrate more 9-11s, more Madrid and London train bombings and more Bali bombings? The truth is that our continued operations in Afghanistan against the Taliban to deny the return of al-Qaeda
and its allies to Afghanistan, combined with coordinated counterterrorism operations around the world, have helped in preventing a repetition of a series of large-scale September 11 type attacks. Of course there have been many near misses—in fact, many more than the general public is ever likely to know about. The problem is that the success of an effective counterterrorism strategy is much harder to recognise than its failure.

In summary, we argue that the counterterrorism argument underpinning the continuing mission in Afghanistan remains valid. Afghanistan does not represent the totality of the international coalition’s global counterterrorism strategy. It does however represent an important part. If Afghanistan were to fall, the global counterterrorism challenge would be rendered much more difficult than is currently the case.

A further reason for our continued military engagement in Afghanistan is our alliance with the United States. Some have argued that this represents an invalid basis for our engagement. The government disagree. The government have never regarded the alliance as a blank cheque in our dealings with the US. That is why when in opposition we opposed the Iraq war and committed to the withdrawal of combat forces were we to succeed in being elected to office. And that is precisely what we did. The government’s policy towards Afghanistan was different for two reasons. Firstly, the UN Security Council authorised the creation of an international security force, which it did not do in the case of Iraq. Secondly, the ANZUS alliance was formally invoked in the case of Afghanistan, which was not the case in Iraq.

These arguments aside, however, the government has stated in both the 2009 defence white paper and the government’s National Security Statement to the Australian parliament that the US alliance is fundamental to Australia’s overall national security. The dense fabric of defence, diplomatic and intelligence cooperation which occurs within the framework of the alliance is of great strategic importance to Australia. It cannot be replicated elsewhere. Therefore, the government do not apologise for a single moment for invoking the alliance as a relevant consideration in our continued engagement in Afghanistan.

Further, Australia has broader international obligations to support an international order which confronts terrorism head-on rather than ignoring it. As noted above, UNSC resolution 1386 authorises ISAF’s mission under chapter VII of the charter—the chapter which governs the use of force in defence of international peace and security. In fact, article 2 of resolution 1386 actually calls upon member states to ‘contribute personnel, equipment and other resources to the International Security Assistance Force’ as well as explicitly authorising member states to take ‘all necessary measures’ to fulfil its mandate. Once again it should be noted that this resolution has been renewed on 10 occasions since then. The point here is that, if we are serious about our obligations to maintain a stable international political order, it follows that responsible states are in fact obliged to act under the UN charter rather than this simply being a matter of discretionary choice.

It is for this reason that 47 states are now members of ISAF, including 19 non-NATO members. It is also the reason why more than 70 countries and international organisations attended the London conference on Afghanistan in January this year and around 70 attended the Kabul conference in July, including Islamic countries such as Egypt, Pakistan, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates as well as the Organisation of the Islamic Conference. In short, we are not in this alone. We are part of a collective in-
ternational effort aimed at defending an at times fragile international order. Of course it is a matter for each state to determine what resources they dedicate to the collective security task assigned to the international community by the council. Some are doing much more than others, just as others have varied their commitments over time. But the core principle at stake is one of defending an international system based on collective security, the same system which, for example, provides the international legal authority for the outlawing of terrorist organisations worldwide and the authorisation of national actions against such organisations. As a middle power which has long exercised global responsibilities it is appropriate that Australia also play its part rather than freeloading on the international system. Freeloading is not in our nature.

The next question to consider is a practical one, namely, the content of the current international strategy in Afghanistan and Australia’s role within that strategy. There are four key elements to the current international strategy in Afghanistan: first, counter-insurgency operations to degrade the capability and will of insurgents; second, a transition to the Afghan government taking lead responsibility for its own security; third, negotiation and, where possible, reconciliation with insurgents within the country to bring about not just a military solution for the country’s future but, more importantly, a political settlement as well; fourth, effective engagement with Pakistan in order to give genuine effect to the political and military goals outlined above.

As noted by the Prime Minister on Tuesday, transition is core to the coalition’s strategy both nationally and in Oruzgan province. This entails training the Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Police to, in time, take on lead responsibility for the maintenance of national and local security. It also requires assistance to the Afghan government to enable it to deliver basic health, education and infrastructure for the benefit of ordinary Afghans and, as a consequence, to foster support for the Afghan government. A number of contributors to the debate have argued that, whatever is done to enhance the capacity of the Afghan government, its weaknesses are such that it cannot deliver real benefits. They argued that the Afghan government is so flawed on a number of fronts, from corruption through to the treatment of women, that it is no longer a government worthy of international support. Certainly, the government of Afghanistan has a number of failings and, in the course of this parliamentary debate, some have raised examples. Nonetheless, it is important, once again, to apply the counterfactual test: were the withdrawal of international support to result in the loss of authority of the Afghan government, a return to anything approaching the previous Taliban regime from the perspective of the Afghan people would be infinitely worse against practically all measures, compared with the imperfect situation they now confront. Australia, nonetheless, remains committed to supporting the continued reform of the Afghan government and political system through our aid program.

Negotiation and reconciliation represent another arm to the international strategy in Afghanistan. Australia recognises that reconciliation and reintegration are a matter for the Afghan people, who must be led and owned by the Afghan government, and need to be consistent with conditions set by the Afghan government. It will be critical to ensure that these undertakings are met and observed in practice. Negotiation and reconciliation are complex processes that can only succeed if the necessary military and political environment is in place. In practice, that means applying military force against the Taliban leadership as part of a hard-headed strategy
which reinforces political negotiation and reconciliation processes, with clear military resolve—in other words, to talk from a position of strength rather than weakness.

The international community, including Afghanistan’s neighbours, has a role in supporting such efforts. There have been some preliminary signs that some senior Taliban leaders are perhaps considering taking the path towards negotiation. President Karzai said earlier this month that the Afghan government had been holding unofficial talks with the Taliban for some time. In recent days General Petraeus has confirmed that the US and NATO have facilitated some contact between the two. This is encouraging, but we must recognise that the negotiation and reconciliation process is likely to be long, complex and inevitably the subject of setbacks.

A further arm of the international strategy on Afghanistan concerns Pakistan. The truth is that Pakistan has a highly permeable border with Afghanistan. This has meant that hostile Taliban forces have been able to move freely between Pakistan and Afghanistan to conduct attacks against ISAF, Afghan and Pakistan forces. The government of Pakistan has cooperated with ISAF to take action against elements of both the Taliban in Pakistan and al-Qaeda. However, there is still much scope for Pakistan to do more, particularly against the Afghanistan Taliban and al-Qaeda. Closer cooperation between ISAF and Pakistan is essential if this vital element of the international strategy is to succeed.

Both the Prime Minister and the Minister for Defence have outlined in their statements to the parliament that Australia is deploying a coherent strategy in Afghanistan in concert with the international strategy outlined above. I do not propose to repeat the detailed contents of our own strategy here. Our special forces are applying pressure to Taliban insurgents with telling effect. Our military and police training programs in Oruzgan are substantial. A development assistance engagement of some $120 million, through AusAID, is making a measurable difference on the ground. Our diplomatic engagement in Kabul, where we seek to inject an Australian view in the central deliberations of both ISAF and the Afghan government through our highly capable ambassador, Paul Foley, and his team of diplomats and aid officials is, again, having an effect. Australia is well served by these first-class officers. For those who have argued in this debate that our military forces be withdrawn now and that, instead, our development assistance program be enhanced, it should also be borne in mind that all our aid workers require significant force protection—currently provided by the ADF and our US allies—in order to do their job.

We have committed $25 million to the Afghan government’s nationwide peace and reintegration program that focuses on creating the conditions among communities for the reintegration of insurgents who are willing to lay down their arms and return to their communities. As for Pakistan, Australia is a founding member of Friends of Democratic Pakistan. We run a significant development assistance program. We are also the second largest trainer abroad of Pakistan military officers, including in counterinsurgency techniques. Taken together, the government believes this is a credible, integrated political, military, economic and diplomatic strategy for Australia which reinforces the overall ISAF effort. Of course, any such strategy and the financial resources committed to it must be the subject of continuing review, as will occur at an international level at the upcoming Lisbon summit.

My contribution to this debate has not sought to replicate those of either the Prime Minister or the defence minister. Instead, it
seeks to complement those statements, particularly in relation to the international dimensions of the Afghan conflict. It also seeks to add to the debate by responding to various concerns raised by others in the debate and in a manner which seeks to be constructive. The Australian government is fully seized of the difficulty of our mission in Afghanistan. This is a hard war, not an easy one—a fact underlined by those who have lost their lives in their country’s service, those who have been wounded and those whose families have suffered terribly as a consequence. More casualties will occur, including the real possibility of civilian casualties. Our responsibility as a government is to maintain bipartisan support for our troops in the field and to maximise the wider support of the Australian international community. Once again, this will not be easy but our mission is clear, as is our strategy, and the resources we have committed to it are significant. At a personal level, I am also very mindful of General Cantwell’s recent remarks that now is not the time to lose faith. For the reasons I have outlined in this statement to the parliament today I agree with General Cantwell: Australia will stay the course in Afghanistan.

Ms JULIE BISHOP (Curtin) (9.44 am)—At 8.46 am on 11 September 2001, an aeroplane crashed into the World Trade Centre in New York. At 9.03 am a second aeroplane exploded on impact at the same site. The history books will show that it was these shocking terrorist events that resulted in the first major conflict of the 21st century. Even before coalition forces entered Afghanistan on 7 October 2001, some 2,977 innocent civilians, including 11 Australians, had been killed in New York and Washington. Afghanistan was the crucible of the terrorists who plotted and launched this unprovoked attack that, in the minds of many, rivalled the day of infamy when Japan attacked the American base at Pearl Harbor, thus bringing the United States, with a terrible retribution, into the Second World War.

The Taliban government of Afghanistan, led by Mullah Omar, not only protected but encouraged the perpetrators of this strike, Osama bin Laden’s al-Qaeda network, in their evil purposes. After the Taliban’s refusal to hand over the criminals, coalition forces commenced a campaign, initially to depose the Taliban regime and to destroy the al-Qaeda network. The operations of the International Security Assistance Force, ISAF, were carried out under the aegis of United Nations Security Council resolution 1386 of 2001. The Taliban regime was effectively overthrown by 13 November 2001 when Kabul was taken after just six short weeks of war. However, as we all know—and this is the reason for holding this opportune debate in the nation’s parliament—the struggle against terrorism in Afghanistan did not end at that time. It has been a too-long, grinding war of attrition against an insurgency that is tenacious in its staying power.

In historic terms Afghanistan has been called the ‘graveyard of empires’ due in large part to the fierce resistance of the population to the presence of various international forces over the centuries. There are many examples where the forces within Afghanistan have refused to be subdued by the world’s great powers. Famously, in the 19th century there were the Anglo-Afghan wars and the terrible story of more than 16,000 British soldiers and civilians killed while trying to flee Kabul. More recently, in the 1980s, there was the withdrawal of Soviet troops after years of guerrilla warfare. Therein lie the lessons for the current NATO-led mission in Afghanistan. It is very difficult to achieve a decisive military victory against a determined insurgent force that is able to find safe haven amongst the civilian popula-
tion by hiding in the rugged terrain and in the neighbouring country.

The ongoing development of Afghanistan was set back decades after the devastation that occurred during the Soviet occupation. National development was set back even further under the brutal medieval rule of the Taliban. In addition, the Taliban had imposed a particularly harsh interpretation of sharia law in Afghanistan that took away the rights of women particularly and which brutally suppressed the rights of the native Afghan population.

Afghanistan has a long way to go in terms of meeting the challenges and being a robust, peaceful, independent nation. While the Afghan government of President Hamid Karzai nominally holds jurisdiction over major cities like Kabul and Kandahar, its remit over much of the countryside is often tenuous. The Karzai government’s moral authority is also weakened by persistent allegations of corruption and maladministration that never seem to go away. The credibility of the national elections in Afghanistan has been undermined by widespread claims of fraud. While this is a cause for deep concern, the allegations of corruption pale in comparison to the situation when the Taliban ruled Afghanistan.

Australia was a key participant in the coalition of the willing that began this mission all those years ago. Initially, our commitment included Army special forces and elements of the RAAF. This initial deployment was principally active from 2001 until the end of 2002. Between 2002 and 2005 Australia’s involvement in the conflict was significantly downgraded before ramping up with the redeployment of special forces in the second half of 2005. In 2006 a reconstruction task force was deployed in the Oruzgan province with protection provided by elements from the Royal Australian Regiment and the Cavalry Regiment, based outside Tarin Kowt.

Over the course of the war some hundreds of Australian troops have been rotated through the theatre of operations. Twenty-one brave Australians have lost their lives in the service of their country and another 152 have been wounded. As a nation our hearts go out to the families and friends of these heroes, who have so honoured Australia with their sacrifice. The human element to this conflict is heartbreaking. The Special Air Service Regiment at Campbell Barracks is based in my electorate in Perth’s western suburbs. Every time I hear the news that a soldier has been killed or wounded in Afghanistan, I think of the men I have met at the barracks, the wives and partners with whom I have shared morning teas, their children at the local Swanbourne Primary School, and fear that one of those men, one of those families, will be receiving that devastating news.

We cannot debate the military participation in Afghanistan without making some reference to the other principal conflict of the early 21st century, namely, the war in Iraq. For base political purposes, the Labor Party has made a distinction arguing that in some way the Iraq war was a bad war while the Afghan war is a good war. The coalition has never made that distinction. There has been a fight against extremism and the two wars have been two battle fronts in what is a long and protracted conflict.

The fight has also encroached into Pakistan. Extremist forces coming from Pakistan, and foreign fighters, are taking part in cross-border attacks. The Taliban has previously attacked Pakistan’s military headquarters. In recent weeks, militants in north-west Pakistan have reportedly attacked and destroyed fuel tankers attempting to deliver fuel to the NATO forces in Afghanistan. The efforts of
the Pakistan government to repress extremists within its borders would not be assisted by any lessening of the international commitment to neighbouring Afghanistan. It is unthinkable for the Taliban to gain control of Pakistan, a nation with a significant arsenal of nuclear weapons. However, the increased efforts of ISAF, in particular through the Obama administration’s surge and the additional troop deployment from the United States as a result of the Afghanistan-Pakistan strategic review, should provide the necessary leadership and resources to implement and improve military strategy and the nation-building campaign.

Like the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, I have also visited our troops on the ground. I undertook a visit last year with the member for Wentworth and Senator David Johnston. I was impressed by the strides made by our troops in their tasks of training the Afghan army and I was privileged to meet the men and women bravely serving on a foreign field, just like their military predecessors over the decades.

ISAF has been focused on providing stability and security to a nation shattered by decades of conflict. The task of reconstruction remains daunting. While there have been great gains, much remains to be done. There is the task of building the capacity of the local Afghan people to provide for their own security through armed forces and police. The Afghan government is also being supported to build the institutions to enable the nation to achieve long-term stability.

I pay tribute to the work of Australia’s troops and civilians working in a dangerous environment in support of the Afghan people. However, despite their efforts, the security situation remains fragile. Against this background it is worth noting that President Karzai announced recently that he has established a council to support peace and reconciliation talks with militants. President Karzai has said that the National Council for Peace, Reconciliation and Reintegration will consist of government officials and tribal elders. He has called for an end to violence, with militants rejoining mainstream society. Importantly, President Karzai urged the Taliban leadership to drop the condition that NATO forces leave the country before entering peace talks. He reminded the Taliban that international forces were in Afghanistan to ensure that extremists do not regain control of the country and that the international forces will remain until that objective can be met.

It is vital that the Australian government not set artificial time lines for the withdrawal of troops. The Taliban would use any such time line, regardless of how far into the future, to promote its cause among the Afghan people. Putting an end date on withdrawal would greatly encourage the Taliban. Debate about artificial time lines for withdrawal is also damaging to the efforts of our people in Afghanistan because the local people remain sceptical that the international forces will remain in the country for the long term. After all, they have seen others come and go over the years.

Local people are naturally very concerned about their future security after the international forces withdraw. The Taliban uses that prospect as a weapon to convince local communities to remain on their side. One of the keys to the decline in violence in Iraq was the successful promotion of awakening councils, which involved the local population no longer harbouring insurgents and forming armed groups to battle militants in their midst. The challenge in Afghanistan is, if anything, greater than in Iraq because of the drastically lower standards of literacy and education. Afghanistan lacks many of
the institutions necessary for the functioning of a civilian government.

The key to success in Afghanistan is, to use the familiar phrase, to win the hearts and minds of the people. Part of this is to convince the Taliban that the international forces remain committed to the original task. It also involves winning the trust of the broader Afghan community that the international forces will not abandon them to the extremists, al-Qaeda or related Jihadist groups. It involves building the trust of the people that corruption within the Afghan government can be reduced or, hopefully, eliminated. The Afghan people also need reassurance that other nations will not desert them after they take control of their own security needs. The Afghan people must be confident that they will be supported in coming decades as they slowly rebuild their shattered nation.

The primary goal of ISAF is to enable Afghanistan to stand as an independent nation responsible for its own affairs and with the capacity to provide a secure and peaceful environment for its citizens. The Afghans are like people all over the world in that the vast majority want to live in peace and to have the opportunity to build a better life for themselves and their families. A necessary element of establishing Afghanistan as a state capable of defending its people and its institutions and policing its territory is to build an effective national security force. Much of the international effort and the effort of the Australian troops has been aimed at training the Afghan army and police.

Ensuring that the Afghan people succeed not only politically but also economically will assist in the battle against extremism. Australia’s Mentoring and Reconstruction Task Force is supporting local communities with infrastructure projects, particularly in security, health, education and other essential services. I recall visiting the trade training centre that the Australian troops have provided for local people, encouraging young men of fighting age—and that can mean age 10 or 11 and above—to work at the trade training centre to gain skills that will enable them to help rebuild Afghanistan.

The Afghan government has had some success in its efforts to strengthen its security forces, and it has implemented programs in health and agricultural development. However, the Taliban is well aware that its chances of success are greatly improved if the Afghan government is weak. The aim of our commitment in Afghanistan must be to defeat the Taliban and to stabilise the country to prevent it from becoming a terrorist haven again. However, the military objectives must be supported by civil objectives in strengthening the legitimacy of the Afghan government through progress on the security, political, governance and economic fronts so that the country can stand on its own.

When the 1,900 Dutch troops in Oruzgan province pulled out during the year, the coalition said that we were prepared to consider doing more if the nation’s military advisers thought there was a strategic sense and it was compatible with our other military commitments. Based on the reports that the coalition has received, there is concern amongst our troops in the field about resourcing issues, and it would appear that our resources are indeed stretched. The Prime Minister has already conceded in public statements that there may be a case for increased helicopter support, and we await the outcome of the government’s deliberations in that regard.

Let me conclude by reconfirming that the coalition supports a successful conclusion to our operations in Afghanistan. There is no concrete time limit on that task. The Obama administration has not declared, although some have verbaled it, that United States troops will withdraw from mid-2011. That
timetable is simply a notification that the United States aims to begin handing over security responsibility to the Afghan Army from July 2011. This will begin to allow for future troop withdrawals. However, it will be protracted. Indeed, our own commitment to training the Afghan Army's 4th Brigade has been placed in a two- to four-year time frame by the government. The coalition stands behind this time frame as practical and reasonable. The sacrifice of our brave troops demands that. The memory of more than 100 Australians who have been killed by terrorists in recent years also demands that. There should be no precipitate withdrawal from Afghanistan. To do so would be a grave strategic and tactical error, as the history books would surely record when this chapter is closed.

Mr McCLELLAND (Barton—Attorney-General) (10.01 am)—I commend both speakers this morning on their contribution to this debate on the motion to take note of the Prime Minister's statement about Australia's commitment to Afghanistan. I also thank the Prime Minister for this important opportunity to debate the war in Afghanistan. This debate provides an important opportunity to spell out the key national interests for Australia at stake in this conflict. There can be no greater decision for any government than to put Australian men and women in harm's way by committing them to an armed conflict. Any decision to ask our forces and other Australian personnel to risk their lives must always be an option of last resort taken only when all of the other alternatives have been exhausted. But there are times when our national security and our national interests demand such difficult decisions, and we face such a situation in Afghanistan today. Put simply, Australia has a key interest in preventing Afghanistan from re-emerging as a safe haven and a base for global terror groups.

This link between Afghanistan and the threat of terrorism to Australia is neither hypothetical nor imagined; it is real and it continues today. Since 2001, as we have heard in previous speeches, more than 100 Australians have been killed in terrorist attacks overseas, and, of course, countless other innocent civilians around the world have also been killed. Many of these attacks can be linked to Afghanistan and the safe haven it provided before the fall of the Taliban. In some cases, those who carried out these attacks received training and, in other cases, support from al-Qaeda and its allied groups. Most infamously, in 2002, the Bali bombings were financed by al-Qaeda and undertaken by Jemaah Islamiah, who had trained with al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. These attacks, as we are aware, killed 202 people, including 88 Australians. Subsequent terror attacks—such as the 2004 bombing of the Australian Embassy in Indonesia, the Jakarta hotel bombings in 2003 and just 12 months ago at the Marriott Hotel, where we lost three lives, the second Bali bombings in 2005 and the 2008 attacks in Mumbai—killed even more Australians and, again, other innocent civilians from other countries.

In light of this terrible history, no responsible government could disregard the clear links between these horrific attacks against Australian citizens and terrorist safe havens in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. There is no doubt that the ability of terror organisations to exploit safe havens in Afghanistan has, as a result of the intervention, been severely curtailed, but we cannot afford to rest on our laurels. Australian forces have unquestionably played a vital role in maintaining pressure on terror networks and ensuring Afghanistan does not once again revert to being a source of support for these horrific terror attacks. In this way, the efforts of our troops have paid a real security dividend for Australia's interests, but our success in de-
grading al-Qaeda and in denying them safe haven in Afghanistan is not a reason to abandon our mission. The latest assessments indicate that the main source of international terrorism, and the primary threat to Australia and our interests, continues to be from al-Qaeda, groups allied or associated with al-Qaeda, and others inspired by a similar extremist view of the world.

Australians have travelled to Afghanistan in the past for terrorist training and to fight, and even today we still see examples of Australians seeking to travel to Afghanistan and Pakistan for that same purpose. If military and counterterrorism pressure in Afghanistan is withdrawn or reduced, al-Qaeda could resume using Afghanistan as a safe haven for planning terrorist operations. This of course would have serious implications for Australia’s national security. Quite simply, we cannot allow it to occur. It is not just the Australian government that holds this view; this assessment of the legality and the necessity of coalition efforts in Afghanistan is shared by the United Nations and the international community more broadly.

It was less than a decade ago, shortly after the September 11 attacks on the United States by al-Qaeda, that the United Nations Security Council passed resolution 1378. In this resolution the United Nations Security Council condemned the Taliban for allowing Afghanistan to be used as a base for the export of terrorism by al-Qaeda and by other terrorist groups. The United Nations Security Council also condemned the Taliban for providing safe haven to Osama bin Laden, al-Qaeda and others associated with him. In the days immediately following the attacks, United Nations member states also condemned the attacks through a unanimous General Assembly resolution. The General Assembly called urgently for international cooperation to prevent and eradicate acts of terrorism. The resolution stressed that those responsibility for aiding, supporting or harbouring the perpetrators, organisers or sponsors of such acts would be held accountable for their actions.

In passing these two resolutions, the international community recognised that for many years al-Qaeda had possessed the freedom to plan and train for terrorist attacks with impunity within the borders of Afghanistan. The council condemned the Taliban regime that allowed this to occur. The Security Council’s continued support of the International Security Assistance Force, known as ISAF, and the contributions of 47 nations from around the world to their mission demonstrate that the international community remains committed to preventing Afghanistan from again being used as a training ground for terrorism. Most recently, NATO’s ISAF mandate was renewed by the Security Council in resolution 1943 of 13 October 2010. This authorisation from the Security Council and the consent, significantly, of the Afghan government provide the legal basis for the presence of Australian forces. It is important to recognise that the legal basis for Australian forces being in Afghanistan is in no doubt.

Australia recognises that military means alone will not be sufficient to bring long-term stability to Afghanistan. Civilian efforts to improve governance and economic development are also essential. Afghanistan has taken modest steps towards building civil institutions. But there is a long way to go. But a new constitution enshrines human rights, including freedom of religion, and provides women with equal protection under the law. Importantly, the constitution also recognises an independent judiciary. Nevertheless, the challenges for Afghanistan’s law and justice sector remain profound. Considerable reform is required to institutionalise the rule of law and to ensure functioning and fair legal processes as well as to build the
capacity of judicial and law enforcement authorities.

As the Afghan people work to rebuild their legal system, active support from countries such as Australia is absolutely crucial. The Australian government is currently considering options for capacity building in Afghanistan and as a first step it is envisaged that the Attorney-General’s Department will offer training to Afghani legal officials in order to strengthen legal responses to transnational crime. Assistance may also be offered to strengthen Afghan legislation relating to transnational crime and corruption and to train those involved in the law enforcement area, including prosecutors. Building a more effective law and justice system will be important to achieving a functioning and effective state in Afghanistan.

We should also not forget the role of Australian support in confronting Afghanistan’s narcotics trade, much of which can end up on the streets of our cities. Since 2007, AFP officers have assisted the Afghanistan National Police counternarcotics effort and this has led to a number of tangible counternarcotics gains. For example, in 2009-10, AFP officers supported the Afghan led major crime taskforce operations that resulted in the arrest of the Arghistan district Afghan national police chief for drug trafficking offences and contributed to the seizure of significant quantities of narcotics and firearms. This action, which was against a local police chief, confirms the intention to enforce the rule of law, which is that all will be held accountable, irrespective of the office that they may hold.

In debating our role in Afghanistan, we need to also consider the rights of the Afghan people. In particular, we cannot afford to forget the barbarous human rights record of the Taliban, both now and before Western intervention. Before its overthrow, the Taliban imposed an extreme form of sharia law on the people of Afghanistan, which severely curtailed the rights and liberties of its citizens and in particular women. Even out of power, the record of the Taliban remains appalling. Today in areas under their control the Taliban continues to curtail the rights of women, including denying them the fundamental rights of education, freedom of movement and political representation. Aside from women and those who defy their extreme version of Islam, the Taliban also continues to accelerate its ruthless war against political opponents. Amnesty International estimates that in the first half of this year the number of executions and assassination of civilians by the Taliban and other insurgent groups increased by over 95 per cent. Most of these people were executed or assassinated for supporting the government.

We must be frank, however, in admitting that since the fall of the Taliban human rights have not advanced as far as we may have wished and have strived for. Indeed, the human rights situation of many citizens, especially women, in some parts of Afghanistan remains absolutely and totally unacceptable. But progress has been made. For example, since 2001, Afghanistan has established a Ministry for Women’s Affairs and introduced a constitution that provides women with equal legal status to men and representation for women in parliament. Although there is considerable room for improvement and a long way to go, our presence in Afghanistan ensures that we are able to continue to exert pressure to improve conditions for women and human rights more broadly in that country.

In conclusion, the sacrifice of 21 Australian personnel who have lost their lives in Afghanistan weighs heavily on all members of parliament and indeed the Australian community generally. Afghanistan has endured decades of conflict and there is no
easy solution to its many and deep-seated challenges. But walking away and neglecting our responsibilities to the Afghan people, as well as our national security, is not an option. There is a saying that, each time history repeats itself, the price goes up. In September 2001 the world witnessed the consequences of allowing Afghanistan to fester as a failed state. Neither Australia nor the international community can afford to make that mistake again.

Mr PYNE (Sturt) (10.15 am)—Throughout this debate we will hear thousands of words spoken about our involvement in Afghanistan. We will hear terms like ‘strategic goals’, ‘campaign objectives’, ‘regional security’ and the like. But no matter how many words Hansard eventually records on this debate, there is only one thing we can all be certain of: somewhere in Afghanistan, at this very moment, the men and women of the Australian Defence Force are simply getting on with the job.

Yesterday in this chamber we heard the names read out of the 21 Australian soldiers who have so far paid the ultimate price for their commitment to serving our nation, its people and its interests. No-one understands the hardships, risks and dangers of war better than those who serve on the front line. Like their colleagues on the front line today, these 21 soldiers went forward to face those dangers in the full knowledge that it may cost them their lives. They did not have the luxury of being able to second-guess their actions. They did not have the luxury of being able to hesitate, waver or look for a softer option. Despite the hardships, the risks and the dangers, they did not look around for someone else to do the job for them.

Pulling on the uniform of the Australian Defence Force is the ultimate act of courage. In doing so these young men and women signal their willingness to risk their own lives on our behalf. They understand it is their job to do so. Their service underpins, protects and guarantees our democracy. As the elected representatives of the Australian people, what we owe to these young men and women is to be clear in our purpose and unwavering in our commitment. There are no soft options or opt-out clauses in the war against terrorism. We need to ensure our troops have access to all of the military hardware, equipment, resources and support they need to do their job and to return home safely. We need to support their families and loved ones while they are away from home in the service of the nation. And we must always honour their courage, their service and their sacrifices.

The work of Australia and its allies in Afghanistan was never going to be easy. We knew that when we first engaged in Afghanistan after the September 11 attacks. It is no easier today. It is difficult, dangerous work. The men and women of the Australian Defence Force face that reality every day. This parliament needs to face up to that reality and decide whether we no longer have the stomach for the fight or whether, like our troops, we will simply get on with the job because it is right thing to do in our national interest. I cannot imagine a situation where an Australian parliament would leave its armed forces second-guessing on our commitment to such an important cause. During a long conflict such as this one, people rightly ask questions of their leaders to ensure that the reasons for ongoing involvement in war are just ones. As the Leader of the Opposition said in this place, we owe it to those who have died, and their families, to be confident that the cause has been worthy of their sacrifice. The coalition has welcomed this debate because it provides that opportunity.

The men and women of the Australian Defence Force are fighting to protect free peo-
ple everywhere from the scourge of international terrorism. They are fighting to liberate the Afghani people from the tyranny and oppression of a totalitarian regime that has long harboured and supported the terrorist organisation al-Qaeda. This is a fight they are winning, but the job is not yet done. The mountains of Afghanistan must never again become a safe haven and launching pad for terrorist activities. The Afghani people deserve the opportunity to enjoy the democratic freedom we take for granted, and the chance to decide their own path into the future. This did not exist under the Taliban regime. By achieving these goals we will safeguard our own security and the security of our allies.

I welcome the statements of the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition this week, and am hopeful that the bipartisan support for the continuation of this operation will not be subverted by Labor’s desire to appease the Greens. The Australian Greens are this Labor government’s partner in the 43rd parliament. The Greens opposed the war in Afghanistan and continue to oppose the Australian deployment. The new member for Melbourne has said this week that Australia’s involvement in this conflict is unjustifiable. If the Greens had won the argument in 2001, and coalition forces had never intervened in Afghanistan in the first place, the Taliban regime would still be in power, the region would still be a haven for Islamic terrorism. It would also mean that two million Afghani girls would not be in school today, learning to be the teachers, doctors and leaders of tomorrow. It seems counter-intuitive that the Greens, who profess to care about human rights, would see two million girls be illiterate and uneducated if their views prevailed. If the Greens believe that somehow a coalition withdrawal from Afghanistan would not result in another takeover of extremist elements then they are dangerous partners in government and dangerously naive.

The member for Melbourne says the war is unjustifiable. What greater justification can there be than combating terror, stopping those who would commit acts of terror and neutralising those who harbour, support, and provide succour for terrorists? The Taliban regime emerged in 1994 and, over four years, with the support of Osama bin Laden and others, seized control of Afghanistan. The regime stripped half the population of the country of even the most basic rights. Women were ruthlessly oppressed, denied medical care and access to education. Perceived offences against the fundamentalist Islamic moral code were punishable by public beating, stoning or decapitation without trial. The country became a base of operations and training ground for Islamic terrorism.

On 11 September 2001 these same Islamic terrorists struck the World Trade Centre in New York, one of the most heinous and cowardly attacks in history. It caused the ANZUS Treaty to be invoked and Australia answered the call. Striking a civilian target, murdering almost 3,000 innocent people and causing widespread devastation was a clear provocation that had to be answered with force. This act became the catalyst for a war against terrorism that was long overdue.

It is difficult for us to understand the motivation of an enemy who wilfully attempts to murder innocent civilians. It is the goal of an Islamic terrorist organisation to harness fear through acts of murder and destruction and from this fear extract concessions. They seek to scare the populace into support for their cause; they seek to expand their reach through terror.

Australians have suffered at the hands of this enemy: 88 Australians were amongst the 202 in the 2002 Bali bombings and other
Australians have died in New York and in operations planned and executed by Islamic terrorists around the world. The elements of our society we treasure the most, the Islamic fundamentalist despises the most. Freedom and liberty in our country are viewed as offensive to the Islamic terrorists who are driven by control and oppression. It is no surprise then that Islamic terrorism was a threat to our national security before 2001, and it is certainly no surprise that it remains a threat today.

Australia’s National Security Statement demands that the government of this nation ensures that its people and our interests are protected specifically in terms of freedom from attack or the threat of attack. We are committed to combating terrorism wherever it hides, and I am proud to be part of a nation that is prepared to stand against it.

Since the 2001 intervention began, terrorist operations in Afghanistan have greatly diminished due to the work of the coalition forces. The fall of the Taliban has placed the Afghani people on a pathway to lasting change, but now is not the time to waver in our commitment to this task. This task has changed as the war has progressed. In 2005 the Australian government increased its deployment in Afghanistan as part of a wider strategy to combat the Taliban insurgency and, while it is still relatively modest when compared to our allies, our soldiers do a difficult job in the Oruzgan province, close to the Islamic extremist enemy. Where the Taliban has retreated, a new democratic government has been established, along with the necessary independent mechanisms for the management of elections and the oversight of these processes.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan continues to cultivate the idea of an Afghani national identity, a re-engagement with regional and outlying areas and aiding the government of Afghanistan in rebuilding vital infrastructure. Australian forces are mentoring Afghani soldiers and training them up to beat the enemy in conflict. We are assisting to create police and security forces. By the very presence of Australian troops in the country, we are breaking down the falsehoods perpetrated by the Taliban and al-Qaeda. The Australians in Afghanistan are better ambassadors for the advantages of freedom and democracy than reams of propaganda ever will be.

Now is not the time to withdraw. The entire nation remains in the balance. This is not a country with a historical democratic tradition. Rather it is an ancient land where conflict and conquerors have swept in and swept out like the tide over thousands of years. Outside of major cities, it has long been controlled by warlords and tyrants. We need to give the Afghani people the time they need to take the reins of their nation firmly in their own hands without the threat of extremists who still seek to subvert that nation. No democracy has ever had an easy birth. Afghanistan will continue to grow as a country. While traditions and beliefs are not so easy to put aside, a democracy has the best hope of achieving a climate where freedom and liberty can flourish. No-one thinks this will be an easy process, but it is a just and worthy one.

Our commitment in Afghanistan must also remain part of a wider regional strategy to combat terrorism wherever it appears. We provide police training and intelligence sharing through our security agencies, and these operations, along with the fight against terrorism in Afghanistan, must similarly be maintained.

I have never served in the armed forces but I have the most profound admiration for those who serve their country in this way. I can only imagine the immense sorrow of the
families and friends of the 21 brave Australians who have died in this conflict. I can promise those families that the sacrifice of their loved ones will never be forgotten.

Mr CLARE (Blaxland—Minister for Defence Materiel) (10.26 am)—This is an important debate. There is no more important decision for government than the decision to send its own citizens to war, and it is important that that decision and the ongoing mission have the support of this parliament and that the parliament and the people it represents understand why our troops have been deployed, what they are doing and what support the Australian government is providing to get the job done. In my contribution to this debate, I will focus on these three things.

First, why we are there: we are in Afghanistan because it is in Australia’s national interest to be there. I believe it is in our national interest because the threat posed by an unstable Afghanistan reaches far beyond its own borders. It affects its neighbours. It affects us. We all remember where we were on September 11. The actions of al-Qaeda that day killed more than 3,000 people from more than 90 countries, including 10 Australians, but this was not the only act of terrorism planned or supported from Afghanistan. The 88 Australians killed in Bali died at the hands of Jemaah Islamiyah terrorists trained and supported by al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. It is just one example of the global reach of the violent extremism that was allowed to flourish in Afghanistan. That is why 46 other countries are contributing to the same effort under the mandate of the United Nations, including our closest ally, the United States. We are all there for the same reason: the threat posed to all countries by an Afghanistan where malign forces can take root again.

We cannot pretend that what happens in Afghanistan does not affect us here in Australia. It does, and because it does it is right that we are there. Australia and Australians would be less safe if Afghanistan became a place where terrorists could operate from again. It is true that creating a stable Afghanistan does not eliminate the threat of terrorism. Terrorist groups are active in a lot of places—Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, the Maghreb—but that does not mean that what happens in Afghanistan is without consequence. If we fail, if Afghanistan becomes a place that provides sanctuary to terrorists again, the impact to the cause espoused by organisations such as al-Qaeda would be enormous. It would be felt not just in the Middle East but in our own region, and that is why it is in our national interest that we play a role in establishing a stable and secure Afghanistan.

So how do we do that? This is not a conventional war and it will not be won by conventional means. Relentlessly seeking out and killing insurgents is not enough. The commander of Australian forces in the Middle East, Major General John Cantwell, tells the story of an Australian patrol conducting a meeting, a shura, with local elders in the Baluchi Valley where they met a young boy with a badly broken arm. His arm had been caught in a wheat-threshing machine and the bone was poking through his skin. The Australian soldiers asked local elders for permission to take the boy to be treated, but the boy’s father refused. General Cantwell recounts:

After two hours of pleading, he said that if the Taliban see that I have taken anything from you they will kill me and my family. That boy will either lose his arm or die.

I can understand that father’s concern. What happens when the soldiers leave the village? What happens when we leave Afghanistan and he is still there? Counterinsurgency relies on winning the hearts and minds of men like this, but that can only be done if there
exists a sense of confidence that, when we are no longer there, the foundations of a stable, secure society will remain.

That is why the work that we are doing in Afghanistan training the 4th Brigade of the Afghan National Army is so important. You cannot have a stable, secure society unless the government has a monopoly on the legitimate use of force. There is a lot to do to improve governance in Afghanistan, but if you do not have a monopoly on the legitimate use of force you cannot do any of those things. Our job in Afghanistan is to help build that monopoly of force. The work we have done in Iraq and East Timor demonstrates that we are very good at it. That is why NATO has asked us to provide more artillery trainers. We have agreed to meet that need by providing up to 20 artillery trainers to support the establishment of the artillery school in Kabul. It is an important contribution to the broader coalition effort. ISAF forces are doing the same thing throughout Afghanistan. It takes time to train and build an army—it is expected to take two to four years to mentor and train the 4th Brigade before they take lead responsibility for security in Oruzgan—and beyond that we will play a supporting role for some time.

But, as the Prime Minister has said, before that transition occurs the ability of the Afghan forces to assume responsibility for security must be irreversible. If that standard is not met, we risk repeating the mistakes of the past. We are making progress, but if we hand over responsibility to the Afghan army before they are ready to take over we will not leave a stable and secure Afghanistan.

I have spoken about why I believe that it is right that we are in Afghanistan and why our mission is the right one. The next issue is how we support our troops to get the job done. There has been a lot said and written in the past few weeks about troop numbers, tanks and other equipment. I welcome the comments by the Leader of the Opposition in this debate that the opposition supports the deployment and has accepted the advice of the commander on the ground and the Chief of the Defence Force that the mission has the resources it needs to get the job done. Bipartisanship is the bedrock on which this mission rests. In that spirit, I would like to make a few comments about the support we are providing our troops. Last year the former Minister for Defence initiated a review of force protection, and from this the government has allocated $1.1 billion in new measures to improve the protection of our troops in-theatre. They include upgrading the protection of our ASLAV and Bushmaster vehicles against improvised explosive devices and artillery fire, SPARK mine rollers that attach to the front of Bushmasters to help combat IEDs, the rollout of an early-warning system—which is called C-RAM and expected to be deployed later this year—against rocket and mortar attacks and the use of the Scan Eagle unmanned aerial vehicle to provide our troops with increased surveillance coverage.

We are always reviewing what is needed to protect our troops, particularly from the threat posed by IEDs. Our troops are well equipped. In June, the Chief of Army, Lieutenant General Ken Gillespie, told a Senate estimates hearing:

The vast majority of troops acknowledged that they were among the best-equipped troops in the theatre.

This was confirmed by Warrant Officer, Regimental Sergeant Major of the Army, Stephen Ward. He is the Army’s most senior soldier, and he said:

The issued equipment that is given to our soldiers is of world leading quality. This is not just my observation; it is reinforced through statements by soldiers who have combat experience. It performs very well on operations.
An example of the quality and effectiveness of our equipment is the Bushmaster Protected Mobility Vehicle. They have been hit hard by IEDs and have done an incredible job protecting the lives of Australian soldiers inside them, most recently in northern Kandahar only two weeks ago. I went to the Bushmaster production line in Bendigo last week to thank the men and women who build the Bushmaster. It is a great Australian story—iron ore from the Pilbara and coking coal from the Hunter forged in Port Kembla, cut to size in Melbourne and welded together in Bendigo to make a vehicle that is saving the lives of Australians in Afghanistan. No equipment is perfect, and there are plenty of issues still to work through, but in the short time that I have been Minister for Defence Materiel I have seen a lot of evidence of Defence’s ability to respond to the issues raised by our soldiers in-theatre.

Perhaps the best example of this is what has been done about the combat body armour our troops are wearing. The standard issue MCBAS body armour is very effective; it is also very heavy. It worked well in Iraq, where troops required maximum ballistic protection and were not required to regularly patrol on foot. In Afghanistan, the feedback from troops is that it has made it very hard for them to do their job. Defence has responded by purchasing about 1,000 sets of the lighter body armour called Eagle Marine. That means our troops can now use light or heavy body armour depending on the mission. That flexibility will be enhanced next year. The Army is currently trialling new, tiered body armour that will allow troops to insert different armour plates in their rigs depending on the conditions. I am advised that Army is working towards having this ready for mission rehearsal exercises next year and expects that when Task Force 8 deploy in the middle of next year they will go with this new equipment. It is just one example of the work being done by the team equipping our soldiers. As Minister for Defence Materiel, I recognise how important this work is and that there is more work to do.

This is not an easy fight. The last nine years are proof of that. We have already mourned the loss of 21 young Australians. Many more have been wounded. I met one of them the other day when I visited Robertson Barracks in Darwin. While the rest of us were still celebrating Christmas two years ago, he was in a firefight in the Chora valley. His platoon was ambushed. They were hemmed in on both sides. As he ran to find cover behind a tree, he was shot through both legs. He survived because his mates dragged him 600 metres, through irrigation ditches, around small mud brick walls and a compound, taking us much cover as they could along the way. He was carried the last 200 metres to a Bushmaster by one of his mates who carried him over his shoulder. The Bushmaster got him to a medivac helicopter that got him back to Tarin Kowt. He was operated on there, and then again in Germany.

Meeting him had an enormous impact on me. I felt very fortunate to meet him and to shake his hand and more conscious than ever before of the importance of the decisions that we make. They are not easy decisions, but in our darkest moments in Afghanistan it is important to remember why we have made them, why we are there, why there are 46 other nations there and to contemplate what would happen if we were not. An unstable Afghanistan where malign forces could rise again is not just a threat to a father too afraid to let Australian soldiers help save his son. It is a threat to all of us. The impact of our success or our failure will be felt for many more years than those we have already spent in Afghanistan, and that is why it requires our support now and our endurance.
When asked how he measures progress, General Cantwell said:

It is a matter of doing small things whenever we can to move the campaign forward. It has to be a whole series of constant small chips.

Progress … is measured in small victories. We influence this community leader, we open a school, we clear an IED, we kill a Taliban who is trying to kill us or we capture someone and put them in gaol.

There’s a thousand things that need to be done. Some of those are military. Others are about being kind and generous and encouraging, to be sympathetic to the cultural issues, to understand that these people are scared.

He said it demands the endurance of commanders and soldiers, ‘And it demands endurance of our government if they want to see this thing come to an ending that is satisfactory’. It does. It demands the endurance of government and it also demands the endurance and support of this parliament.

Ms LEY (Farrer) (10.40 am)—Although I have no problem with the parliament debating Afghanistan, I note that this debate is taking place because of the government’s alliance deal with the Greens. I know, however, that most members will give strong support to the mission, its rationale and our troops in the field. However, the fact that without the Greens, who do not believe in Australia’s involvement, we would not be having this debate, in my opinion gives it a flavour that it should not have. I sincerely hope that the message that comes from this parliament is one of clear, strong support for Australia’s presence in Afghanistan.

Yesterday a couple in their 60s from a rural area in my electorate called in to see me in Parliament House and I explained that we were debating the subject of Afghanistan and asked them their views. They both expressed some doubt and uncertainty about Australian soldiers losing their lives in a war so remote for a cause not well explained. They did not say we should not be there but they did not seem convinced that we should. I believe this attitude sums up the views of a great many in my electorate of Farrer and underscores a point, which is that we have not explained well to people what the mission in Afghanistan is and why we are there. As casualties have begun to mount, the conflict has been attracting greater attention, and public opinion has begun to shift more decisively against Australia’s continuing participation. We must spell out more clearly the strategic rationale for Australia’s involvement in Afghanistan. We are not arguing the case with sufficient conviction. The Australian people need to know what is at stake, because the steady decline in public support for the war is of concern.

Also important is the attitude of the Afghans to the foreign forces. Many Afghans view the presence of foreign forces as supporting President Karzai’s corrupt and dysfunctional government rather than making a difference to the lives of ordinary Afghans, most of whom are still poverty stricken. What Afghans need most is structural political reforms, institution building, strong central principles around which to rebuild their society and reconstruction to provide them with employment, improved living conditions, safety and security. It would be the best way to contain the Taliban’s resistance. Australia is in Afghanistan helping with this task.

The people in my electorate of Farrer have a long and strong association with the men and women of the Australian Defence Force, an association and pride that still flourishes today. Through Australia’s past engagements and conflicts—and now with our efforts in Afghanistan—the adjacent regional training facilities of Latchford Barracks at Bonegilla and the Blamey Barracks, Kapooka are preparing our young men and women to be ready if called upon to defend our national
interests. I remind the House that early last year we had the opportunity to pay tribute to Trooper Mark Donaldson, who received the prestigious Victoria Cross—the first Australian in almost 40 years to be awarded the Commonwealth’s highest military honour for acts of courage performed in Afghanistan. Trooper Donaldson began his military training and career from Kapooka, just south of Wagga. Regularly from outside my office in Albury a bus leaves with new recruits to the Army, Navy and Air Force going to begin their military training. The dads look proud, the mums sometimes a little bewildered, trying to be strong, the girlfriends almost always in tears—as, I should say, are the mums in my office. But the new recruits look excited and determined and they are so clearly doing what they want to do. There are numerous stories of the courage and commitment from Australian military personnel from my area.

Can I also draw the House’s attention to a non-military example of Australia’s feelings toward this battle. I draw from a report in the local Albury newspaper, the Border Mail, from May of last year. It is the story of a 22-year-old former supermarket worker, Tim Stephens, who spent two months teaching in an Afghan school for poor children. A member of the local Wodonga District Baptist Church, Mr Stephens had developed a passion for Afghan people after reading a book written by a member of the Shelter for Life organisation, which has worked in the country for 25 years. He said:

The Afghan people have battled through droughts, civil wars, Soviet invasions, Taliban oppression and a backlash from the September 11 attacks, … (They) have no choice but to live a hard life. I guess I just wanted to help out in some way.

The Australian government describes Operation Slipper as: ‘the ADF’s contribution to the international coalition against terrorism. Australia’s commitment to Afghanistan is necessary to help establish democracy, to prevent a re-emergence of the country as a base for terrorism and to prevent it being taken over and controlled by drug cartels.’

The enemy in Afghanistan is the Taliban, and its reach is considerable. Units of the Taliban have been linked with militants in Pakistan’s Punjab province. The deadly assault in March 2009 in Lahore, Punjab’s capital, against the Sri Lankan cricket team, and the bombing in September 2008 of the Marriott Hotel in Islamabad, the national capital, were two examples of the joint campaign. The hand of the Taliban can be felt further abroad, too. Faisal Shahzad, who tried to set off a bomb in Times Square in May 2010, said the Pakistani Taliban had taught him how to make bombs.

Afghanistan produces more opium than any other country in the world, and the Taliban are widely believed to make money at virtually every stage of the trade. They run a sophisticated financial network to pay for their operations, raising hundreds of millions of dollars from the illicit drug trade, kidnappings, extortion and foreign donations. The fact that some consider foreign donations, rather than opium, to be the single largest source of cash for the Taliban indicates again their worldwide reach.

There are better cash crops then opium. Next month, raisins grown in the Parwan province will land on the shelves in Britain, and hopefully soon in Australia, under a brand that comes from an alliance between Afghan farmers and international aid organisations. There is evidence that the reliance on opium as part of the Afghan regional economy is being reduced. The marketing director of this enterprise said:

A country like that, that has been at war for 30 years, if you can bring calm and happiness to a
few families’ lives and that can grow, why wouldn’t you want to do that?

We should consider the impact of the chaos in Afghanistan on Pakistan’s stability. The collapse of Pakistan into the hands of al-Qaeda would be a strategic disaster. Afghanistan might be an imperfect democracy but the fall of any democracy to terrorism would embolden extremism in Asia and elsewhere, to say nothing of the threat that would be generated by Pakistan’s nuclear warheads falling into the hands of terrorists.

There are reasons for optimism in Afghanistan, but the point that needs to be made is that the outcome of the war will almost certainly have a profound impact on the future stability of the whole south-west Asia region. The military, political and economic challenges to be overcome are formidable. They demand a long-term commitment by all those who have a strategic interest in the outcome. This certainly includes Australia and it is the reason the opposition strongly supports the government’s commitment.

We must prevent Afghanistan again becoming a safe haven for terrorism. The significant, dangerous and continuing linkages between the Taliban and al-Qaeda are a persistent threat to Western interests. We would be taking a massive strategic risk if the International Security Assistance Force were to leave Afghanistan without a high degree of confidence this enemy had been crushed.

In recent days there have been reports of talks to end the war in Afghanistan involving extensive, face-to-face discussions with Taliban commanders from the highest levels of the group’s leadership, who are secretly leaving their sanctuaries in Pakistan with the help of NATO troops. The talks have been held on several different occasions and appear to represent the most substantive effort to date to negotiate an end to the nine-year-old war. An Afghan with knowledge of the talks said:

These are face-to-face discussions … This is not about making the Americans happy or making Karzai happy. It’s about what is in the best interests of the Afghan people.

I have never worn the uniform of the Australian Army, Navy or Air Force. I am no expert on the conflict in Afghanistan. When I listen to the arguments about why we should or should not be in this war, I understand the sentiments that are being expressed from all sides about an issue that is so complex.

I mentioned earlier the bravery recognised of Trooper Mark Donaldson. But, as we have been reminded so recently, while we could rejoice in the exploits of this fine young Australian, in this same House just a few months ago we also rose to honour Sapper Darren James Smith, killed while part of an Australian dismounted patrol conducting operations in the Mirabad Valley region of the Oruzgan province. Like Trooper Donaldson, Sapper Smith also entered the military at Kapooka. Unlike Trooper Donaldson, Sapper Smith did not return—in life—from his duty in Afghanistan, but for me he does also return a hero.

This pair, along with the hundreds of other young trainees from my area, willingly forged themselves to be ready for active duty in fields such as Afghanistan. They do this for one reason: they care. They care about their country. They care about its future. They care enough to defend our right to be free—in some cases to the death. Today I salute and honour each of those 21 Australian soldiers who have lost their lives in Afghanistan.

In the end, it comes down to the threat and the response to that threat. I believe that the threat posed by the regime in Afghanistan, its links with terrorist networks and its capability to destabilise the region and the world, has to be fought and defeated. Afghanistan has long been known as the graveyard of
empires, a phrase often quoted but surely thought of much by those in the field on both sides. President Obama has remarked in relation to America’s commitment to Afghanistan: ‘You don’t muddle through the central front on terror.’ Neither should Australia.

Mr OAKESHOTT (Lyne) (10.50 am)—by leave—I table the minority report that I prepared in relation to the review into the Defence Annual Report 2008-09 as part of the Defence Subcommittee work for the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade. I table that report because it goes into detail in regard to my views on this topic, which I have held from a long way back, from my work in the defence space.

After nine years of war, 21 lives lost, more than 150 soldiers injured and at least $6.1 billion of taxpayers’ money spent, Australia welcomes this parliamentary debate in the ‘people’s chamber’. Many Australians have a great understanding of parliamentary procedure, and recognise that we are debating a statement to the House by the Prime Minister rather than a motion before the House—a subtle difference, maybe, but important, as it means there will be no vote at the end of this debate. As the debate will not conclude with a vote, I therefore ask that the Prime Minister commit to making a concluding statement to this debate, in response to the many contributions from members. It would show respect for the Parliament, respect for the debate and a listening ear from the Prime Minister. I hope she does make that statement.

I listened closely to the contributions of both the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition, as I have listened closely to many other good contributions such as those from new members—the member for Denison and the member for Melbourne. They are all good contributions demonstrating the truth that no-one owns political and moral right in what is a complex issue.

After nine years and with a potential 10 more now on the table, with those working for freedoms exposed as propping up a less than perfect, corrupt regime, with the language of war and peace becoming tangled alongside the drift in objectives from military to civilian, with nation building being on and now off, with democratisation being on and now off, with the chase for Osama bin Laden being on and now off, with the defeat of al-Qaeda in Afghanistan being largely achieved, with the traditions of international rules of war and the challenges of nation-state versus nation-state being exposed by free movement of the Taliban between Pakistan and Afghanistan, and with increasing reports of institutional support from Pakistan itself, and with all this being dressed in an argument of ‘building a safe haven’ when Yemen, Somalia, the southern island of the Philippines at Mindanao and locations in Indonesia and many other hot spots having emerged in this same nine-year period, and with narcotics, sharia law and religious extremism thrown into the complex mix, it should be very clear to any open-minded Australian that this is all about the shades of grey and anyone arguing a black or white absolutist view on whether we should go or stay is really pushing a barrow all of their own.

We have now found ourselves in one hell of a bind. If we leave, like when the 120,000 Russian troops left in 1989, there will be a void. There will be civil unrest and there will be blood. The bad elements of the Taliban would push back and potentially again gain control. The implications for being a ‘base for terrorist groups’ would potentially re-emerge. On the upside if we leave, however, our 1,550 Australian troops are safe, our tight budget has less strain and our ability to engage on both domestic and regional defence
matters arguably increases. Importantly, we must also recognise that article 4 of the ANZUS treaty would be tested if we left.

Compare this with our military staying; there would be more Australian deaths and wounded. The ‘base for terrorism’ would continue to move to alternative locations such as Pakistan, the Horn of Africa, several Asian hot spots and even into locations such as London. We would continue to work on peace and reconstruction, with gun in hand—‘shoot and talk’ as General Petraeus recently put it—and we would continue the work of clear, hold and build for at least another 10 years.

Importantly, however, if we are operating in Australia’s sovereign interests, we have to leave sometime and we cannot delay the inevitable void that will follow—not now nor in 10 years time. It is this issue—the one called Australia’s sovereign interests—that should be central to this debate. We will leave sometime so that we do not spend another $6.1 billion on questionable return. We will leave sometime so we do not continue to lose Australian soldiers for a corrupt regime. We will have to at some point accept a lesser democracy than ours and we will have to at some time recalibrate to focus on our international obligations to our region, to the many challenges that religious extremism and terrorism pose and to what we can and should be doing to develop peace and development in our own region.

The surprise argument that we are in Afghanistan in a military capacity for another 10 years is wrong. We should not be. The US is not even saying that and nor should we. We will not strike a ‘grand bargain’ in 2020, and it is wrong to pretend that we somehow can or will. This will be a messy and complex withdrawal, whether it happens now or in 10 years time. This work should therefore be on in earnest now.

It is and should be recognised as such by the Prime Minister and the parliament. NATO, right now, is escorting Taliban commanders through to the capital, Kabul, to hold peace talks. We are trying to strike a deal now, so why won’t the Prime Minister either admit these peace talks or encourage them? General Petraeus is using the language of ‘shoot and talk’ in regard to the current strategy of engaging with the Taliban. This means that with some elements we are all involved in chasing the worst of the worst down every foxhole.

But we are also talking with other elements of the Taliban in an effort to form a working arrangement and then to get out. Why, therefore, is Australian public discourse stuck on the ‘shoot’ and unable to admit and discuss the ‘talk’ that is currently going on and is the potential light at the end of this complex tunnel? We must admit to the Australian people our true strategy of the moment, and that is that we are talking to elements in the Taliban and we are hoping they will form a part of a lasting relationship in the nation-state of Afghanistan. It is this that will allow our military withdrawal alongside a US and coalition withdrawal. It is sensible work that is happening right now that should be admitted and should be supported and encouraged to draw a conclusion soon. We are talking to the Taliban and we should admit it. We should admit it because it is a sensible military and political strategy that is in both Afghanistan’s and Australia’s best interests if it is successful.

The language of ‘safe haven’ should also be challenged. It is illogical to create a safe haven in one location that creates many other unsafe havens in many other locations. That is what we have done and continue to do. Pakistan is now an obvious example. In the Horn of Africa and in our own Asian region we should not be blind to ongoing concerns about religious fundamentalism. Logically,
therefore, our case of making a safe haven in one nation-state is weakened by our lack of action in many others.

One person can do a lot of damage today. None of us are safe from that one person on an unholy mission. We can only use best endeavours within government and within society generally to protect each other. It is the job of all of us to be—and I almost hate to use the expression—‘alert but not alarmed’ in all we see in the way we live our lives.

It is a lie for government to try and guarantee safety through invading one nation. This is a global challenge of trying to capture the heart and mind of that one person with evil intent. It involves all people in all countries. I am optimistic that we are doing good work on this in many locations which deserves recognition within this debate.

I mention as an example my brother John, who works for the little known Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research. He lives in Davao City on Mindanao, a southern island of the Philippines, home to some of the world’s most violent and extreme religious and antigovernment fundamentalists. John works on building economy for local farmers to try to build a long-term sustainable option other than the money to the locals that is on offer for terrorist actions. John does not carry a gun in one of the most dangerous places in the world. John is not alone and has many other Australian aid and development workers in the field in the areas of agriculture, education and health working alongside him.

It is the John Oakeshotts and the many Australians like him who are the nation-builders and who are the answer for the long-term to global terrorism. Australia’s name is strong in the southern Philippines because of this, just as it is in Cambodia, where many in the legal profession have just completed the Duch trials following the atrocities in this poorest of poor nations and the most corrupt of corrupt nations. Civil engagement, without a military engagement, can be achieved. This is how we build safe havens for the long term.

This is not to deny the military role. They have done an excellent job, and I particularly mention the faceless men of the SAS, who have been on the front line in the most difficult of conflicts. To the best of my knowledge, Australian troops and all coalition troops have won all battles. To that I say, ‘Job well done.’

But the challenge is to move beyond the ‘clear and hold’ to the build. And the build, through the peace and reconstruction trust, will be and should be through all Australian departments and all of Australian civil society—just like in the southern Philippines and just like in Cambodia. I would therefore ask the Prime Minister to reconsider her 10-year military commitment and bring that forward to at least 2014. I would ask for her to consider the civil society building that is being done in other hot spots in the world and focus on them as a model for Afghanistan. And I would ask for her to admit we are talking to the Taliban now and we are working for a peaceful settlement now. We will be a stronger democracy if she does.

Mr LAMING (Bowman) (11.02 am)—Some things must be fought for. Not everyone shares our values. Talk alone will not always get you there. Not everyone is always ready to talk, but no group should ever be beyond talking to. Without making any references to Christian morality, even humanists will describe a just war, as Rothbard said, when people try to ‘ward off the threat of coercive domination by others’. Afghanistan fits that perfectly and it always has.

Sure, this debate comes at a time when it is not running that well. The PR battle and the bad stories at home are probably in some
ways overwhelming the stories that we hear about victories on the ground. Many of us are truly seduced by the notion of war by remote control, without casualties, and the idea that perhaps we can pull away from battlefronts like this and our values and our lives will be unaffected. For many, making the connections and joining the dots between 9-11, the Horn of Africa, Bali, the Philippines and Times Square is all that little bit too difficult and perhaps they think militant Islam is something that we can afford to ignore. I suspect that because it was John Howard who joined those dots together so articulately it has become a potent political battle over the last decade.

So for Australians who have questions, it is only right that we lift that veil and answer them. Many Australians out there must feel, as Kipling described:

For undemocratic reasons and for motives not of State, They arrive at their conclusions—largely inarticulate. Being void of self-expression they confide their views to none; But sometimes, in a smoking-room, one learns why things were done.

Let us learn why things are done. Let us learn why we are in Afghanistan. It is far more complex than downloading a page from the Socialist Alliance website and running through the eight reasons why we need to ‘get out of Afghanistan now’.

The key questions that I would put to the Australian people would be these, because it is right that they be asked. Firstly, are our military leaders engaged in Afghanistan balancing military potency and effectiveness with doing everything they can to spare the lives of our military and civilians? I have no doubt that they are. Secondly, when can patrolling in the most dangerous parts of Afghanistan be taken over—in our case, by Orouzgan’s 4th Brigade of the 205th ‘Hero’ Corps of the Afghan National Army? When can they start pulling the load and doing their fair share? Finally, how vigorously can we proceed from defence to diplomacy and then to development?

But my great frustrations in this debate over the last three days have been many. The first is that this work in Afghanistan is immensely complex and nothing has infuriated me more than the member for Denison, whose glib conclusion ran like this:

The only way to turn Afghanistan around now is to hastily rebuild the governance, infrastructure, services and jobs which give people hope and underpin long-term peace.

There is no-one on this planet who knows how to do that. There is no way to hastily rebuild governance. If there was a way to do it we would have been doing it decades ago. This is one of the most complex engagements of our time.

Let us also remember that our Australian forces, like the coalition, work under extraordinary military scrutiny. Sure, in every war there have been those who have felt that we should come home, but never has it been under such ruthless media scrutiny of everything these fine soldiers do. That is a very tough ask, as we have learned.

This debate has still been a little too simplistic. We have not yet considered the role of Iran in maintaining the efforts of the Taliban. There has been inadequate attention paid to whether our withdrawal will strengthen or weaken Pakistan and what we are going to do with those federally administered tribal areas, FATA, in northern Pakistan, which in the end are responsible for creatures such as Najibullah Zazi and Faisal Shahzad, the Manhattan subway bomber and the Times Square bomber respectively. In the end there must be a solution to that.

We still have not truly examined in this debate the nature of the adversary—the Taliban, this heterogenous group of fighters around Afghanistan, who for generations have been fighting the British, the Sikhs, the
Persians, the Macedonians, the Moguls, the Mongols, the Soviets and the list goes on. That is not a reason to stop trying; it is a reason to find a way to succeed.

There is an end state in Afghanistan and we must not lose hope of that. The end state, in all asymmetric wars, is to build a domestic force of police and on-the-ground military presence that is strong enough for democracy to take root. I am not saying that these elections in Afghanistan have been perfect and I am not saying that President Karzai is an immaculate president, free of any whiff of corruption. But consider the political conditions in which the administration operates. This is a $12 billion licit annual GDP, operating in parallel with a $14 billion military operation. It is almost impossible not to be involved in a cash grab with your hand out. It is almost impossible for schools not to cost 10 times what they should and it is almost impossible for ordinary everyday Afghans not to be unhappy about that. But we are a little tired of analyst reports being written by people across the border. In this debate we have not heard enough about what the Afghans are saying, and I hope to address that today.

In Afghanistan, in 1992, I lived not with the military cordon, not under the hospitality of the Australian Army, not with a UN security clearance but in a small village in northern Afghanistan. I went to the markets, went to the hen fights, drank the ulubalu and talked to people by the river. There is not a clear solution and there is not an easy answer, but I think those words need to be heard.

Kay Danes is a humanitarian worker who is there right now. She has travelled from Nangahar in the east to Herat in the west. I am not going to select her quotes; I think I should be as non-selective as I can. But the main theme that comes through is (1) peace and security; (2) finishing and getting rid of corruption; and (3) the killing of innocent people by both international forces and the Taliban. It is not a clear picture. But the one thing that I hear over and over again from Afghans on the ground is that the schools that were empty and were bombed are now rebuilt and are full. To me, that is such a powerful endorsement of what we are doing there. The women in Afghanistan will say, ‘We’re at university. I beg you to stay the course until we can finish our studies. Our fathers and brothers are supporting us in our study, even though at night we get an anonymous note saying: we will come and kill you, as soon as the coalition forces withdraw.’

There are simple questions to be asked. Is this deployment relevant to Australia? I argue that despite the damage inflicted by this aggressor, the Taliban, and by its weakening links to al-Qaeda, by virtue of the fact that we are there and they cannot remain in contact as easily with those Arabic petrodollars that fund al-Qaeda, they are not as well connected as they were, but they still pose a risk to us of grave and lasting implications if we withdraw. Has every means, apart from war, been exhausted with these groups? The answer is yes. Is there a serious prospect of success in Afghanistan? Absolutely, simply by virtue of having got one election off the ground and then another election off the ground. And to walk away is to lose everything and to go back not just to 2005 but back potentially to 1992 when we were rebuilding towns, clearing the landmines. There is no greater look than on the face of a family who return to their home having had those landmines cleared.

If you talk to Afghans, they will say that the international forces have failed to bring peace. It is a truism. Security conditions in some parts are getting worse day by day. The killing of innocent people is utterly regrettable and, in many cases, there is intense abhorrence at the fact that that has been done.
with only a small, flippant excuse from international forces. I am not going to gild that, but the clear message that comes with that from Afghans is: ‘If you evacuate, you leave us in despair. The limited developments and the relative peace achieved in significant parts of the country would be entirely lost and that everything you have done will collapse. It will go back to anarchy, back to the Taliban era, civil strife, warlords re-emerging and total destruction of what we know.’ That is a clear message from Afghans. Sure, they do not love everything we do, but if you do a poll in Afghanistan and ask, ‘Do you hate the war?’ of course most people will say yes. It is a truism.

We must endeavour, as the previous speaker, the member for Lyne, said, to negotiate with the Taliban. There is no secret about that. Secretary of State Clinton has not ruled that out. We know it is happening, but that is not what the debate is about. The debate is about pulling our troops out. The debate is being driven by a socialist alliance agenda. Two MPs who are in here, thanks to the vagaries of the preferential voting system, are saying, ‘Pull the troops out.’ And this is the list of Socialist Alliance reasons, and you can run through them: life is getting worse for Afghans. Wrong. Where were you during the Taliban? More people are dying and being displaced as a result of military operations. Before there was a military operation people were displaced for other reasons in equivalent numbers. Another reason: the war has cost us billions. The war cost the coalition $120 billion a year in Iraq. In Afghanistan we are spending just a fragment of that, at around $20 billion a year, for potentially far greater yields. This is not an economic war; it is a war to ensure there is nowhere left to hide.

The next argument is that the war has not liberated women. You cannot just quote one former MP from the Afghan assembly who thinks that is the case. Talk to women in Afghanistan before you make such a foolish comment that women are not slowly being emancipated, thanks to our presence. The next claim is that the Afghanistan government is corrupt and undemocratic. Consider the conditions. It is a democratic government, it has its warts, but what is the alternative? In fact, if you replace the current administration, you would end up with something very similar to what we now have, simply with a different head. The majority of the world wants the troops to leave and the Afghans do not want the war. This sort of ordinary polling that we are meant to be making national decisions on is, frankly, really disappointing. Even attributing the spread of terrorism worldwide to our presence in Afghanistan is absolutely amazing. The member for Denison suggested that our presence in Afghanistan is somehow attributed to some terrorist here in Australia who wanted to attack the Holsworthy Barracks. Is the member for Denison suggesting we withdraw our troops so that this guy has a better day? Seriously, we are here to fight for the values that we regard as democratic values. Why are we there? Because we can be and we have the resources.

There is a simple conviction that, given a fair go, human beings can better themselves. They just need to be given a chance to do it and they can make a better world around them. These are values that we live by and, as awkward an ally as the Americans sometimes are, they are values they also live by and that is why I am proud that we continue to do it. It is one thing to shed tears for our wonderful troops who make the supreme sacrifice. Never forget the aid and care workers, who work in similarly dangerous conditions and often suffer even greater privations. Though, not necessarily risking their lives in such intensity, they never know their enemy but often still lose their lives. To all of
those Australians I say to you that these are the values we live by. Yes, we are engaged in a titanic struggle to free ourselves of a group of individuals who wish to impose their values on us and by so doing remove our liberties. That to me is one of the strongest reasons to have this fight.

In closing, remember that the Taliban is not some crazy uniform entity. They are a conglomeration of warlords, of disenchanted mullahs and of young people. I said this in my first speech in 2004 before we were actually in Afghanistan—we had only one officer in Afghanistan in 2004 before we deployed. I said at that time that we have an urgent appointment with the Islamic world. On the one hand we need to ensure that trouble cannot be fomented in any corner of this planet by extremists, but on the other hand we need to provide the economic opportunities so that the young and, often, dispossessed can have an opportunity to gain capabilities rather than turning towards extremism. Those words are no less true than they were when they were said in 2004. They apply exactly to what we are doing in Afghanistan.

This will not be easy but, please, I beg the Australian people, do not assume that this is something that can easily be done without a military presence. Part of it—if you call it shoot and talk—is the fact that the Taliban will have to one day come to the table. We may not defeat them, but we can handle them if we engage their respective groups effectively. The Haqqani network is one. It has been pointed out by Tom Gregg, a young Australian who has been an analyst on the ground in Afghanistan, that the Haqqani network has an elderly leader who is probably in his final years. His 36-year-old son, Sirajuddin, is different. He is not a tribal elder. He is not a religious scholar. He has known nothing but war. He has never been part of a government nor lived in a peaceful society. Our one opportunity with the Taliban may be only a brief moment of sunshine. That is why I know that the US, Holbrook and the others are going to have to reach out. But it is a two-step process. The debate today is purely and simply a debate about withdrawing our troops and it is a step that would undermine everything that we have achieved so far.

Mr SNOWDON (Lingiari—Minister for Veterans’ Affairs, Minister for Defence Science and Personnel and Minister for Indigenous Health) (11.17 am)—I want to thank the member for Bowman for his contribution. I have been in this place for more than 20 years and in the course of that time I have participated in three debates over whether or not Australia should be involved in conflict. The first was in 1991 when we had a debate in this parliament about the Hawke government’s decision to send troops to the Gulf. I was privileged to be involved in the debate and happy to support the government’s position. The second was in 2003 when we debated here in this place whether or not we should be in Iraq. I am happy to say that I opposed that war.

Today, we are debating Afghanistan and whether or not we should withdraw our troops. Let me make it very clear from the outset that I think it is in our national interest that we maintain our mission in Afghanistan until we have completed the job. People who have listened to this debate will have heard the Prime Minister, the Minister for Defence and the Minister for Foreign Affairs outline very comprehensively the rationale for Australia’s ongoing presence in this conflict. It is absolutely imperative and in our national interest that we continue.

It is very important that the people of Australia understand what we are doing here and the privilege that sits in the hands of every member of this parliament to stand up here and debate whether or not we should be in-
volved in this conflict. After all, we live in a democracy which, I think, is the envy of much of the world for our capacity to be able to have these debates in a sensitive and appropriate way without taking to the streets. We need to comprehend how important that is.

When we commit ourselves to an engagement like that in Afghanistan, the Australian government—and I include the Howard government, when it committed our troops to Iraq, against the wishes of many—has a commitment to the Australian Defence Force, to their families and to the nation to see that our soldiers will have everything they need to give them the best chance of success and the support they require when returning home. Importantly, while our defence platforms and assets may be becoming increasingly mechanised, complex and machine oriented, it is the people of the ADF and their exceptional performance that gained the ADF the international reputation and respect for which it is renowned. In the end they are responsible for enduring the tough work of fighting the war, for risking and in some cases, sadly, dying—sacrificing their lives so that we here in Australia can sleep soundly in our beds at night. I have been to Tarin Kowt and met our soldiers on the ground and I continue to be impressed by their professionalism, their bravery and their commitment. Our service men and women are wonderful people who, on our behalf, go out and lay their lives on the line. There can be no doubt that our people are our most vital asset.

It is not difficult to understand the ongoing public debate on our role in Afghanistan. It is clear that many people are asking, ‘Is this our war?’ I think the Prime Minister, the Defence Minister and the Foreign Minister have all laid out the rationale as to why we should be engaged in this conflict and that rationale is comprehensive and logical. It is my judgment, too, that it is in our national interest to continue this mission. In this place we might disagree on policy; however, the people who are fighting this war on our behalf should be left in no doubt that, despite the different views in this place about the appropriateness of their mission, our troops on the ground have our total support in carrying out their tasks.

There should be no doubt about why we are involved in Afghanistan and why we should stay the course. After September 11 we committed to support our ally the United States to pursue al-Qaeda and rout out the terrorists from their safe haven in Afghanistan. This was a course supported by the United Nations, as explained comprehensively by the Minister for Foreign Affairs earlier this morning. As the Prime Minister has said, our mission in Afghanistan is not yet complete; our job is not yet done.

Yet there are positive signs in Afghanistan. International efforts have dealt a serious blow to al-Qaeda and its affiliates in Afghanistan. We are creating a situation where the ordinary Afghan citizen can be confident that the International Security Assistance Force and the Afghan national security forces are making headway. We know that the Taliban suppressed free speech. There are now 400 print media publications, 150 radio stations and 26 television stations in Afghanistan. In the past nine years we have seen more than two million girls enrolled in schools. We have seen basic health care being extended from 10 per cent to 85 per cent of the population. Progress is clearly being made. Our mission is to put the Afghan government in the best position to provide its own security.

But we must remember, as the member for Bowman pointed out, that the world is not perfect. The Afghanistan administration is wanting in areas. There is absolutely no
question or doubt that President Karzai and the government must deliver on commitments made at the London conference on Afghanistan held in January this year. Unfortunately, the knowledge that thousands of votes in the recent Afghan election have been disallowed because of questions over their legitimacy will inevitably undermine the confidence of many. Yet while we continue to put the lives of young Australians at risk it is vital that the Afghan government delivers on its promise, roots out corruption and achieves the reforms it has signed up for.

Since the commencement of our operations in Afghanistan, approximately 21,000 Australian Defence Force members have been deployed in support of operations in Afghanistan. Many have now undertaken multiple deployments in support of these operations. Sadly, 10 members of the ADF have been killed in action in Afghanistan this year. Over the life of the conflict, 21 ADF members have been killed in action in Afghanistan—such a sacrifice made on behalf of our nation. I know that every combat death is felt by all Australians, but particularly by the Defence Force family. I recently visited 1 Brigade at Robertson Barracks in the Northern Territory, where I was welcomed by Brigadier Gus McLachlan and his team. 1 Brigade is currently generating forces to support operations in the Middle East and East Timor. A key priority of 1 Brigade, and indeed of the rest of the ADF, is the support it provides to families whilst ADF members are on operations. In addition to the support provided by units, the Defence Community Organisation provides a wide range of support services to the families of members to help them cope with the demands of the military lifestyle.

Supporting the recovery and rehabilitation of wounded personnel is a very high priority for this government. As a result of our election commitment, we will invest $21.2 million over four years to enhance rehabilitation and recovery services as part of the new Simpson assistance program. This program, while in the very early planning stages, will look at the feasibility of setting up a rehabilitation centre of excellence using similar systems and programs used by our military allies. The focus of this centre will be the provision of holistic rehabilitation care and support for ADF personnel and their families in an environment tailored and suited to the young, active adult workforce. The program builds on the current support services, which include providing families with advice on how best to support their loved ones and linking them with the most appropriate services. Sadly, in previous generations a lack of understanding by the entire community meant that many veterans who required treatment for mental health conditions often did not receive assistance or the understanding that was required. In recent decades, this situation has, thankfully, changed, and there have been dramatic improvements. There is now comprehensive provision of mental health support services, but there is still more work to do.

The government is aware that physical injuries are not the only type of injuries that may occur as a result of a deployment. We are focused on understanding and supporting those with mental health issues. In partnership with the Department of Veterans’ Affairs and the Department of Defence, the Centre for Military Veterans Health has been commissioned to undertake a series of studies to assist in identifying potential health impacts of deployment. We also have a rigorous process to ensure that we monitor the mental health of those we deploy. I would have thought that these things would be self-evident. They are things we must do.

Another area for which I have some responsibility and which plays a crucial role in improving protection, saving lives and re-
ducing injuries for Australian troops and equipment and operations in Afghanistan is science and technology. I will ensure as far as I can that support to ADF operations in Afghanistan remains the highest priority for the Defence Science and Technology Organisation. DSTO supports military operations by providing direct technical advice, technology insertion and operational analysis support to the ADF in-theatre. Many of the measures announced as part of the force protection review involved the rapid introduction of new technology to assist Australian forces in Afghanistan. In particular, DSTO has been deeply involved across the spectrum of counter improvised explosive device initiatives. DSTO has also enhanced its support to operations by establishing a science and technology fly-away team that Defence Force commanders call on. DSTO scientists are available to provide the Defence Force with expert advice and assistance in introducing a new technology or assisting in the conduct of field trials both in Australia and in Afghanistan.

In the past 12 months, DSTO has deployed seven fly-away teams that have addressed a range of critical issues to support commanders in the field. Providing force protection and scientific support to the men and women of the Defence Force who are deployed in operations is a critical element of our approach to Afghanistan, and I am extremely proud of our defence scientists and the leading-edge scientific support they provide to our troops in the field. Australians rightly hold our servicemen in the highest regard, and I share that high regard. In the finest traditions of those who fought in previous conflicts, today’s veterans have a reputation for tenacity, courage and spirit. Recent losses, though, remind us all of the terrible price that comes with such a reputation. In our grief we must not forget the profound responsibility for caring for those who remain.

The face of the Australian veteran is changing. The high operational tempo in Iraq and Afghanistan has resulted in service men and women as young as 21 needing the support of the Department of Veterans’ Affairs. Our veterans are increasingly fathers and mothers of young children. They are sons, daughters, sisters, brothers and friends. The Department of Veterans’ Affairs currently supports almost 1,500 veterans with disabilities sustained in Iraq and Afghanistan. Almost 1,300 of these men and women are under the age of 50. Almost 30 children of those who have died in Afghanistan or Iraq in recent years are now assisted by the government, along with 20 widows.

This is the face of war. It is imperative that measures are in place for a lifetime of support. It is an obligation the nation owes to this community. To that end, we are working hard to ensure that the delivery of services to those who are serving or have recently completed service is as seamless as possible across government. We are reviewing existing programs for the treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder and working hard to support those at risk. Mental health issues often arise some time after a potentially traumatic event. The government is investing heavily in reducing stigma and delivering self-help. Early intervention is a key focus. Our objective is to give those injured in service the best outcome available—rehabilitation to return to active service or, if they are separating from the forces, transition to a quality and healthy civilian life. We need to make better use of the opportunities that technology provides, be more responsive to individual needs and ensure fast and fair decisions with benefits and support delivered in a timely manner.
It goes without doubt that I, along with every member of this House, have a great respect for all of Australia’s veteran community—for what they have endured for the service of this country, for the price their families pay and for the impact of their experiences on their health. I see the impact on individuals and families of our involvement in Afghanistan. That is why this debate is so important. We need to understand the human impact of what we are doing. Our mission in Afghanistan is critical to our national security. There are others in this place who have different views on our commitment. I respect their views, but I do not agree with them. I take comfort from the fact, as I said earlier, that in our country such disagreements are conducted here in this place. We have a responsibility to ensure the best possible support for those who need it as part of their service. We are obligated to provide it. We also have a responsibility to stay the course in this important mission. We need to see this job through.

Mrs GASH (Gilmore) (11.32 am)—On the cover of the August 2010 addition of Time magazine is a harrowing photograph of Bibi Aisha. Bibi is a young Afghan woman, a pretty girl by any measure. It is a high-resolution photograph, and what makes the photograph harrowing is the fact that, where Bibi’s nose should be, there is a large cavity. You see, Bibi’s nose was cut off by her husband for some perceived transgression. But what was not shown in the photograph was that her ears had also been cut off by her husband. Rod Nordland wrote in the New York Times that this image has become the:

… litmus test about attitudes toward the war … in Afghanistan. Critics of the American presence in Afghanistan call it “emotional blackmail” and even “war porn,” while those who fear the consequences of abandoning Afghanistan see it as a powerful appeal to conscience.

I suppose that is where we are in this debate—pondering not so much how we got there or even what we are doing there but more what would happen if we left. By ‘we’, I of course mean the coalition of military forces in which Australia is a participant.

Australian troops are aware, tolerant and understanding of other cultures. They are taught to respect other cultures before they are deployed and they have an outstanding record of success in working with those cultures wherever they have been deployed and within many countries across the globe. I am under no illusion that Afghanistan is not a basket case of democracy barely being held together by Western military might. The values we cherish as a Western nation contrast strikingly with the ancient culture and values of the Afghans. Of that there is no doubt. Without making light of the situation, I am reminded of the missionary zeal of the spread of Christianity amongst the heathens in the 15th and 16th centuries. I often wonder whether some of those conversions were willing. There are historical similarities in present-day Afghanistan, and history can be a precursor to the future.

In terms of modern history, Afghanistan and the West have never really hit it off. The British had a go in the 19th century, rather unspectacularly, and the Russians had a turn as well, in the 1980s. It is interesting to explore the Soviet experiment. At that time, the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan was a Soviet satellite headed by a Marxist government. Running in the background was the situation in Iran, with the Islamic uprising in 1979 and the overthrow of the shah. The political tide obviously had no territorial borders, and the flow of sentiment to the mujahideen in Afghanistan was of great concern to the Russians, who saw a threat to their power base. They had to intercede aggressively to protect against any perception of the diminishment of their authority, espe-
cially while there were similar murmurings in Chechnya and other subordinate countries in their domain. They needed a strong gesture, and in their minds I am sure they believed that intervention in Afghanistan would send a powerful message.

History shows the Americans supported the Afghans against the Russians, with military assistance and advice. The movie Charlie Wilson's War, with Tom Hanks and Julia Roberts, gives some insight into the effort on the part of the Americans in that period. With the help of the Americans and the CIA, the Russians tasted defeat and withdrew after a 10-year occupation. The vacuum caused by the Russian withdrawal was rapidly filled out of the ranks of the mujahideen, with the emergence of a zealous and armed Taliban motivated not by territory or traditional tribal divisions but by religious fervour. There was no effective government in Afghanistan. Tribal might and the AK-47 constituted the law of the land, financed through the very lucrative poppy fields whose by-product was killing so many Westerners through drug abuse. The ascendency of the Taliban also assisted in the rise of even more extremist religious zealots, foremost of which were al-Qaeda. Al-Qaeda were both the architect and the instrument of 9-11.

The rest is history. America intervened and once-allies soon became enemies. Australia has enjoyed a strong bond with the United States of America, going back to World War I. They were there for us against the threat of the Japanese invasion and we responded with a show of solidarity in Korea. We went with them to Vietnam and Iraq, and they tacitly supported us in Timor. The relationship is deeply ingrained in the Australian psyche because of our shared values and historical antecedents.

Having said that, I also need to state clearly and unequivocally that I abhor war. Having been born in wartime Holland in 1944, I was raised in a family climate clouded by the experience of war. My father served in the Dutch underground. While he said very little afterwards, the war had changed him—memories so profound and entrenched they were never far from the surface. Whilst I do not have a personal experience of the war—I was only a child at the time—the influence of the views and nuances of my parents had a deep and lasting influence on my development, views and attitudes.

Today, we are in Afghanistan not only as a gesture of solidarity with the United States but also because we abhor all that the Taliban and al-Qaeda represent, including their attitude towards human dignity. We are not there to wage war for the sake of doing so. By any examination of the philosophy of religion, the war in Afghanistan is not a religious war, although it is being promoted as such by the Taliban because it suits them. What we are witnessing is an exercise of power under the guise of a religious crusade. There are certainly enough precedents in history.

That brings me to the point of asking this question: do we stay or do we go? If we truly believe in what we are doing and why we are there, then the answer is obvious; if we have doubts and our commitment is wavering, then we should not be there. Before broaching that proposition, the question to first consider is what will happen if the coalition strikes camp and departs. That question was considered in an article in Time magazine based on a book written by Bob Woodward of Watergate fame. Woodward’s book Obama’s Wars explores that very question. Afghanistan is characterised as having a persistent medieval culture based on a tribal system of power sharing. Corruption is rife, the power of the gun being the final arbiter. In some parts, women are regarded as less than domestic animals and treated as such.
Woodward describes Afghan president Hamid Karzai as a manic depressive with severe mood swings. That in itself is not a hanging offence. Many great leaders in the world were depressive, Churchill included, and did a sterling job in leading their respective countries. However, it does point to the type of vacuum that would be left waiting to be filled.

There is no suggestion that the Taliban would allow al-Qaeda a safe haven. After all, if one assumes that Afghanistan reverts to its previous ‘business as usual’ mode run by several powerful warlords with a token head of state, it is unlikely that al-Qaeda, made up of fighters from diverse nationalities with their own subset of ambitions, would get much of a look in.

We saw in Iraq, for instance, after the downfall of Saddam Hussein the emergence of an internal conflict between the Sunni and Shiite sects in Iraq. That conflict was always there. Like politics within politics, there are religions within religions. Under Saddam Hussein’s regime, the minority Sunni sect enjoyed the upper hand. But the tables have been turned. There, as the Americans devolve their participation, the attacks go on, albeit among Iraqis as they struggle to position their respective interests in the emerging power vacuum. Let us hope that after all these years of occupancy a workable model for government has been left that will give the Iraqis a chance of success. If not, the situation will soon devolve into anarchy.

When I look at previous instances where a controlling power has handed over government I see a familiar pattern emerging in nearly every situation. I am talking about how the once mighty British Empire divested itself of its protectorates. Where there was a strong social and democratic ethic, the transition was reasonably seamless. On the other hand, leaving behind a dysfunctional substitute only compounded the instability. I look at our own experiences in Papua New Guinea, which I would describe as a reasonably successful transition.

So to my mind, based on history, unless we invest in providing stability to the country we are overseeing then our withdrawal can only result in a backward spiral. I am hard-pressed to find any published opinion anywhere in the world that suggests an optimistic outcome in the event of our premature withdrawal from Afghanistan. The question for us then becomes whether we are prepared to cut loose and allow them to take their chances, no matter what. And it is a question that must be left to the individual conscience.

However, responsible government does not have such an indulgence but must rely on the principle of serving the greater good. What is the greater good in this case? Is it our greater good—that is, that of the Australian people? Or is it that of the people of Afghanistan? If not for anything else but the women of Afghanistan, like Bibi Aisha, my conscience tells me that we need to invest in the hard yards. My practical side says that there is no easy, short-term fix to this. There is not a mood emerging that suggests to me anything other than that as soon as we are gone it is back to square one and that we would have wasted our time. I could be wrong.

But I cannot deny the sense of futility within our own community towards the question of Afghanistan. Are we trying to impose values that they cannot comprehend in the context of their own value systems, let alone want? On a more parochial basis, what if we withdraw our presence and leave the mess to the Americans? How would we view ourselves as the principled and reliable mates that we pride ourselves to be? And if we did, could we honestly continue to expect that the Americans would continue their strong sup-
port of Australia, especially in a time of need? This whole issue comes down to a question of morality and global responsibility.

There are many diverse views in the constituency that I represent and I am not going to start telling them what they should be thinking; neither are the Afghans obliged to listen to or subscribe to our opinions—that is a fact of life. My personal inclination is that if we entered into this for all the right reasons then we should go the distance. But I do appreciate the other schools of thought that say it is none of our business and that we should not be there. But the fact remains we are there right now. Do we stay or do we go? This is a decision for the government of the day. It must weigh up the pros and the cons for both scenarios. But, in doing so, I want them to take into consideration our history. It is a history of service towards those who need us and a history of supporting the underdog in their hour of need. This is the Australian ideal, and frankly I would be repulsed by anyone who deliberately turns their back on someone in need, even a nation with a continuing threat of terrorism across the globe.

If the Afghans ask us to leave then that is entirely a different proposition. But they have not. The women of Afghanistan, the thousands of Bibi Aishas out there who have no voice but who want to live, deserve our protection. To those who want us out of there, will your conscience be rested knowing you have turned your back on many of those women? Would we consider ourselves an advanced nation if we were to take a laissez faire view of the world; live and let live? My conscience will not allow me that latitude but we have our respective personal views. Again I say that I acknowledge the diversity of views on this subject in my electorate and I respect those views. Perhaps all these seemingly contrasting ideals are attainable given time and the right approach. But are we prepared for an investment of that magnitude?

Professor Dennis Altman of La Trobe University in an article last year said:
There is little evidence that the current Afghan government, or its likely successors, is any more likely than the Iraqi government to build the sort of democratic progressive state we hope for ...

I emphasise ‘we’. In other words, except in terms of conscience, there is no other practical reason why we should stay.

Thankfully, we all don’t think like that, and I recognise the bipartisan position echoed within this chamber. However, I do think it prudent to have a line in the sand, a point where we have to accept that it is either working for us or it is not—a set of parameters that are beyond challenge and repeal. That has not been done. With such an arrangement in place we will be able to move on with dignity, with confidence and without offence.

In conclusion, I fully support the mentoring work that our troops are performing, both with the police and the Afghani community. We have always punched above our weight with our targeted operations on their territory. As the Leader of the Opposition said in his statement, “A government’s commitment to our soldiers should be no less strong than our soldiers’ commitment to our country.”

On that note I would also like to take this opportunity to recognise the contribution of our service men and women, both past and present, and those stationed at HMAS Albatross and HMAS Creswell, in my electorate. They are serving with the full knowledge that they may be called upon to contribute—and, if they do, it will be in accord with the highest standards and traditions of our defence forces; of that I am confident.

I thank the House for allowing me to speak my mind. Nothing is set in concrete,
and whether we stay or whether we go is a decision that must be based on considered and sober deliberations—not by dogma, which is what we are fighting over there. I also thank our community in Gilmore, especially those who took the time to email, write or phone me to let me know their views.

Dr MIKE KELLY (Eden-Monaro—Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry) (11.46 am)—Sending our young men and women into harm’s way is one of the most important and challenging decisions a government ever has to make. This parliament is situated on an axis that ensures we are always in sight of the Australian War Memorial. There is no mistake in this, as it was intended that it be a reminder of the consequences of political decisions and that they should not be taken lightly. It is also a reminder that this nation has made great sacrifices throughout its history in the cause of peace and freedom. Previous generations of Australians have been tested in ways we can barely imagine today. There were times when the very existence of this nation was in question, when we had to steel ourselves against a steady drumbeat of defeat and setback, when it would have been so easy to succumb, to try and pretend that the isolation of our island home would somehow save us from extremism and evil or that others would come to our rescue without us having to make the sacrifices that we would ask of them.

Those generations did not succumb, they did not shirk; they kept faith with those who were asked and who volunteered to assume the greatest risks, and they did their bit to support the national effort. We venerate their fortitude and salute their service. But are we worthy of them? Are we made of the same stuff? Are we prepared to carry the torch they have passed to us with the same courage? This generation is facing tests that are forcing us to ask these questions. One of these tests is the threat of Islamist extremism.

I believe that Islam today is going through a period of ideological struggle not dissimilar to that experienced by Christianity during the Reformation, with a similarly tragic loss of life. One little understood feature of this struggle is that the victims of Islamist extremism have overwhelmingly been Muslims, although there have of course been countless tragic, outrageous and unacceptable losses borne by others. There may be some who think that we can hide from this threat or its consequences, but this is sadly delusional.

Our challenge is to encourage and promote the voices of moderate Islam, which are in truth the majority, both at home and abroad. At the same time we must confront and defeat the extremists by using all the elements of state and non-state power at our disposal. We are essentially engaged in a battle of ideas, key to which is maintaining the moral high ground. In this battle our chief weapons will be what is termed ‘soft power’—promoting interfaith dialogue, reducing sources of grievance, advancing education. This last element is extremely vital, as we are not really engaged in a war on terror at present but a war on ignorance. Where ignorance flourishes, the seeds of Islamist extremism grow most plentifully. It is no accident that in 2008, when the Taliban controlled the Swat valley in Pakistan, the first thing they did was blow up 100 schools and replace them with radicalising madrasahs. They know knowledge is their enemy.

The problem of Islamist extremism becomes most severe when such forces have secured the resources, machinery and possibilities of a state. Where these extremists are forced to operate on the margins, their potential for causing harm is much more limited. This is the key to the challenge to us posed
by Afghanistan. Once the Taliban had won control of most of Afghanistan it was not only free to pursue horrific domestic policies based on its own interpretation of Islam but it became the international epicentre of Islamist terrorism. Principal among these was of course al-Qaeda. Al-Qaeda was able to attain a level of organisational sophistication, in the space and state support that was provided by the Taliban, which they could never achieve elsewhere. For those who say that al-Qaeda can and does operate in other disrupted or poorly governed spaces in Somalia, Pakistan or Yemen, this may be true, but these locations in no way offer what al-Qaeda enjoyed in Afghanistan until 2001. Between 1997 and 2001 al-Qaeda was able to operate a conventional battle formation, the 055 Brigade of around 2,000 effectives, which served as shock troops for the Taliban but which also formed the strategic reserve for al-Qaeda’s terrorist network.

Through the opportunities provided by the freedom it had in Afghanistan, al-Qaeda was able to establish an extensive global financial network that also enabled it to exercise effective control over the Taliban. This financial resource provided the funding for operations such as the 9/11 attack. Al-Qaeda was also able to establish an extensive terrorist training network in Afghanistan, with thousands passing through these facilities. This training consisted of all the ideological, technical, logistical and organisational skills a modern terrorist could need and was vital in underpinning the related terrorist capability throughout our region, including Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jemaah Islamiah, to name a couple. We know that al-Qaeda was also using its opportunities in Afghanistan to experiment with and develop biological and chemical weapons to enable it to perpetrate ever-escalating levels of slaughter on the West. We cannot allow the circumstances to ever arise again where a terrorist organisation can have at its disposal the resources and opportunities of a state, and this is the risk we run if we do not maintain our support for the international effort in Afghanistan.

And let us not forget the horror of the Taliban regime itself and the atrocities Taliban insurgents still inflict. From the moment they seized power, a brutal, medieval reign of terror and ignorance descended on the country. Summary processes which were a mockery of justice were followed by hangings, shootings, amputations and stonings. Women were prohibited from working or gaining an education, forced to wear burqas and denied the most fundamental of human rights. Because all women were withdrawn from the education system, this resulted in the loss of 70 per cent of the teachers, and so a generation of Afghan children have missed a basic education and the human capital of the country has thereby been crippled. The Taliban were responsible for vandalism on a massive scale of the cultural heritage of Afghanistan and the world through the irrational destruction of the centuries-old Bamyan buddhas and hundreds of other treasures besides. The massacre of thousands occurred in places like Mazar-e-Sharif and Yaklaolang, while large numbers of women were abducted, forcibly married, raped or sold into sexual slavery by Taliban fighters.

This was the regime that promoted the development of the narcotics industry that is plaguing the streets of our cities, with estimates that they were supplying up to 90 per cent of the world’s heroin production. Our continuing effort in Afghanistan carries with it the hope that this will at least be much reduced, with transition plans for the farmers of the country and the cessation of the dependence of the state and warlords on this industry of death and social devastation.

It also never ceases to amaze me that those who are quite rightly passionate in the
defence of asylum seekers from Afghanistan are not prepared to extend their compassion to the people who remain. Are not the women and children of Afghanistan deserving of our best efforts to prevent a return to the brutalisation of the Taliban years? The silence of some activists against Islamist extremism shocks me, as this extremism should be total anathema to the agenda of liberals and social democrats. Granted, Afghanistan still has a long way to go along the reconstruction path and the assurance of fundamental human rights, but it is light years in advance of what was occurring before 2001. It should also be well understood in the context of our concern over the flow of asylum seekers from Afghanistan at the moment that, should the country descend back into chaos or Taliban control, we would need to brace ourselves against a much larger human wave, where no doubt further lives would be lost at sea.

Another critical consideration is the impact the disintegration of the situation in Afghanistan could have for the broader region. Already it is well understood that the Afghanistan problem is closely related to the situation in Pakistan, and we very recently experienced the advance of Taliban and extremist elements towards Islamabad in 2009, which was thankfully thwarted. Should the Taliban regain Afghanistan and facilitate the takeover of Pakistan by extremist forces, the implications would be enormous. As it is a nuclear armed state, one can imagine the tension that this would cause in India, the region’s other nuclear armed state. The threat of a wider war in our region would deeply affect Australia. There would also be bleed-out destabilisation occurring in other Central Asian nations, widening the human and economic consequences impacting on us.

Our presence in Afghanistan could not be founded on a sounder basis of legitimacy. We are part of an international community effort which goes well beyond the military contribution of the 46 nations whose forces are on the ground sharing the risks with us. The mission is underpinned by UN Security Council resolutions and a clear basis of self-defence arising from the horrendous assault on the United States on 9-11, which killed thousands of innocents including Australian citizens. It is not just our alliance with the United States, though, that is at stake in Afghanistan but the future of NATO and the ability of the international community to stand firm in the face of the Islamist extremism. Signs of weakness in this broader alliance of democracies will only encourage the extremists.

This is not to say that we should be offering a blank cheque of support and that, if the mission were clearly headed for strategic failure or the governance and rule-of-law situation in Afghanistan were proving utterly repugnant to Australian values, we should stay regardless. That is not what the government is asserting. We have formed our view based on Defence advice, observation on the ground and close consultation with our coalition partners. From this we have formed the view that progress is being made, although this is not uniform across the country or across all aspects. It also does not mean that the risk of strategic failure is not still there or that progress is inevitable.

Discussions about strategy and methods will continue, but the overall basic concepts underpinning the effort are now well accepted and are being pursued. These include providing the surge of troops necessary to establish a secure space so that good governance and the rule of law can develop. It also involves reorienting the focus of the military forces to understand that protection of the civilian population is the centre of gravity and that we cannot kill our way to success. Key good governance and rule-of-law issues are also finally receiving the attention they
deserve, as the success of this mission is at its heart mostly dependent on social, economic and political factors. It is precisely to address these key dimensions of our operations that this government has established the Asia Pacific Civil-Military Centre of Excellence. The Centre is proving, as it continues to mature, to be a vital mechanism in refining the whole-of-government and NGO effort in stabilisation operations and disaster response.

The Australian effort in Afghanistan has achieved much since 2005. This includes standing up education, health and trade-training facilities; providing critical aviation support to the ISAF coalition; shouldering much of the security heavy lifting in Oruzgan through our Special Operations Task Group; providing key military staff positions and civilian experts for mission-critical coalition roles; and primarily now providing the mentoring and training support to the 4th ANA Brigade. This last is the most critical from the military perspective. Ultimately our mission is to make ourselves redundant, not create continuing dependency. We must therefore build the Afghan capacity to provide their own security. In relation to claims that we should be sending more troops, it should be noted that these assertions have not been informed by the situation on the ground. It should also be recognised that there comes a point where a continuing and overbearing presence of foreign troops can become counterproductive. While the vast majority of Afghans, estimated at around 82 per cent, do not want a return to the Taliban and continue to broadly support the international military presence, this will have a use-by date.

In terms of the civil aspects of our effort in Oruzgan, and noting my reference to this being a war against ignorance, we have gone from almost no child receiving an education to numbers now having risen towards 50,000. This is the most pleasing aspect of all we have achieved so far. NATO recently reported that in 2002 nine per cent of Afghans had access to health care. Today that figure is 85 per cent. Afghan women hold almost a quarter of the seats in parliament, in contrast to being barely visible under the oppressive Taliban rule. The number of teachers has almost doubled since 2002.

The Afghan National Army has expanded to 134,000 and continues to improve in capability and expand in size. The Afghan National Police has now grown to 109,000, and our mentoring and training effort provided by the AFP and outlined by Minister O’Connor is one of the most vital aspects of our work. In April this year the Special Operations Task Group supported a community-led push to expel Taliban insurgents from the town of Gizab, north of the Chora valley. This was a clear indication that the insurgents are not welcomed by the population at large. Fighting side by side, the people of Gizab, the Afghan National Security Forces and Australian Special Forces troops pushed the insurgents out of the town.

I understand what we are asking of our men and women in Afghanistan and their families. I have seen the devastation of war in Somalia, Bosnia, Timor-Leste and Iraq, watched men die, lost friends and washed their blood from my uniform. I have shed tears over broken bodies and, together with coalition colleagues in recent times, tried to console families. I do not support the continuation of our commitment in Afghanistan lightly. If you were to ask the troops themselves, they would tell you that they think they are making progress, they want us to keep faith with them, as do the families that I have spoken to. We should not leave Afghanistan because it is hard. We are in Afghanistan because our national interests are engaged and because it is the right thing to do. What the government has outlined is not
a prescription for a blank cheque but, as things stand at this moment, we believe it is worth our perseverance, and persevere we must.

Debate (on motion by Mr Forrest) adjourned.

GOVERNOR-GENERAL'S SPEECH

Address-in-Reply

Debate resumed from 20 October, on the proposed address-in-reply to the speech of Her Excellency the Governor-General—

May it please Your Excellency:

We, the House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Australia, in Parliament assembled, express our loyalty to the Sovereign, and thank Your Excellency for the speech which you have been pleased to address to the Parliament—

on motion by Ms O'Neill:

That the Address be agreed to.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. DGH Adams)—Order! Before I call the honourable member for Riverina, I remind honourable members of the House that this is the member’s first speech. I therefore ask the House to extend to him the usual courtesies.

Mr McCormack (Riverina) (12.01 pm)—‘I love a sunburnt country, A land of sweeping plains, Of rugged mountain ranges, Of droughts and flooding rains.’ Dorothea Mackellar’s famous lines best describe our wonderful and unique Australia. Her words could also specifically apply to the Riverina region of southern New South Wales, the area I now proudly represent in this parliament. It is a region like no other in this wide, brown land for it stretches from the magnifi-cent Snowy Mountains across to the red, dusty plains around Hillston and beyond.

This starkly differing landscape has resulted in amazing diversity within the Riverina, which encompasses an area of almost 61½-thousand square kilometres. Yet the people of the Riverina, as different as they may be, are bound by a common thread. The thing which binds them is a country spirit—a ‘can-do’ attitude—which is embedded in their hearts and minds as they seek to build a better region, a better Australia, a brighter future. The people of the Riverina have contributed mightily to this nation and will continue to do so. All they need is a fair go. It is all they have ever sought. Just some recognition for their worth to this great nation.

When Mackellar wrote of a sunburnt land, she was echoing the sentiments expressed in a journal entry by the first European to visit the district now occupied by the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area. ‘The whole country,’ explorer John Oxley despaired in 1817, ‘seems burnt up with a long continued drought … a country which for bareness and desolation has no equal. I am the first white man to see it and I think I will undoubtedly be the last.’ Oxley did not, however, count on the resilience of those early settlers whose push westward during the 19th century was unceasing and whose pioneering spirit could not be broken.

In 1906 the Barren Jack and Murrumbidgee Canals Construction Act was introduced by New South Wales Secretary for Public Works Charles Lee, after whom Leeton is named. On tiny blocks of stiff clay soil, far removed from markets, the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area Scheme was launched. The official opening, the turning on of the water by State Minister for Public Works Arthur Griffith, whose name lives on through the vibrant Riverina city bearing his name, took place at Yanco in 1912. By 1916 it was deemed that the MIA was a place fit for heroes—and more than a thousand of our bravest from the Great War took up soldier settlement blocks. This historical background to the establishment of the MIA is important because it is one of the greatest success stories of Australia and therefore the Riverina. May it continue to be so.
The next grand engineering feat, in fact the most outstanding in Australia’s history, also took place within the boundaries of what is now the Riverina electorate. The Snowy Mountains Scheme, constructed between 1949 and 1974, generates electricity and enhances irrigation flows for the dry west. It was built by people from 32 countries, many of whom had been at war with each other only a few years earlier, and it had a significant effect on the cultural mix of Australia.

Griffith was Australia’s major early experiment in cultural integration and this inter-racial melting pot has stood the test of time, which says a lot about the people and their acceptance of each other for the greater good—that ‘can-do’ mentality. The Riverina is, therefore, the cradle of Australian multiculturalism. It is a region which has defined an inhospitable landscape, a less than always favourable climate and a racial mix which has worked in few other places. It has progressed in spite of itself. It has advanced because people of many and varied ethnic backgrounds cast aside their differences, rolled up their sleeves and, under a hot Australian sun, got on with the essential and back-breaking task of tilling the soil in order to produce the food to feed the nation. Our nation. Our people.

Against all odds and often in the most trying of times, the MIA has lasted generation after generation thanks to the hardy resolve of its people. What those determined and resourceful people of the MIA do not need and will not survive against now is poor policy from this place—this place which is supposed to protect and support Australian industry; this place which is here to stick up for the Aussie battler; this parliament which now, more than ever before, says it is focusing on the needs and the rights of rural and regional Australia.

Well, here is the real test. Here is the challenge facing this parliament, this nation. Never mind whatever else you may have heard previously stated in this chamber, let it be known this is the greatest moral dilemma of our time. Do we, as a nation, turn our backs on our fellow Australians who have done everything asked of them by government—turning a barren and desolate land, according to Oxley, into the country’s food bowl?

Do we, as a nation, now repay the farmers who have still managed to put food on our tables despite a dozen years of the worst ever drought by taking the precious resource with which they need to grow their produce? Can we, in all conscience, allow a situation whereby the very people who feed us and sustain us are coerced, encouraged or forced—call it what you like—into selling their right to use water? Buybacks lead to waterless properties and the loss of jobs and food production as well as the confidence in and the viability of regional communities. None of us in this House should want that, nor can we afford that. Food production is serious business in the MIA, contributing more than $2.5 billion annually to the Australian economy. The Australian Farm Institute says that every Griffith farmer feeds 150 Australians and 450 foreigners each year. Those same farmers and many more besides are now faced with the very real and grim prospect that they will be unable to continue the irreplaceable role they play and that their parents and grandparents before them played in the service of this country—feeding the nation.

I am the son of a dryland farmer, and his father and grandfather also ploughed their Riverina paddocks, planted crops and hoped Mother Nature would be kind. Sometimes she was and times were good. Other years were not so generous, but that is the cycle of farming—an industry reliant on the right
amount of rain falling at the right time. When it does not rain for years on end, it does not mean it will not rain again. It does not mean we all need to listen to a government grant-seeking academic sprouting doom and gloom about climate changing irreversibly. My father was a big believer in weather cycles—drought followed by flood—just like we have at present. It is just as Dorothea Mackellar described: weather doing what it has always done in this unforgiving land. We just have to make the best of what we get. Flo Grant, an Aboriginal elder with the Wiradjuri people in Wagga Wagga, summed up the water issue so eloquently and succinctly just last week. ‘We all like to eat,’ she said. ‘Farmers have to come first and foremost. They need the water to grow the food. The environment will always take care of itself as it has been doing for tens of thousands of years.’ Her comment rings far truer than the nonsense we hear so often spoken by so many who base their views on mere assumptions of what might or might not happen. And here is another truism. Our irrigators, our farmers, are the best in the world. They are the best environmentalists because their livelihoods and their futures depend on it. They are world leaders in maximising production using the least amount of water. Australian food quality is second to none. That is why it needs protection—fair trade rather than free trade.

There is a worryingly growing chasm between our overcrowded cities and the bush, and it is incumbent upon all of us and particularly those of us in this House to do more to bridge the gap. If we do not then people in cities will forget where their food comes from; they will take it for granted, accept more imports and then wonder why their food prices have gone up and there are food safety scares. We all want a better environment, but who is actually prepared to do something, to go without or to put their hand in their pocket to achieve it? If this is a difficult prospect for most people then think about this before far-reaching decisions are made in the name of the environment—and remember we cannot make a decision in the name of the environment without knowing what the supposed environmental benefits will be, without embracing people and without considering the human cost.

When our farmers talk about biosecurity threats we, in this parliament, need to listen and act. Our wheat growers’ best interests were not looked after when the single desk was dismantled in 2008. Our apple growers were blighted, pun intended, in July this year when final approval was given for China to begin exporting apples to Australia. This move has the potential to ruin Batlow, a town in my electorate. It is bad enough that Riverina’s wheat and apple growers are now confronted by so much uncertainty due to poor policy, but we should not, cannot and must not allow our family farms to now be left high and dry. Everyone wants a healthy river system, none more so than the good folk of Coleambally, Griffith and Leeton and other towns, villages and farms in the Murrumbidgee Valley. We can have good environmental flows and family farms.

Some reports put the number as high as 7,000 who attended a Murray-Darling Basin Authority community information session at Griffith last Thursday. Those who turned up were upset. They were united. And people power won the day. The ashes from the ceremonial, some would say justifiable, burning of a heap of copies of the guide were still smouldering—no-one doused the flames because they do not waste water in Griffith—when the government announced an overdue parliamentary inquiry into the socio-economic effects of any proposed water cutbacks. Let us hope some good comes of this. Let us hope sanity prevails for the good of our irrigation communities, for the good of
those who wish to eat home-grown food in the future and for the good of Australia.

We need to better store, better harvest and better use water—our most valuable asset. We are not doing it at the moment. Our country has some of the most inventive minds, finest engineers, smartest entrepreneurs, willing workers and people prepared to have a go, to try things. But do we have the conviction and courage to stand up for what is best for Australia? Do we have the political will to do what is necessary and build dams where there is an abundance of water and pipe it to areas most in need? We have enough water in this country; we are just not using it wisely. Let us have a vision, show some courage and start planning now for projects of the scale of the MIA and the Snowy scheme to again show the world what a mighty nation of thinkers and builders we are. What a fine legacy that would be for generations to follow! It all comes down to common sense. What a shame there is not a federal portfolio for it.

The Mayor of Tumbarumba, Ian Chaffey, at a Nationals’ election campaign fundraising luncheon hosted by my good friend, Labor Party life member George Martin—such is the spirit of cooperation in the Riverina—declared that there ought to be a ‘ministry for getting things done’. That could work too! One project of vital importance to the entire Riverina is a new Wagga Wagga Base Hospital. It was first promised in 1980 but the people are still waiting. They are good people in the Riverina. They are tolerant. They are generous. They helped to fund their own cancer care centre. But while their spirit of giving will never wane, their patience is certainly wearing thin. They too rallied in their thousands recently to demand action for a new regional referral hospital. Wagga Base is terribly run-down. Local physician-cardiologist, Doctor Gerard Carroll, describes it as ‘dangerous’. Whilst the building is dilapidated, staff members at the hospital continue to be caring, conscientious and consummate professionals in the most trying of conditions. They are to be admired for the extraordinary feats they perform in the less than ordinary working environment they are forced to endure. The current Wagga Wagga Base Hospital was first promised in 1958 and officially opened just over four years later—four short years. It has now been 30 long years since the first pledge was made to rebuild. Both sides of state politics, it must be said, have reneged on promises made. But, you know, for a mother with a sick child lying limp in her arms or an age pensioner waiting in pain for surgery, they neither know nor care about political sides or whether it is federal or state funding—they just desire and deserve to be treated in a facility similar in standard to those many metropolitan people take for granted.

There is an opportunity in this parliament to end the wait for the long-suffering Riverina residents and medical fraternity who ought to be given—and who need—a facility offering the very best in modern health. I commit myself to doing what I can to help this process. Health is so important. It is for most people the No. 1 priority. That is understandable. Without good health, you have nothing. During the election campaign I doorknocked thousands of Riverina homes. Health and water were by far top-of-the-mind issues. People were also concerned about increasing costs of living, how we would repay the debt and protecting small business and the vital transport industry.

I encountered very few people who rated national broadband as something they could not live without—maybe a dozen, probably less, out of the many thousands of residents of all ages who spoke to me at their doorstep, in the street and at various events in the lead-up to the election. The $43 billion that Labor claims the National Broadband Network will
cost—in truth, probably twice that amount—would fund more than a hundred new base hospitals of the size the Riverina requires. Think of the public health system our regions could have. What a crying shame! What a wasted opportunity! More doctors, nurses, allied and mental health professionals and aged-care services are desperately needed in rural and regional areas. Nationally, we need to do more for Aboriginal health to increase the life expectancy and standard of living of our first nation people.

The Riverina is so very fortunate to have a facility such as Kurrajong Waratah which provides opportunities, support and training to more than 700 babies, children and adults with an intellectual disability or developmental delay and their families and carers on a daily basis. Wagga Wagga, or more specifically the Army Recruit Training Centre at Blamey Barracks, Kapooka, is the home of the Australian soldier. My hometown is a tri-service city boasting Air Force and Navy bases as well. It also has a progressive campus of Charles Sturt University, a leader in tertiary education.

Education is fundamental to a successful society. We must have a strong public school system. Equally, funding of non-government schools is essential to ensuring that parents continue to have a choice as to where their children will be educated. The fact that 704,000 young Australians—or one in five students—receives a Catholic education should be evidence enough to this parliament that every cent of support is needed and well spent and that future funding should be at the very least maintained and properly indexed, not frozen at its current level or, worse, scrapped. That any government would even contemplate withdrawing money from Catholic schools is an insult at a time when we are rightly celebrating the woman who was the first to introduce a national curriculum, our own Mary MacKillop, St Mary of the Cross.

Catholic schools are very accountable and always spend government funding wisely. For proof, one needs only to look at the Building the Education Revolution projects costed and managed by Catholic school dioceses. These have given the government—and, therefore, the taxpayers of this nation—good value for money. Schools have received worthwhile facilities generally on budget and on time. Compare this with the disgraceful rip-off which occurred in the public system where schools had no say in who did the work, how much it would cost or what sort of building would be thrown up. The BER, in principle, was a good idea and a way to stimulate the economy. Similarly, the Home Insulation Program was also, in theory, worth while, but it is in the execution where this Labor government mucks everything up. It is why practical people such as Councillor Chaffey want a ‘ministry for getting things done’.

Country people are sensible people. They are fair dinkum. They expect when someone says they will do something that they will follow through, deliver, get it done. This is why so many regional Australians feel let down at the moment. They feel that, despite all they do for this great nation of ours, their worth is not recognised or appreciated, not by this government in its previous term, not by a government which now expects regional Australia to produce more and more with less and less—less water, less money for health and roads. It cannot continue to happen. Prices at the farm gate in no way reflect those being demanded by the duopoly which controls the Australian grocery and retail market. Petrol prices in Wagga Wagga are uniformly high—in fact, consistently and unfairly the highest in the state. The Australian Consumer and Competition Commission needs to show it has real teeth and do some-
thing about this—soon. When regional Australia is strong, so too is our nation. It is time a few more in this place took heed of that and started to give our regions, our future, a decent go. That is why I joined The Nationals.

This year our party celebrates 90 years. The foundation leader of the then Country Party in 1920 was William McWilliams, with whom I feel a sense of connection for prior to entering politics he was engaged in that noble profession of editing a newspaper. While the nay-sayers have long predicted our demise, the Nationals refuse to go away. Indeed, since Federation in 1901, no party has spent as much time on the government benches as the Country Party and Nationals. We have a solid record of achievement, purpose and stability and will continue to stand up for country people, real Australia. We are a party of toilers and doers, the only party the sole interest of which is looking after and speaking up for rural and regional Australians, the only party which cares about regional Australia the most. That is our only focus.

I am the 14th member privileged to serve Riverina, a foundation seat in the parliament of Australia. It is a duty and an honour which means so much to me. The inaugural member for Riverina, John Chanter, was the first member of the House of Representatives to have been defeated three times in the same seat. He kept coming back for more, which must say something for the fighting qualities of this pioneering politician. The man who defeated him by just five votes at the 1903 election, Robert Blackwood, was born in Australia but had the distinction of being runner-up in the amateur lightweight boxing championship in England—again, those fighting qualities.

My predecessor, Kay Hull, was also a fighter. She punched way above her weight. What a fighter! What a lady! I have Kay to thank for my being here today. Short in stature but big in heart, Kay delivered genuine and lasting outcomes for the Riverina. She was friendly but feisty, compassionate yet controversial. Her commitment to her electorate was absolutely unconditional. The Riverina always came first. She was a shining example of what it means to be a good local member.

I also pay tribute to another dynamic woman—the Nationals state chairman, Christine Ferguson. The party I represent is passionate about being a grassroots organisation and no-one has championed this better than Christine. I am delighted that the Nationals’ highly talented state director, Ben Franklin, and his devoted energetic and excellent team of Greg Dezman, Douglas Martin, Nathan Quigley and Felicity Walker are in the public gallery today. Their amazing support helped enormously in what we all achieved together on 21 August. It truly was a team effort. Federal Nationals director, Brad Henderson, and his campaign officer, Erin Adams, were people to whom I often looked for advice and were always patient, measured and, most importantly, correct.

No political party has a more dependable leader than the Nationals’ Warren Truss. Reliability is a hallmark of the Nationals. One of our party’s great strengths is its stability. In our 90 years we have only had 12 federal leaders and Warren, who visited the Riverina three times during the lead-up to the election, exemplifies the traits of honesty, integrity and solidarity that this parliament has come to expect of our party. I was also delighted Senators Barnaby Joyce and Nigel Scullion took the time to help the campaign. However, no National came to the Riverina more than the irrepressible Senator Fiona Nash, for whom nothing was too much trouble and whose bubbly appearance and wealth of knowledge proved invaluable wherever and
whenever she bobbed up, whether it was at a street stall or an evening meeting with interested constituents. The state members for Murrumbidgee, Adrian Piccoli, and Burrinjuck, Katrina Hodgkinson, also trumpeted the Nationals message loudly and proudly in the Riverina. I look forward to 26 March next year when they will help the Barry O’Farrell-Andrew Stoner New South Wales coalition jettison the most inept Labor government in this country to the oblivion where it belongs.

The management of my campaign committee was in the safest pair of hands. The indefatigable Joe Dennis splendidly coordinated advertising, booths, mail-outs, media, signage, strategy and anything and anyone else needing his expertise. It was a terrific performance from a terrific person. Joe’s parents, Anna and John, as well as Tina Bingham, Isabelle Britt, the Hon. Rick Bull, Wes Fang, Pam Halliburton, Margaret Hill, Dominic Hopkinson, Georgie Hutchinson, Joanne McNamara, Donna Neville-Ross, Gretchen and Richard Sleeman, Angela Smit, Lucy Spora, Robert and Lesley Vennell, and my wife Catherine, were as dedicated a campaign team as could be. Thank you, one and all.

The sort of teamwork the Nationals exude is underlined by the fact that four others who stood for preselection—Wes Fang, Mark Hoskinson, William Maslin, and John Minogue—all pitched in and did not just what they could to help but went above and beyond to make sure the party retained the seat. I am delighted Rick Firman, the Deputy Mayor of the marvellous town of Temora and someone whose counsel and friendship I value, is here today. To all those loyal Nationals branch members and volunteers who handed out in the cold at any one of the more than 100 booths or helped out in some other way, thank you. I am eternally grateful to the Riverina electors for their trust and vow to always do my best on their behalf.

I was brought up in a time when life was much simpler. My late father, Lance, was very busy with the farm but found time to build me a billycart, a cricket net and football goalposts. It was an era when, if the sun was up, children played outdoors. We were encouraged to climb trees and to swim in the river. Skinning your knee and getting a little dirty were part of everyday adventures. The local council did not get sued if someone fell off a swing. People generally took responsibility for their own actions. My dad instilled in me a hard-work ethic. By his actions he demonstrated that anything was possible, anything worth doing was worth doing well and his word was his bond. They are examples I follow. My mother, Eileen, made a happy home and she and dad raised five children—Denise, Robyn, Julieanne and Mark being the others.

There is one person here today to whom I am indebted more than any other—my beautiful wife, Catherine. As well as being the devoted mother of our three lovely children, Georgina, Alexander and Nicholas, who are all now teenagers, she has always been my guiding strength, my keenest ally and my fiercest critic. She has sacrificed much in order that I can pursue my dreams. Her parents, Beverley and the late Bernard Shaw, have also had a profound and positive influence on my life.

Politics is not about power; it is about people—representing those people and speaking up for them loudly, often and passionately. I have lived my life by this motto: I promise not to be silent when I ought to speak. That is my commitment to the people of the Riverina and to this parliament. Thank you for your indulgence, Mr Speaker.

The SPEAKER—Order! Before I call the member for Wright, I remind the House that
this is the honourable member’s first speech. I ask the House to extend to him the usual courtesies.

Mr BUCHHOLZ (Wright) (12.29 pm)—Mr Speaker and members of the House, it is with a sense of history and humility that I stand here as the elected member for Wright, a newly created seat in the south-east corner of Queensland. I thank the electorate for entrusting me with the honour of representing them in this our nation’s House of parliament. I can report that as I moved through my electorate on my path to this place the people gave me some clear messages. My farmers are struggling to get a better price for the product at the farm gate. My businesses, small and large, are struggling with an increasing level of compliance and red tape. My mums and dads are struggling to meet the cost of living as it quickly becomes unmanageable.

In preparing this speech I sought the guidance of political colleagues both in this House and in the Senate, both past and present. I have sought the compassion of family and friends and the wisdom of party members and communities. The overwhelming advice was, ‘Just be yourself and prepare a speech that will have relevance to your electorate now and in 20 years time.’ During my recent political journey I would like to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of my campaign team, who worked tirelessly throughout the campaign along with a great number of volunteers who unselfishly manned booths and scrutineered on election day. It is with humility that I thank you for your contribution to our local victory. Each of you as volunteers should celebrate, knowing that your contribution assisted in such a historic outcome—the election of the first-ever member for the seat of Wright. To the electors of Wright, who I now represent, I owe you a debt which I will repay through the long hours of hard work in which I will invest as your member of parliament. Please know this about me: I will never give up.

The seat of Wright is named after one of Australia’s more famous female poets, whose views on the environment and social issues were ahead of her time. Judith Wright resided in Mt Tamborine and had a strong connection with the Australian landscape. The seat of Wright is a newly created seat, and one could say it is the beginning of an era which is as diverse as the seat itself—from Mudgeeraba on the Gold Coast through to the spectacular hinterland of Mt Tamborine and the Canungra Valley, the beautiful fertile Scenic Rim district, up to the west of Logan City, where we have exciting growth with the expected creation of the two new towns of Yarrabilba and Flagstone and right through to the bottom of the Toowoomba range, encompassing the food bowl of Queensland’s mighty Lockyer Valley.

The diversity of the electorate is immense, from its vital food production and associated industries to the smaller sectors and those homeowners and families who seek a lifestyle outside the metropolitan areas. Despite the obvious wealth, there are a large number of everyday residents who are doing it tough. The Salvation Army, St Vincent de Paul, Lifeline and similar agencies have large client bases and, sadly, they are growing—yet, I have 22 private polo fields in my electorate. The electorate of Wright contains a collection of communities which represent contemporary Australia in its myriad forms. However, the links to the past are not far beneath the surface. First came the timber-cutters and sawmillers who provided the raw materials for the region and for Brisbane houses. They were joined by the farmers and the graziers who cleared the land and now produce the food that we consume as a nation. Where once the bullock wagons slowly carved their tracks across the landscape road trains are now travelling at a hundred kilo-
metres an hour. Much of the transport infrastructure built over the past hundred years is now struggling under the weight of heavy vehicles and traffic volumes which our forebears would scarcely imagine. The timber bridges that dot the landscape may have a rustic charm but they cannot meet the demands of modern traffic. What was once a hard day’s travel by stagecoach from the centre of Brisbane to the Cobb and Co. depot at Jimboomba is today little more than an hour’s drive; however, that drive gets more expensive and crowded each day, as the years go by. The outer suburban fringe is now contested territory between energy producers, farmers and urban sprawl. All government services are under extreme pressure. There are not enough hospital beds and a regional transport infrastructure upgrade is long overdue.

It is timely that I now reach back into the history pages and draw on the words of the founder of the Australian Liberal Party, Sir Robert Menzies, in his landmark speech ‘The Forgotten People’, which he delivered in 1942. He spoke of that majority of the population who he identified as, and I quote:

The forgotten class … who properly regarded, represent the backbone of this country.

He went on to say:

But what really happens to us will depend on how many people we have who are of the great, and [sober and dynamic middle class]—the strivers, the planners, the ambitious ones. We shall destroy them at our peril.

This is the very sector of the community I refer to as the silent majority. The silent majority today are struggling with the cost of utilities such as power and water. The silent majority are struggling with the increasing costs of fuel and food. The silent majority go about their business in an efficient way. The silent majority work to ensure a better life for their family and community. I will provide a voice for the silent majority of the electorate. These are not the people you see on the front page of the paper or on the television each night; they do not seek glory or public notoriety as they quietly go about their tasks. These are the many people of my electorate who go about providing random acts of kindness which enrich us all; the staff and families of Rural Lifestyle Options and Beaucare, who work with the disabled and elderly; the charity service providers and the support networks; the Pauline Fathers from the Marian Valley; or the bloke who just pulls over on the side of the road and helps someone change a tyre. We in the parliament have to give greater support to this silent majority and support them in more effective ways, for if we fail to support them we will surely destroy them, and we destroy them at our peril. Those powerful words spoken over a half a century ago remain relevant today.

The time has come to reflect upon this nation’s over regulation and this government’s waste and escalating mismanagement. The time has come for us to look more carefully at the practices of government. I am concerned that the machinery of government is becoming more reliant on external advice. The budget expenditure on external consultants and advisors has been steadily increasing and the growing trend of outsourcing the decision-making process has been steadily eroding the capacity of departments to provide quality advice in a timely fashion. In some cases, the terms of references given to consultants are skewed to the political agenda of the government. This is not an efficient use of government money. In my experience in the private sector, mismanagement dooms an enterprise to insolvency. Efficiency is the pathway to business success and, likewise, efficiency is the only acceptable pathway to good government. These are the things which ensured my success in business and they are the same things which I will bring to my work here.
It is fair to say that some sectors of government are under constant review and are change weary. I understand, that my stance may be met with vigorous resistance from sectors of the machinery of government, with a thousand good reasons why something cannot be done. To them I say: shift your mind to a different place and give me a thousand reasons how it can be done. I want the machinery of government to know that I will always be trying to make things better. I want them to know that on this issue I will be fair and I will be consistent, and I will not give up. I will not give up because my people expect me to pursue these issues to the best of my ability.

The silent majority are the average Australians who, through hard work, tenacity and self-reliance, have played their part in the development of this nation. My electorate contains some of the richest farming land in the nation—and I make the point, in response to the first speech by the honourable member for Riverina: we have some cracker-jack country as well! I aim to give maximum respect and support to those working in the agriculture sectors, from the research scientists and teachers at the Gatton campus of the University of Queensland to the farmers and graziers going about their business producing food for our tables and for export. In the early days these were the men and women who cleared the scrub and tilled the soil. Like their contemporaries, they did not give up when things got hard; they simply worked and hoped for a better tomorrow.

Many of those families are still there today. However, increasing state and local government controls over their property rights and access to water and vegetation management restrictions now threaten their very livelihoods. I am going to search for solutions to these problems, for a reduction in red tape and ways in which we can increase the prices paid to farmers at the farm gate, for without these people we are all poorer; without these people we become captive to overseas producers and overseas markets; without these people we lose our dignity and our sovereignty.

In this my first term in this place I have set myself these goals: I will do my best to represent the silent majority, the forgotten people, the disappointed, the urban fringe dwellers, the long-established families in the Lockyer Valley and the Scenic Rim, the tree-change communities in the Gold Coast hinterland, and the outer suburban residents of Logan City and the small towns dotted along the highways and byways of what is truly a beautiful landscape.

One community in particular deserves a special mention: the men and women of the Canungra jungle warfare training centre. It is here that generations of soldiers have lived and trained. They are, in the Anzac tradition, the warriors to whom we turn when the dangerous and difficult work of protecting this nation has to be done. We live with them and their families in our midst and in return it is these warriors who offer their lives and youth in our protection and the nation's defence. It will be my privilege to represent those people.

I want to put into Hansard my commitment to family values and the Australian tradition of fairness and hard work and of tolerance, tenacity and resilience. To my electors, know this: as a husband and father I will represent you as best I can. I owe you my place in this House and I will not be silenced on my opposition to those things which threaten our quality of life. I will oppose the sale of illicit drugs, with the terrible scars they leave on society. Businesses and families should know that I will be working for a safe environment for work and play, and for the protection of our youth and elderly. I will not tolerate those who prey on our children and
elderly, the very ones who have contributed
to this great nation and the ones who will be
its future. To those who see the helpless and
vulnerable as an easy target for assault, know
this: you will not be welcome in the seat of
Wright.

At this stage of my speech I would like to
share with you a little of who I am and how I
came to be in this place. As I stand here to-
day in the centre of the nation I realise how
profound the journey to this place has been
for me. I am one of four children in my fam-
ily. My father died when I was eight years
old, leaving my mother to raise us alone, so I
am well aware of the financial pressures of
being brought up in a household whose sole
source of income for many years was a
widow’s pension. Mum is a devout Catholic,
and we were dragged to every novena, every
stations of the cross and every benediction.
As a young adolescent, to make time go
quicker at mass, I became an altar boy. I was
always ambitious. I remember even as an
altar boy I always wanted to be the Pope. We
had a warm and loving childhood, and I
thank all my family for their friendship, love,
support and encouragement.

I acknowledge my mother and family here
today in the gallery. To each of you: I thank
you for your guidance, love and support.
With tongue in cheek, I disclose to the mem-
bers of the House that the constant thrashings
I received in my childhood were unfounded
and ill informed at the time and have left me
a shy and reserved shell of the man I once
was. To each of you: I love you all very
much. Most importantly, in the gallery is my
loving wife, Lynn, and daughter, Grace. To
Lynn, who looks after me, loves me and sac-
rifices time with me so that I may serve my
community: your commitment to our mar-
rriage and friendship is immeasurable, and for
that I will always love you. To Grace: I am
so proud of the many personal achievements
that are already part of your young life.

Know that your dad is your No. 1 ‘clapper’,
mate. I love you very much.

I also acknowledge my friends and rela-
tives who have travelled here all the way
from Queensland, including the senators in
the gallery, and take the opportunity to ac-
knowledge and thank Senator Barnaby Joyce
for encouraging me to pursue a political ca-
reer in the House of Representatives.

I grew up in Rockhampton and have
worked in Clermont, Blackwater, Emerald,
Toowoomba, St George and Beaudesert—all
great regional towns of Queensland. I started
my career as a ringer on a station halfway
between Clermont and Charters Towers in
the Kilcummin district, where I learnt the
principles of hard work with no concept of
time, only that of working until the job is
done, from daylight to dark—a skill set of a
strong work ethic that serves me well today.
I then worked in Emerald in the finance indus-
try, specialising in agri-finance, where I
 gained further skills in fiscal literacy that
gave me the economic fundamentals to assist
clients. These skills served me well both in
my own business enterprises and later in
boardroom activities.

My transition to self-employment was ac-
celerated by tendering for and winning a
courier run from Emerald to Rockhampton
six nights a week, transporting the local pa-
pers and, later, courier parcels. I built that
business to 14 depots across the state, em-
ploying 105 permanent staff and subcontrac-
tors. My wife and I have now divested ours-
elves of much of that, retaining only our
specialised services division, comprising
eight staff. Our company’s growth was built
on a two-pronged strategy: one of internal
domestic growth and the other of growth by
mergers and acquisitions. It is this skill set
that served me well in my role as chairman
of the transition action committee that
worked on the due diligence process for the
merger of the Liberal and National parties in Queensland to create the Liberal National Party of Queensland.

The success of the LNP in Queensland has contributed to delivering the coalition to the threshold of government. This was no accident, just as it is no accident that the LNP now have a strong membership that consists of 13,000 contributing Queenslanders. We put aside three-cornered contests which saw us compete against ourselves and delivered 11 new capable, motivated federal members. I also acknowledge the class of 2010. To each of them: I acknowledge your arrival in this place and wish you every success and a long, effective political career.

I recognise the strength of the federal Liberal Party and its long history of national leadership. I stand here as a representative of the newly formed LNP, the Queensland division of the Liberal Party of Australia, which also has an affiliation with the National Party of Australia. They are both conservative parties that have a long and proud tradition of serving their communities and governing the nation.

I acknowledge the contribution and friendship of the LNP state president, Mr Bruce McIvor, and his entire executive, in particular the LNP state treasurer, Mr Barry O’Sullivan, who is in the gallery today—friendships that I will honour for the rest of my life. It was a proud day when Barry and I registered the LNP as a political party with the Australian Electoral Commission and the Electoral Commission of Queensland.

While there will be many tasks in front of me here in this place, I acknowledge the single interest groups who seek to influence the decisions made in this House. I will be fair in my support for each cause and I will treat each case on its merits, but my support will always be skewed to the protection and encouragement of the silent majority of my electorate.

To conclude, I return to my opening comments about what my electors have told me and I give them these undertakings. I will endeavour to fight to get my farmers a better price for their product at the farm gate. I will fight for my small and large business operators who struggle with ever-increasing costs of ‘over-compliance’ from all tiers of government. I will fight for the mums and dads of the electorate of Wright who are struggling to make ends meet. I will oppose unnecessary new taxes which threaten to take more money out their pockets each week.

Although my immediate focus is on the electorate of Wright, I will always try to take the national interest into consideration. Therefore, when it comes to fighting for my electorate, what is good for my electorate and what is good for my nation, I will not give up. From now until the day I leave this place, I will try to make things better. Know this: I will never give up. Thank you.

Mr DANBY (Melbourne Ports) (12.46 pm)—I congratulate the member for Wright on his first speech. It is something momentous, which you will remember all your life. For the few hundreds of us who have been members of parliament, who are greatly honoured by the Australian people, it is a great credit to have achieved that status. I congratulate him on becoming the new member for Wright.

I want to thank all of the people who worked on my campaign in Melbourne Ports: my campaign director, Garth Head, deputy campaign director, Dr Jane Shelton, my staff and the many volunteers who contributed their time and effort to the campaign, including Dr Henry and Marcia Pinskier, George Droutsas, who had some very welcome news in the Melbourne newspapers recently, Roger Byrne, John Dyett, Martin Foley, Jenny
Huppert, Tony Lupton, Ian Strong, Jackie Burgess, John Lewis, Bunna Walsh and Simon Kosmer, all the local branches in Melbourne Ports and the more than 300 volunteers and 31 booth captains, who worked tirelessly to help me achieve a 57.56 per cent result, which is the highest margin Melbourne Ports has had for the Labor Party since it was redistributed on the current boundaries in 1990.

I come into this House today with some additional good news for the voters of Melbourne Ports in that the Redistribution Committee has just published maps which largely accord with the submissions I made to the committee. It is an honour to represent the people of Melbourne Ports and I want to continue to represent the people I have largely represented since 1998. I am very pleased to see that the electoral commissioners have made a number of changes to the initial maps, affecting the seats of Corangamite, McEwen and Melbourne Ports, all in a way that preserves the boundaries of those seats, more than their initial maps would have. This is one of the strictures by which the Electoral Commission is meant to operate. Therefore, it is particularly gratifying to see them doing that.

I particularly want to thank my delightful wife and barrister about town, Amanda Mendes Da Costa, who stood with me in the freezing cold pre-polling, when she was not in court. All of us experienced the phenomenon of people voting early, and standing at polling booths in Melbourne in the winter is a challenge to members of parliament and candidates.

I want to congratulate new colleagues who sit in this chamber, including Rob Mitchell, the member for McEwen: Geoff Lyons, the member for Bass; Stephen Jones, the new member for Throsby; Laura Smyth for La Trobe; and Deborah O’Neill, the new member for Robertson. I particularly want to single out for congratulations my good friend Ed Husic, who arrived here, as he should have earlier, but for some dastardly and uncalled-for propaganda which shamed the entire Australian political system. It is really good to have him here, widening the full range of Australian backgrounds in this House of Representatives.

This House is all the better for the new members who join us in this place. It is poorer for the loss of tireless workers who have striven for a better way of life for the Australian people. I miss my good friends—Jennie George, the former member for Throsby, Belinda O’Neal, the former member for Robertson and Roger Price, the former member for Chifley and Bob Debus, the former member for Macquarie.

Education is the key to equality. The government’s investment in schools across the nation—from Wollongong to Toowoomba, to Barinia in South Australia, to Subiaco in Western Australia and to Melbourne Ports in Victoria—has seen primary schools and secondary schools receive state-of-the-art classrooms, multipurpose halls, language centres and playing fields. Over the last four years under the then Minister for Education, now Prime Minister Julia Gillard, Australian schools have had a golden era of Australian investment in the nation’s education system. If we do not invest in providing our children with the best equipped schools and the best equipped resources, we do not only ourselves but also the nation a disservice.

It is enormously satisfying for me to visit local schools and see this investment come to fruition. The government has invested over $65 million in schools across Melbourne Ports and to see young, bright and enthusiastic students benefiting from the government’s programs gives me great pride. If we do nothing else, we must ensure that the future
generations of leaders, entrepreneurs, sports stars, academics, authors and scientists have the best education system. I have been across the system, from the Japanese school in Melbourne Ports to the Catholic Galilee Primary School, and we are soon going to be opening wonderful secondary schools.

I see all of this criticism of the school program from some media sources and the Liberal Party, but in my electorate—particularly in the government sector—I see only positives. At Glen Eira College the building of a language laboratory, where Chinese and French are going to be taken up, has attracted students from right across Melbourne, many of Chinese background. They are going particularly to Glen Eira College to do more Chinese language studies. Nearby, we have a feeder school. In Caulfield Junior College—a government school, which teaches French at primary level—we now have a secondary school that is also teaching French and has resources and facilities provided by this government. If we had not had the BER, these kinds of facilities, especially those in government schools in Melbourne Ports, would not have been possible.

We have the phenomenon in the inner city of having larger numbers of younger people with families moving in and the government program could not have come at a better time. It has built classrooms in schools right across the system—independent, Catholic, Jewish and government—that have been absolutely necessary.

I turn to the issue of emergency housing for the disadvantaged. On 23 April this year I joined the then federal Minister for Housing, Tanya Plibersek, and the Victorian Minister for Housing, Richard Wynne, together with some great people from my friends in the Salvation Army, Territorial Commander Caroline Knaggs, and that great figure of the Salvation Army, General Eva Burrows, to open the Salvation Army’s Crisis Accommodation Centre in Upton Road, St Kilda. The Salvation Army’s Crisis Accommodation Centre is one of a number of projects in my electorate providing emergency housing in which this federal government has invested to the tune of $53 million. Of this funding, $36 million is targeted at housing projects through the Port Phillip Housing Association, the South Port Community Housing Group, and St Kilda Community Housing. I have been to most of these projects and to say that they are achieving their ends is putting it mildly. Of this amount, $5.1 million is for a new building of 17 units in Grey Street, $1.5 million for eight units in Alma Road, $1.1 million for nine new units in Blessington Street, St Kilda, $1.5 million for 14 new units in Jackson Street and $5.5 million for 36 new units in Beaconsfield Parade. The Australian government has made homelessness a national priority. In the previous government, under Minister Plibersek, the building of these new facilities in my electorate was a step forward to making the changes necessary to cut the rate of homelessness by 2020.

One issue that has got some attention during the recent election and which I think should be given more prominence is electoral reform. The High Court’s decision on 6 August to invalidate the draconian Liberal rort introduced by the Howard government in 2006 was welcome. Under the previous conservative government’s legislation, the electoral roll was closed on the day the writs were issued for an election to be held. Previously, for decades people had had seven days to enrol or update their details. The draconian law passed by the Liberals in 2006, when they controlled the Senate, was deliberately designed to disenfranchise as many young people as possible as well as people who shifted their address.
The win by GetUp! in the High Court was an important one, but I note it was not this parliament that led to the change to rectify the disenfranchisement of thousands of young Australians. The Australian Electoral Commission reports, and has made recommendations about ways this should be changed, that 1.4 million Australians are not on the electoral roll. This is in part due to laws passed by the previous government, which over its period of 12 years in office excluded tens of thousands of Australians who shift their address and who usually got a provisional vote at the polling booth but do not get it any more.

This legislation was designed to prevent individuals from voting, in that provisional voters had to produce photo ID at the polling booth in order to have their provisional vote admitted. Voters without such ID would later go to the AEC office with a photo ID and validate the vote. But how many can often find an obscure AEC office, which is often not even sited in their electorate? The previous system was much more sensible. The returning officer at the polling booth double-enveloped a person’s application for a provisional vote. If the person lived in the electorate, the officer compared the signature on the outside of the envelope with a signature at the electoral office. Fully 50 per cent of people who applied for provisional votes under the previous system that applied for decades were admitted. They should have been, of course, included in a compulsory voting system where we should try to get on the roll every person we can who is a legitimate voter.

In an earlier submission to this House, I regrettably exaggerated the number of people that this affected. I said it was 166,000. Thanks to some advice from the Electoral Commission, I can now report that number was in fact only 130,000—28,000 of whom were Australians who were denied a vote due to the coalition’s 2006 legislation which made it much more difficult to obtain a provisional vote. Only 19 per cent of people who applied for a provisional vote at the 2010 election received one. As I said, in all previous elections, including the elections from 1996 to 2007 at which the Liberal Party was elected, fully 50 per cent of people who applied for a provisional vote with a double envelope and signature on the outside system were admitted. They should have been, of course, included in a compulsory voting system where we should try to get on the roll every person we can who is a legitimate voter.

During the last parliament, the Australian Electoral Commission itself recognised that this process of taking citizens off the roll had disenfranchised hundreds of thousands of Australians. Currently, the AEC processes remorselessly remove people from the roll when they change address, but these AEC removals have not been matched by legislation or the technical ability of the AEC to use modern technology to get people back on the rolls.

We are all familiar with this as members of parliament—people who shift addresses that are confirmed by the AEC and have themselves taken off the electoral roll. They then get a snail mail letter from the AEC, which especially shift workers, people working interstate, people who are overseas or young people do not tend to respond to. It is our civic duty to represent those that sent us here. It is also our civic duty to ensure that every Australian has a right to have their say in who represents them in this place. Therefore, I hope that the 43rd Parliament will take up the mantle of ensuring that those who had no voice at the last election will have one at the next election.

I am also confident that this parliament will be able to put in place concrete measures to address climate change. If only some of those opposite were willing to help the government rather than just be wreckers. The last parliament was a story of double-crosses
by members of the opposition. The Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency explained to this House that there is a cost to not putting a carbon price into the Australian economy. It is a cost that we will bear for as long as we are not able to legislate changes in this area. I hope that the non-partisan committee that is investigating a carbon price makes recommendations that lead to Australia’s being able to become internationally competitive in this area, and I mention the fact that the minister pointed out to me that AGL Energy estimates there will be a $2 billion negative effect in the form of higher electricity prices by the year 2020 if we do not legislate in favour of a carbon price.

It seems an age ago now, but the Liberal Party did once have a leader who believed in climate change and the need for action to combat it. During the last parliament, the Labor Party spent many months working with that leader to create a system to begin the process of lowering carbon emissions in Australia. But, as we know, the Liberal leader was toppled by a faction in the coalition that refuses to believe in the existence of climate change. That leader was replaced with the current Leader of the Opposition, who believes that climate change is, as he said so eloquently, ‘absolute crap’. Having negotiated a deal with the government, the opposition then broke their word—which is becoming something of a pattern—and voted against the government’s legislation. It is doubtful that the Liberals’ hardline Senate-driven opposition to the science of climate change will change while they have their current leader, so it is unlikely that the government will be able to work with them to combat climate change.

I turn to some issues of Australian foreign policy. The three pillars maintaining the Australian-US alliance are that we work through the United Nations system, that we build our relations with our Asian neighbours, and that we build our relations with our Pacific neighbours. Each of these has been strengthened by the current government. Our relationship with the Obama administration is very strong, and we see eye to eye with that administration on many issues. We have been playing a leading and constructive role at the UN and we have worked to strengthen our regional relations, including those with China, India and Indonesia, the three countries which hold the keys to our regional future.

Today, managing our relations with China has become a fourth pillar of our foreign policy. Recently we have seen suggestions that Australia and the US should resign ourselves to Chinese military and political supremacy in our region and in certain Oceanic areas. I reject that view, and I think most of the Australian people reject that choice’s being forced on them. Australia should welcome a strong, prosperous and stable China and its return to the great power status that it should have as a great and populous country as well as accept its legitimate aspiration to be treated with the respect that its status merits. But we must always defend the values that our country stands for—democratic government, human rights and international law. We should not betray these values in our dealings with China, even while we maintain advantageous economic relations.

One development that is threatening the world at the moment is the determination of the theocratic regime in Iran to develop nuclear weapons and use them against its neighbours. This situation has the potential to be the most dangerous threat the world has faced since the Cuban missile crisis. Iran has not ratified the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and continues to skirt its obligations. Our autonomous sanctions legislation, introduced this year, imposes sanctions on a total of 21 Iranian individuals and 20 Iranian organisations. The two additional organisatons...
tions are Bank Mellat, one of four designated banks under UN Security Council resolutions, and the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Line, IRISL.

Along with the United States, the European Union, South Korea and Japan, Australia has introduced autonomous sanctions to complement the very tough United Nations sanctions that were introduced this year. The sanctions, a result of a resolution of the Security Council, are working at the moment. It is interesting to see that Sydney based engineering contractor Wolsey Parsons have announced that, since the sanctions were introduced, they will not be accepting any more work in Iran. Australia has imposed sanctions on Iran since 2008.

Iran has failed to comply with UN Security Council resolutions 1737, 1747, 1803 and 1835, which call on it to cooperate with the International Atomic Energy Agency and suspend its proliferation activities, and that is frightening. It is currently enriching uranium to 20 per cent. In September, the IAEA said that Iran was pushing ahead with higher level enrichment and continually failing to answer the agency’s questions about the military dimensions of its nuclear work. The threat of a nuclear-armed Iran poses a threat not only to the Middle East but also to the world, and it should not be taken lightly.

The Iranian government’s influence over Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza cannot be underestimated and makes these sanctions even more integral. I am very pleased that the former defence minister in this government, John Faulkner, blocked three Australian shipments to Iran. The Australian government’s move to block dual use items from being shipped to Iran is an important step in ensuring that Australian companies do not assist Iran or its proliferation activities. I conclude by saying that we must continue to put pressure on Australian financial institutions and organisations not to associate or assist Iran to skirt international sanctions. Those that are assisting Iran to do that should be publicly called out for what they are doing: assisting in the worsening of the international situation. (Time expired)

Mr CHESTER (Gippsland) (1.07 pm)—I would like to begin by congratulating all of the 150 members who were elected to this place in what was a historic election. It was a great honour and a privilege for me personally to be elected here the first time, and then to be returned as well is something that I personally would never take for granted. I am sure the other members of this place would agree with me on that point. It was a historic election on many fronts—most obviously the closeness of the result but also the fact that we have had our youngest ever member of parliament, our first Muslim MP, our first Aboriginal MP and also the first Greens MP elected to the House of Representatives. So I congratulate them all in particular for those historic milestones but also all other new members. We have just heard the inaugural speeches of two of the new members, and I particularly want to mention the member for Riverina. The new member for Riverina physically has some very small shoes to fill but metaphorically he has the boots of a giant to fill in the absence of the former member, Kay Hull. Kay may have been small in stature but she is fondly remembered by all in this place, particularly in the National Party, for the enormous impression she made as a member of parliament and simply by being a good local member. I do not think there is any greater praise we could give to a member at the end of their career than to say that she was a good local member and she served this place with distinction.

To those of us who were re-elected, I congratulate them. I congratulate you all on winning the support and the trust of your
communities. To have your contract renewed for the next three years I think is a credit to all who have put in so much time and effort, both in the campaign phase and also in the years leading up to the election. It is a very different parliament from the one we have just finished and I welcome the package of reforms that have been negotiated, which I believe will provide more opportunities for private members’ business and allow local members to raise more local issues. I recall that in my own maiden speech I commented on the need for greater respect to be demonstrated in this place and I believe the Australian people are demanding that from us. They are watching us and they are demanding it from us in this new parliament. I believe that neither side is the font of all knowledge and it is incumbent on both sides to listen to the debates and to consider the ideas and the merits of policies that are put forward and not simply oppose for opposition’s sake. I believe at the same time that the government has a responsibility to listen to the ideas put forward by the opposition, to take them on board and to amend policy to reflect the feedback they receive from the other side. We can have robust debate, but when it descends into name-calling and heckling I do not think we do ourselves any great credit in this place. So from my perspective I will certainly be doing everything I can to hold this government to account, but I will work with ministers where appropriate to achieve good outcomes for my electorate—not just for the good of Gippsland but for all regional Australians. I will be, as I said, urging the ministers to listen more to opposition MPs. I do not believe that in the first term the government actually lacked ideas; they simply lacked the ability to deliver the projects on the ground. Their record of delivery has been appalling and there are many occasions where they have been quite incompetent when it comes to issues such as the Home Insulation Program and certain aspects of the Building the Education Revolution program. In both those programs there were opportunities for the government to listen to the advice provided by others—sometimes from this side of the House, sometimes from departments—but those opportunities to listen were ignored.

Like other MPs, I come to this place with an enormous amount of support from a team of volunteers that helped us to get elected in the first place, and it would be remiss of me not to use this occasion to thank so many people for their support during the election. It was a great result for us in Gippsland. Against a swing that was heading towards the government in Victoria, we were able to record a swing of more than five per cent to the National Party. That is the first time since 1996 that the seat of Gippsland has been won on primaries. So I was delighted with the result but fully cognisant of the fact that the result was a team effort. Nothing could have been achieved without the strength of a team behind me. The National’s performance at a federal level, with Warren Truss as our leader, is one that we can be very proud of. To win additional seats and to see all my colleagues in the Nationals returned, plus some new faces in our party room, gives me great hope for the future of our party. It is something that media commentators may want to take a closer look at. Although they are still writing stories about the death of the Nationals, the facts do not fit their story. We have had three additional members of the House of Representatives elected and also an additional senator elected in Victoria. I thank my colleagues in the Nationals for the support they have shown me over the past 2½ years. It really is, in comparison to the other parties, I believe, more of a family style party in the sense that we do get along very well, we work closely with each other and we are quite a small unit. We enjoy each
other’s company enormously, and I think that is the strength of our party looking to the future.

I would also like to thank our federal director, Brad Henderson, for his support and encouragement over the years and certainly during the election campaign. Brad and his team do a terrific job. He has only a small team but they do a terrific job in supporting the MPs, particularly in the lead-up to the election. At a local level, nothing is possible for a member of parliament without the support of good staff. I think we are all able to do our jobs because we have staff who are willing to share the load with us. I am very fortunate in my seat of Gippsland to have excellent staff and I would like to thank them all individually: Ruth Lucas, Nicole Conway, Kirsten Collins, Jenny Graham, Jenny Hammett, Jo Crawford, Heather Buntine, Di Lilburne and Chris Daffey. I assure the House that I do not actually have nine staff working full time for me—just a mixture of part-time and maternity leave positions which makes it sound like more than usual. But my staff have been an enormous support to me over the past 2½ years and they continue to offer their professional skills, their dedication and their loyalty to help us in the role that we fulfil and to help me personally in the role I play in the Gippsland electorate.

The role of volunteers in election campaigns is critical to us all and I had great support right throughout the electorate. But in particular I would like to thank four individuals. At the risk of offending all the others who did a great deal of work, I would like to congratulate and thank Barry Buntine, Fred Crook and Ann and Laurie Hiscock, because they took on the majority of the burden of the pre-poll. For those who live in Victoria, the pre-poll in winter is an arduous occasion. I must say, if there is any electoral reform that I feel very passionately about today it would be a ban on winter elections.

Ms King—I’ll back it!

Mr CHESTER—The member for Ballarat and other members endorse that. My volunteers certainly risked hypothermia to hand out how-to-vote cards at the height of the winter chill in Victoria. I would also like to congratulate my opponents in the seat of Gippsland. It was a campaign conducted in good spirit. It was fiercely contested but it was fair, it was honest and it was a good contest. So I congratulate my opponents in that regard.

My campaign gave me the opportunity to spend a lot of time getting out to a lot of the smaller towns in the electorate of Gippsland. You get to drive around a lot when you represent a seat of about 30,000-plus square kilometres. We conducted what we called a ‘Talk to me tour’, in which we encouraged people to come out and meet with us at shopping centres and community markets. I am a big believer in listening to local knowledge—listening to people with practical experiences on the ground and listening to the ideas of country people, who have a lot of commonsense to offer members of parliament. A lot of issues were discussed during that time and it gave me a good sense of where the people of Gippsland would like me to go over the next three years.

I believe that the key to the future of the Gippsland and Latrobe Valley communities is to make sure that our young people have access to a quality education and also to support economic growth opportunities by promoting local businesses as much as possible. I believe that if more of the young people growing up in our region have the chance to learn new skills and secure employment in our region, without being forced to move away, we will have a more vibrant and prosperous region in the future. For those young people who do need to move away to further education, whether to take up a trade or to go
to university, we must fix the system of student income support to help them and their families with the high cost of accommodation and other expenses.

The election in Gippsland was very much decided on local issues. The biggest issue was the threat posed by the Labor Party and the Greens to jobs in our traditional industries, such as power generation, paper manufacturing, mining, timber harvesting, tourism and fishing. I reject the proposition that is regularly put in the media that the Greens are the only party that cares about the environment. I believe every person in this place and every political party cares about the environment. Some of the more extreme policies of the Greens—now in partnership with the Labor Party—are a direct threat to jobs.

Gippslanders have sent a strong message to Canberra that they are tired of city based MPs telling them how to live their lives. As a person who has been a member of Landcare for several years and a strong advocate for the future of Gippsland Lakes, I want to see more funding allocated for practical environmental work and projects to build better facilities on public land and our waterways for everyone to enjoy the magnificent environment of Gippsland. The so-called environmental policies which would ban fishing or lock people out of parks are a recipe for disaster. We must fight against the extreme views of people who do not even live in our community.

It is an interesting electoral fact that the further you move away from regional Australia the more likely you are to vote Greens. Around Melbourne the Greens might have a primary vote of 30 per cent, but by the time you get to Gippsland the Greens’ primary vote drops to six per cent. The people who actually live, work and engage with the environment on a daily basis do not vote Greens, because they realise that the Greens’ extreme policies are a threat to jobs in our traditional industries. The electoral map will show that to you anywhere you go in Australia. In the city and urban areas you will find people voting for the Greens. Out in the country, where people have commonsense and work with the environment daily, they reject the Greens’ policies.

A huge challenge before us, which is not directly related to my electorate, is the Murray-Darling Basin Authority. The prospect of a government legislated drought is something I am very concerned about. As a Gippslander, I talk to my colleagues in the Murray-Darling Basin. I am adamant that I will not be part of any policy that seeks to shut down country towns. In our deliberations in this place on the plan, when it is finally released, the people must come first. Economic, social and environmental needs are not mutually exclusive. We can find a balance.

I was heartened yesterday when the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities spoke in this place in what I regard as probably the best MPI since I was elected. The minister spoke about balance. I appeal to him to as soon as possible rule out some of the more extreme aspects of the guide. The heartache and anxiety that have been caused throughout the Murray-Darling Basin by the more extreme claims in the guide are adding to the suffering of people. I believe it is within the minister’s capacity to take steps to relieve some of the stress by ruling out some of the more extreme aspects of the guide as it stands. I congratulate also the member for Parkes for his presentation yesterday on the MPI. I believe it was very well balanced and displayed a huge amount of commonsense, which is what I have come to expect from my good friend and colleague the member for Parkes.
As the local member, I believe it is my role to come into this place and fight for a fair share on behalf of the people of Gippsland. That is the contract I have signed with the people of Gippsland for the next three years. I believe that it starts with jobs, which I have just talked about—fighting for local jobs in our traditional industries like farming, fishing, timber production and the Latrobe Valley power industry.

Throughout the campaign, many claims were made, particularly in the metropolitan media, about the coal-fired power-generating sector. I say ‘particularly in the metropolitan media’ because none of the ministers concerned had the courage to come to Gippsland to make the claims. The vilification of the coal-fired power-generating sector and of the power generators’ workers must stop. I have appealed to the Prime Minister and her ministers to stop vilifying these people, who have done only what has been asked of them by their nation. All they have done is provide the cheap and reliable baseload energy supply that Victoria and Australia has demanded for job growth and the economic prosperity of our nation. I am frankly disgusted by some of the claims which are made, almost on a daily basis, in the metropolitan media about the brown coal power sector. There is a myth that surrounds the Hazelwood power station in particular that somehow we can shut down Hazelwood power station, which generates 25 per cent of Victoria’s power supply, and there will be no cost. That is fanciful thinking that will result in massive job losses. Quite simply, in any case, there is no baseload supply of energy available in Victoria to replace Hazelwood. So I do appeal to other members to think a little bit more before they open their mouths and make claims about the brown coal power sector.

I also refer briefly to the other great myth which is spread around our community in relation to coal more generally. I understand that in 2008-09 Australia exported 270 million tonnes of coal to India, Korea, Japan and China. As far as I am aware, those four nations have not accumulated a massive pile of coal just to look at. They have burnt that coal in their power stations to provide their economic prosperity and wealth. It is absolute folly for us to say that we are going to shut down coal-fired power generators in this country but be quite happy to export coal to other places. I will not be part of anything that shuts down the Latrobe Valley power sector, risks jobs in our traditional industries, seeks to vilify the hardworking families of the Latrobe Valley and causes them unnecessary grief and strain, all for the political outcome of achieving Green preferences in the city for the Labor Party.

I believe that another key area that the people of Gippsland would like me to focus on over the next three years is making sure that we have access to good health services. I give credit to the Minister for Health and Ageing in relation to a couple of announcements which were made in the months leading up to the election. I supported them at the time and support them again today. One announcement was the provision of more than $20 million for the Gippsland Cancer Care Centre and another was the decision to provide $1.5 million for Rotary Centenary House.

I have spoken in the chamber before about Rotary Centenary House. Without doubt one of the greatest achievements by my community over the last five years is to have built a facility which provides accommodation for people while they are receiving cancer treatment. It is a sad fact that the demand on the facility has got to the stage where an additional nine units are required. The government has come on board with $1.5 million and the community is going to raise in the vicinity of $1 million. I support the community’s efforts and I congratulate the govern-
ment for its willingness to support that particular project.

The real challenge for us in Gippsland, Mr Deputy Speaker Scott—and I assume it would be a challenge faced by your own community of Maranoa—is in attracting and retaining skilled health professionals in regional areas. It is our health workforce which provides us with our greatest difficulty. We need to be doing more on a long-term basis to train more country kids in the first place. That is why I am so passionate about student income support, the independent youth allowance and the other forms of youth allowance. We need to make sure that young people in regional communities have the chance to achieve their full potential. Achieving full potential for many of them may mean going to university several hours away from home, and we need to make sure that we do as much as we possibly can to reduce that economic barrier. I think that one of the key issues to make sure that we have access to skilled health professionals in regional areas is by training young people who have had experience of country life and who are more likely to return to regional Australia in the future. I also believe that we could do a lot more. The Rural Doctors Association of Australia is, I think, on the right track. We can do a lot more in terms of targeted funding for recruitment to help improve access to GPs, specialists and allied health professionals in our regional communities.

On the other side of the health debate on the concept of prevention and keeping people healthy, I congratulate the government for some of its initiatives in investing in sporting and recreation facilities. I encourage it to go further in the future in partnership with local and state governments. The more facilities we can provide for young people to get engaged in their communities, to be active and be part of community recreational clubs, the more likely they are to live long and fulfilling lives and healthy lives in regional areas.

I focus quite considerably in my electorate on helping young people to achieve their full potential. If there is one thing after I leave this place that I would like to be remembered for, it is that I have always worked hard to help young Gippslanders achieve their best. I spend a lot of time in the schools in my community and one of the things I talk about is aspiration. I see the school students here in the gallery today and I wish them well in their studies. It is so important for us in regional communities to encourage our young people to achieve their absolute best. If they are the only person in their family to ever reach year 12, that is fantastic, then they should aim to be the only person in their family to go onto university. I am not saying that university is the only way to measure your life by, but it is so important that if young people have the ability then we should help and nurture them in that ambition. Our role in this place is to reduce some of the economic barriers which are stopping so many of those young people from going on to achieve their absolute best.

A message I give to the young people when I meet with them is to get involved and to be someone who is prepared to take action in the community, to be someone who joins community or sporting groups and to actually participate in everything that our communities have to offer. Decisions are made, as we all know, by the people who turn up. So I am encouraging young people in my community to make sure that they are the ones who turn up and to take action by getting involved in community life.

My other great passion is the environment of Gippsland, in particular the Gippsland Lakes. I have spoken before in this place on the need for additional funding for research, for monitoring and for practical environ-
mental work which is so critical for the future of our environment. I am at a loss to understand why the state government has cut funding for the Gippsland Lakes task force. Also the federal government has made no recurrent budget commitments beyond the $3 million, which is about to run out.

I am also at a loss to understand why the current government has cut $11 million from the forward estimates for the Landcare movement. If we can afford to spend tens of millions of dollars on advertising propaganda campaigns about climate change or advertising propaganda campaigns about the mining tax, we can afford to find a few million dollars to help 100,000 Landcare volunteers in Australia who are doing the practical and hard work required to sustain the environment through regional Australia.

As I said at the outset it is a great honour and privilege to come to this place. I congratulate again all members who have been given that honour and I wish them well over the next three years in their deliberations.

Mr BRADBURY (Lindsay—Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer) (1.27 pm)—It is with great pleasure that I rise today to add my voice to the words that have been contributed to this debate in the address-in-reply. I would like to take this opportunity to reflect upon the election campaign that we have all endured—some more so than others. It is very much that punctuation mark, if you like, in the term of our democracy, where local residents in communities all around the country have an opportunity to determine the future direction of this nation.

I know that in communities such as the electorate of Lindsay people take their responsibility very seriously. They take their responsibility to determine the future of our government and the future of our nation with great care. It is with a sense of privilege that I return to this place as the member for Lindsay after having served for one term. My association and my connection with the Lindsay electorate goes back many years. Of course, having contested the 2001 and 2004 elections unsuccessfully, it was a source of great pride for me to have the opportunity to serve my community at the 2007 election. To be given the opportunity to continue to service our local community is something that I am very proud of. I thank the local residents who voted to give me the opportunity to keep working hard for our community.

I went to the election in Lindsay based on what I believed was a record of achievement in our local community. As someone who had served in the Penrith area for 11 years as a councillor and then as the member for Lindsay, it was on that record that I went to the election. As part of the Labor government that was elected in 2007 I had been a part of a government that had delivered a great deal for my local community. It was on the strength of the record of achievement of that government that I went back before the people at the election.

I think it is important to reflect upon some of the projects and achievements that were delivered in the Lindsay electorate in the three years of the previous government, because that is central to understanding why I believe it was so important that the people of Lindsay did what they did—and that was to give me the opportunity to keep working in our community as the local member.

Over the last three years the Labor government has delivered the biggest investment in the Nepean Hospital of any Commonwealth government in the history of that hospital. The Nepean Hospital is the central tertiary referral hospital in my electorate, but it serves a catchment that is much greater than my electorate. We often see stories in the papers or on the television news that talk
about the lack of capacity in our hospitals. Sometimes these stories go to resourcing issues; other times they go to issues connected with the great challenge of delivering the high-quality health services that we expect in this country, combined with the challenges of an ageing and growing population. The stresses of a growing population are felt as much in a place like my community as in any place in this country. That is why I believe it was significant that as a government we contributed $96.4 million to the redevelopment of the Nepean Hospital.

The works at Nepean Hospital have already commenced, and those works will be expansive. They will include: the construction of six more operating theatres; extra day-only and extended day-only beds; two new, purpose-built, 30-bed surgical wards to replace the older wards and a new surgical outpatient clinic; a new 12-bed intensive care pod, including six more intensive care unit beds; a new renal dialysis unit for hospital inpatients; and a new 64-bed mental health unit and community mental health facilities. In addition to that, there will be an extra 32 chairs in the oral health building.

They are the capital improvements that this government is making at the Nepean Hospital but, as any person who has worked in the hospital system or who has attended our hospitals as a patient will tell you, it is one thing to put money into the bricks and mortar; it is another to resource the hospital system on an ongoing basis. That is why the health reforms of the government in our previous term are so important to delivering the improvements in health care in communities such as mine. It is not just about delivering the improvements in the infrastructure; it is about delivering the ongoing resourcing improvements that are needed to improve the quality of health care.

I want to take the opportunity to thank the staff at the Nepean Hospital, the many doctors and nurses and other employees of the hospital who are not necessarily in clinical roles who contribute and always give their all to try to ensure that local residents have access to quality services. The job of governance is to empower those people to do the jobs that they so passionately commit themselves to by committing adequate resources. I believe that the commitments that we have made over the last three years go a long way towards doing that.

In addition to the investment in the Nepean Hospital itself, we have also invested $17.2 million in the new clinical school, which will be run by the University of Sydney. We are very pleased to have the Nepean Hospital as a teaching hospital in our local community, but with the investment in the new clinical school we will give medical students who are undertaking their practical work at the hospital a real home within the Penrith community. We think that this is important not just in terms of investing in the skills of the future health workforce. It is also about trying to ensure that we are able to establish a strong connection between those practitioners who come into our area and the community itself. That is what will ultimately ensure that communities such as mine have the health professionals that they need into the future. The clinical school is a significant initiative because, particularly in marrying up with the very good work that the Nepean Medical Research Foundation have been doing in our community, it will also improve the research capabilities of the health professionals within our region. This is important work and I want to acknowledge the outstanding work that is being done by the many health professionals that form the network of clinicians of the Nepean Hospital.

One of the big initiatives that we pursued—and which I championed—in the last
term of parliament was trying to secure funding for a commuter car park at the Penrith station. We are an outer suburban electorate. People who live in my community often travel into the city. The only public transport option is catching the train. Often the connection from their homes to the station is a difficult one for people to make. Public transport does not service that connection that well. So for so many families driving to the station and parking their car before hopping on the train to head into work in the city or Parramatta or other parts of Western Sydney is a central part of their daily existence. Providing adequate parking for people as they confront all of the challenges that come with getting to work in the morning is something that has been a massive challenge in our community. We have been working with the state government to try to secure a future for the north Penrith army land site, which is adjacent to the northern side of the Penrith station, to ensure not only that we have car parking facilities—although that has been an important part of what the Commonwealth has been engaged with—but also that we are able to ultimately, as far as our community is concerned, achieve a development outcome that will make it a site that the people of our community will be proud of and that will help us lift the productive capacity of our local community by ensuring that employment, residential and retail opportunities are available at the very centre of this major transport hub which is the Penrith station. I am very pleased to have worked as a part of the government to deliver that funding towards the commuter car park and I look forward to the commencement of the construction of that in the near future.

In our local community we have a history of having a very strong representation in the trades. Whilst, in some respects, we are under-represented when it comes to participation in higher education, many tradespeople live in my electorate. Many people understand that the importance of securing a vocational education is just as important as having the opportunity to go to university. That is why I am particularly proud of the more than $13 million that the government have invested in trades training centres in my local community, one which will be hosted at Kingswood High for all of the government schools in our local community and then another trades training centre hosted at McCarthy Catholic College, which will service the Catholic schools within the region. These initiatives will deliver real opportunities to young people in our community, to get the chance to learn the skills that they will need not just as part of their qualification to get through school but to begin learning the trade that they will ultimately undertake and hopefully go on to complete, to work in the area for which they have a trade and to fill some of those skills shortages that we have right across the country. These skills shortages are hampering our ability to realise the productive capability that our country requires.

Our investments in education and health have very much been the cornerstone of the first term of our government. Having achieved the opportunity of a second term, we look forward to completing those investments, to seeing them through to their completion and also building upon them. I want to comment briefly on the computers in schools program, which has been an outstanding program. When the first stage of the rollout began to occur in my electorate, members will remember that priority was given to those schools that had a ratio that was worse than one computer for every eight students. I suspect that very few electorates benefited from that initiative in the first phase—where, frankly, the ratios were appalling—as much as my electorate. But, as a result of that initiative, we have been able to
invest in the technological capacity of our schools, ensuring that all of the high schools, between years 9 and 12, in my electorate now have ratios of one to two. As we move towards the completion of that funding period for which funds were committed, that will move to one to one. I am very proud of this because, as I have travelled from school to school, I have seen the way in which this technology is being employed. It really is changing the nature of the classroom, engaging more and more young people in particular in their education so that they can go on and realise the potential that a good education can help them realise.

There were many other achievements and the government made a number of commitments in the course of the election campaign, and I will briefly refer to those. There was a commitment of $1 million to repair the Western Sydney International Hockey Centre. This is a tremendous initiative that will keep hockey going in our local community. The facilities were so bad that the future of hockey was in jeopardy. A sum of $7½ million was committed to the Cumberland Conservation Corridor. This builds on the $15 million that we committed in the previous term. This is about ensuring that we have green-space opportunities in Western Sydney so that, with the march of development, the urban sprawl, we are able to preserve some of our natural environment and ensure that there is the green space that livable communities require.

In addition to that, we made a commitment in relation to the Safer Suburbs Plan to invest in CCTV lighting and other community safety measures around the Joan Sutherland Performing Arts Centre and in the Westfield shopping centre. Whilst referring to the Joan Sutherland Performing Arts Centre I make the point, with some sorrow but also with some pride, that the Joan Sutherland Performing Arts Centre, which is located in Penrith, was given that name with the permission of Joan Sutherland. As many Australians and many people throughout the world mourn her loss, my sympathies go to her husband, Richard Bonyng. I know that the two of them have been great supporters of that facility, having visited the facility on a number of occasions, giving kids in Western Sydney the opportunity to pursue their potential in cultural and artistic pursuits. That is something that our local community has benefited greatly from. We thank her for allowing her name to be used for ‘The Joan,’ as we refer to it.

I would like to thank a few people who assisted me throughout the election campaign and assisted in our local campaign. I wish to acknowledge the fact that I believe I am here for a second term as the member for Lindsay because of the very strong local campaign that we ran. I had tremendous support from a number of people. I wish to take the opportunity to thank my family, in particular my wife, Kylie, and our four children, for having endured all that comes with running in a marginal seat. Without their support I would not have been able to contest the election and go on to win. I thank them very much for their support. I thank my parents, my siblings and my many family members who contributed. They all made and played a very important part in helping me hold on to the role that I am so proud to have as the member for Lindsay.

I wish to acknowledge a number of people who took what, in my experience, is a very big step—that is, people who are not connected with political parties came forward and allowed their name to be associated with me by endorsing me as the local member. I would like to thank Michael Morris, who is head of the Samuel Morris Foundation. Michael and his wife, Joanne, and their son Samuel are great advocates for the cause of preventing drownings and near-death drown-
ing experiences in homes right across the country. I thank them for putting their name behind me in support of my efforts as the local member.

I would like to thank Jackie Legenda and Mark Fleming, a family in Emu Heights. They are very decent people who were prepared to come forward and endorse what I have been able to do as the member and to give me a vote of confidence and put that before the electorate. I would like to thank Greg Alexander. *(Time expired)*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott)—Order! It being 1.45 pm, the debate is interrupted. In accordance with standing order 43 the debate may be resumed at a later hour and the parliamentary secretary will have leave to continue his speech when the debate is resumed.*

**CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS**

**Aged Care**

Dr LEIGH (Fraser) (1.45 pm)—One of the most important things a society can do is look after older members. Indeed, the first payment issued from the Commonwealth government was the age pension, instituted in 1909. Labor continues in that proud tradition today. In the last term of government we increased the single age pension from 25 per cent of male total average weekly earnings to 27.7 per cent. This was the largest increase in the pension since its inception. The Gillard government is also committed to raising the minimum superannuation contribution from nine to 12 per cent.

Another important principle is ensuring that people live in homes that are appropriately set up for their needs. I am delighted to be joined in the gallery today by Charmian Leigh, who is here with Rosemary Chivers and Gabrielle Leigh and my parents Barbara and Michael.

Charmian is an occupational therapist whose work aims to ensure that veterans can continue to function in their own homes by installing a range of mobility aids such as ramps and handrails. I know one hospital in Sydney that refers to this work as that of the ‘geriatric flying squad’. It is critical to providing older Australians with dignity in retirement, and I could not be more proud of Charmian and her work.

**Volunteers: Mrs Gwen Braga**

Mrs PRENTICE (Ryan) (1.46 pm)—I wish to record my congratulations to Mrs Gwen Braga on her re-election as Queensland President of Meals on Wheels. Just a few weeks ago I said in my first speech that ‘it is by empowering the individual that we will unlock the real potential of our society’. Like many volunteers in Ryan, Gwen has enriched the community through her dedication and hard work. It has become abundantly clear over many years that touching and improving the lives of others is a personal mission for Gwen.

Meals on Wheels sees thousands of elderly residents from every corner of our nation receive a nutritious meal organised and delivered by 14,000 volunteers across Queensland alone. They help the elderly to live healthy and independent lives, and since its beginning in 1956 it has developed into so much more. The volunteers provide personal contact with their clients and also check on their wellbeing.

Gwen has always said it was volunteering for this organisation, along with her mother’s involvement previously, that opened her eyes to people in need within the community. This spirit of compassion and helping those in need is one that epitomises so many community and volunteer groups in Ryan. Gwen has the respect of so many within our community as a volunteer for Meals on Wheels for more
than 16 years as well as for her involvement in the Indooroopilly senior citizens group.

We are all part of a community and some are involved more than others. But we should all be inspired by Gwen and take up the challenge to contribute to our community in the best way we each can. To say the least, Gwen has made a difference, and I urge others to follow her lead and the example she has set. (Time expired)

Chisholm Electorate: Mr Mark Beovich

Ms BURKE (Chisholm) (1.48 pm)—On Sunday, in between going to the 50th anniversary birthday lunch of Box Hill Lions, a terrific organisation that I want to commend for its efforts, and the 25th anniversary afternoon tea of the Monash Volunteers Association—it was a big birthday weekend—I had the pleasure of attending Syndal South Primary School to present an award to Mark Beovich. Mark was recognised out of 9,000 coaches Australia wide as the best community coach in Australia for 2010.

Mark is part of the volunteer coaches in the Active After-School Communities program, and I want to put on the record my appreciation to the minister for extending this terrific program. Mark is a triathlete and he is coaching kids in primary school to become triathletes. On Sunday at Syndal South 100 kids were working out what it meant to be a triathlete, because we did not have a swimming pool, although that did not dampen the enthusiasm.

Mark is a tremendous member of our community and we need to recognise and reward such people who give of their time for free. Mark gives of his time for free after school, as well as being a very involved triathlete and part of the Nunawading triathlete community, which has an exceptional club. Mark not only does the coaching but has actually put together the seven-week training program that is now being used across Australia in the Active After-School Communities program and he also encourages kids to stay active. A lot of kids do not want to go into traditional sports and this is a great way of encouraging them to stay active. An active kid becomes an active adult. (Time expired)

Hinkler Electorate: Isis River Bridge

Mr NEVILLE (Hinkler) (1.49 pm)—The crucial Isis River Bridge upgrade on the Bruce Highway in my electorate has been brought forward because of concerted public pressure. The bridge is located south of Childers and its approaches consist of sweeping bends, while the bridge itself is quite narrow and low to the river. I have spoken about the need to prioritise the scheduled $25 million replacement, in the name of safety, after Labor promised the project back in 2007. At the start of this year an 80 kilometres per hour speed limit was imposed on the approaches to the bridge as a stopgap measure until the upgrade occurred—the clearest possible indication that safety issues existed.

The original works schedule stretched the project out as far as 2014—note that: 2014. But I am pleased to say that preliminary works have now started on the project. Public pressure, of which I was part, forced the issue after a series of terrible accidents in the past 12 months or so. I applaud the efforts of the local community in speaking out, in particular the Isis Town & Country and News Mail newspapers.

The new bridge will be wider with a higher clearance and streamlined approaches and it will improve visibility in both directions. The new bridge will be to the east of the existing one. I understand that the project will be finished in approximately 12 months time, which is great news for every single person who drives on the Bruce Highway in my electorate. (Time expired)
Sustainable Living

Ms PARKE (Fremantle) (1.51 pm)—I want to share with Australia the most inspiring account of community action and social inclusion. For three years now, Hulbert Street, a local street in South Fremantle, has hosted the Spring Sustainability Fiesta that has worked to educate, inspire and support the more than 5,500 visitors who have flocked to this little street to celebrate sustainable living and to learn how to take on a more sustainable lifestyle.

This year over a weekend in mid-September every Hulbert Street household, 37 per cent of which are solar powered, participated in the fiesta, with one front yard converted into a woodworking shop and several homes, artists’ studios and gardens opened to share the environmental sustainability changes they have made to their lives with people living in streets beyond Hulbert. Local artisans, businesses, community groups and even a bank filled the street itself with displays and booths geared towards supporting people in their quest for sustainable living.

Fremantle is a community that has sustainability deep in its heart and it is leading the way when it comes to embracing renewable energy and green power, water conservation and reuse, home gardens and organic horticulture. But the Hulbert Street Sustainability Fiesta goes further in showing that sustainability is also about building connections and relationships within community.

I pay tribute to Shani Graham and Tim Darby and all the residents and friends of Hulbert Street for their creativity and energy and for their community spirit, dedication and generosity in sharing their place so that others may be inspired.

Banking Policy

Mr RANDALL (Canning) (1.53 pm)—I wish to clarify comments I made during a morning doorstop interview. When I referred to ‘their lunatic fringe type ideas’, I was referring to the policy on banking being proposed by the Australian Greens towards a super profits tax on banks. At no time did I relate these comments to those made by the shadow Treasurer when he called for a debate on the future of banking, as the banks continue to ignore the government’s warnings. In fact, when I was directly asked I commended Mr Hockey’s actions as Minister for Financial Services and Regulation, as he then was, to ensure that Australia’s banks were solid institutions. I support a public debate on this issue. I seek leave to table the transcript.

Leave granted.

Cafe Ink

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (1.53 pm)—I congratulate Cafe Ink for recently taking out the ACT Chief Minister’s award for social inclusion in the small business category. Cafe Ink is a social enterprise set up about six months ago by Woden Community Services to give labour market access to people battling disability, mental health issues and just plain bad luck. The cafe currently employs 10 people, who get not only a job but also training, certification and business skills. Cafe Ink is located in the Woden Library precinct. I thank the staff of the library for making the team so welcome.

The cafe is a social enterprise, so it runs to make a profit according to strict commercial principles and practices. That profit is then reinvested in the business or other social ventures. Cafe Ink is also a sustainable business. It sells fair-trade coffee, promotes reusable cups, uses recycled packaging and minimises food wastage. Wherever possible, it buys locally to support Canberra businesses and reduce its carbon footprint.

Congratulations to Chris Redmond, Matthew Gallagher and Emma Walter for com-
ing up with the cafe concept, getting it up and running and making sure it provides a social service while still providing a social enterprise. Most importantly, congratulations to the 10 people who are working to make Cafe Ink a success in a highly competitive market.

Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust

Mr FLETCHER (Bradfield) (1.55 pm)—I rise today to pay tribute to the organisers of the newly formed Australian offshoot of the Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust, HART. This organisation was launched at a dinner held last Saturday at Barker College in my electorate of Bradfield. The dinner was addressed by the quite remarkable Baroness Caroline Cox of Queensbury, a member of the British House of Lords and a longstanding champion of oppressed peoples, who inspired all of us present with her remarkable stories of courage and of advocacy. She spoke of the four As: advocacy, aid, authenticity and accountability.

I congratulate the Australian organising committee, particularly Dr Martin Panter, an Australian doctor who has been doing voluntary work in Burma for many years assisting those who are oppressed by the terrible regime in that country.

I also congratulate St Swithuns Anglican Church, Pymble, including Rector Roger Chilton, for their support of HART through administrative assistance and through important moral support. The work of the Australian branch of HART will be focused initially in Burma and East Timor, where the need is great and where some very brave people are doing outstanding work to help those who very much need help. I congratulate them and all involved in the formation of HART in Australia.

Clifford Craig Medical Research Trust

Mr LYONS (Bass) (1.56 pm)—I congratulate the Clifford Craig Medical Research Trust. I attended their fundraising dinner on Friday night. I commend this organisation for the research that they fund, particularly for undergraduate medical students and, for that matter, for allied health professions. This organisation is rather small. It is based at Launceston General Hospital, probably the greatest local hospital in Australia. They are a fantastic part of that hospital. Research is a really important part of undergraduate training. Launceston General Hospital has this magnificent medical research trust, a local trust set up basically to do research within the northern region of Tasmania. They are involved in some international studies as well. Some of the research papers that have been released, particularly on aged care, have been presented at international conferences and have been internationally recognised. I pay tribute to the Clifford Craig Medical Research Trust.

Ms ROWLAND (Greenway) (1.58 pm)—I rise today to recognise the outstanding achievements of my constituent Fabrice Lapierre, who won a gold medal in the men's long jump event at the recent Delhi Commonwealth Games. This is Fabrice's second major victory in 2010. He was also victorious at the world indoor titles. He previously won gold in the 2008 World Athletics Final and silver at the 2006 Melbourne Commonwealth Games.

Fabrice, who is known to friends as the 'big red kangaroo' because he can jump as far as one, grew up locally in Quakers Hill and was an active member of the Blacktown Little Athletics Club. Fabrice is a dedicated and committed athlete who trains six times a week. In fact, following his success at the Delhi games, Fabrice returned home for only a few days before leaving to take part in another overseas competition. He is also turning his attention to the 2012 London Olym-
pic Games, where I have no doubt he will again do his local community and his country proud. I have no doubt that young athletes across my community are looking to Fabrice as a source of inspiration. We are all very proud of Fabrice’s achievements, and I wish him all the very best for his future sporting endeavours.

Farrer Electorate: Floods

Ms LEY (Farrer) (1.59 pm)—I draw the attention of the House to the very serious flooding in the eastern part of New South Wales in my electorate of Farrer and I make a very specific request to the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, who I know is in the other place. That request concerns the area east of the Hume Highway travelling north from Albury, where farmers have recently come out from their exceptional circumstances regime and are therefore not entitled to any support by way of rural financial counselling or subsidies that they would normally get when their crops and their livelihoods have been ruined in this way. My specific request to the minister is that these farmers be included in the existing exceptional circumstances regime, which is available to farmers in the rest of my electorate.

The SPEAKER—Order! In accordance with standing order 43, the time for members’ statements has concluded.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Mining

Mr ABBOTT (2.00 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to the words of the head of Rio Tinto last night: ‘If you can’t trust the government, who can you trust?’ I ask the Prime Minister: why has she reneged on the government’s pre-election deal with the mining industry?

Ms GILLARD—My colleagues are assisting me by reminding me how extraordinary it is to get this question from the Leader of the Opposition, given his statements on accuracy and truthfulness during the lead-up to the election campaign. Putting that to one side, the answer to the member’s question is this—and it is exactly the same answer as I gave yesterday: the government is working through with its policy transition group. Don Argus, of course, is leading that. The minister is working alongside Don Argus. On the issue that the Leader of the Opposition is referring to, about the treatment of state royalties, the implementation of the arrangements is being worked through in the policy transition group. We will keep working through to deliver the legislation as promised to this parliament.

Mr ABBOTT—Mr Speaker, I have a supplementary question for the Prime Minister. Is she insisting on an interpretation of the agreement clearly at odds with that of the mining industry, clearly at odds with the statement of the heads of agreement, because she knows that it is necessary to have her interpretation to protect the return to surplus by 2012-13?

Ms GILLARD—Once again I would refer the Leader of the Opposition to what I said in the parliament yesterday and what I said at a press conference yesterday, which is that it obviously is not the government’s intention to have state governments able to change royalty arrangements in a way which means the federal government foots the bill. We are working through in the policy transition group on implementation. We will work through with Australian mining companies. I know that it is the Leader of the Opposition’s stock in trade to overstate everything, to be constantly claiming crisis and carry on. There is no need for that. We are methodically working through.
Economy

Ms ROWLAND (2.03 pm)—My question is to the Treasurer. What role have the fundamentals of Australia’s economic framework played in delivering 20 consecutive years of economic growth, and why is it so important they be preserved?

Mr SWAN—I thank the member for Greenway for that very important question. Members may not be aware, but Australia is entering its 20th continuous year of economic growth. That is not something that can be said about other advanced economies. This is a very substantial achievement. This very substantial achievement has been built on 25 years of economic reform. It has been built on a floating dollar, a deregulated banking sector and the independence of the Reserve Bank when it comes to monetary policy. Of course, it was this framework, along with the government’s timely stimulus, that did so much to support growth in this economy and to make sure that Australia, unlike many other developed economies, avoided recession. So this consensus has been very important. It has been very important to domestic confidence. It has been very important to international confidence.

In the last week it has been challenged on two occasions. We had the member for Goldstein suggesting that we should be fixing the dollar and today we have had the member for North Sydney arguing for the removal of the Reserve Bank’s independence for re-regulating interest rates. These two initiatives from those opposite are a grave challenge to the foundations of that economic model and to make sure that Australia, unlike many other developed economies, avoided recession. So this consensus has been very important. It has been very important to domestic confidence. It has been very important to international confidence.

What Australians want is concrete action, not populist rhetoric. That is why we on this side of the House have put in place some essential reforms—a very big investment in AAA rated residential mortgage backed securities, for example, to give a flow of funds to the smaller lenders to challenge the bigger banks. That has been very important. Then there are the new credit laws, which will challenge unfair charges from banks when people exit mortgages. These are all very, very important reforms and they are part of responsible economic management—the responsible economic management that saw Australia avoid a recession, that saw Australia generate a very significant—(Time expired)
Government Advertising

Mr McCormack (2.07 pm)—My question is to the Special Minister of State. I refer the minister to taxpayer funded advertisements on the government’s water policies which aired on television last night. Given the Murray-Darling Basin Authority has released ‘a guide to a draft to a plan’, under what provisions has the government approved the advertising campaign? Why have there been no ministerial announcements about the campaign? How much will the campaign cost? Where will the ads run and for how long? As for the mining tax ads, is this another national emergency or is it a political emergency?

Mr Gray—I thank the member for his question. It goes to government advertising. As all members in this place and as people paying attention to this issue will know, government advertising in recent years from the grotesque record of over $250 million worth of advertising to support Work Choices—

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order on relevance. The minister was asked a specific question about one ad campaign, not a general question about government advertising.

The Speaker—There were a number of parts to the question. There were references to at least one other campaign. But I acknowledge that the Special Minister of State has not yet referred to either of those campaigns. I understand that he realises that his response needs to be directly relevant to the question.

Mr Gray—I thank the Speaker. The grotesque levels of spending that were observed by all Australians in 2007 have been wound back substantially by the current government—in fact, more than cut in half. The question goes particularly to television advertising, which the member has seen. I do not believe that it is necessary for all advertising campaigns to be the subject of public announcements by me as the Special Minister of State. They should and do, however, go through due process. It is important that the House note that this particular advertising campaign did go through that process and was duly, properly and appropriately recommended to go forward on the basis that it was a properly constructed public information campaign to provide information at a cost which is a small fraction of the grotesque $250 million Work Choices campaign funded by members opposite.

Interest Rates

Mr Ripoll (2.11 pm)—My question is to the Treasurer. Will the Treasurer please update the House on the government’s position on recent commentary about monetary policy and banking regulation?

Mr Swan—I thank the member for Oxley for that very important question. There has been a range of commentary in recent days about monetary policy and banking regulation. The shadow Treasurer made his views well known this morning: he wants to re-regulate interest rates and wants to take punitive action against banks, and if we will not do so then the parliament should. Those were the words that he used this morning.

There has been a range of commentary today. The member for Cook was asked about this. He was asked what action should be taken. He said, ‘An infinite number of measures.’ But he could not name a single one. That was the member for Cook. The member for Mayo was asked about this, and he said, ‘I’ll let Joe Hockey talk about what, what, what we’ll do.’ That was the response of the member for Mayo. But you can always count on the member for Wentworth. He has been out there a lot: the Turnbull wing of the Liberal Party. He was out there today and was asked about this very important commentary.
Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. How could it be within the Treasurer’s responsibility to comment on the commentary of members of the opposition?

The SPEAKER—The question is in order. It talked about updating the House on the government’s positions and recent commentary about monetary and banking policies. The Treasurer’s response is going directly to those matters.

Mr SWAN—The member for Wentworth was asked about it this morning and he had this to say about monetary policy: ‘Any precedent for the federal parliament regulating interest rates? You really should speak to Joe about that.’ The member for North Sydney went out and compounded it. A journalist said, ‘You’ve been a bit unclear about what you’re saying should be done.’ This is what the member for North Sydney said: ‘Well, look, I’m not going to be specific, because I’m not fully aware of exactly what the banks are asking for.’ These people have lost the plot. The final word on monetary policy goes to the member for Canning. He was asked about this, and this is what he said about this commentary.

Mr Pyne—My point of order is not on relevance, Mr Speaker; it is on another matter. If the opposition cannot ask questions that are not strictly within the standing orders, how can this answer be appropriate to the responsibilities of the Treasurer, when he is not responsible for the commentary of the opposition?

The SPEAKER—Order! I indicated my position about the question, which was not challenged at the time that it was raised. I will indicate that, to the extent that the answer goes to the comments, it would be in order; but any debating of those comments would be out of order. I would caution the Treasurer about that matter. The Treasurer has the call.

Mr SWAN—Thank you, Mr Speaker, because the member for Canning was commenting on monetary policy this morning, and he was asked about the member for North Sydney’s views on monetary policy.

Mr Hockey—No he wasn’t; that’s not true.

Mr SWAN—And this is what he said about those views: … just another one of their lunatic-fringe type ideas …

Mr Hockey—You’re a liar; a bald-faced liar!

The SPEAKER—Order! The Treasurer will resume his seat. The member for North Sydney will withdraw.

Mr Hockey—I withdraw.

Government members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The House will come to order!

Mr Schultz interjecting—

Mr Randall—Thank you, Mr Speaker. Earlier today I made a clarification that that statement made by the Treasurer in the House is not true, and that I was referring to the Greens.

The SPEAKER—The member for Canning will resume his seat. I will give him the opportunity at the end of question time to make a personal explanation.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! If those on my left have a comment, they can come to the dispatch box and make that comment. I am not going to respond to what people believe to be helpful advice by interjection. If the helpful advice is that the member for Canning has already made this personal explanation: (a) I am unaware of it, and (b) regretta-
bly, many members of this place have been in the position where they have had to continually make re-announcements of an explanation. Whilst I regret that, that has been the situation for a number of parliaments. I have offered the member for Canning the opportunity to remake the personal explanation. The Treasurer has a minute and half to go, but is hopefully in conclusion.

Mr SWAN—Thank you, Mr Speaker. It does pain me to say it, but I could not agree more with the member for Canning.

Murray-Darling Basin

Mr SECKER (2.18 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities. I refer the minister to the comments by the head of the National Farmers Federation yesterday:

The last two weeks have gone so badly that we actually threaten the entire water reform agenda … at the moment the trust in our communities in regional Australia is threadbare …

Why won’t the minister attend any of the 19 community briefings on the Murray-Darling Basin guide to help restore trust in the government’s ability to deliver balanced and consultative water reform?

Mr BURKE—The answer to the question from the member for Barker is the same as the answers that were given yesterday in the MPI and the same as have been given in question time each day this week—that is, I will continue to be out in irrigation communities, conducting consultation, but it will not be at the events organised by an independent authority.

Economy

Ms BURKE (2.20 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. What action is the government taking to support families to meet pressures on the family budget?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for Chisholm for her question. I know that she is frequently out in her community talking to people about what is on their mind and finding that the response is the pressure of the cost of living, making the family budget add up. These are the things that are talked about by families around the dinner table.

The government understands this. Government members understand this. We also know that the best way of assisting families to meet cost-of-living pressures is to ensure that people have the opportunity to get a job—to have a job, to have the benefits and dignity of work. That is why the government was so focused on supporting jobs during the global financial crisis. I note that the Benevolent Society this week released a report about the wellbeing of children. They said:

The government’s stimulus package helped us avoid significant unemployment, and that can only be terrific for families and children.

The same instincts that drove us to do what we could to support jobs during the global financial crisis are driving us now to assist families with cost-of-living pressures, particularly meeting the costs of supporting children. That is why we have reduced taxation so that someone on an income of $80,000 is paying $1,550 less tax than they were in 2007-08. That is an extra $1,550 in the family budget.

And of course—and congratulations go to the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs—next year sees the start of Australia’s first Paid Parental Leave scheme to help families manage the pressures at the time of the birth of a child. Around 148,000 new parents will be eligible to receive 18 weeks paid parental leave paid at the minimum wage, which is currently around $570 a week. We have also increased support for families that have childcare costs, increasing the childcare tax
Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for Hasluck for his question, which I believe to be his first question. I say to the member for Hasluck that, in terms of supporting families with cost-of-living pressures, I refer to my last answer and to the new measures that the government has taken in the last few years and the new measures that it has committed to during the election to assist families with cost-of-living pressures—measures like the family tax benefit change for teenagers that I referred to, because we do not believe the costs of kids go down when they turn 16; measures like the childcare tax rebate being available fortnightly; measures like school uniforms being eligible for the education tax rebate. We believe these are important in supporting families with cost-of-living pressures. I understand—

Mr Wyatt—Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order. The point of order is that my question was about the carbon tax, not about the other support measures.

The SPEAKER—The member for Hasluck in asking his question referred to an Anglicare report, referred to the effect, as he believed, of a carbon tax and then concluded—and I have not written down the exact words, but they were something like ‘How could the Prime Minister restore the faith in her of electors?’—

Ms Julie Bishop interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The Deputy Leader of the Opposition is warned because she continues to just interject, not only on everything but on the chair. I am just trying to convey that I would like to see that cut out.

Ms Julie Bishop interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The Deputy Leader of the Opposition should just be very, very careful about her approach. I have indicated that yes, the carbon tax was mentioned in the question along with other things and there
was another conclusion to the question. The Prime Minister is responding to the question.

Ms GILLARD—Thank you very much, Mr Speaker, and I think the member for Hasluck has learnt about taking advice from the member for Sturt.

The SPEAKER—Order! The Prime Minister will go back to the question.

Ms GILLARD—Coming to the question of a carbon price and electricity prices, which the member asked about, I have obviously addressed questions of assistance with cost-of-living pressures. We understand that it is tough for people. On the question of pricing carbon, of tackling climate change, I believe Australians want the people in this place to try and work together to tackle this issue in good faith, which is exactly what the government is trying to do through the creation of the Multi-Party Climate Change Committee. Of course, there is the option that, if the Leader of the Opposition diverts from his strategy of wrecking and looks to real reform, the opposition can participate in that committee and make a positive contribution to this nation tackling climate change.

I understand that the member for Hasluck, coming from Western Australia, would be genuinely concerned about electricity prices, because I know that there is a very big debate in Western Australia about increasing electricity prices and the pressures on families. As the member for Hasluck would be well aware, that is because of actions of the Liberal state government there in relation to electricity pricing. I want to quote the Western Australian Premier on what has caused him to take this action and what is putting pressure on electricity prices, because I believe the member for Hasluck may be interested in the insights of his Western Australian colleague, who says:

These increases have been coming for some time and, at the end of the day, I guess you know, we have to have a situation where the electricity industry pays its own way.

And, in relation to the circumstances in WA about which his government made decisions, Premier Barnett goes on to say, ‘And all of us for a whole set of reasons, a whole host of factors, are going to cop higher electricity prices.’ He says:

We also, as a community, tend to use a lot more electricity than we did in previous times, so that is part of it.

That is Premier Barnett on electricity price decisions of the Liberal government in Western Australia. I refer the member for Hasluck to those words, which obviously are about the need to reinvest in electricity generation. So, when it comes to cost pressures on working families, I understand that he wants to raise questions in this place; he may also want to raise questions with his WA Liberal colleagues.

Economy

Mr PERRETT (2.29 pm)—My question is to the Treasurer. Will the Treasurer inform the House of the importance of international engagement and the upcoming meeting of the G20 finance ministers?

Mr SWAN—I thank the member for Moreton for his question. Tonight I am leaving for the G20 finance ministers meeting in Korea which will undertake very important work as a prelude to the G20 leaders summit in Seoul in a few weeks time. This is important because it was through the work of the G20 over the last couple of years that the global economy avoided a global depression. So the G20 did do very important things in putting in place stimulus across the global economy to support jobs, something that is not appreciated by those opposite. But what we and all those finance ministers and leaders who go to the G20 know is that there are difficult times ahead. There are hard and difficult reforms that must be put in place
across the global economy to ensure that growth is stronger and more sustainable, so the meeting this weekend will talk about the G20 framework for strong, balanced and sustainable growth.

There will be a discussion in that context about, for example, exchange rates—which we have been talking about here—and other things as well. The reform of the International Monetary Fund is very important to make the International Monetary Fund more representative of the global economy, particularly the growing economies in Asia. That will be very important, as will the discussion about a new international framework for financial regulation, which is very important for this country and very important for the global economy.

Global engagement in this context is important. It was very important in ensuring that Australia made it through the last couple of years without going into recession, and it will be very important as we go forward because, as the International Monetary Fund has already pointed out, the global outlook is uncertain and the risk is still very much on the downside. We on this side of the House understand the importance of maintaining a credible and consistent macroeconomic policy, even if those opposite do not. Even if those opposite want to rip up the economic consensus that has been so important to this economy, we will move forward with a credible policy for the future.

**Asylum Seekers**

Mrs GRIGGS (2.32 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to her promise before the election to establish a regional processing centre in East Timor to dissuade unauthorised arrivals from coming to Australia. As she is yet to present a formal proposal to the government of East Timor and has reversed her pre-election commitment not to expand detention centres in Australia, and given that today the 107th boat this year has arrived. why should the Australian people trust her to stop the boats?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for her question, which I understand is her first question in this parliament. I say in answer to her question that there are a number of asserted facts in it which are simply not the case. I understand that the member may not have researched all of those matters herself, but can I say to the member that the government is pursuing dialogue with East Timor on the question of a regional protection framework and regional processing centre. As I have had cause to say in the parliament this week on a number of other occasions, the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship was in Dili, in Jakarta and in Kuala Lumpur pursuing discussion as recently as last week.

On the question of detention centre capacity, the government has made a series of announcements. We wanted to provide transparency and certainty to Australians and to communities. We were well aware that there were fear campaigns being whipped up in various parts of the country. I certainly do not suggest that was being done by the member who asked the question, but it was being done, and consequently we wanted to clarify the government’s long-term intentions in relation to detention centres.

We also made what I believe is an important announcement about the treatment of children and families, and it is still not clear to me what the Leader of the Opposition’s position is on that announcement. On some occasions, he has said that it is the work of the Howard government and sought to claim credit for it; on other occasions, he has repudiated it, saying that it would somehow exacerbate problems. At some point he will have to pick between the two.

An opposition member interjecting—
The SPEAKER—Order! The Prime Minister will resume her seat. This is not directed towards the Manager of Opposition Business, but a warning is a prelude to a naming. The Manager of Opposition Business has the call.

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, on the issue of direct relevance: I cannot work out how the Prime Minister’s answer at the moment could possibly be relevant to the question she was asked by the member for Solomon, and I ask you to ask her to return to the question.

The SPEAKER—I will be listening carefully to the response by the Prime Minister, and she must know that wandering into the policies of other parties may be stretching it on this occasion, even though the question was fairly broad by the end.

Ms GILLARD—The question made assertions about dialogue with East Timor and the regional processing centre, and I have answered them. The question made assertions about the government’s detention policies, and I have answered them. The question also made assertions about dealing with unauthorised arrivals, and I say to the member, as I had cause to say in the parliament earlier this year, that this is a complex problem. I do not believe in three-word slogans, I do not believe in boat phone and I do not believe in the Prime Minister of the nation pretending that he or she is in a better position than a patrol boat commander to deal with a situation at sea. What I do believe in is working through dialogue on a regional protection framework and regional processing centre, and the government is doing precisely that.

Mr SYMON—My question is to the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport, representing the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy. What problems have been identified with Australia’s current broadband technology? Are these problems widely identified, and how does the building of the National Broadband Network provide a solution to these problems?

Mr ALBANESE—I thank the member for his question and his ongoing interest in the whole area of infrastructure development but particularly the National Broadband Network. Just this week the broadband quality survey has found that Australia has actually fallen from 18th to 21st in world broadband rankings. We know that innovation in information and communication technology is the single biggest driver of productivity in our economy. Some 78 per cent of gains in services productivity are a direct result of ICT and 85 per cent of improvements in productivity in manufacturing are a direct result of ICT. We know in fact, and should be ashamed of the fact, that of the world’s top 100 cities when it comes to broadband speeds there are no Australian cities in that list—not one in the top 100. That is the legacy that this government inherited from the 18 failed plans of the former government.

So it has been identified very clearly what the problems are. However, I am asked also whether there is wide recognition of that, and of course the member for Wentworth is one person who argued today on Fran Kelly’s program: ‘The NBN is an answer to a problem that has not even been identified.’ It has not even been identified! It has not been identified by them. We know what all the problems are and we know about the benefits, but the member for Wentworth does not seem to address that. We know about the benefits for productivity. We know about the benefit of 25,000 jobs a year on average. We know about the benefits for consumers—the benefits in education, the benefits in health, the benefits in tackling urban congestion—but this is what we have from the shadow minister. It is a bit like the ‘What have the Romans ever done for us?’ scene from

National Broadband Network

CHAMBER
Monty Python. What are the benefits of national broadband technology? Well, apart from transport benefits, education, health, productivity and jobs, there are none—none whatsoever! That is the attitude of the wreckers opposite. But I wonder whether—

Mr Pyne—I rise on a point of order, Mr Speaker. Again I ask: how is it that it is relevant to this minister’s responsibility, or that of the one he is representing, to be bagging the opposition? I had thought on a general point that these ‘slag and bag’ answers were going to end with the new standing orders.

The Speaker—the minister understands his responsibility to be directly relevant to the question. Regrettably, there are these—and people will, I suppose, deride this—incidental mentions in this answer of the opposition which are not helpful.

Mr Albanese—we on this side of the House have identified—along with the business community, along with people in regional Australia, along with people in our cities—what the benefits of the National Broadband Network are. We are determined to do something about it. It would be interesting to know whether the comments of the shadow minister were actually authorised or whether perhaps they were like the comments of the shadow Treasurer, because we have had no questions from him either. Quite clearly they are just going rogue.

The Speaker—the minister has concluded.

Interest Rates

Mr Hockey (2.42 pm)—My question is to the Treasurer. I refer the Treasurer to his words of warning to the banks earlier this year that ‘they would incur the wrath not just of the Australian people but of the Australian government’ if they increased interest rates beyond the Reserve Bank moves. Why should the Australian people take the Treasurer at his word when he now suggests that there is nothing he can do about the behaviour of the banks on interest rates?

Mr Swan—Well, that is not what I have said, and I have made it very clear. I have made a number of things very clear and I will just very clearly go through them. I have made it very clear that there is no justification on the part of any of the major banks in the current circumstances to go for an out of cycle rate rise, should the Reserve Bank at some future stage take a decision to put up the cash rate. Of course, those over there like to go around pretending that somehow the Reserve Bank is not independent. The Reserve Bank is independent and it will take its decisions separately from the government.

What we have done, because we have been concerned about competition in the banking sector, is a couple of very significant things. The first thing that we have done is make a very significant investment in AAA rated residential mortgage backed securities. Why is that important? It is very important because one of the unfortunate consequences of the global financial crisis and the global recession, which those opposite do not think ever happened, was further concentration in our banking sector. That was an unfortunate consequence of the global financial crisis. Of course, when we were dealing with that those opposite were in here opposing the bank guarantee, something that was absolutely fundamental, particularly to the viability and the standing of our smaller lenders. It was absolutely critical to seeing the flow of credit through credit unions and other smaller lenders during the global financial crisis, and they came into this House and opposed us every inch of the way.

The member for Wentworth led that charge, and he did it with Godwin Grech. We have got the whole history of their connivance against the bank guarantee revealed to us by Godwin Grech and his relationship
with the member for Wentworth. We have put in place additional measures to ensure there is more competition in the sector because of the global financial crisis. Therefore, our investment in residential mortgage backed securities is critical.

**Workplace Relations**

Mr CHEESEMAN (2.45 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government and Minister for the Arts representing the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Jobs and Workplace Relations. Why is a fair deal at work important to Australians and what challenges does the government face in this area?

Mr CREAN—Fairness for workers is important. It is important to their families and it is also important to the economy. So far as families are concerned, it is important to ensure that their rights are protected in the workplace: the right to collectively bargain and the requirement for employers to bargain in good faith. Also, the safety nets that we have introduced are important for their security. As for the importance to the economy, since we changed the previously unfair Work Choices arrangements we have seen productivity increase in the economy, real wages go up, an increase in jobs—600,000 of them created since we have been in office—a fall in industrial disputes and an assessment by Access Economics that the changes that we made to the unfair Work Choices legislation would reap benefits of $4.8 billion in savings to the Australian economy over the course of the next decade.

I am also asked if there are any challenges to this. I have to ask myself, ‘Why would you challenge a framework that delivered those sorts of outcomes?’ But those on the other side do challenge it. The coalition has basically committed, through statements today and earlier this month, to return this country to Work Choices, were they to get back into office. Remember that during the election campaign the Leader of the Opposition, when questioned about returning to Work Choices, said it was ‘dead, buried and cremated’. He even had to put it in writing on the Neil Mitchell program, because he told us that you could not believe a thing he said unless it was included in writing.

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, on a point of order: again, for the third time today, this could not possibly be directly relevant to the question that the minister was asked. He was asked about hurdles to do with workplace relations. Past history is not relevant to the government’s policies for the future.

The SPEAKER—The question went to what challenges this government faced in this area. In one sentence the minister talked about an announcement today and then went on to matters in the election. I assumed that he was going to get back to announcements today.

Mr CREAN—I was asked about the challenges, and the challenge comes from the other side of the parliament. Dead, buried and cremated, we have got the exhumation party out—the shadow Treasurer and the shadow finance minister.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The minister will get back to the question. He will ignore the interjectors. The interjections will cease.

Mr CREAN—The challenge to Australia if Work Choices returns is this: a cut to conditions in the workplace, a freeze on pay—

Mr PYNE (Sturt) (2.48 pm)—I move:

That the member be no longer heard.

Question put.
The House divided. [2.53 pm]
(The Speaker—Mr Harry Jenkins)

Ayes............ 72
Noes............ 75
Majority....... 3

AYES
Abbott, A.J.        Andrews, K.J.
Andrews, K.        Alexander, J.
Baldwin, R.C.      Billson, B.F.
Bishop, B.K.       Bishop, J.I.
Briggs, J.E.       Buchholz, S.
Chester, D.        Christensen, G.
Ciobo, S.M.        Cobb, J.K.
Coulton, M.        Crook, T.
Dutton, P.C.       Entsch, W.
Fletcher, P.       Forrest, J.A.
Frydenberg, J.     Garbano, T.
Gash, J.           Griggs, N.
Haase, B.W.        Hartsuyker, L.
Hawke, A.          Hockey, J.B.
Hunt, G.A.         Irons, S.J.
Jensen, D.         Jones, E.
Keenan, M.         Kelly, C.
Laming, A.         Ley, S.P.
Macfarlane, I.E.   Marino, N.B.
Markus, L.E.       Matheson, R.
McCormack, M.      Mirabella, S.
Morrison, S.J.     Moylan, J.E.
Neville, P.C.      O’Dowd, K.
O’Dwyer, K.        Prentice, J.
Pyne, C.           Ramsey, R.
Randall, D.J.      Robb, A.
Robert, S.R.       Roy, Wyatt
Ruddock, P.M.      Schultz, A.
Scott, B.C.        Secker, P.D. *
Simpkins, L.       Slipper, P.N.
Smith, A.D.H.      Somlyay, A.M.
Southcott, A.J.    Stone, S.N.
Tehan, D.          Truss, W.E.
Tudge, A.          Turnbull, M.
Van Manen, B.      Vasta, R.
Washer, M.J.       Wyatt, K.

NOES
Adams, D.G.H.      Albanese, A.N.
Bandt, A.          Bird, S.
Bowen, C.          Bradbury, D.J.
Brodmann, G.       Burke, A.E.
Burke, A.S.        Butler, M.C.
Byrne, A.M.        Champion, N.
Cheeseman, D.L.    Clare, J.D.
Collins, J.M.      Combet, G.
Crean, S.F.        D’Ath, Y.M.
Danby, M.          Dreyfus, M.A.
Elliot, J.         Ellis, K.
Emerson, C.A.      Ferguson, L.D.T.
Ferguson, M.J.     Fitzgibbon, J.A.
Garrett, P.        Georganas, S.
Gibbons, S.W.      Gillard, J.E.
Gray, G.           Grierson, S.J.
Griffin, A.P.      Hall, J.G. *
Hayes, C.P. *      Husic, E.
Jones, S.          Katter, R.C.
Kelly, M.J.        King, C.F.
Leigh, A.          Livermore, K.F.
Lyons, G.          Macklin, J.L.
Marles, R.D.       McClelland, R.B.
Melham, D.         Mitchell, R.
Murphy, J.         Neumann, S.K.
O’Connor, B.P.     O’Neill, D.
Oakeshott, R.J.M.  Owens, J.
Parke, M.          Perrett, G.D.
Ripoll, B.F.       Rishworth, A.L.
Rowland, M.        Roxon, N.L.
Rudd, K.M.         Saffin, J.A.
Shorten, W.R.      Sidebottom, S.
Smith, S.F.        Smyth, L.
Snowdon, W.E.      Swan, W.M.
Symon, M.          Thomson, C.
Thomson, K.J.      Vanvakinos, M.
Wilkie, A.         Windsor, A.H.C.
Zappia, A.

PAIRS
Broadbent, R.  Plibersek, T.
* denotes teller

Question negatived.

Mr CREAN—Mr Speaker, I thank the House for showing more fairness and judgment than, obviously, the member for Sturt has. I am just making the point, Mr Speaker. The question I was asked was: why is a fair deal at work important for Australians and what challenge is there to it? And I am being directly relevant to that, I would suggest. The fairness to Australians is really important for their families and the economy. So any threat to it is antifamily and antiAustralian. That is
why the threat to bring back Work Choices, which we are seeing being exhumed by the other side, is a very major threat indeed. It will see cuts to leave and shift loading, cuts to penalty rates, cuts to holiday pay and pay freezes.

This approach was rejected at the last election and we will ensure that, whilst we hold government, we will continue not to just reject it but to put in place a positive structure that lifts the productivity of the nation, lifts the job opportunities of the nation, lifts real wages and lowers industrial disputes. The problem for this House though is that when the Leader of the Opposition makes the commitment, even in writing, you cannot trust his words.

Lyne Electorate: Roads

Mr OAKESHOTT (3.00 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Following the worst bus crashes in Australian history at Clybucca and Grafton, the then coroner in 1989, Kevin Waller, made a very clear recommendation that dual carriageway on the Pacific Highway from Hexham to the Queensland border was critical. Since then we on the North Coast of New South Wales have seen over 20,000 injuries and over 900 deaths on a highway that remains single-lane in too many spots. We have also seen subsequent state and federal governments come and go alongside promises of completion dates which also come and go. So, Prime Minister, will you commit to the current completion date of 2016 and, if so, will you commit to some urgent injections of funds into the forward estimates?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for his question. I know this is an issue that he has raised consistently in this parliament and beyond and has campaigned on, and it is one of key concern to the community that he represents in this parliament. I say to the member who has raised this question that I can very much commit to him that the government is committed to duplicating the Pacific Highway by 2016. I would note for the member and for other members of the House who are interested in this question that the government is investing more than twice as much funding in half the time as the previous government. We are investing $3.1 billion over six years—

Opposition members interjecting—

Ms GILLARD—I am sure the members interjecting would acknowledge that that is the largest investment in a single road. This compares to a track record over 12 years in office of an investment of $1.3 million. So investments and financial allocations are being made and being made quickly.

This level of investment is actually showing progress and work. As the member is probably aware, right now today we have more than 1,000 workers on site at various parts of the road working on various bypasses and upgrades to make a difference to people who use the road. We have brought forward $35 million to accelerate planning work between Port Macquarie and Kempsey to get that section shovel ready. We will continue making this work a key priority in the next funding program and we will deliver the Pacific Highway by 2016.

Mr Hartsuyker—Can the Prime Minister table the notes from which she was reading?

The SPEAKER—Was the Prime Minister referring to a document?

Ms Gillard—I was referring to a document.

The SPEAKER—Was the document confidential?

Ms Gillard—Yes, it was.

St Mary of the Cross

Mr MURPHY (3.04 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Foreign Affairs. Following the minister’s participation in a bipar-
tisan delegation to the Holy See, will the minister update the House on the canonisation of Australia’s first saint, St Mary of the Cross MacKillop, and the celebrations surrounding this historic event?

Mr Rudd—I thank the member for Reid for his question and I acknowledge his strong and continuing commitment to the Catholic Church and of course that of so many other members of the House, including the member for Menzies and the Leader of the Opposition, among others. The canonisation of Mary MacKillop was an occasion of great joy for the entire Australian Catholic community, and Catholic pilgrims gathered in great numbers in St Peter’s Square for the canonisation ceremony. In fact, Mary MacKillop must have been a woman of extraordinary virtue and significance given her ability to bring together a unity ticket on the part of myself, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition and Barnaby Joyce. For those who doubt the possibility of miracles, I offer that as a piece of evidence to the contrary!

The canonisation ceremony in St Peter’s Square was cause for enormous celebration for the 10,000 or so Australian pilgrims who were present. In fact we could hear across St Peter’s Square that ancient Australian Gregorian chant, ‘Aussie, Aussie, Aussie, oi, oi, oi,’ which left the entire square bemused except those of us who knew what it meant. The ceremony itself was supported by a bipartisan agreement between opposition and government to provide a $1.5 million support payment to the Sisters of St Joseph and the Mary MacKillop Foundation. In part these funds were drawn upon to provide support for 20 or so young Australians and 20 or so Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians to go to Rome to participate in the events in St Peter’s Square.

Together the Deputy Leader of the Opposition and I opened the exhibition at the Vatican Museum, entitled ‘Rituals of life’. This was an extraordinary exhibition, bringing together artefacts and artworks from across Aboriginal communities sent first to the Vatican in 1928 and not seen since. This was a remarkable exhibition and our thanks go to the Vatican Museum for their assistance. Together the Deputy Leader of the Opposition and I also attended the canonisation ceremony itself and the celebratory mass at St Paul’s beyond the walls the following day.

Also, it was my great privilege to open the chancery of the first resident Australian mission to the Holy See, led capably by Australia’s first resident Ambassador to the Holy See, Tim Fischer. Tim Fischer is doing a first-class job for Australia. He is a first-class ambassador. In fact, his Akubra is now almost as recognised as the helmets of the Swiss Guards as it is the subject of much comment by those who frequent St Peter’s Square.

Many Australians have asked, ‘Why do we have a resident mission to the Holy See?’ The first reason is that there are 77 other states that do so as well—most major powers and certainly most middle powers do—and, secondly, we work with the Holy See on a range of important policy areas: religious freedom, interfaith dialogue, food security, disarmament and such matters across the global agenda. But on this occasion we were there to support, as an official delegation, the canonisation of Mary MacKillop. The Sisters of St Joseph led by Sister Anne Derwin deserve particular recognition, as does the leadership of the Catholic church under Cardinal Pell and his archbishops. This was a celebration of an extraordinary Australian woman’s life and, whatever people’s religious beliefs might be, a cause for celebration for the Australian nation.

Ms Julie Bishop—Mr Speaker, on indulgence: I was going to move that the Minister
for Foreign Affairs have an extension of time because he answered the question so beautifully and effectively.

Opposition members—Bring back, Kevin!

The SPEAKER—Order! The House will come to order.

Ms Julie Bishop—I thank the foreign minister for arranging this bipartisan delegation from the Australian parliament. It certainly was a magnificent occasion and I am grateful that the coalition was able to be represented there and I join with the foreign minister in congratulating the Catholic community in Australia on this momentous event, the canonisation of Australia's first saint.

Mr Robert Rice

Mr Vasta (3.09 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to the case of Queensland war veteran Robert Rice, who served in Bougainville and Afghanistan, who said that he was forced to sell his service medals after being financially crippled by the government's failed Green Loans program. Mr Rice said:
The way the government handled it was absolutely disgraceful.

What does the Prime Minister intend to do to resolve Mr Rice's trust in government?

Ms Gillard—I thank the member for his question. I have seen the media report about Mr Rice and his medals that the member refers to today. I would like to place on record the nation’s thanks for his service. I have also sought advice from Defence on the policy of replacing service medals, but the policy is very clear that this is generally limited to circumstances of loss or theft. That policy is aimed at ensuring we do not debase the value of service medals awarded to Defence Force personnel. I am advised that that policy has wide support in the ex-service community.

On the question of Green Loans and the issue involving Mr Rice, I will ask Minister Combet to ensure—through his parliamentary secretary, who has direct oversight of the matter—that any outstanding issue of Mr Rice's involvement with the Green Loans program receives appropriate consideration.

National Security

Mr Danby (3.11 pm)—My question is to the Attorney-General. How is the government strengthening Australia's national security arrangements to better coordinate counterterrorism intelligence?

Mr McClelland—I thank the member for Melbourne Ports for his question and his contribution to policy development in this area. This morning the Prime Minister and I and heads of our national security and law enforcement agencies attended the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation to announce the establishment of the Counter Terrorism Control Centre. This morning the Prime Minister made special mention of the work of the staff, their dedication and the fact that on a daily basis they protect the safety and security of Australians. Of course, the very nature of their work is such that they receive little public recognition.

In the course of the presentation, the Director General of Security advised of the threat to Australians and Australian interests from a possible terrorist event. It was a reference to the fact that over a hundred Australians have lost their lives during the past decade. As recently as last year, three Australians lost their lives in the Marriott bombing, and we all remember vividly the 2002 Bali bombings where 88 Australians lost their lives. Reference was made to the success that our agencies are having—a number of disruptions, arrests, charges and a number of prosecutions—but the advice was that we
cannot rest on our laurels. We need to review processes, we need to learn from Australian experience and we need to learn from overseas experience. In that context, special mention was made of last Christmas Day’s attempted bombing of Northwest Airlines flight 253 and how that revealed how crucial it was for agencies to share information, their expertise, their capability and their experience.

That is precisely what we are doing with the Counter Terrorism Control Centre. It will play the lead role in strengthening the combined capability of our intelligence and law enforcement agencies. It will set and manage priorities, it will identify intelligence requirements and it will, importantly, harmonise the collection and distribution of that vital intelligence. In that sense, it will play a very important role in supporting the established role of federal, state and territory law enforcement agencies. The centre itself will be hosted at the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation, but it will include officers from the Australian Federal Police, the Australian Secret Intelligence Service and the Defence Signals Directorate. Its approach will be one of flexibility but focused. Each of those agencies will be able to draw on their own expertise but bring it back to the table of the partnership created by the Counter Terrorism Control Centre.

The creation of the centre will unquestionably improve the ability of our national security and policing agencies to detect and prevent a terrorist event. It will be a significant enhancement of Australia’s counterterrorism capability, and I thank the Prime Minister once again for attending to open the centre.

**Home Insulation Program**

**Ms GAMBARO** (3.15 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to Solar Wise, a small business in Queensland almost sent broke by the government’s roof batts program. If Solar Wise and other small businesses like it that trusted the government to get its roof batts program right now cannot rely on the government to fix it after it went wrong, why should they trust the government on anything?

**Ms GILLARD**—I thank the member for her question. I advise the member that, in terms of the home insulation program she refers to, obviously the government has worked through a set of arrangements to deal with compensation. If she has an individual example she wants to raise with the relevant minister or through his parliamentary secretary then she is obviously able to do that.

More broadly, can I say to the member that the government is delivering its election commitments. We will deliver our commitments, as I outlined today, to assist families with the cost of living. We will deliver our education revolution commitments to make sure that after long, long years of neglect every child in every school gets a great education. We will deliver our health policies and plans, the biggest round of health reform, because after long, long years of neglect and the oversight of the Leader of the Opposition we inherited a circumstance where the nation was short of doctors and nurses and hospitals were short of funding, and Australians wanted to see action and change, which we have provided. As a government we have honoured our commitment to get rid of Work Choices, which ripped people off so profoundly. It hit their cost of living and their pay packets.

**Mr Hunt**—I rise on a point of order concerning relevance. The answer in question has nothing to do with Solar Wise and the jobs lost—

**The SPEAKER**—The member for Flinders will resume his seat. The chair called in
Ms GILLARD—I am of course directly answering the question that was asked, and if the member for Flinders thinks it was badly drafted then he should take that up with others.

To directly answer the question that was asked on trust and delivery of promises, of course we delivered our promises to get rid of Work Choices. And on the question of trust, clearly who cannot be trusted on that area is the Leader of the Opposition. Already—the member may not be involved in this yet—the opposition is cooking up plans to toss overboard its written promises at the election about not introducing Work Choices.

We will of course deliver our policy and plans to keep expanding the productive capacity of our economy. We have emerged from the global financial crisis stronger than most, stronger than others in the world, but in order to harness the benefit of that strength we need continuing rounds of reform, including investment in infrastructure. That is why we will continue to deliver on infrastructure and on our promise—the member asked me about the question of trust—to deliver the National Broadband Network. Do we have obstacles in relation to that? Yes, we do: the position of the Leader of the Opposition. But we will deliver the National Broadband Network because of its capacity to transform the economy.

Of course, the list of what the government can be trusted to deliver could go on. How can I say very clearly to the member that you can trust the government to deliver these things? It is because during the election campaign, as we made these promises, we carefully costed them. We found offsetting savings. We made sure that our figures added up and we made sure that the budget would come back to surplus in 2012-13.

So, if the member is truly concerned about questions of trust, then I hope that within her political party she is trying to find out why she went to the election with a $11 billion black hole and a shadow Treasurer who had not even bothered to look at the costings—

Ms GILLARD—On questions of trust, there are some very big ones for the member to resolve involving the Leader of the Opposition and his shadow Treasurer.

Indigenous Affairs

Mr NEUMANN (3.20 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Veterans’ Affairs, Minister for Defence Science and Personnel and Minister for Indigenous Health. Would the minister inform the House about progress to close the gap in respect of Indigenous health outcomes?

Mr SNOWDON—I thank the member for Blair for his question. Together he and I visited an Aboriginal medical centre in his electorate a couple of months ago. I know of his commitment to join with us in ensuring that we close the gap in Indigenous health outcomes. I know it is a view that is supported across the chamber, and I am pleased to announce and reaffirm our commitment to closing the gap in Indigenous health outcomes. That is reflected in the partnership between ourselves and the state governments through the COAG process, where we have jointly committed $1.6 billion for that purpose, $808.5 million of which is from the Commonwealth to address chronic disease.

It is worth pointing out that this financial year we are investing $1.2 billion in Indigenous-specific expenditure for 2010-11. This is an 87 per cent increase over what it was in 2007-08. But it is not just about money. We
need to make a difference, and clearly that is quite difficult. We need to—and we must—close the gap in life expectancy within a generation and halve the gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children under five years of age by 2018. I think all members would share the view that closing the gap in life expectancy will not be easy and that it will be some time before we can achieve concrete outcomes. But there are some good signs, and these are in the area of child mortality. The National Indigenous Health Equality Council, chaired by Professor Ian Anderson, of which the new member for Hasluck was formerly a member, has advised us that we are on track in addressing the issue of infant mortality. We believe that we can now halve the gap in Indigenous infant mortality within the decade, and that is a very important outcome for all of us.

The implementation of the government’s $805.5 million chronic disease package will take time. It is important to understand some of the limitations in improving health outcomes amongst Indigenous Australians. One area that I will concentrate on for just a brief moment is smoking. Amongst Indigenous people, 50 per cent smoke. The figure for the non-Indigenous population in this country is around 18 per cent for people aged over 14. The stark difference means that if we want to change the life expectancy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people we have to effect changes in smoking. That is why we have invested $115 million in addressing smoking amongst Indigenous Australians.

There is a lot to be done, but I am sure that, working with the state governments, working with the private sector and making sure that we continue to work constructively with Aboriginal health organisations throughout the country, together we can make a difference and we can close the gap.

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

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The agreement explicitly requires that 20 questions be asked or that question time finish at 3.30 pm. It is not 3.30 pm, and we have not had 20 questions. On what basis is the Prime Minister moving that further questions be placed on the Notice Paper?

The SPEAKER—That is not a point of order. I cannot answer on behalf of the Prime Minister, as per the standing orders.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The standing orders do not relate to the number of questions, and there was no change to the fact that the Prime Minister could ask that further questions be placed on the Notice Paper. I accept that that was a question to me, and I apologise.

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

Mr RANDALL (Canning) (3.25 pm)—Mr Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation.

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

Mr RANDALL—Yes.

The SPEAKER—Please proceed.

Mr RANDALL—Earlier today I made a statement to the House about comments made at the doors this morning in relation to the banks lifting fees outside of the RBA’s raising of fees. In doing so, I made comments regarding the fact that it was an idea of a lunatic nature. This was not attributed to anyone but the Greens—to the Greens’ policy—which I have clarified. When the media and the opposition have endeavoured to connect this to the member for North Sydney, it has been clarified that I have said, on the record, that this statement was made in relation to the Greens and that I said of the member for North Sydney that as the minis-
ter for financial services he did an excellent job in making sure that the banks were sound institutions.

The SPEAKER—Order! The member is starting to debate, but I am sure the member for North Sydney is appreciating it.

Mr RANDALL—I thank ninemsn for correcting the record online.

The SPEAKER—The member for Can-
ning has indicated where he was misrepre-
sented.

COMMITTEES
Selection Committee
Report No. 3

The SPEAKER (3.26 pm)—I present the Selection Committee’s report No. 3 relating to the consideration of bills introduced between 28 September and 21 October 2010 and amending the Selection Committee’s determinations in respect of committee and delegation business and private members’ business for Monday, 25 October 2010. The committee’s determinations will appear on Monday’s Notice Paper. Copies of the report have been placed on the table.

The report read as follows—
This report is in four parts:

PART 1
Report relating to the consideration of bills introduced 28 September – 21 October 2010
1. The committee met in private session on Wednesday, 20 October 2010 and Thursday, 21 October 2010.
2. The committee determined—that:
   • the Higher Education Legislation Amendment (Student Services and Amenities) Bill 2010 be referred to the Standing Committee on Education and Employment for report by the end of the Autumn period of sittings in 2011; and
   • the National Radioactive Waste Management Bill 2010 be referred to the Standing Committee on Climate Change, Environment and the Arts for report by the end of the Autumn period of sittings in 2011.
3. The committee determined that the following bills not be referred to committees:
   • Australian Civilian Corps Bill 2010
   • Australian National Preventive Health Agency Bill 2010
   • Autonomous Sanctions Bill 2010
   • Carer Recognition Bill 2010
   • Commission of Inquiry into the Build-
ing the Education Revolution Program Bill 2010
   • Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Political Donations and Other Meas-
ures) Bill 2010
   • Corporations Amendment (No. 1) Bill 2010
   • Corporations Amendment (Sons of Gwalia) Bill 2010
   • Defence Legislation Amendment (Secu-


4. The committee was not able to make a determination to refer the following bills which, at the time of the committee’s meetings, had passed the House or on which debate on the motion for the second reading had resumed:

- Airports Amendment Bill 2010
- Civil Dispute Resolution Bill 2010
- Food Standards Australia New Zealand Amendment Bill 2010
- International Tax Agreements Amendment Bill (No. 2) 2010
- National Health Amendment (Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme) Bill 2010
- National Security Legislation Amendment Bill 2010
- Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Legislation Amendment (Miscellaneous Measures) Bill 2010
- Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage (Safety Levies) Amendment Bill 2010
- Ozone Protection and Synthetic Greenhouse Gas Management Amendment Bill 2010
- Parliamentary Joint Committee on Law Enforcement Bill 2010
- Primary Industries (Excise) Levies Amendment Bill 2010
- Protection of the Sea Legislation Amendment Bill 2010
- Superannuation Legislation Amendment Bill 2010
- Tax Laws Amendment (Confidentiality of Taxpayer Information) Bill 2010
- Telecommunications Interception and Intelligence Services Legislation Amendment Bill 2010
- Tradex Scheme Amendment Bill 2010
- Veterans’ Affairs and Other Legislation Amendment (Miscellaneous Measures) Bill 2010.

5. The committee reports to the House that it has deliberated upon and adopted a process for its consideration of bills for referral to committees. The process is aimed at ensuring that the committee has the necessary information to enable it to judge whether committee scrutiny of a bill is warranted, and to be aware of any programming considerations. To support its considerations, the committee requests that private Members, when presenting bills to the House, also present an outline of the bill in, or as, an explanatory memorandum to the bill.

PART 2
Amendment of Selection Committee Report No. 2

6. At the committee’s meeting on Wednesday, 20 October 2010, there was further discussion in relation to its determinations reported
to the House earlier that day (Committee Report No. 2).

7. The committee determined that its determinations in respect of committee and delegation business and private Members’ business for Monday 25 October 2010, be amended to the effect that:
   i. the second reading and debate on:
      1. the Commission of Inquiry into the Building the Education Revolution Program Bill 2010 take place in the Chamber at the commencement of private Members’ business after 8 pm for one hour; and
      2. the Evidence Amendment (Journalists’ Privilege) Amendment Bill 2010, take place in the Chamber at approximately 10.15 am for one hour; and
   ii. debate on the motions in relation to:
      1. Pensions and the Cost of Living (notice given by Mr Adams on 18 October 2010), take place in the Main Committee commencing at approximately 11 am for one hour; and
      2. the Joint Select Committee on Broadband (notice given by Mr Turnbull on 19 October 2010), take place in the Main Committee commencing at approximately 12 noon for one hour.

8. The committee reports that, in setting times for the second reading and debate on the two private Members’ bills, the committee was constrained, by standing order 222 (a) (iv) and standing order 1, from setting speaking times of 10 minutes per speaker for all speakers on the bill, including the mover and the Member representing the Prime Minister. The committee notes, however, that, under standing order 222 (c), the committee may determine the times allotted for each member speaking in private Members’ business debates.

9. The committee suggests that the Procedure Committee, in monitoring and reviewing the procedural reforms implemented for the 43rd Parliament, consider proposing amendment of the standing orders to enable the Selection Committee the flexibility to set lesser speaking times for the mover of the second reading and the lead speaker for the Government or the Opposition, for private Members’ bills.

PART 3
Recommendation of items of private Members’ business to be voted on

10. Pursuant to standing order 222, the committee recommends that the following items of private Members’ business be voted on:

Orders of the Day
Australia’s Future Tax System Review (resumption of debate, from 18 October 2010, on the motion of Mr Hockey)
Criteria for Independent Youth Allowance (resumption of debate, from 18 October 2010, on the motion of Ms Marino)
Afghan Asylum Seekers (resumption of debate, from 18 October 2010, on the motion of Mr Morrison).

PART 4
General Principles Relating to the Selection of Private Members’ business

11. The Committee reports to the House that it has endorsed general principles relating to the selection of Private Members’ Business, as attached. The principles reflect those applied by Selection Committees in the 41st and earlier Parliaments and by the Whips in the 42nd Parliament. The Committee recommends that the general principles be adopted by the House.

Attachment
General principles relating to the selection of private Members’ business.

1. In formulating the priority to be given to items of private Members’ business the Selection Committee shall have regard to:
   (a) the importance of the subject;
   (b) the current level of interest in the subject;
(c) the extent of the current discussion on the subject both in the Parliament and elsewhere;
(d) the extent to which the subject comes within the responsibility of the Commonwealth Parliament;
(e) the probability of the subject being brought before the House by other means within a reasonable time; and
(f) whether the subject is the same, or substantially the same, as another item of business which has been debated or on which the House has already made a decision in the same period of sittings and, if so, whether new circumstances exist.

2. The Committee shall accord priority to private Members' business:
(a) with regard to the numbers of Members affiliated with each party in the House;
(b) in a way which ensures that a particular Member or the Members who comprise the Opposition Executive do not predominate as the movers of the items selected;
(c) in a way which seeks to ensure balance is achieved over each period of sittings;
(d) in a manner that ensures appropriate participation by non-aligned Members.

3. When a private Member has the responsibility for the carriage of a bill transmitted from the Senate for concurrence, the bill shall be accorded priority following the question for the second reading being put to the House in the same way as a private Member's bill originating in the House is accorded priority by standing order 41.

4. Priority shall not be accorded to any item of private Members' business if the matter should be dealt with by the House in another, more appropriate, form of proceeding.

5. The general principles set out above shall be observed by the Selection Committee but nothing in the general principles shall be taken to prevent the Selection Committee departing from those general principles in order to meet circumstances, which, in its opinion, are unusual or special.

6. These general principles shall continue in effect until altered by the House following a report from this or a future Selection Committee.

The SPEAKER—The committee has asked that I draw the House's attention to paragraphs 8 and 9 of the amendment to the Selection Committee’s report No. 2. Here the committee outlines difficult constraints that the standing orders have placed on the committee’s deliberations of allocating times for speakers when debating private members' bills. The committee seeks the House’s assistance in addressing these constraints.

DEPARTMENT OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PARLIAMENTARY SERVICE COMMISSIONER

Annual Reports

The SPEAKER (3.27 pm)—Pursuant to section 65 of the Parliamentary Service Act 1999, I present the annual report of the Department of the House of Representatives for 2009-10. Pursuant to section 42 of the Parliamentary Service Act 1999, I present the annual report of the Parliamentary Service Commissioner for 2009-10.

Ordered that the reports be made parliamentary papers.

DOCUMENTS

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (3.28 pm)—Documents are presented as listed in the schedule circulated to honourable members. Details of the documents will be recorded in the Votes and Proceedings and I move:

That the House take note of the following documents:
Debate (on motion by Mr Hartsuyker) adjourned.

COMMITTEES
Joint Select Committee on Gambling Reform
Membership
The SPEAKER—I have received advice from the Chief Government Whip, Chief Opposition Whip and Mr Wilkie nominating members to be members of the Joint Select Committee on Gambling Reform.

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (3.28 pm)—by leave—I move:
That Mr Champion, Mr S. P. Jones, Mr Neumann, Mr Frydenberg, Mr Ciobo, and Mr Wilkie be appointed members of the Joint Select Committee on Gambling Reform.

Question agreed to.

CARER RECOGNITION BILL 2010
Report from Main Committee
Bill returned from Main Committee without amendment; certified copy of the bill presented.

Ordered that this bill be considered immediately.

Bill agreed to.

Third Reading
Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) (3.30 pm)—by leave—I move:
That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE
Australian Industry
The SPEAKER—I have received a letter from the Leader of the Opposition proposing that a definite matter of public importance be submitted to the House for discussion, namely:

The failure of the Government to keep its commitments to Australian industry.

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 ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (3.30 pm)—There was no greater commitment to Australian industry given by this government than the commitment that was given by the Prime Minister, by the Treasurer and by the Minister for Resources and Energy to the mining industry just prior to the calling of the election. This commitment has now plainly been broken. When you see someone of the stature of Australia’s Rio Tinto chief, Sam Walsh, going on national television, as he did last night, to say, ‘If you can’t trust the government, who can you trust?’ you know that there is a developing crisis of confidence surrounding this government, a gathering certainty that this is a government which simply cannot be trusted to keep any commitment. Its commitments to industry, its commitments to the public and its commitments to its own heartland all have been junked in the days and weeks following the recent election.

When it comes to the mining tax, there is no better illustration of the fact that this government cannot be trusted to keep its commitments. First of all, you could not trust the government’s figures. When it first introduced the mining tax, it said the tax would raise $12 billion in two years. That commitment lasted just a few short weeks. Then we learned that the original version of the mining tax was going to raise not $12 billion but $24 billion. You could not trust the government’s process. The initial version of the mining tax was brought in without any serious consultation with the industry. Then
there was a $38 million advertising campaign brought in by this government, which had not gone through any of the due process requirements which government is supposed to observe. You could not trust its judgment, because this was plainly a tax that was going to seriously damage the most important industry in this country, the industry upon which all of us rely for our continued prosperity.

Above all else, what you could not trust this government for was honesty, because the commitment that it made in black and white, in writing, before the election has plainly been junked after the election. It is as plain as the words on the page on the minerals resource rent tax heads of agreement:
All State and Territory royalties will be creditable against the resources tax liability …
There is no question of date, no question of ‘Yes, before that time but not after this time’; it is an absolutely unqualified commitment:
All State and Territory royalties will be creditable against the resources tax liability …
So this was an absolutely straight commitment that the government made to the three big mining companies of this country, a commitment which has now been absolutely broken, a commitment which has now been completely trashed because it serves the purposes of the government after the election to do something completely different to what it promised to do before the election. This is the fundamental problem with this government. This is what erodes the real legitimacy of this government—the fact that it has not kept its commitments. It said one thing before the election to win votes, and it has done consistently another thing since the election to try to form government and hold government.

Let me offer this thought. We have the Australian boss of Rio Tinto, Mr Sam Walsh, stating calmly and honestly what is the true situation: ‘If you can’t trust the government, who can you trust?’ You would think, with a statement like that from someone as well respected as Sam Walsh, that the government would come to its senses. But I tell you what, Mr Deputy Speaker, it is obvious from what we have heard in this parliament, two days running, that there is no way that this government will honour its pre-election agreement. I give you this tip, Mr Deputy Speaker: if Mr Walsh keeps speaking out, as he should be able to, what will we see from this government? Not honesty, not going back to keep its commitment—we will see threats; we will see bullying; we will see the kind of intimidation which is the stock in trade of this government.

This is a government which simply cannot keep its word. Those of us in this chamber who watched the election debate a couple of months ago would remember the Prime Minister being asked what her greatest contribution to the life of the nation over the last three years had been. After a great deal of stumbling and hesitation she finally came up with one achievement. Her one achievement was the establishment of uniform national occupational health and safety laws right around the country. It turns out that this one achievement does not exist. It is an achievement which is being disputed, questioned and undermined by the Premier of New South Wales.

What did the Prime Minister say in response to the obstruction of the Premier of New South Wales? She said, ‘A deal is a deal.’ If a deal is a deal between the Prime Minister and the Premier of New South Wales, why isn’t a deal equally a deal between the Prime Minister and the mining industry of this country? If a deal is a deal when it suits the Prime Minister to keep it, why isn’t it also a deal when it does not suit the Prime Minister to keep it? This is the fundamental dishonesty which we see from
this government time after time. This is the fundamental dishonesty that will bring this government down.

Back in June, we saw the now Prime Minister politically execute the former Prime Minister because, she said, the government had lost its way. She said back then that the way to restore the government’s position was to fix the big problems. First of all, she was going to fix the mining tax. Then she was going to fix the boat people problem. Finally, she was going to fix the climate change problem. On none of these issues has the Prime Minister’s commitment been met. Each of these fixes is unravelling. The government is still lost. What is worse is that, because the government is lost, the Australian people are still suffering these serious threats to their wellbeing.

First of all, you cannot trust this government to protect the mining industry, which is still under deadly threat. You still have out-of-control borders because you cannot trust this government to deliver on its commitments on border protection and on detention centres. Most of all, you cannot trust this government to deliver on its commitments not to have a carbon tax. I put this question to the parliament: if the former Prime Minister could not trust the current Prime Minister, why should the Australian people ever trust the current Prime Minister? If the member for Griffith could not trust the member for Lalor, why should the Australian people ever trust the current Prime Minister of this country?

As I said, this Prime Minister made commitment after commitment in the course of that election campaign and each one of those serious commitments has been systematically undermined since the election. One of the first commitments that the Prime Minister made in office was to open a processing centre in East Timor. This was the processing centre which she proudly announced to the Australian public without properly discussing with the East Timorese government. This was the Prime Minister of Australia announcing to the Australian people that something would be done in a foreign country without first discussing it properly with the government of that foreign country. It was, if I may say so, perhaps the first sign that the Prime Minister was not up to it. So in the Prime Minister’s very first major announcement there was an indication that she had been overpromoted and that she fundamentally lacks judgment—a conclusion that the Australian people are increasingly coming to because each one of her big decisions has unravelled or is unravelling.

Her commitment to have an asylum seeker processing centre in East Timor will never be delivered. The East Timorese will not have it. The Indonesians do not like it. It will not work anyway. What we have seen since this election is a government in panic. It has effectively junked the East Timorese detention centres and is now opening more detention places here in Australia in flagrant breach of its election commitments. We heard the Prime Minister on radio just before the election twisting and turning and sneaking her way around a question on the expansion of the detention centre at Curtin. We had a categorical denial from the Prime Minister’s office of any plans to have a detention centre at the Scherger air base. Both of those prime ministerial commitments were completely junked once the election was over.

Then there was the infamous commitment not to have a carbon tax. The day before the election she could not have been more clear. On the front page of the Australian newspaper she was quoted as saying, ‘I rule out a carbon tax.’ She ruled it out to win votes. Then she ruled it in to try to form a government. What we have seen from this Prime Minister is a fundamental inability to keep
any commitments whatsoever. Her justification for breaking that fundamental commitment was, ‘There was an election and the state of the parliament proved, showed or meant that I could not keep that commitment.’ I remind the Prime Minister that there are no fewer than 144 members of this parliament who got elected ruling out a carbon tax. Every single member of parliament on this side got elected ruling out a carbon tax. Every single member from the Labor Party got elected ruling out a carbon tax. One member of parliament, the member for Melbourne, got elected ruling in a carbon tax. In the weird calculus of this Prime Minister, one vote somehow intimidates and coerces 144.

If the Prime Minister’s logic is to be believed, the most powerful member of the House of Representatives is not the Prime Minister but the member for Melbourne, and the most powerful person in this parliament, at least while this government is in office, is Senator Brown, the Leader of the Greens, because the Greens plainly have this government intimidated. The true situation is that Labor is in government but the Greens are in power: whether it is strengthening the mining tax, whether it is weakening border protection, whether it is introducing a carbon tax—these are Greens initiatives which this government is being drawn towards. Labor is in government but the Greens are in power.

It is no wonder that Senator Faulkner said recently that the Labor Party is long on cunning but short on courage. It is no wonder that Senator Faulkner did not want to serve in the Prime Minister’s government. It is no wonder that he preferred the member for Griffith, Mr Rudd, to the current Prime Minister. And it is no wonder that this is the first government in memory not to get a poll bounce after re-election. People do not trust it, and they should not trust it. *(Time expired)*

---

Mr CLARE (Blaxland—Minister for Defence Materiel) (3.46 pm)—The Leader of the Opposition says this is about trust. We welcome this debate, because the Leader of the Opposition has form when it comes to trust. We all remember the 7.30 Report, where the Leader of the Opposition said you cannot trust anything he says unless it is written down.

Mr Abbott interjecting—

Mr CLARE—You can’t trust anything that you say unless you’ve written it down. We will go to the 7.30 Report, and remember the question that Kerry O’Brian asked you, Leader of the Opposition. I think all members of the Australian public will remember what you said. Just in case anyone does not remember, this is what the Leader of the Opposition said:

Well, again Kerry, I know politicians are gonna be judged on everything they say, but sometimes, in the heat of discussion, you go a little bit further than you would if it was an absolutely calm, considered, prepared, scripted remark, which is one of the reasons why the statements that need to be taken absolutely as gospel truth is those carefully prepared scripted remarks. That is what the Leader of the Opposition said. When he was queried on his commitment that Work Choices was dead, buried and cremated, he went to an extra effort to prove it. That is why, on the Neil Mitchell program—and the Leader of the Opposition will remember this well—he wrote it down: ‘dead, buried and cremated’. But now it seems that you cannot even trust what he says, even if it is written down, because before the body is even cold, the opposition are digging it up—it is the zombie policy that you just cannot kill.

During the election we remember that the opposition said they would do nothing when it came to the Fair Work Act—they would make no changes to the legislation. But here
is what the member for Moncrieff said afterwards:

We have been elected many times before embracing small business exceptions for unfair dismissal and we should be doing everything we can to be responsive to small business needs.

Senator Williams said:

I’ve always believed that small business should be exempt from wrongful dismissal …

The member for Canning said:

In my own electorate people are saying to us, ‘Can you have a look at this? This is crazy’. I plan to report back to the partyroom and the policy review …

The member for Mayo, one of the architects of Work Choices, said:

We made a mistake with Work Choices … but it’s an important time to go back and have a look at what we took at the election and looking at our economic reform over the next three years.

Only two weeks ago the Leader of the Opposition is on record as saying:

We absolutely stand by the policy we took to the election and we have no intention, not the slightest intention, not the nearest skerrick of a hint of a plan to do anything that might resemble the policy of the last days of the Howard government.

But in the Australian today we see the shadow minister for finance with a shovel, digging Work Choices back up, saying that he will ‘look at issues such as unfair dismissal laws and the reinstatement of individual contracts’. Before the election they said the Fair Work Act should be given a chance. I remember very clearly the opposition leader saying that industry—and remember, this is an MPI about industry—wanted certainty. Now, only a couple of months after the election, we are told in the Australian today that the shadow minister for finance believes that the Fair Work Act is ‘unravelling’. So, if you want to talk about trust—and the Leader of the Opposition has said that this is a debate about trust—then the government is very happy to.

The opposition told us during the election that their costings were audited by the company WHK Howarth. I remember the shadow Treasurer saying:

… we have the fifth-biggest accounting firm in Australia auditing our books and certifying in law that our numbers are accurate …

What do we find now? We find that those books were not audited at all. A letter, signed by the Director of the Liberal Party, Mr Brian Loughnane, said that they do ‘not constitute an audit … or a review in accordance with Australian auditing standards’. So, before the election, the Liberal Party says their books were audited; after the election—‘Well, not exactly; the books weren’t exactly audited.’ And what was the consequence of that? After the election the Independents asked to see the books, asked Treasury to examine the numbers, and we found an $11 billion black hole. So, if you want to talk about trust, whether it is Work Choices or whether it is the costings that you take to the Australian people when you seek their vote to form a government, then we are very happy to talk about trust.

Let us talk about what happened after the election. We all remember here the group hug. Remember the Leader of the House and the Manager of Opposition Business signing up to a document committing this parliament to parliamentary reform, and in particular the pairing of the Speaker? Signed one week; thrown in the bin the next. It was thrown in the bin only because the opposition did not get their way.

If you want to talk about trust, if you want to talk about keeping commitments, we can talk about it all day, because every day in this place the opposition seem to be changing their position on something. Yesterday it was the structural separation of Telstra. Before
the election, the member for Casey said the coalition were against the structural separation of Telstra. Now, today and yesterday, the member for Wentworth tells us that they are in support of it—that he supports structural separation, the industry supported structural separation and he believes Telstra also supported structural separation. He says in the Australian:

The case for structural separation is a very compelling one …

That is not exactly consistent with what the opposition said before the election, so perhaps the member for Wentworth, the shadow minister for communications, has to explain whether the coalition’s policy has changed again since the election or whether it is just his position which has changed—whether his position is out of kilter with that of the coalition, a little like his position on climate change.

Or take water policy. The opposition said before the election that they would sign up to the draft water plan. Now they say that they are opposed to the whole thing. On defence, a few weeks ago the shadow minister for defence said there should be more troops in Afghanistan and there should be tanks. He said there should be helicopters. Now there has been another backflip. Last week, on radio, the shadow minister for defence had to make this humiliating backdown:

I’m not demanding tanks … any more. I have changed to agree with what Abbott said.

So, whether it is defence, whether it is water or whether it is the structural separation, we see a commitment one day and a change of position the next. So, if you want to talk about trust, if you want to talk about commitments, we can talk about that.

The opposition have now got to the point where they are attacking each other. We saw that on display on the doors today. The shadow Treasurer was saying that we should remove the RBA’s independence and re-regulate interest rates. When asked about this by the media this morning, the member for Canning had this to say:

This is one of their lunatic fringe type ideas but that’s the problem …

‘That problem’s for the Gillard government now.’ There you go. That is what their own side thinks of their ideas. You have the member for Canning criticising the shadow Treasurer’s position.

Ms Julie Bishop—Mr Deputy Speaker, I raise a point of order. As the member well knows, there has been a personal explanation—indeed, two personal explanations—by the member for Canning, and I ask that the member at the table not continue with the lie that the member for Canning was referring to anyone other than the Greens.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)—I think it is important to recognise that the honourable member for Canning did in fact make a personal explanation, and I ask the minister to be cognisant of that fact as he proceeds with his contribution.

Mr CLARE—This MPI is also about commitments. Well, when the global recession hit, when the greatest economic crisis in 75 years hit, we made a commitment. We made a commitment to keep Australia working. That is why we stimulated the economy, and we did it at a time when the other side opposed us. The action that we took protected the jobs of 200,000 Australians and kept this economy out of recession. The eminent economics professor, Professor Joseph Stiglitz, said this about the stimulus package:

I did actually study quite a bit the Australian package, and my impression was that it was the best—one of the best-designed of all the advanced industrial countries.

As a result, unemployment in Australia today—for which we all should be thankful—is 5.1 per cent. In America, unemployment is
9.6 per cent. In Europe, it is 10.1 per cent. Go back three years to when this government was first elected, in November 2007. Unemployment in Australia and unemployment in the United States were both under five per cent. Now, unemployment here is 5.1 per cent and unemployment in the United States is double, proof of the action that the government have taken and the commitment that we made to keep Australia working.

The Leader of the Opposition in this debate had something to say about the mining resource rent tax. The facts on this are pretty clear. We have said all along that we will credit existing and scheduled increases in royalties. We said that the Policy Transition Group will discuss with relevant companies how this might best occur, ensuring long-term certainty for industry. We are not going to write blank cheques; that is the responsible thing to do. We should not sign taxpayers up for things that state governments decide to do, but let us not forget what the MRRT will go towards: tax cuts for 700,000 Australian businesses, $6 billion that will be invested in infrastructure for regional communities and an increase in superannuation for every working Australian.

What does this mean? It means that, if you have constituents in your electorates—and I am sure you do—who are 30 years old and on an average wage, they are going to have an extra $108,000 in their superannuation when they retire. I ask some of the new members here to consider this as you are asked to vote on legislation about increasing the superannuation guarantee from nine per cent to 12 per cent, because, for a 30-year-old on an average wage, it is going to mean more money in their pocket when they retire and will make an easier, more secure retirement for them—an extra $108,000 in their pocket when they retire.

The word is that the Liberal Party are planning to vote against this. That would be very, very disappointing. It would be a repeat of what happened in the past, 20 years ago, when we did this. The Liberal Party voted against it then. They said that it was ‘little short of lunacy’. They said it would kill small business and destroy jobs. What happened? Superannuation proved to be one of the most important economic reforms of the last century. It spawned a whole new industry that now employs 60,000 people and manages a trillion dollars in managed funds. It also helped to get us through the global recession. When Australian industry could not get access to funds overseas, it was our superannuation that saved them, allowing them to raise $90 billion. The point is this: the Liberal Party was wrong two decades ago; do not let the Liberal Party be wrong on this again. This is an important reform to the Australian economy and it will be important to the people that you represent.

This is a debate that has been framed by the Leader of the Opposition as being about commitments and about trust. Well, if you want to have a debate about trust and commitments today, tomorrow or for the next few years, we are very happy to have that debate, because from all accounts the opposition cannot seem to keep a commitment from one day to the next, even if the Leader of the Opposition writes it down. The Leader of the Opposition made a written commitment at a radio station to scrap Work Choices. He said it was ‘dead, buried and cremated’, but now it seems like the zombie policy that you just cannot kill.

Mr Briggs interjecting—

Mr CLARE—It is good to see the architect has arrived in the chamber. It is good to see Dr Frankenstein here—the man who created the monster that killed his boss. It is good to see him here again.
The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)—Order! The minister ought to be aware that under the standing orders it is inappropriate to refer to other honourable members in that way.

Mr CLARE—Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. This is a debate about trust and commitment. The Leader of the Opposition has told us that you cannot trust anything he says unless it is written down. We thought, ‘At least if he writes it down, we will know that we can trust it.’ But he wrote down that Work Choices was dead, and now all we see in the paper is that that is not good enough either. Even if it is written down, you cannot trust a thing that the Leader of the Opposition says.

Ms JULIE BISHOP (Curtin) (4.00 pm)—I rise in this matter of public importance to speak about a breakdown in trust between this government and Australian industries, a breakdown in trust between this government and the Australian people and a breakdown in trust exemplified by this Prime Minister’s failure to honour a written commitment to three mining companies. Coming from the great mining state of Western Australia, I know how deeply concerned the Western Australian mining industry is about this broken promise from the Prime Minister. They are astonished at how the Prime Minister has walked away from a promise that she made to three mining companies. All Australians know that the Prime Minister reached an agreement with these companies prior to the election—at least she purported to reach an agreement, though the precise details have remained secret. But it now appears that the agreement is not worth the paper on which it was written. The heads of those mining companies appear somewhat shocked at this betrayal by the Prime Minister, with Rio Tinto’s chief, Sam Walsh, asking, ‘If you can’t trust the government, who can you trust?’

These mining companies appear shocked, but it is my melancholy duty to inform the House that the mining companies should have seen this coming. Ask the member for Griffith. After all, he was repeatedly assured by his loyal deputy’s public statements that she would be more likely to fly to Mars than to challenge for the leadership of the Labor Party. She ridiculed the idea of a leadership challenge, saying that she was more likely to play full-forward for the Western Bulldogs than to challenge for the leadership. Yet challenge she did. If we cast our minds back to the sorry demise of the member for Griffith, a clearer picture starts to emerge: there is a pattern in this Prime Minister’s conduct. Rely on this Prime Minister, and it will end in tears.

Remember how the former Prime Minister made the fatal decision to dump his clear 2007 election promise to implement an emissions trading scheme, having previously argued it was necessary in order to deal with what he described as ‘the greatest moral challenge’ of our age? Why did he dump his policy? On whose advice did he do it? We now know that it was his loyal deputy who was most persuasive and convinced him against his better judgment to dump the emissions trading scheme, a decision that was fatal to his leadership. When things became difficult for the member for Griffith and he as leader most needed the support of his loyal deputy, she betrayed him—she betrayed the trust he had placed in her. Given the repeated and unequivocal assurances she had given to the member for Griffith which had implications for the highest office in the land—that of Prime Minister—it is fair to ask: is there any promise, any commitment, that the current Prime Minister can be trusted to honour?

The matter of public importance today relates to Australian industry, and one of the biggest issues facing Australian industry is
the government’s response to climate change. Australian industry knows that this Prime Minister convinced the former Prime Minister to dump the emissions trading scheme. They know that this Prime Minister repeatedly said prior to the election that there would be no carbon tax under any government she led. They know that this Prime Minister ruled out a carbon tax the day before the election. There were no ifs or buts; she categorically ruled out a carbon tax. Mind you, this Prime Minister’s only climate change policy was a citizens assembly, which was widely ridiculed. It was the policy howler of the 2010 election, right up there with Medicare Gold, another of her policy shockers. Yet after the election and true to form we now have a carbon tax on the agenda.

What is Australian industry to make of that astonishing backflip? What should the Australian people make of it? There is no room for interpretation and there are no grey areas—it is fundamental dishonesty. The Prime Minister gave her solemn word to the Australian people one day before an election that there would be no carbon tax and then brazenly broke that commitment a few weeks after the election. It is safe to assume that all sorts of backroom deals were done with the Greens and the Independents who supported this truly awful government. Faced with a choice between honouring commitments to the Australian people and doing deals to cling to power, the Prime Minister chooses the latter.

Let me return to the agreement the Prime Minister says she reached with the mining companies and quickly recap. The former Prime Minister announced the super profits tax on the mining sector that would have destroyed dozens of jobs and sent mining investment offshore. We on this side of the House opposed ferociously this opportunistic grab for cash. We opposed the potential destruction of jobs. We opposed the destruction of investment confidence. We opposed this attack on one of the most productive sectors of our economy. Mining companies, outraged at the complete lack of consultation or warning, launched a highly effective advertising campaign against the government’s super profits tax. The member for Griffith decided to tough it out but was betrayed by his deputy, who had been plotting his downfall for weeks, if not months. After the political assassination, the new Prime Minister justified it by saying that the government had lost its way under the member for Griffith’s leadership. She said she had to fix the problem of asylum seekers coming by boat, she had to fix the problem of climate change and she had to fix the mining tax. But we know that she has fixed none of them. This year, 107 boats have arrived, 21 of them since the election. The citizens assembly has been dumped and we now have a committee. But, with great fanfare and theatre, the great negotiator took personal responsibility for negotiating a deal with the three largest mining companies.

The Prime Minister invited them to Canberra. She excluded Treasury officials and others because the great negotiator believed she could do it all herself, with the assistance of her Treasurer. After a few days the champagne bottles were wheeled in. The Prime Minister announced she had reached an agreement. At the time, there was great suspicion that a room full of mining executives would have outsmarted the Prime Minister and the Treasurer, but the Prime Minister assured everyone she had negotiated a rock-solid deal. The Prime Minister has repeatedly said she would honour the terms of the deal but yet again her assurances have been worthless, because the Prime Minister now realises the mining executives negotiated a better deal than she understood at the time. Surprise, surprise! Who could have seen that
coming—that a room full of tough and clever business operators would get the better of this Treasurer and Prime Minister? Who would have thought? The agreement makes it clear that state royalties are creditable against the mining tax. That is what the deal says. In fact, the mining companies would never have agreed otherwise. But there is an important principle at stake here. Regardless of the eventual outcome of the negotiations, the companies had an explicit written agreement with the Prime Minister of our nation.

Perhaps they should have listened to the views of one Laurie Oakes, describing this Prime Minister’s behaviour over another of her policy blunders, regarding East Timor. Remember how the Prime Minister announced a regional processing centre in East Timor and then tried to say that when she said East Timor she did not mean East Timor? Laurie Oakes said:

Julia Gillard just looked silly and slippery and slimy and shifty in all that and it’s a very, very bad start to her prime ministerial career.

No wonder the distinguished Mr Oakes is up for a Walkley award.

What is clear is that this government is bad for business. There is no commitment that this government can give that business and industry can trust will be honoured, because there is no commitment that cannot be broken under this Prime Minister. There is no promise that she will not break. At the first whiff of political opportunism, this Prime Minister will renege on any promise at any time. This is a government based on lies. This is a government based on falsehoods. Promises not to introduce a carbon tax? Broken. Promises that state royalties could be offset against the mining tax? Broken. This Prime Minister and her government cannot be trusted. Australian industry, Australian business and the Australian people cannot trust this government. They cannot trust this Prime Minister. There is no worse indictment of the leader of this nation.

Mr PERRETT (Moreton) (4.10 pm)—I rise to speak on the matter of public importance. I was fortunate to be in the chamber at 12 o’clock when it was distributed by the clerks. I had a look at it: ‘The failure of the government to keep its commitments to Australian industry.’ I cogitated and I thought: ‘I wonder what industries they’ll be looking at. Will it be the education industry? Look at what’s been happening there in the last three years or so. Or perhaps it will be the superannuation industry,’ which the minister touched on in his speech—the incredible achievements that have taken place over the last three years and what we are about to see take off. We have had some great comments from the superannuation industry about our increases in the SGC. I thought it might even be the agricultural industry, since we seem to have a significant influx of young Nationals into the chamber, up in that corner. I thought maybe they were driving the agenda and it would be about the agricultural industry. Then I thought of building or broadband. Obviously the member for Wentworth is pretty interested in broadband and has been making some comments, so I thought, ‘I wonder if that’s what they’ll focus on.’ But no. I listened to the Leader of the Opposition and obviously, even though his speech was a little bit erratic, he seemed to be focusing on mining. In fact, he made this statement, and I think I am quoting it accurately: ‘The mining industry is under deadly threat.’ I have a bit of background in the mining sector. I have worked for the Queensland Resources Council as a mining adviser. I have worked for the state government in mining. I thought, ‘Okay, I’ll explore that a bit.’

I cast my mind back to a release that came out on Monday about a mining project up in Cape York, up in the wild rivers area. I thought maybe that was where Mr Abbott
was getting his information from about the mining industry being under deadly threat. Perhaps it was because of something that was put out on Monday. You might remember that Mr Abbott is passionate about overturning the Queensland wild rivers legislation, which locks up the few pristine wild rivers left in Australia—well, left in Queensland. I cannot speak for the other states. But he is suggesting that it is going to overturn industry opportunities in those areas, which is actually complete rubbish. Mining can take place in wild river areas. Tourism and other things can take place in wild river areas. There just needs to be consideration of those wild river values. But I thought that maybe it was because he is passionate about wild rivers and intends to go up to North Queensland and actually talk to the traditional owners around the wild rivers. Instead of just listening to Noel Pearson and saying, ‘This is our policy,’ he said, ‘No, I will go and talk to the traditional owners who walked up and down these corridors last week and told people they loved the wild rivers legislation.’ These people said: ‘We’re the traditional owners. We can speak with authority. We’re not Noel Pearson.’ I thought, ‘Maybe that’s what guided Mr Abbott’s comments that the mining industry is under deadly threat.’

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)—The Leader of the Opposition’s comments.

Mr PERRETT—Sorry, the Leader of the Opposition’s comments. Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. So I had a look at the press release put out on Monday, 18 October by Cape Alumina Ltd about their Pisolite Hills project being unviable. It was an interesting release. If you looked at the spot prices of aluminium, you might say perhaps they guided the viability of the project, but it was strange timing, coming out the same day that the Leader of the Opposition said he was going to reintroduce his wild rivers legislation. Then I looked at the name at the bottom of the press release.

Mr Sidebottom—And?

Mr PERRETT—And it was my opponent. My Liberal-National Party opponent in the federal election put out the release by this mining company. I thought: ‘Gee, that’s a coincidence!’ That’s strange. These things happen, I suppose. It is a small state, Queensland, these things might happen. Then I thought, ‘Let’s have a look at this MPI and unpack it, particularly when it comes to mining.’ The reality is that, when we look at the deal that is on the table about the minerals resource rent tax, it is going to be a great thing for Australian businesses. We are going to lower company tax, we are going to increase SGC contributions for all Australians, we are going to do many great things for small business, we are going to provide other tax benefits, we are going to boost national savings, we are going to deliver tax cuts throughout—

Mr Zappia interjecting—

Mr PERRETT—Yes, infrastructure. I thank the member for Makin for that contribution. Infrastructure, particularly in places like Queensland and Western Australia, will benefit from the MRRT. There is a bit of quibbling from those opposite and there are some concerns from the mining industry. But let us go to the common-sense approach to a deal, because we understand how to keep a deal. The reality is that, when we are talking about the deal with Rio Tinto, BHP Billiton and Xstrata and when we are talking about the state government royalties, we are talking about the current state government royalties. Imagine a scenario where, say, in Western Australia the National Party, which I understand is not in a coalition with the Liberal government—is that right, member for Fremantle?
Ms Parke—I believe it is.

Mr PERRETT—We saw that in the federal election, when the colourful Wilson Tuckey was knocked off by a National Party person. Imagine if the Western Australian Nationals said, with their Royalties for Regions program, ‘We need to ratchet up the state royalties by 10 per cent or 20 per cent.’ Imagine if that applied to state royalties and the federal government had to make a contribution—

Mrs Mirabella—Mr Deputy Speaker, on the point of relevance. Although—

Mr Crean—It’s feigned pain.

Mrs Mirabella—No, it’s not feigned pain, it’s real. It’s genuine and I know, Simon, you can feel my pain on this point.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Order! There is no point of order.

Mr PERRETT—Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—The honourable member will resume his seat for a moment. I am listening carefully to the member for Indi. She is not convincing me at this point in time.

Mrs Mirabella—As the shadow minister for, amongst other things, industry, I have heard the member for Moreton say nothing in the last five minutes that is relevant to this.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—There is no point of order. The honourable member will resume her seat. This is a matter of public importance debate; it is a wide-ranging debate.

Mr PERRETT—I would point out to the member for Indi that the mining industry is actually quite significant when it comes to Australian jobs.

Mrs Mirabella—Then why are you trying to destroy them?

Mr PERRETT—I am focusing on the mining industry. If you will sit there rather than play with your BlackBerry I will give you a real lesson on the mining industry. As I said, when it comes to considering the realities of deals, if we had the Western Australian Nationals come in and ratchet up their demands on the Liberal state government in Western Australia and say, ‘We need to increase royalties by 20 per cent or 30 per cent,’ how could we budget appropriately? That is why the deal that is on the table with Rio Tinto, BHP-Billiton and Xstrata is a realistic deal. And it is a good deal.

Let us look at what some of the industry leaders have said about it. I know there is a lot more work to be done by the Minister for Resources and Energy, Martin Ferguson, and the BHP Chairman, Don Argus, but let us look at some of those left-wing commentators, like our comrade Mitch Hooke from the Minerals Council. What did he say? He said it is ‘a positive outcome for Australia’. BHP Billiton’s Marius Kloppers even said he would work constructively with this government. He said:

We are encouraged that the MRRT design is closer to our frequently stated principles of sound tax reform, in that the proposed tax will be prospective in its treatment of profits from our iron ore and coal businesses, and not apply to the other commodities in our portfolio.

We work, and those opposite wreck. That is the reality of this. As I said, I looked at this MPI and thought about the number of industries that we could have talked about and our great relationship with them—things like the NBN—but, no, there was no mention of those. Anyone who understands the opportunities in the future for a smart Australia knows that we will not get there by lowering wages—that low road way is the way of the past. We need to be a smarter country, not investing in firing up your Atari 64 and hoping that will get us through. We need a
broadband network, because, as I think the minister pointed out in question time today, 85 per cent of manufacturing productivity gains come from improvements in ICT. Broadband is the way of the future that will support the mining industry. (Time expired)

Mr TRUSS (Wide Bay—Leader of the Nationals) (4.20 pm)—If there is one word that sums up the Gillard government it is ‘mess’. It is the Prime Minister’s own word to describe her government’s Home Insulation Program. That is indeed a mess: four dead, 200 or more house fires and a billion dollars to fix. The Building the Education Revolution—the Gillard memorial halls—in which at least 30 per cent of the money was wasted, is a mess. Since Labor softened the refugee rules 175 boats have arrived bringing 8,300 arrivals, there are more detention centres and there are people wandering free—that is a mess. The Green Loans Program—hundreds of trained assessors with nothing to do—has been abandoned because it is a mess. New workplace laws that have left half a million people worse off and uniform workplace safety laws, where the deal is off, are a mess. The emissions trading scheme was the greatest moral issue of our time. Now, ‘It is never going to happen in my time as Prime Minister.’ It is a mess. There was the 150-person assembly to try to dream up a new climate change policy and the three new committees. It is all a mess. The mining tax was always going to destroy jobs and Australian industry. The changes to the tax were made in a deal with the big boys. Now the deal is falling apart and it is another mess.

The government’s guide to the draft plan is all about how to share the pain that is being created from the proposed plan. But the government has not provided any information about why this amount of pain has to be borne in the first place. It has not explained why it is now necessary to have 3,000 or 7,800 gigalitres to deliver the environmental outcomes. I will remind the House that, when the Living Murray Initiative was launched, a detailed study was done about the environmental needs of the Murray-Darling Basin. On that occasion it was assessed that 1,500 gigalitres would be necessary to deliver the water that was required for environmental purposes. Why has this figure gone from 1,500 gigalitres to 3,000 or some other figure? What has
changed? The government has not provided any of that information. The government has provided no detail about how the environmental management plan will work. It has not provided any information on how it plans to manage the various water reserves provided for particular environmental purposes. None of that information has been provided. People are just being asked to bear pain without being trusted with the reasons for that pain.

The reality is that the Living Murray Initiative proved that in a well-managed way you could use a relatively small amount of water to deliver good environmental outcomes. Everyone knows that the Murray-Darling Basin needs more water for its environmental needs, but why does it now need double the amount that was considered to be necessary when the last environmental impact assessment was done? One of the keys to the success of the idea associated with the Living Murray Initiative was that the environmental water was going to be managed and managed carefully.

You can use environmental water more than once. If you put it into an area and lock it in a wetland so that a bird breeding season can be completed, you avoid what happens in nature when whole generations of birds die because the breeding season lasted longer than the water supply in the wetlands. If you manage the water, you can make sure it stays in the wetlands until the breeding season is completed, then you can release the water and perhaps send it downstream to some river gums so that they can be appropriately watered. Maybe later on it can be used for irrigation or some other purpose. That is the way in which environmental water can be managed and managed in a way in which you deliver real results without having to take vast quantities from those who use it productively. Is this new plan going to ditch that method of careful management and simply take water off people because someone has an ambition or because some green group demands that a greater amount of water be provided?

Let us also remember that, when the previous government launched the National Water Initiative, developed initially by John Anderson and then legislated by John Howard and the member for Wentworth, $10 billion was set aside to modernise the Murray-Darling Basin. It was to be for the benefit of the environment, the irrigators, the basin communities and, indeed, the nation as a whole. A key element of that program was $5.8 billion to effectively replumb the basin by introducing more effective water meters and reducing seepage and evaporation. Some buybacks may well have been appropriate, particularly where there were willing sellers, and the engineering and management initiatives would have provided a win for all.

In reality, of that $5.8 billion—although the minister could not answer the questions yesterday—it seems the government at this time has spent as little as $300 million, which is a little over five per cent. It is possible to make the engineering changes to replumb the system for better infrastructure, to use better distribution systems on farms and to use better management to save the water that is needed for the environment. You do not have to take it off people; you can save it and still deliver productive outcomes without resorting to the lazy way out that this government has adopted. The lazy way out is taking and buying water out of the system rather than re-engineering it and getting into the position where you can, in fact, save the water that is necessary to deliver to the environment.

One project reported on in the *Weekly Times* last week estimated that $43 million—not $43 billion but $43 million—can save 1,100 gigalitres of water, which is about one-
third of what is alleged may be required. Savings in the Narran Lakes and the Menindee Lakes can also make significant differences to the way in which the amount of water required can be reduced. The report in the *Weekly Times* referred to the flooding of areas around Lindsay Island wetlands. They could cut the amount of water required to achieve the environmental outcomes from 1,200 gigalitres of water to 90 gigalitres. They could save 295 gigalitres in the MurrayMurrumbidgee River catchment through relatively cheap improvements. The *Canberra Times* reported last weekend that the study that identified these amounts has been mothballed. There are ways to do this properly, but once again the hallmark description of this government will prevail. It will be a mess. It will be another mess because this government cannot deliver programs.

**ADJOURNMENT**

The SPEAKER—Order! It being 4.30 pm, I propose the question:

That the House do now adjourn.

**Barker Electorate: Keith Hospital**

St Mary of the Cross

Mr SECKER (Barker) (4.30 pm)—I rise in the House today to speak about two issues that are especially important to me as they involve my home town and my family. The first is the Keith hospital. Keith is my home town and I spoke in this House earlier this year about Keith because the township’s childcare centre closed. I rise today to speak about the closure of the hospital, because it is certain that the hospital will close if the state government does not back down on its funding grab and its commitment to cut 60 per cent of the funding for the Keith hospital.

The Labor state government is out there telling everyone that the Keith hospital is a private hospital, as if it is some sort of profit-making hospital. That is not the case at all. In fact, it is a community run hospital. There is a big difference. It was built in 1954 by the community, not by the state government or the federal government. It was built by the community and it has remained outside the state government bureaucracy. That is the only difference. The minister is also wrong to suggest, as he has in some comments, that somehow the nurses at the Keith hospital are paid more. In actual fact they are paid less. They are paid eight per cent less because they are committed to keeping their hospital going.

Keith hospital have had the funding equivalent of three beds stripped from them by the Labor state government. This is a hospital to which both Liberal and Labor federal governments have committed just over $1.3 million in recent years, as well as having done a lot of fundraising in the local community. So you would think it would be in the best interests of the federal Minister for Health and Ageing, Nicola Roxon, to keep Keith hospital open. I note with interest however that, in a state Labor government seat, McLaren Vale hospital, another so-called private hospital under the same criteria that the minister talked about, receives 10 beds that are fully funded. So why, I ask, can the state Labor government not see fit to fund the Keith hospital for a mere three beds per year when they can fund the McLaren Vale hospital? If the Keith hospital closes, which it will—it will close within nine months if this funding is not at least kept at parity—there will not be a hospital for the 200 kilometres between Bordertown and Murray Bridge. I think the locals are talking about erecting signs as you leave Bordertown and Murray Bridge that read: ‘Please, don’t get sick, because there will not be another hospital for 200 kilometres.’ A community meeting is taking place tonight in Keith, there is a petition going around, Facebook groups are asking the government to
support the hospital and I will continue the fight to keep this very worthy hospital open.

The second thing I would like to speak about is Mary MacKillop’s canonisation on Sunday. I would like to acknowledge that my eldest sister, Sister Genevieve Secker, is a nun in the order of the Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart—or ‘Joeys’, as they are affectionately known—the order founded by Mary MacKillop. Whether you are Catholic or not, it really was a magnificent event. Mary MacKillop—now St Mary—was a remarkable woman and the Sisters of St Joseph deserve recognition too for their dedicated work. I spent Sunday for the celebrations in Penola, a small township of about 1,000 people in my electorate of Barker. Penola is where Mary MacKillop started her first school, run by the order of the Sisters of St Joseph. It was a Catholic school for the underprivileged. Certainly on Sunday, I can assure the House, the community was really alive. I suspect there would have been over 10,000 people there, so you can really see how people have taken the town to their hearts. Most will remember that Penola was devastated by a tornado a few months ago. I commend the extraordinary efforts by the community, the local council and the state government to get everything re-built and ready for the influx of visitors last weekend. Mary MacKillop’s canonisation is admirable not only because it recognises her miracles but because it highlights her story and her hard work, which ensured all children, rich or poor, could receive schooling. Perhaps something that can also be considered a miracle is the quality of the wine that comes from the Penola region!

**Shortland Electorate: East Lake Macquarie Respite Centre**

Ms HALL (Shortland) (4.35 pm)—Tomorrow is a very special day for people living with dementia and their carers in Lake Macquarie with the official opening of the new East Lake Macquarie Dementia Service respite centre by the Governor-General, Quentin Bryce. The building is situated in the grounds of Belmont hospital and has been funded in partnership by the state and federal governments through the HACC program.

It has been my privilege to work with the East Lake Macquarie Dementia Service since the early 1990s, as a state and federal member of parliament and also as a Lake Macquarie city councillor. I have seen the commitment and the struggle of those involved with the service over the years and the dedicated community members and professionals who have refused to take no for an answer. It is because of their work that tomorrow this new centre will be officially opened.

The dementia day care centre is being jointly funded by the state and the Commonwealth. The Australian government is putting in $900,000 and the New South Wales government is putting in $600,000. It is really important for people in my area—I think the Shortland electorate is the 11th oldest in the country—because as people age they should be able to remain at home and live independently. It is important that people with dementia can attend day care centres such as the East Lake dementia centre and that their carers can have the support that they need. This centre will provide much-needed support to boost dementia services in East Lake Macquarie.

The centre was first established in 1988, next to the Dudley nursing home. It was the first community based dementia centre in the Hunter. It moved to the grounds of Belmont hospital in 1992 and increased its floor size by 60 per cent. It continued to develop and establish its own transport service for its clients and it currently has two buses. In 1995, with the introduction of other specialist de-
mentia services in Westlakes, Macquarie and Newcastle, it reviewed its boundaries and concentrated its services in East Lake Macquarie. It decreased its size in 2002 with the provision of demountable buildings. I might add that during this time it operated out of demountable buildings. In the early years of the service, the centre averaged 37 clients per month; today, it has 65 clients per month. It provides support for primary carers as well. Integral to the service is the carers’ social network and activities, as well as the support component, which is available to carers and their families.

The new centre will permit a wide range of services. It will allow for an increase in client numbers and the ability for more than one group to be accommodated at any one time. It has two separate activity rooms, ample showers and toilets that will give the daily program more flexibility. It will provide quiet rest areas for clients and will accommodate their special needs.

The building was designed by architect Peter McMullen of Rod and Hays and the builders were J and J Killalea, who have done a fine job. The design of the proposed centre is best suited for people with dementia who have a potential to wander. It will be less restrictive for clients and it will make staff supervision of clients easier. The privacy of clients, their carers and staff—to protect them from others—will also be paramount in this new building.

The new building will have a community training room, which will enhance the existing education training programs for staff, carers and board members. It will also provide a meeting place for carers, interagency groups and the board. The proposed facility will give access to a choice of genuine six-day respite and will also have the potential to provide 24-hour respite a week. That is something I know the centre is working towards.

The coordinator of the centre is Glenis Butler and the current board members are Jenny Webb, who has been the chairperson for a very long time; Dick Delbridge, who is the long-serving treasurer; Val Fraser, who I believe is retiring from the committee soon; Sue McConnell; Jo King, who was the original coordinator and is so dedicated; Nicola Rosenthal; Kathy Tudor; Pamela Evans; and David Edson.

**Australian Competition and Consumer Commission**

**Mr BALDWIN** (Paterson) (4.40 pm)—The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission was established to promote competition and fair trade in the marketplace to benefit consumers, businesses and the community. Today, I want to highlight how bureaucracy, driven by the ACCC, can actually stifle competition and not promote or protect it. I bring to the parliament’s attention a recent matter. In 1989, two Hunter Valley businessmen, Hilton Grugeon and Grahame Chevalley, started a business together in construction and development. Two of their many enterprises were a ready-mix concrete business and a joinery business. In 1998, Grugeon and Chevalley became frustrated with their difficulty in sourcing concrete pipes in Australia, so they decided to make their own. They acquired the latest technology from the United States, Korea, Italy and Germany and installed it in a factory in the Thornton industrial estate. The business was named Hunter Concrete Products, or HCP.

At first they only used the pipes for their own development business. However, they soon found that their equipment was so efficient they could produce enough for others; thus, they began selling to the open market. By 2009, HCP had taken nine per cent of the
market share in New South Wales. Its two major competitors, Humes Pipes, owned by Holcim Australia, and Rocla, held 34 per cent and 39 per cent respectively. Much of this growth was made possible because of the advanced equipment being used by HCP. Even at this stage, they were only utilising the equipment at 12 to 15 per cent of its full capacity.

In late 2009, Holcim approached Grugeon and Chevalley to see if they would be interested in selling their equipment to Humes Pipes as they wanted to modernise their plant. Grugeon entertained the offer, as he was looking to his retirement and wanted to see the equipment used at full capacity. At this stage all dealings between HCP and Holcim were confidential because Holcim did not wish to telegraph its potential upgrade to the market. Nevertheless, while HCP considered the offer, the lawyers for Holcim put together a confidential courtesy notification for the ACCC. Approximately six months later, on 9 July 2010, the ACCC put that confidential courtesy note on its website. This blew any confidentiality between the parties wide open. Grugeon and Chevalley were not even advised that the notification had been made public. They only found out when customers reported that HCP’s major competitor, Rocla, had phoned to say there was no point buying from HCP any more as Humes was acquiring the business.

The lawyers for Holcim had mistakenly written a covering letter, which described the transaction as a total buy-out of HCP, when in fact the acquisition was only ever of plant and equipment. The ACCC launched an investigation and continued on in false information, even after it was made aware of the lawyers’ error. The ACCC put on its website a date on which it would deliver a decision; however, at six o’clock the night before it then put on the website that it could not make a decision because all of its queries had not been responded to. The ACCC also asked for documents from Grugeon and Chevalley but they declined because the information had to do with figures of the business and not of the equipment. Of course, Holcim itself had never wanted nor had access to the figures because it was not acquiring the business.

Grugeon was particularly hesitant to provide the information since the ACCC had completely ignored any measure of confidentiality. He told the ACCC that it should have cancelled the investigation when it discovered the lawyers’ error. The ACCC made various calls to Grugeon for information but was unsuccessful. During this time Grugeon said he felt intimidated by four lawyers at the ACCC who phoned him on a conference call to entice him to meet their requests. Both parties were advised the decision would be made before 19 August. Finally, on 12 October, almost two months later, the ACCC did announce the inevitable finding that there was absolutely no problem with the acquisition. However, its statements suggest that it had still not figured out that it was a purchase of equipment and not the business itself.

The difficulty for Grugeon and Chevalley was that the whole thing was played out in the public arena. This caused unnecessary uncertainty for their staff and customers. Further, had Holcim not completed the purchase, the whole affair would have been extremely detrimental to HCP.

What this says to businessmen and investors planning to take on a big company is: don’t do it as you might not be able to exit your business easily; and, the ACCC can cause all sorts of problems by not adhering to its own charter. The bottom line is this: the
ACCC is stifling opportunities for competition and it flies directly in the face of what it was created to do. It therefore needs to maintain a better focus on competition. Small business should be encouraged to invest and take on a national competitor. That is how companies grow, creating more jobs and a stronger economy. It is also how many Australian companies are able to offer us such wonderful goods and services.

Werriwa Electorate: Community Events

Mr LAURIE FERGUSON (Werriwa—Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs and Settlement Services) (4.45 pm)—I wish to congratulate a number of residents of Macarthur and Werriwa electorates—Charlie and Mal Fruean, Alofa and Faiva Aii, Barbara Lealie’e, Ron Inu, Sam Lenk, Rich Manu, Mal Smith, Char Elers and Tania Tungalu, who constitute the awards night committee of the South-West Sydney Regional Advisory Committee of the New South Wales Council for Pacific Communities—for the event they held on 17 September at the CUBE at the Campbelltown Catholic Club. I have to say that this event is very impressive. It was established only three years ago when there were a mere 20 nominees for awards. It has now grown into a function that has 76 nominees and, where it once had 80 attendees, it now has 300 to 400.

I want to salute their effort because in actual fact Werriwa has the second highest concentration of Polynesians in this country—there are 5,500 people—and, equally, it is the ninth placed electorate in this country in regards to Maori speakers. Obviously this is a very challenged community. We see antisocial activity. We know that because of the state of the New Zealand education system a number of Polynesian migrants passing through New Zealand come to this country with poor English, an issue that most people would not be aware of, and this leads to a number of problems.

I want to salute another effort in the region out there: the Body Pacifica event—a display of tattoos connected with rugby league players of Polynesian extraction, which occurred at the Casula Powerhouse.

These awards are very fitting. They are an indication to the Islander community that the way forward is through education, through engagement and through involvement. These awards on the night really saluted some fine people. For instance, Tali Ofo, who gained a major award, is a female minister in a Protestant church who travels by public transport late at night throughout the region visiting people and ministering to them. There were a number of people there involved in sport and in entertainment and also those who were succeeding in academia. An interesting person there on the evening was Timothy So’e, the main force behind Reel the Musical, which is very popular out there. It occurred when a group of young people got together after one of their confreres was murdered at Minto a few years ago. It is a very successful musical effort where he is the dancer, choreographer et cetera.

I have no doubt that the entertainment on the night, Angel Tupua and Paulini Tawamacala, will be featured in Australian culture in a big way in the next few years. Also there was David Nofoaaluma, who played in the under-18s for Australia and is signed by Wests Tigers. Organisations such as Minto Access Point were saluted for their efforts. Nikk-Talo Talaaloa was recognised for her efforts with fashion design, visual work, carving, apprenticeships et cetera.

This was a night on which many people who have made major efforts in the Pacific Islander community were honoured. The important thing is that young people, who constituted a big part of the audience, can see
people who are succeeding in the society. They can see a way forward, they can see an alternative, and these people are to be saluted for that. The judges of the evening show the community involvement behind this: Rudi Kolkman, a well known Campbelltown councillor, Lisa Havilah, the director of the Campbelltown Arts Centre and Benjamin Sega, who as a community leader is now undertaking a social science degree in policing at UWS.

This organisation aims to help all communities—Polynesian, Micronesian and Melanesian—not just those from Polynesian areas. This community event is in the first line of gala festivities in the area.

I will take the last few minutes to talk very quickly about two other events. It is a great country, Australia, where two weekends apart, at Liverpool Whitlam Leisure Centre, we can have a Ramadan celebration, Chand Raat, for the Pakistani community, and a week later, at the same venue, Ganeshotsava, a major Hindu celebration. So, in the same region in Sydney, two communities that overseas have great difficulties with their nations constantly involved in conflict over Kashmir and every second issue that can be thought of, in this country, Australia, on several weekends can have festivities that, while they are of a religious nature, are essentially a community celebration. I salute the two organising groups for that. In the case of the Indian one, the whole event was run by young people under 18—MCs, choreography and all the acts put together by youths.

Pearce Electorate: Mount Helena Primary School

Mrs MOYLAN (Pearce) (4.50 pm)—Before returning to this place for this sitting I had the great pleasure of visiting the Mount Helena Primary School in the electorate of Pearce to present them with their award as the Swan East region Super Site for the Active After-School Communities program.

The school won the award for the outstanding delivery of the program with strong community participation. Of the 109 students involved in the AASC program in semester 1 2010, 75 of the students joined in local club competitions. These included hockey, netball and tennis. Mark Sanders, Swan East Regional Coordinator for Active After-school Communities, has done a magnificent job coordinating the program throughout the electorate of Pearce, ensuring schools are well resourced. Mount Helena is fortunate to have an excellent staff involved in the program’s operation, and they have been extremely well supported by Mark Sanders.

School physical education teacher and AASC coordinator, Wally Groom, and fellow teacher Kerry Gow are responsible for the implementation of the program and its strong community links. In fact, Kerry Gow has been a recipient of the Pearce Australia Day awards for her community services. Mrs Gow has had similar involvement in these programs previously, at the Mundaring Primary School, and her efforts have been ground breaking with respect to facilitating children into local sporting clubs. The Principal of the Mount Helena Primary School, Leanne Alderman, also provides tremendous leadership in empowering her staff to be able to deliver positive health outcomes through this program.

In the meeting I had with the staff when I went to present the awards, I was struck by their enthusiasm. The staff shares great passion for trying to get students involved in physical activity and sport in the school. Their enthusiasm has clearly rubbed off on the students. Through the Active After-school Communities Program, the school continued its annual involvement in the City to Surf, with the school winning the ‘best
spirit’ award, earning the school $10,000 worth of solar panels. That is a great achievement. Indeed, one of their teachers, Steve Matthews, completed the 12-kilometre journey of the City to Surf pushing one of the students in a wheelchair. That was an extraordinary feat.

Mount Helena Primary School is an outstanding example of the excellent social and health outcomes the Active After-school program is providing our schools and the community more broadly. For anyone not familiar with the program, the Active After-school Communities Program is a national initiative that provides primary school aged children with access to free sport and other structured physical activity programs in the after-school timeslot of 3.00 to 5.30 pm. The program aims to engage children, particularly encouraging less active students in sport and other structured physical activity through a positive and fun experience. They are encouraged to develop a love of sport that inspires them to join a local sporting club and hopefully makes physical activity and sport a lifetime activity.

It is unfortunate that a program such as the one at Mount Helena Primary School may be in jeopardy. Despite the success of the program, the government has, to date, not committed to long-term funding. I was, however, very pleased on Sunday to note that they have extended the funding for another 12 months. If we are to retain the talented people like Mark Sanders and expand the capital that has already been developed, we will need to provide greater certainty of a longer future for this excellent program.

I noted the Prime Minister—rightly—declaring war on obesity, and I support that aim. That is exactly what this program was set up to do, and it has been very successful in getting previously inactive children participating in sport. I hope we are able to encourage the government to provide longer term funding for this program so that we have greater certainty and so that we can continue to encourage all children to take up sport and include it as part of their routine for a lifetime and to beat this problem of obesity which is a growing concern within our communities.

Reid Electorate: Carers Week

Mr MURPHY (Reid) (4.55 pm)—I am very pleased to speak about Carers Week, which we are currently celebrating. From 17 to 23 October we recognise, appreciate and celebrate carers in Australia. It is estimated that there are 2.9 million Australian carers, and this week is a special time to acknowledge their very important contribution to our society.

The theme of Carers Week this year is ‘Anyone, Anytime’. It is a theme that sends a powerful message that carers are a mixed group of people and that being a carer is not age specific or gender specific. Carers could be you or me or anyone we know, and circumstances could dictate that we become carers at any time. Carers represent a broad spectrum of our society. This diversity of carers and care recipients, as pointed out by the Minister for Health and Ageing at the launch of Carers Week here in Canberra, means that a diversity in circumstance also means diversity in need.

The Gillard government faces the challenge to support measures that cater for these diverse needs. Statistics indicate that there are almost 500,000 primary carers, and this number is expected to increase. These are challenges that we are working through to achieve better outcomes for carers and care recipients. I am proud to say that the Labor government recognises the amazing contribution of carers and has already introduced significant reforms to improve their lives
with changes in the areas of disability, health, mental health and aged care.

The Labor government has already delivered significant increases in the base pension and a new pension supplement for those receiving a carers payment. We have also provided an ongoing carers supplement of $600 for each person being cared for, as well as increased funding for state and territory governments for specialist disability services, including supported accommodation, in-home care and respite.

Moreover, the government has commissioned the Productivity Commission to investigate the possibility of a national long-term disability care and support scheme. It is fitting that during Carers Week the House has debated the Carers Recognition Bill 2010. This bill, introduced by the Labor government, is in response to a report from the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth, titled *Who cares? Report on the inquiry into better support for carers*.

So, who cares? We care. That is why the government has introduced measures to show our acknowledgement of the role and rights of carers—acknowledgement that they clearly deserve. That is why the government has responded to the many calls from the submissions to the inquiry with a commitment to lead the development of a national carer recognition framework. Among emerging themes from the inquiry, the report highlighted the need for improved acknowledgement and recognition of carers. The government committed to develop a national carer recognition framework, and the bill is the first part of that commitment. A key focus of the bill is the statement of Australia’s carers, which contains 10 core principles outlining how carers should be treated by Public Service care agencies.

The bill also emphasises that all carers should have the same rights, choices and opportunities that other Australians enjoy. There is no doubt that while many carers continue their important work with dedication, many sacrifice their finances, careers, social networks and even their own health. I can assure carers that we recognise their vital contribution to our community and acknowledge the sacrifices that they make. This week we recognise your efforts and thank you for your dedication, carers. This week certainly reminds us that anyone can become a carer, anytime.

I conclude by commending all carers for their tremendous work and reaffirm the Gillard government’s commitment to provide better support for people to have the same opportunities as other Australians to live happy, healthy lives and to reach their full potential. In my electorate of Reid, a constituent was recently diagnosed with motor neurone disease. I look forward to a fundraising evening on 5 November, and I take this opportunity to commend the organiser of that event for her courage and the efforts of those organising that event. Well done.

The SPEAKER—Order! It being 5.00 pm, the debate is interrupted.

House adjourned at 5.00 pm

NOTICES

The following notices were given:

Ms Brodtmann to move:

That this House:

(1) notes that:

(a) organ donor rates are showing slow and sustained improvement in 2010;

(b) more than 98 per cent of Australians agree that organ and tissue donation have the potential to save and improve lives, yet less than 60 per cent of Australians accept the invitation for their loved ones to become organ donors when asked;
there are more than 1700 Australians on the transplant waiting list at any time;

many more Australians cannot get into waiting lists as they are too sick or unlikely to receive a life saving transplant because there are not enough donors; and

the Government has invested more than $150 million over four years to establish a coordinated approach to organ donation, enabling all jurisdictions to work cooperatively to support sustained improvements in organ donation in Australia; and

(2) acknowledges:

(a) the selfless act of the 228 donor families who have already donated organs in 2010 (to 30 September), which has saved or improved the lives of at least 683 Australians;

(b) the work undertaken across jurisdictions led by the National Medical Director of the Australian Organ and Tissue Authority, State and Territory Medical Directors and clinical groups to develop nationally consistent protocols and clinical triggers;

(c) the support of community groups such as Gift of Life, Kidney Health Australia, Transplant Australia, the Organ Donation and Transplant Foundation of Western Australia and the David Hookes Foundation, which are integral in supporting the work of clinicians in improving organ donor rates; and

(d) the importance of a steady and sustained improvement in organ donor rates to support Australia’s quest to become a world leader in organ and tissue donation and transplantation.

Mr Murphy to move:

That this House:

(1) notes that the Bernie Banton Foundation estimates that by 2020, some 40 000 Australians will have contracted asbestos related cancer;

(2) recognises the role governments, the trade union movement and individuals, such as Bernie Banton, have played in raising awareness about the dangers of asbestos and in banning the sale and use of asbestos and asbestos products in Australia;

(3) expresses concern that:

(a) countries, such as Canada, continue to export asbestos to India and many other countries in South Asia; and

(b) international efforts to list chrysotile asbestos under the Rotterdam Treaty, which requires importing countries to be warned of the risks associated with hazardous substances and products, have been blocked by countries, such as Canada; and

(4) leads international efforts to ban the sale, mining and use of all forms of asbestos, such as chrysotile asbestos, throughout the world.

Ms Saffin to move:

That this House:

(1) notes:

(a) that the Commonwealth is responsible for regulating the export of live animals, and for negotiating the arrangements and conditions that apply to the export of both live animals and chilled or frozen meat;

(b) that the current Commonwealth support for the live export industry and the current tariff barriers that apply in some countries to chilled or frozen meat exports means that there is not a level playing field between the two forms of export;

(c) the national and international concerns about the welfare of animals transported under the live animal export trade, both during transportation and at their destination, has been raised and substantiated in campaigns by organisations and individuals including the World Society for the Protection of Animals, Stops Live Exports, Princess Alia of Jordan, the RSPCA and the Barristers Animal Welfare Panel; and
(d) that Australia is one of few countries that consistently treats animals humanely during slaughter and that Australian chilled or frozen meat has gained wide acceptance in the Middle East for its quality and observance of halal and kosher standards;

(2) acknowledges the opposition of the Australasian Meat Industry Employees Union and the local meat processors, to the live export trade on the grounds that the live export trade has a detrimental effect on the local meat processing industry, affecting jobs and the Australian economy;

(3) calls for renewed consideration of a planned and supported transition in the medium term away from live exports and towards an expanded frozen and chilled meat export industry; and

(4) asks that Austrade be encouraged to be involved in negotiations to increase exports in frozen/chilled meat.
The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper) took the chair at 9.30 am.

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

McMillan Electorate: Long Jetty

Mr BROADBENT (McMillan) (9.30 am)—Prior to the last election and the election before that, the Liberal Party, in its great wisdom, offered the people of South Gippsland $3 million for the Long Jetty. It was a big commitment and there is a very good reason behind it. I had hoped it would be taken up in both election campaigns and promised by the Labor Party. We believe this jetty is the longest jetty in the Southern Hemisphere. It is in pristine waters off the South Gippsland coast. If we rebuild the jetty and build an underwater observatory, the cold water fish that could be observed from that jetty include species that you would not be able to see anywhere else in the world. So it would be a world first and something unique. The first pile was driven around the 1930s and the pier was opened in 1939. A 20-year-old Mr Norry Rossiter climbed onto a pile way out on the built but not yet decked jetty with his box brownie camera to take some striking photographs. It is a wonderful record. I do not know whether he is still alive, but it is interesting that I was brought up in Rossiter Road, Koo Wee Rup. I would guess that in South Gippsland at that time it was the same family. It is a wonderful record of an icon, but we need to restore this jetty.

An underwater observatory has been built at Busselton, in Western Australia, and they have offered to make the money available to build the underwater observatory if we as a government and the state government do this job on the jetty. It will cost $3 million to save an icon. It has great benefits for tourism; disability access, which I have been on about for a long time; and disability access for fishing, which I have been on about forever. South Gippsland is an area with one of the most disadvantaged groups of people in country Victoria, as the Jesuit report described. It is something that we need to do. I call on the government today—and I have been to Martin Ferguson with this before—to go and have a look at this proposal. It could be great for the whole of South Gippsland. It could tie in to the penguin parade down at Phillip Island. It has all the attributes and it ticks every box for something we could do on behalf of this nation and allow, for the first time, something wonderful to happen in a tiny area of Gippsland.

Calwell Electorate: Fiji-Australia Day

Ms VAMVAKINOU (Calwell) (9.33 am)—I would like to bring to the attention of the House a very significant event that took place in my electorate marking the fourth anniversary of the Fiji-Australia Day celebrations. Since the first time the event was held the celebration had gone from strength to strength, and the fourth anniversary I attended on 9 October was no exception. The celebration was organised by the Fiji Social and Cultural Organisation of Victoria Australia under the leadership of its national president, Mr Ardimalan Pillay. It attracted more than 500 participants, with the Consul-General of Fiji, Mr Reginald Hodgeman, as well as the Victorian Multicultural State Representative, Mr Shushil Sharma, amongst the many guests. As a result of the event’s growing popularity, this year’s celebrations had to be divided into two parts—sporting events, which took place during the day, followed by the official dinner and cultural dance in the evening. I am told by the National President of FSCOVA, Mr
Pillay, that next year’s celebration is anticipated to attract an even greater audience and in order to facilitate that demand they are going to need to run it over a period of a number of days. So it will grow into a very large festival.

While I was there watching the celebrations, I was very impressed by the resident Fijian community and its commitment to and support of the broader local community and, of course, Australia, the country that its members now call home. Community organisations like FSCOVA have recognised the need to develop community harmony through such activities, and in this sense Fiji-Australia Day celebrations contribute immensely. A Commonwealth national settlement report entitled Settlement needs of new arrivals 2006 acknowledges the benefits of multicultural festivals and the integral role they play in inviting and assisting new arrivals to participate in sporting, cultural and recreational groups. The festivals also serve as a means of providing more information to the broader community about the new arrivals and help prevent any cultural discord that may arise as a result of unfamiliarity with new environments. Victoria has several thousand Fijian families that are settled in its north-west, so it comes as no surprise that FSCOVA’s several thousand supporters statewide are active participants in this festival. Organisations such as FSCOVA have contributed a great deal in enabling Victoria’s Fijian-born community to forge a new identity based on shared heritage and experiences, a community in which Fijian Indians, ethnic Fijians and others are now united as Fijian Australians. This community is an example of the success that new arrivals can experience through social interaction and participation. (Time expired)

**Maranoa Electorate: Health Services**

Mr BRUCE SCOTT (Maranoa) (9.37 am)—I rise in relation to the downgrading of the Aramac hospital in my electorate of Maranoa. Aramac is a town north of Barcaldine, to which the Labor Party claims a birthright, and it is now in the Barcaldine Regional Council after the forced amalgamation of the wonderful councils out in central-western Queensland. That was forced on them by the Labor Party of Queensland. The amalgamation of the shire councils was bad enough news for this small community but now we have its hospital downgraded from a hospital to a primary healthcare unit. The town was notified on 23 September this year. On 16 October, just a few days ago, they were planning to celebrate the centenary of the hospital in this wonderful community of Aramac. It has been devastating news for this community. I have been to see the Minister for Health and Ageing, Nicola Roxon, and I thank her for seeing me about this issue. What I would like to see and what I know the community would like to see—and I acknowledge that for a number of years we have been unable to attract a doctor to the town—is a model developed under the multipurpose health service criteria. I know that requires a full-time doctor but let us look at a model that would fit Aramac, and I am sure it would fit many other rural communities in the future.

The Prime Minister says in this parliament she is talking about a parliament for regional Australia. Well, here is an opportunity for the Prime Minister and the government to look at how we can deal with some of these very complex and difficult issues, including that it is becoming difficult to attract doctors and professional people. We have lost 12 jobs in this small community. For instance, the police sergeant’s wife was a part-time nurse at the hospital. She has lost her job, as I understand it. There are other people in town who were part-time domestics at the hospital. They have lost their jobs. And so you start to see the slow disintegration of communities unless you put a halt to this economic rationalist approach to providing essential
services in some of these communities. The Queensland minister says, ‘Oh, we can transfer these patients by paramedics by ambulance to Barcaldine,’ which is 60-odd kilometres away. Yes, you can. But on three occasions this year Aramac Creek was flooded and you could not get across it.

Here we have a great opportunity—and I welcomed the opportunity to meet with the federal minister last night—to deal with this issue and to try to find a model, other than the economic rationalist model, that would look after the hospital and health needs of the people of Aramac. Let us see to looking after the old people with respite beds in the hospital. Let us not close it. Let us work through this so we can save this hospital for the benefit of this small community. I am not going to give up and I hope I have got the minister onside to work with me to get a solution. (Time expired)

Lindsay Electorate: Anti-Poverty Week

Mr BRADBURY (Lindsay—Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer) (9.39 am)—I rise to take note of some of the local organisations in my community who are helping to alleviate the pressures facing those who are most vulnerable. In Australia, with our high standard of living, we do not often consider it possible that people could be living in poverty—yet poverty is a daily reality for many Australians. There are pensioners, young people, families and Indigenous Australians for whom it is a struggle to make ends meet. There are people in communities like mine for whom taking time off work due to illness could mean that they do not make their mortgage repayments, for whom having to pay to repair a broken washing machine means they do not eat for a week, or for whom it becomes impossible to find private accommodation because they cannot save up money for a rental bond.

These are the people who become isolated from the broader community, who fall through the cracks in our health and our education systems, and who often suffer from the debilitating effects of family breakdown, mental illness and homelessness. But these are the people who a number of committed organisations in my community are working with to overcome the enormous disadvantages that they face. I had the great honour last Friday of joining representatives from Unions New South Wales, local businesses and a large number of community stakeholders to launch Anti-Poverty Week. We joined together to help with the refurbishment of Fusion Accommodation and Support Services’ youth facilities at St Marys. It was a great pleasure to lend a helping hand and apply a fresh coat of paint to their new premises at the St Marys Band Club, which has been supporting Fusion. I would like to particularly thank Mary Yaager at Unions New South Wales, and also the Penrith council for their assistance on the day.

I have had a long association with Fusion, and I am a great believer in their work. I would like to acknowledge all of the staff and volunteers at Fusion, and in particular the Chief Executive, Dave Hammond, who brings an amazing passion to the organisation. Amongst their many activities, Fusion work directly with people at risk of homelessness. They take in individuals and families who are at risk of homelessness and help to integrate them into safe and independent living. But they are also innovators in the way they engage the community. They draw on a network of dedicated volunteers and tradespeople, who undertake renovations and refurbishments to the homes of the elderly and the disabled. They also work with vulnerable young people and families, Indigenous Australians and isolated individuals to deliver education programs, mentoring, support for domestic violence and other services.
I would like to acknowledge some of the people involved in this initiative. The United Way Penrith Valley Fund is a grassroots fundraising group that is supported by Penrith Press. I acknowledge Simone Cody, Pastor Martin Beckett and Richard Eastmead for their enthusiastic support and advocacy of the program. It was a great privilege to be involved in this initiative and I wish Fusion and other stakeholders working towards the alleviation of homelessness all the best into the future. (Time expired)

Hasluck Electorate: Maddington Trades College

Mr WYATT (Hasluck) (9.42 am)—Recently I had the opportunity of visiting the Australian Trades College Western Australia established by the Howard government in Maddington, which is in the electorate of Hasluck. The Australian Trades College Western Australia is a senior secondary college and a registered training organisation that focuses on delivering trade training to young Western Australians. They have established a subsidiary company, ATC Group Training, which employs apprentices and is keen to expand its services beyond the two campuses located in Maddington and Armadale.

The Australian Trades College Western Australia offers a unique year 11 and 12 academic program that is designed specifically for students who are interested in learning a trade. Students spend half a day in a classroom—the rest of the time is spent working in custom-built workshops perfecting the technical skills of their chosen trade. Over the course of the two-year program students will complete up to 800 hours of trade training at the college. Students operate on normal workplace hours and are expected to adopt the mindset that their place of study is no different from what they could expect in any company workplace that they will work in as part of a team or a single operator.

The Australian Trades College WA offers a young person the opportunity to complete their secondary studies and commence an apprenticeship in the following areas which will enable them to commence a trade career: cabinetmaker, carpenter, electrician, light vehicle automotive mechanic, bricklayer and boilermaker/welder. The trades college at Maddington can provide students with the opportunity to complete up to 1,300 hours of industry training with an employer. They are assigned an employment coordinator who will work closely with them during their time at the college and provide support for students when they are seeking to secure a job.

An existing apprentice looking for an RTO is also accommodated by the Australian trades colleges through a block release arrangement specifically tailored to their workplace and employer training requirements. The Australian Trades College WA provides young people with the opportunity of acquiring applied literacy and numeracy skills and plays a critical role in retaining young people within the area by giving them an education and training pathway that sets them on a career path that will value-add to the economy. In my discussions with the college, we are looking to expand this into the Midland region so that young people who are disengaged from the schooling process will embark on an education and training pathway that will develop opportunities for them within the workplace, within the growing industries of Western Australia and, more importantly, within the economy of Australia. They will then be part of a workforce that develops us as a nation within the global economy.
Ms RISHWORTH (Kingston) (9.45 am)—I am very pleased to rise today to talk about the great work done by the Juvenile Diabetes Research Fund. In particular, last Sunday I was very pleased to join with many other people in Adelaide in the Walk to Cure Diabetes. The walks took place in over 20 cities and towns around Australia, raising money for research into trying to find a cure for type 1 diabetes. Type 1 diabetes is a chronic and life-threatening illness and affects over 140,000 people in Australia. It often affects children and it is very important that we try and find a cure.

The Walk to Cure Diabetes was a great event. It was held in Glenelg. It was a wonderful day with wonderful weather and I was able to join the youth ambassador from my local area, Hannah Gordon, a very cheerful 10-year-old who was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes in April 2008. Hannah has been a great inspiration to me, regularly telling me about what it is like to live with type 1 diabetes. But she is not just out for herself; she has done a significant amount to raise money for this important cause. On the day, she was sponsored by Visy Board and United Water and over the last year she has raised $7,507.50. This is a really significant amount and it is her enthusiasm and dedication to raising the profile of this illness and raising money for research into this illness that is really important. Hannah was joined by many members of her family, friends, people from her school and representatives from the sponsors. She said it was just a wonderful day.

Hannah’s mother, Sonya, said that Hannah and her family were absolutely blown away by the support that Hannah got on the day. Hannah was shocked by the amount that was raised, including donations in the hundreds of dollars from people she had never met. Sonya said that it was great to see so many people out supporting such a fantastic charity, as diabetes is increasing among children.

The Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation is the only charity dedicated solely to funding research to try and find a cure. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Hannah, her parents and the over 40,000 people who took part. They are on track across the country to raise $2 million. So I would like to congratulate everyone that was involved and I look forward to seeing Hannah back in Parliament House as part of the Kids in the House event later this year.

Mr MORRISON (Cook) (9.48 am)—Sydney airport is critical to Sydney’s economic future and that of the Shire, the community I represent. The impact of airport operations requires careful management, because it is only through appropriate noise sharing and living within the long-term operating plan, developed many years ago by the coalition government and followed through by this government, that you can continue to foster a harmony between the great economic benefits derived from the airport and the standard of living which the community has come to enjoy. Managing that noise sharing and managing the environmental impact, as well as preserving the economic benefit of Sydney airport, is a very difficult task but one that we have to remain committed to because of the vital significance of that economic infrastructure to Sydney, the nation and certainly to my own community.

Issues arise in the management of airport operations, which do cause troubles within communities, but the things that cause the most angst are when changes take place. If someone
has been used to living under a flight path—even though they are aware of that and probably wish that the planes were not there—there is an acceptance of that reality. But when the heights, noises and times of flights change after people have moved into particular areas to take advantage of a particular lifestyle those people are concerned.

The Sutherland Environmental Aircraft Noise Action Group has been one group raising these issues with me for some time. I was very pleased yesterday when I had a constructive meeting with the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport and Airservices Australia. The meeting dealt with three very important issues. Firstly, there is the increasing incidence of the use of the Boree 4 standard arrival path to Sydney Airport, operating principally under mode 9 and SODPROPS, which has been causing a lot of distress to residents particularly in the morning peaks and in the shoulder periods. Secondly, there is the rivet 9 standard arrival path which takes planes over Grays Point and other western parts of the shire. These matters, combined with a need to get a better handle on the use of these flight paths and the need to ensure, more importantly—and this is the third point—that they are flying out over water rather than flying across suburbs to arrive at Sydney Airport, are very critical.

I appreciate the response that I got from the minister yesterday. I look forward to meeting with him again later in the year to address the issue of the distress being caused by the use of these flight paths, particularly Boree 4, in the early morning shoulder period through to the curfew. I thank the minister for the meeting. I look forward to the outcomes from that meeting and reporting these important results to my community in the days ahead.

Mrs Eva Marks

Mr DANBY (Melbourne Ports) (9.51 am)—Next week the Austrian Ambassador to Australia, Dr Hannes Porias, will confer the Austrian government’s Holocaust Memorial Award 2010 on Vienna born Melbourne resident, Eva Marks, a long-term family friend of the Danby family. There will be a letter of congratulations from the President of Austrian parliament, Barbara Prammer. The award, which was instituted in 2006, is assigned annually to one person who has ‘shown special endeavours for the memory of the Shoah’—the Hebrew word meaning catastrophe. It serves as a symbol of Austria’s opposition to racism and as a signpost for the commemoration of the victims of that period of World War II.

Eva Marks is the first woman and the first Australian to receive the award, recognising a lifetime of active contribution to the remembrance of the atrocities of the Second World War. This has included 17 years as a guide at the Jewish Holocaust Museum and Research Centre in Elsternwick in my electorate. She has also been a volunteer at the Jewish Museum of Australia, which the Victorian government rightly describes as the best boutique museum in Victoria. Eva has for decades talked and lectured publicly on radio, TV and in person about her experiences during the Shoah and the experiences of people like her in central Europe and the former Soviet Union. The Melbourne International Arts Festival featured an interactive video installation, Evolution of fearlessness, to which she contributed significantly.

Eva fled Austria to Latvia after the Anschluss, the union forced by Hitler between Austria and Nazi Germany, in the hope of getting a visa for the United States for her and her family. After the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, the Russians transported her and her family to a gulag in Siberia and later to another gulag in Kazakhstan in 1943. She was liberated in 1947 and came to Australia, where she has built a new and positive life in Melbourne.
with her husband, Stan. A resident of Caulfield, Eva describes the story of her life in her autobiography, *A Patchwork Life*.

The conferral ceremony next Thursday, in addition to having the Austrian Ambassador, will have various other dignitaries there, including her husband, Stan. The musical ensemble will include her son, Peter Marks, and grandson, Nicholas. It will also have the attendance of a young man called Daniel Schuster from the Austrian Service Abroad who has been very anxious to secure my presence next Thursday night. He sent me an email saying I had a very official role and that I must be present. I do appreciate all of the work he has done to publicise this important service for both Australia and for his country, Austria, in remembrance of those events, particularly his service here in Australia on behalf of the Austrian people to commemorate those events.

**Farrer Electorate: Floods**

Ms LEY (Farrer) (9.54 am)—I wish to bring to the attention of the House the dramatic and extreme rainfall event and the subsequent impact on areas of the Farrer electorate during the latter part of last week. In total, over some four days, small rural communities whose lifeblood so often relies on what comes out of the sky were delivered what we might term locally an unwanted truckload from the heavens. There were widespread falls of between 100 to 250 millimetres—that is, up to 10 inches of rain in the old terminology—unseen in some of these areas for some 30 to 40 years. What exacerbated the impact on the people, farms and towns in Farrer was that this was supposed to be the season when temperatures and rainfall had returned to what we once used to take for granted, a time when gentle rains would be followed by the gradual warming rays of spring sunshine, refreshing local optimism and soothing paddocks ravaged by a long drought.

Our regional and rural members would understand that, when this so often absent subsurface moisture had finally returned this year, our farmers were relying on this delicate balance to continue to fully bring home the bacon. But alas, and again, for some this will not be the season. The mayor tells me that, throughout the towns of the local Greater Hume shire, some 100 homes were impacted significantly, 80 of those inundated. This does not begin to list the hundreds of thousands of dollars in extensive damage to local farmland, homesteads, fencing, sheds and equipment.

In the nearby Lockhart area, there were 93 homes awash, including in the towns of The Rock and Yerong Creek. Crops which were potentially the best yielding in the last 10 years have now been either lost completely or significantly damaged by the deluge. Lockhart’s mayor, who assisted the Rural Fire Service in rescuing some of his own shire residents, tells me there is some $20 million of damage to the local road network alone.

May I take this opportunity to express appreciation and gratitude to each of the local government and emergency services personnel who assisted those in need during the past week. I also want to urge those communities—particularly farmers who are just weeks away from that bumper harvest and householders who have lost personal effects to floods—to find time to seek the available assistance provided by state and federal agencies. I do thank the Attorney-General for quickly announcing the Commonwealth’s intent to provide financial assistance to our local communities. To all those adversely affected by this dramatic and unforeseen event I offer—and I ask my fellow members to also indicate—genuine concern and compassion.
Mr Ian Castles

Mr GRAY (Brand—Special Minister of State and Special Minister of State for the Public Service and Integrity) (9.57 am)—I am honoured to pay tribute to Ian Castles, an outstanding economist who died suddenly on 2 August this year. Mr Castles lived a life of strength, integrity and modesty. His extraordinary career in public service spanned the Whitlam, Fraser and Hawke governments. He was respected by prime ministers and successive federal cabinets. As a key driver of economic reform in the 1970s and 1980s, his contribution to Australia’s economy is still with us. The determination of Mr Castles that data rather than ideology should inform and guide policy enabled him to be frank and fearless in his views. It also led to his scepticism about the views and predictions of the Club of Rome. His advice was always put with patience and modest conviction. Former finance ministers Peter Walsh and Dame Margaret Guilfoyle regarded Ian Castles as the most significant civil servant and economist of his day.

Australia has lost one of its truly great thinkers. His intellect inspired political leaders and thousands of fellow public servants to strive for a deeper understanding of the interaction between economics and policy and to develop a thirst for research, analysis and knowledge. Ian Castles saw the synergies in the tax and social security systems and the potential for these policy instruments to work together as a single system. He was instrumental in the big reforms to family allowances, superannuation and income tax. His contribution did not end there. It was Castles who suggested that a department be set up solely for financial management.

Mr Castles went on to challenge the opinions of John Kenneth Galbraith and Kenneth Clarke in his 1985 monograph *Economics and anti-economics*, arguing that economics, far from being the dismal science, can and does support the pursuit of the common good. Castles used the lessons of economic history to contradict the claim that economics acted against the public interest. He later went on to challenge Donald Horne and Hugh Stretton and to discredit their view that the Australian Public Service was the home of privileged dynastic public servants. As Australian Statistician, Mr Castles reviewed the consumer price index and began the task of broadening the living standard measures beyond gross domestic product.

During this time he also became an electoral commissioner. For the first time the Australian Statistician sat as an independent electoral commissioner, ensuring demographics and population growth were central features of electoral boundaries and electoral fairness. Under Ian Castles, the Bureau of Statistics led the gathering of information, providing everything from balance of payments figures to inflation, unemployment rates, crime and divorce statistics. While much of his profound influence was behind the scenes, his intellect, economics and what has been described as his ‘luminous thought’ earned him the reputation as ‘Australia’s numbers man’. Throughout his many roles, Mr Castles achieved outcomes that affect our lives today. Without his contribution, Australia would be poorer.

In describing his father, Richard Castles said he was ‘an old style civil servant’. Indeed, one of Richard’s favourite moments was of Gough Whitlam remarking of his father, ‘Ah, one of my best appointments ever.’ To his family, Mr Castles was a humble, thoughtful man who believed in doing what was right. He had immense love for his wife, Glenys, and his children and grandchildren. I am indebted to Richard Castles, Peter Walsh and Dame Margaret Guilfoyle for their help with these words. My thoughts are with Ian Castles’s family—his wife,
Debate resumed from 29 September, on motion by Ms Collins: That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr ANDREWS (Menzies) (10.01 am)—In May 2008 the House Of Representatives Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth announced a parliamentary inquiry to investigate how carers could be better supported in their role. The committee tabled its report into better support for carers, the *Who cares…?* report, on 25 May 2009. Recommendation 4 was to develop a nationally consistent carer recognition framework comprising, firstly, national carer recognition legislation which complements state and territory care legislation, and, secondly, a national carer strategy which builds on and complements state and territory carer policies.

On 19 October 2009 during Carers Week the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs announced that the government would develop a national carer recognition framework and introduce legislation into parliament in 2010. The government tabled its response to the *Who cares…?* report on 29 October 2009.

The coalition will not oppose this bill. The bill establishes a legislative framework to increase recognition and awareness of informal carers and acknowledge the invaluable contribution they make to society. It is the first element in the development of a national carer recognition framework. The bill sets out a statement for Australia’s carers. The statement will not create rights but will instead establish key principles to provide guidance on how carers should be treated and considered by Public Service agencies and associated providers. The legislation is therefore symbolic rather than substantive. The bill is purely symbolic, stating specifically in part 4, Other matters:

1. This Act does not create rights or duties that are legally enforceable in judicial or other proceedings.
2. A failure to comply with this Act does not affect the validity of any decision, and is not a ground for review or challenge of any decision.

Carers have long sought recognition for the very important and significant role they play. Carers are unpaid Australians who give their time—often 24 hours a day, seven days a week—to provide care, love and support, often at a financial, emotional and social cost to themselves. Carers play a vital role in our society and carry tremendous emotional and financial burdens. Carers are parents, grandparents, siblings, partners, relatives and friends who assist every day with personal care, health care, transport and many other activities. Carers carry out a valuable role which otherwise would inevitably fall to our public systems—our public hospitals and professional carers—to do, a cost society would otherwise have to pick up.

Many carers, despite the tough times it can bring, will tell you that there is nothing more rewarding than giving unconditional love and care to a loved one. Carers are simply quite extraordinary Australians, but for most they take the view that it is just what you do as a partner, as a parent or as a friend. Whether these carers choose to identify themselves as carers or not, it is still our responsibility to support them in whatever way we can. As members of par-
liament, we can help to get the support framework right, but we can never transform the lives of those that they care for like the carers themselves. It is important we recognise carers in supporting them in their invaluable role.

Whilst the sentiments expressed in the bill are commendable, the coalition recognises that sentiment alone does not amount to real action for carers. That is why the coalition has developed practical and affordable initiatives to provide real, tangible support to carers.

Australian Bureau of Statistics data show that 6.6 per cent of carers are aged 18 years or under. Indeed some 400,000 Australians aged under 26 care for a person with a disability or a long-term illness.

Before the last election, the coalition announced a policy for a young carer scholarship program. Many of these young carers are missing chances to further their education or to undertake part-time work to help support themselves whilst at school, university or TAFE. The coalition would have delivered at least 150 annual scholarships valued at up to $10,000, awarded depending on the level of education involved. The coalition also announced a plan to establish a Commonwealth disability and carer ombudsman to give carers a real and independent voice. These are just two practical and affordable policy initiatives that would provide further real assistance to carers.

The coalition recognises the vital role carers play in our society and the tremendous financial and emotional burden they carry. The Liberal and National parties have always believed that the best social support ever devised is family and friends.

In government the coalition developed a package of measures to improve the position of carers, including more respite and the establishment of the National Respite for Carers Program; the introduction of and increases in funding and eligibility of the carers’ allowance; an increase in funding and eligibility of carers’ payment; and access to income support for those caring for a child with a disability and providing encouragement and support for carers to return to the workforce.

Under the coalition every year from 2004 to 2007, carers received one-off carer bonus payments of $1,000 to each person in receipt of carer payments, and $600 to each recipient of carer allowance for each person in their care. This was recognition of the vital role that carers play in our society and the tremendous financial burden they carry.

In 2008 the then Rudd Labor government failed to recognise this and wanted to remove support from carers by stopping payment of the carer’s bonus. The Labor government did not recognise the value of our carers, and it was only after community outrage and opposition from the coalition that they finally backed down.

While recognising the voluntary and personal nature of the work carers do, government needs to assist carers with income support, training and respite. The coalition’s good economic management meant new and improved initiatives could be implemented to support and recognise the vital role of carers in our society.

Mr HAYES (Fowler) (10.08 am)—I too rise to support the Carer Recognition Bill 2010. As you recall, this bill was in the last parliament prior to it being prorogued and now it is progressing. I welcome the support of the opposition in the passage of this bill in the House.

It is appropriate that the government recognises the vital role that carers play in our community and throughout society and to acknowledge the enormous personal and financial con-
tribution that carers effectively make as they go about providing care. Carers are unsung he-
roes, and this bill goes some way to recognising and placing value on their incredible devo-
tion, service and sacrifice and, quite frankly, outright hard work that is put in to looking after
either a loved one or someone who they have dedicated their time to supporting. This belief is
based on not only the sense of social responsibility but also the understanding that the work of
carers in our community is commendable; moreover, it is essential.

According to the last census data, in and about my electorate in south-west Sydney there
are 18,000 people who are reported to be providing unpaid assistance to persons with a dis-
ability. So, as at census night, 18,000 people, which is a very big number, were doing extraor-
dinary work. I suppose one of the reasons it is so high in the south-west of Sydney is that the
number of people who live with disabilities is overrepresented. Obviously, that has a key im-
 pact on the work of carers as well.

People who provide care include those who provide occasional care as well as full-time
care for people with long-term illnesses and others who simply cater for the consequences of
our having an ageing population. That is progressively becoming quite significant in our
modern society. Then there are other people who cannot take any form of external work at all
because they dedicate themselves to providing care to someone with a severe disability or a
medical condition or to a loved one who is just very frail. There are many categories of carers
in our community, and what is significant is that, other than families and people who directly
acknowledge what occurs in the household, most of this caring goes unnoticed. Unfortunately,
there has been no proper recognition until now. Carers have, understandably, been calling for
greater recognition of their role in the community, and that is what this bill sets out to do. The
Carer Recognition Bill 2010 is the first step in developing a National Carer Recognition
Framework.

I remind the House that before the 2007 election the Labor Party made its stance on carer
and carer recognition quite clear. Very deliberately, in a speech given by the then shadow min-
ister for ageing, disabilities and carers, Senator Jan McLucas, she acknowledged the immense
importance of carers in providing support for people with disabilities. I should at this stage
congratulate Senator McLucas, as she now holds the role of Parliamentary Secretary for Dis-
abilities and Carers—a portfolio that I happen to know she is personally very committed to.

Labor believes that all people should be able to participate as valued members of our soci-
ety. Disability should not stand in the way of people being active members of our community,
our workplaces, our families as well as society in general. That is why in 2007 we announced
that we would focus the disability service system on the needs of carers and review the need
for federal legislation to recognise the role of carers in our community. As a result, in 2008 the
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Families, Community, Housing and Youth
conducted an inquiry into better support for carers and carer networks. In May 2009, the
committee’s report Who cares…? Report on the inquiry into better support for carers made 50
recommendations, including that the government develop a nationally consistent carer recogni-
tion framework comprising national carer recognition legislation, which complements state
and territory carer legislation, and a national carer strategy which builds on and complements
state and territory carer policies and provisions currently in existence.

I am very pleased to say that the government has responded favourably to those recom-
mandations and that as a consequence we have the bill that is before the House. This legisla-
tion establishes effectively who is a carer. It contains the Statement for Australia’s Carers and sets up reporting and consultation arrangements for certain public sector agencies as they go about their work, requiring them to have proper regard for those people who give of their time as carers. I will go into some of the detail of the bill shortly but firstly I think it is important to highlight that this legislation is part of Labor’s commitment to national carer recognition. It has certainly been welcomed by the various key organisations operating in this area and supporting the carer networks themselves. In fact, when we announced that we would establish a national carer recognition framework, Carers Australia CEO Joan Hughes said this:

The announcement of a National Carer Recognition Framework by the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, the Hon Jenny Macklin MP, brings us one step closer to a society that supports and recognises the contribution of family carers …

Following the first introduction of this bill into the House, Ms Hughes said:

This legislation is an important landmark and one that we have been working towards for some time. We believe all carers should have the same rights and opportunities as other Australians to enjoy optimum health and social wellbeing and to participate in family, social and community life. It is encouraging that this is reflected under the principles of the legislation. This bill enshrines in law an increased recognition of the awareness of informal carers and acknowledges the valuable contribution that they make not simply to the people they render care to but to society as a whole. It establishes a broad and encompassing definition of who is a carer. Under this legislation the definition of ‘carer’ encompasses all people who provide personal care, support and assistance to individuals who need support due to disability or medical conditions, including terminal or chronic illnesses, mental illnesses or fragility due to age.

I would like to highlight the fifth principle of the Statement for Australia’s Carers:

Carers should be acknowledged as individuals with their own needs within and beyond the caring role. This is something I became vividly aware of, Mr Deputy Speaker. You might recall that two or three years ago we had a delegation of young carers visit this parliament. Like most members, I spent time with some of these young people and I learnt that in their role as carers they were being supported by this national network. I was talking to one of the young people, an 18-year-old, who was completing high school with no scope for extra tuition or assistance. This person was caring for his mother, who had a chronic illness, so he was looking after his mum while at the same time trying to maintain his studies. He thought he was there all by himself as there was no extended family network helping him. Until he became engaged within the carer network and found that there were other people in similar roles and that, besides that, there were organisations that actually looked at the issue of rendering care, this young bloke just thought that this was his lot in life. It is interesting that, having spoken since to him, I now understand that not only has he been accepted into university but he now has a continuing role in a carer network. He lives in the Northern Territory with his mother. So I have always thought this was quite an interesting thing as there was this one person in a crowd who had a story. I think the truth of the matter is that you do not have to scratch too deeply to find out that there are many people in this predicament—feeling isolated and alone and that they have a personal duty in their life to look after a family member or whomever it is.
This bill is trying to go a step further, to show that people are not alone, that we do recognise and value what carers do in the community. We will build support mechanisms as a consequence. Recognition was a big thing for this young fellow. Recognition showed that he was not just looking after his mother; he was seen as delivering to the community very worthy and wonderful assistance. If anything, that is the story which this legislation seeks to establish—giving proper recognition to the role of carers in our community. It is more than appropriate to recognise the role carers play in our society and the invaluable work of caring for those who are less fortunate, are ill or have a disability. It is just as appropriate and important to remember that carers have their own identity outside the role as a carer. While that role certainly contributes to their identity, it should in no way be limiting or stifling. They too have the right to have ambitions, to strive to fulfil their dreams. That is something we need to understand in our communities.

The other principles of the statement of Carers Australia which have struck a particular chord with me include the principles that carers should be treated with dignity and respect and that support for carers should be timely, responsive, appropriate and accessible. Much can be said about simply having a bill which recognises carers. This bill is not just a statement of recognition. It does a lot more than that, formally recognising what it is to be a carer. It ensures that government agencies, in developing policy, take into account carers’ needs and that these principles are considered when they implement and evaluate policies for various programs or services directed to carers. On that basis, I commend the bill to the House.

Mr BALDWIN (Paterson) (10.23 am)—I rise today to address the Carer Recognition Bill 2010. This bill celebrates the amazing efforts of 2.6 million unpaid family carers in our community and acknowledges their vital contribution to Australian society. My hope is that this bill will also promote discussion about the challenges faced by carers. Across Australia in every community, no matter how large or small, carers provide unpaid care and support for family members or friends who have a disability, mental illness, chronic condition or terminal illness.

Carers come from all walks of life and can take on the role of carer at any stage of life. The common attribute of all carers is defined by the adjective by which they are described: they care. They care that their friend or relative is treated with dignity and respect. They care because they prioritise the needs of their family member or friend ahead of their own. They care because they know that only they can provide the love and dedication their friend or family member deserves. I have met and spoken to many carers in my electorate of Paterson. I have learned that being a carer is rewarding but is often exhausting and sometimes heartbreaking. Carers cannot take public holidays, weekends or rostered days off. The job of a carer is 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

I am pleased to note that the Australian government has made progress in helping to ease the burden and stress on our carers through financial support. Currently, carers of people aged 16 years or over are able to claim the carer allowance of $106.70 per fortnight. They are also eligible for an annual supplement of $600. For those caring for a child under 16, a healthcare card is available. In addition, many are also eligible for the carer allowance of $106.70 per fortnight. However, this is dependent on the child’s level of functional disability. Importantly, the carer allowance is designed to help them meet the costs of the constant care and therefore it is not contingent on income or asset tests. Building on this, however, is the carer payment
designed specifically for those who suffer a loss in income due to their carer commitment on a daily basis. The carer payment is currently set at $658.40 per fortnight for a single carer or $496.30 for each carer in a couple. This does not include the pension supplement, which may also be paid concurrently.

Although no support mechanisms or financial assistance can ever completely meet the burden for the hours of unpaid work undertaken by carers, the coalition has always understood that government has a responsibility to assist carers. That is why the former coalition government made significant steps to acknowledge the plight of carers and ease their burden through a series of financial and other support measures. In 2002 the coalition simplified eligibility requirements for carers of children with a terminal illness who receive active treatment. In 2005 the coalition increased the number of hours a carer can work, study or train to 25 hours per week. In 2006 the coalition extended support to carers of children aged between six years and 16 years with severe intellectual, psychiatric or behavioural disabilities. In 2007 the coalition introduced the carer adjustment package of up to $10,000 as an interim ex gratia payment scheme while a review of the carer payment was conducted. Between 2004 and 2007 the coalition supplied one-off carer bonuses of $1,000 for eligible recipients of the carer payment. From 2006 eligible wife pensions and Department of Veterans’ Affairs partner service pensions also received $1,000 carer bonus payments if they were receiving carer allowance. What this timeline shows is that the coalition has always been committed to increased support for carers. I certainly hope that the Gillard Labor government will follow the coalition’s lead and use this bill as the start of another round of discussion and action.

It is clear that the Australian government has a massive role to play in supporting Australia’s carers; however, it would be remiss of me to stand here today and not mention the fantastic community organisations whose staff and volunteers are an invaluable resource for carers across our country. These community organisations are often the ones that step in when our carers have had a rough day and all the usual support mechanisms have failed. They offer emotional support and advice. They also run practical excursions to give our carers a much-deserved small break.

One such organisation in my electorate of Paterson that I have had the honour of getting to know is Port Stephens Community Care. Port Stephens Community Care is a vital part of the Paterson electorate. It supports individuals requiring care services to live as they choose, while providing and promoting the development of community care. The target group of clients includes the frail aged, younger people with disabilities and the carers of these people. This organisation also offers support programs and peer support. Port Stephens Community Care is a not-for-profit organisation and works with government and private sector service providers to deliver a comprehensive and flexible range of services. It does so through the use of community volunteers. Its service delivery model hinges upon the core philosophy built on the values of individual choice, dignity, respect, privacy, confidentiality and accountability. These are values that we can all strive for and that should be a part of any health policy debate in Australia.

There are also a number of other organisations in the electorate of Paterson that do fabulous work, including North Coast Community Care, which supports my constituents in Forster, Tuncurry, Tea Gardens and Hawks Nest. It has worked hard to establish ties with
various support organisations throughout the mid-North Coast, and helps hundreds of people by providing in-home nursing, domestic care and in-home respite services.

Maitland Community Care is another invaluable service for constituents in the west of my electorate. Its focus is on the frail younger people with a disability and of course their carers. Its aim is to help these people continue to participate as fully as possible in their local community and to maintain their normal lives and friendship networks as long as possible. Like Port Stephens Community Care, staff value everyone’s right to choice, mobility, dignity and responsive services. Without these services, in many cases, many constituents of mine would be forced to enter nursing homes or other similar institutions because of their inability to care adequately for themselves at home.

Thus, local care services not only make an immense contribution in the lives of individuals but also help to strengthen our society and local community life. For this reason we should this week celebrate not only carers but also those who support our carers. That includes community organisations and also the friends and family of carers. I will be taking the opportunity to do so this Friday when I will have the privilege of opening the Port Stephens Community Care event, ‘A Carers Journey’ at the Tomaree Community Centre. The aim of the event is to provide information on the comprehensive range of services that are available to assist carers throughout each stage of a carer’s journey.

The team at Port Stephens Community Care is highlighting three stages, those being identification and information for carers, maintaining with support services and decision making. I would like to highlight the tireless efforts of Sheryl Cain and the team at Port Stephens Community Care in support of the Paterson electorate. In August this year the organisation was honoured as Paterson’s Corporate Citizen of the Year for its ongoing commitment to adequately manage and respond to the needs of the vulnerable in our community.

Vulnerable people in our community come in lots of different forms. That is part of the challenge for carers, many whom have the duty of carer thrust upon them unexpectedly. Often the learning process must be quick. From speaking to my constituents, I know that the welfare of a carer’s friend or relative is never far from their mind. For example, Meg and Rob from Salamander Bay are carers providing for an adult daughter and they are riddled with guilt and worry about their child’s future beyond their passing. We as a government should provide help for those in care to establish themselves where possible and live as normal a life as they can. Many carers have also approached me with concerns regarding accessing respite care in emergency situations as they are at their wits end when in need of a well-deserved break. Others are faced with crippling debt after the passing of the friend or relative they have cared for. These are just a couple of the reasons that being a carer is a very tough job. However, it is not without its rewards.

It is the moral duty of a civilised society to provide the support services all carers so richly deserve and this bill should serve many purposes. Firstly, the bill should pay worthy tribute to carers for what they do every day, often without a simple thank you or a pat on the back. Secondly, the bill should promote action to address the need for additional respite and recognition for those in our community who, through their love and dedication, save the taxpayer billions of dollars a year. The situation is not always perfect. Thirdly, the bill should raise awareness of carers and their role in society so that we can move towards an even better support system for Australian carers.
Unfortunately, many people who do not have personal experience with a carer do not understand the personal sacrifices carers make on a daily basis. This lack of awareness is despite the fact that there are so many wonderful carers in our community. For example, in Paterson alone, last year’s figures show there were more than 4,000 unpaid carers. If each of those carers was looking after just one person then this bill affects in excess of 8,000 of my constituents. That is one in 10 people in the Paterson electorate.

I am confident that my electorate of Paterson is representative of many other electorates across Australia. That is why I am proud that I have the opportunity to celebrate Carers Week here in the parliament today. I am also proud to have the opportunity to fight for more support for local carers. There are always improvements that can be made, as no system is perfect, and I will work hard to help ensure that any legislative changes do improve the lives of our carers and, in turn, the people they care for, their friends and their family. It is fantastic to get people talking about this issue, but we also need to walk the walk. We have the opportunity to turn this situation into positive, real, life-changing action. I look forward to working with Paterson’s carers towards this in the future. Again, to all of the carers in the electorate of Paterson, I say thank you.

Mr ADAMS (Lyons) (10.35 am)—There are many in our communities around Australia who are often the forgotten people. They are the ones who take up the responsibility of looking after loved ones—loved ones who may be children or adult family members, siblings, partners, elderly relatives or even close friends. These loved ones may have a disability, a mental illness, a terminal illness or a chronic condition. They may be an elderly person who cannot live unassisted but who wants to remain at home where their belongings are about them, where their favourite chair is, where they feel comfortable, where they have a good view out of their window or where they are in surroundings that they have known for an awfully long time. These carers are the ones who selflessly put aside their lives to care for their relatives or friends. Many children find themselves playing the role of an adult so that they can stay with their parent at home.

These young carers are sometimes children as young as seven. Young people help or take on the caring role in families where someone has an illness, a disability, a mental disorder or substance abuse problems. They might help out with cleaning or the preparation of meals. They might assist their relative or friend or friends with daily tasks or help them with medicines, showering, dressing or watch out for them to make sure that they are okay. Across Australia 390,000 children and young people help care for their relatives. There are as many as 70,000 recognised family carers in Tasmania. The work undertaken by family carers is worth $1.6 billion to the Tasmanian community. Many young carers say that caring can be a great thing to do, that they are proud of who they are and what they do and that they have built up a whole swag of useful skills. However, young carers also say that caring affects the way they feel, how much time they get to spend with friends or to do their homework and their ability to hold down a job, and that often they need some help.

Anyone at any time can become a carer. Some are thrown into it because there is literally no-one else to do it and, of course, it can be extremely stressful. It is amazing how much volunteer time families put into caring for relatives, without any real recognition. So when a bill was raised to enshrine in law the Australian government’s national recognition for the exceptional contribution made by hundreds of thousands of carers across the country it made lot of
sense, and I wanted to support it. This is also Carers Week and the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs should be congratulated for getting the Carer Recognition Bill 2010 into parliament. This bill establishes a legislative framework to increase recognition and awareness of informal carers to acknowledge the valuable contribution they make to society. The bill also establishes a broad and encompassing definition of carer and a statement for Australian carers that outlines key principles on how carers should be treated and considered.

The bill will establish that public service care agencies should take action to reflect the principles in the Statement for Australia’s Carers in developing, implementing, providing or evaluating care supports; to consult with carers and involve them in the development of care supports; and to report on compliance with the obligations established. It will establish that associated providers should have an awareness and understanding of the Statement for Australia’s Carers and take action to reflect the principles in the Statement for Australia’s Carers in developing, implementing, providing or evaluating care supports.

So the new definition is a broader one that encompasses all people who provide personal care, support and assistance to individuals who need support due to a disability, a medical condition including terminal or chronic illness, a mental illness or frailty due to age. However, subclause 5(2) provides:

(2) An individual is not a carer in respect of care, support and assistance he or she provides:

(a) under a contract of service or a contract for the provision of services; or
(b) in the course of doing voluntary work for a charitable, welfare or community organisation; or
(c) as part of the requirements of a course of education or training.

This subclause means that an individual is not a carer for the purpose of this bill if they only provide care under these circumstances; therefore, as subclause 5(3) provides:

(3) To avoid doubt, an individual is not a carer merely because he or she:

(a) is the spouse, de facto partner, parent, child or other relative of an individual, or is the guardian of an individual; or
(b) lives with an individual who requires care.

For example, a foster carer is not a carer for the purpose of the bill unless the child being cared for needs support due to disability, a medical condition including a terminal or chronic illness, or mental illness. I think the real benefit of this bill is recognition of all those people who put in time 24/7 without annual leave, public holidays or time off if they are sick. It gives them an opportunity to get some understanding from the various levels of government that are included in government policy and to have the same opportunities as other Australians to live healthy, happy lives and reach their full potential.

There are 10 main principles in this bill. The first two reframe certain fundamental human right principles with reference to the status of the individual as a carer. So children and young carers should have the same rights as other children and young people and should be supported to reach their full potential. Carers should have the same rights as other Australians on a non-discriminatory basis.

Principles 3, 5 and 8 reflect on the value of the carer and the need to acknowledge them. For instance, proposed principle 8 articulates the need to treat carers with dignity and respect,
while proposed principles 6 and 7 reflect on the relational nature of carers. The statement stresses that:

6. The relationship between carers and the persons for whom they care should be recognised and respected.

It suggests:

7. Carers should be considered as partners with other care providers in the provision of care, acknowledging the unique knowledge and experience of carers.

Proposed principles 9 and 10 provide more specific guidance on the treatment of carers:

9. Carers should be supported to achieve greater economic wellbeing and sustainability and, where appropriate, should have opportunities to participate in employment and education.

10. Support for carers should be timely, responsive, appropriate and accessible.

This bill forms the basis for the National Carer Strategy which is currently under development and which will shape the government’s long-term agenda for reform. This strategy will include many of the issues raised by carers through the inquiry into better support for carers. It should consider, among other things, the training and skills development needs of carers, and the advocacy of care management and care coordination for carers. We must also address the needs of young carers and carers in rural and remote communities, and this will be a key priority in this strategy.

This is a very important bill and its implementation will drive increased awareness and understanding of the role and contribution of carers, as well as a much-needed cultural and attitudinal shift so that carers’ interests are taken into account by public service agencies and service providers. I think we have all seen people give so much as carers in our communities. As we work as MPs representing our electorates throughout the country, we sometimes see enormous sacrifices by such people in our community. I think giving some recognition to them in this way is a great thing for our nation and our parliament to do. I welcome the opportunity to speak to this, and look forward to following the development of the strategy as it begins to take shape. I commend the bill to the House.

Mrs MOYLAN (Pearce) (10.48 am)—Can I begin by acknowledging my colleagues the member for Paterson and the member for Lyons for their long-term interest and their very sincere comments in regard to the introduction of the Statement for Australia’s Carers. I have appreciated personally also their involvement in the Parliamentary Diabetes Support Group.

I have to declare an interest today. I have spoken many times in this chamber and in the House about the need for us to better recognise carers in Australia and the need for ongoing work in this parliament in that regard. But recently I was asked by Carers Western Australia to be a co-patron and I accepted with great joy. It is a great honour to be able to help to represent the interests of carers not only in Australia but in Western Australia particularly.

I acknowledge that it is Carers Week and it is a great thing that we are now able to acknowledge carers in this way through this Statement for Australia’s Carers at a time when there is a great focus on carers nationally.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics estimates that there are 2.6 million carers in Australia, providing assistance to the disabled, the frail and the chronically ill. Carers are mostly family members, close friends or relatives who through circumstances not necessarily of their choosing have become a primary carer. For many it is a shock to deal with the grief that frequently
accompanies the pain and the suffering of somebody that they are close to or the loss of companionship of a close friend, a relative or a spouse, or the realisation that their child will never have the same chance to fully develop and take their place in the broader community that most children have.

As deputy chair of the House Standing Community on Family, Community, Housing and Youth in the last parliament which produced the *Who Cares …?* report, I heard firsthand along with my colleagues the experience of carers in these and many other circumstances. None of us on that committee were left in any doubt that too many carers feel desperate, depressed and isolated.

For a year the secretariat and the members of that committee pored over 1,300 community submissions, mostly from individual carers. It was impossible not to be moved, sometimes to tears, by the heart-rending stories from people who found the courage to come here and share their day-to-day challenges as carers.

One of the many recommendations from that report was that carers be formally recognised by the Commonwealth. So many carers drop out of mainstream activities, out of the workplace and, as they grapple with the day-to-day needs of the person dependent on them, they feel isolated, unrecognised. It is a very lonely road.

We have estimated that Australian carers give upwards, if you want to quantify it in dollar terms, of $30 billion a year. That is the value of the care that is given, yet this contribution often goes unnoticed in the wider community. This statement today gives that long awaited recognition to carers, providing the basis from which to build greater support in society.

The vision is to have a nationally consistent framework for carer recognition, an architecture from which a national strategy to assist carers can be born. Such a strategy is necessary as current assistance often overlooks the human and the emotional needs of carers, adding to the confusion and the turmoil that frequently come with the shock of such a dramatic life change that carers necessarily confront. As Anne-Marie MacArthur, who cares for her elderly mother, noted in her submission:

> Although services are available to carers, trying to access those services is akin to being in an ever increasing maze with illegible signposts so that the carer never really knows where to go or in which direction to take. To add to this mix the carer—

— in this case herself —

is physically exhausted and emotionally spent. Not a happy combination when trying to understand bureaucratic-speak.

As the evidence unfolded, it became increasingly clear that there is simply not enough assistance to go around. Time and time again, the committee heard stories from carers who were under extreme financial or emotional stress. It is intolerable that those who give up so much to care for others should be subject to such pressures.

Women are disproportionately affected as they make up 71 per cent of primary carers with the median age of primary carers being 52 years. This brings me to a part of the statement which particularly interests me—that is, part 2, Children and Young People. There are increasing numbers of children taking on the primary caring role, often of a parent. It impacts on their education, it affects their capacity to get a job in the paid workforce and it often robs them of their childhood. In evidence to the committee, we saw incredible maturity in these
young people and a great sense of pride in their capacity; nevertheless, as the member for Lyons quite rightly pointed out, they need extra support to be able to fulfil their caring role and to make sure they can take their place in the wider world.

Workforce participation and the flow-on financial impacts are critical matters for carers, particularly children and young people, and women who we see are disproportionately represented in the number of people who take social security benefits such as the old age pension. There is an expectation that families with children will have access to affordable high-quality childcare centres, yet parents who are caring for children with profound disability find it very difficult to get a placement in the small number of specialised facilities that are available. This perhaps has a disproportionate impact on women being able to take their place in the paid workforce at some stage and save for their retirement. It is another reason we are seeing disproportionate numbers of women ending up on the old age pension.

Similar accounts can be heard in relation to respite care or day-care facilities for older children and adults, who may not be able to be left at home alone. Cost, suitability and availability are all issues for primary carers who want to continue to work in the paid workforce or who just simply need some respite from the 24-hour a day, seven day a week job that they are often committed to for a lifetime. As I said in my speech to the House of Representatives when the report was presented:

… no wonder carers feel undervalued, no wonder they feel desperate, because when they cannot access work there is a whole flow-on effect. Try living on a carer payment. Try living on a disability pension. I challenge everyone in this House to think about just how difficult it is. And yet—

carers—

have no option sometimes but to stay home and care because there is nowhere to put the person who they care for—

so that they can work. With little paid work it is almost impossible to have superannuation savings so, as I said, in older age this has a major impact on all carers. As it stands, 44 per cent of primary carers are living in low-income households. The range and demand of caring roles varies considerably, but one group I continue to be deeply concerned about—and I spoke in the House about them on Monday and I will not recanvass those issues—is the ageing carers and more particularly their dependants. Twenty-four per cent of carers are over the age of 65 and of those more than 15,000 are caring for severely or profoundly disabled individuals, according to the latest ABS data from 2003. The testimony of Colin West, whose son Richard suffers from cerebral palsy, to the Senate inquiry on special disability trusts typifies the situation of many older carers. He submitted to the inquiry:

We have never applied for or received a carer’s allowance, nor, other than his home loan and a small amount of input from the Disability Services Commission, received monetary or other assistance from any Government body.

We are prepared to support our son as long as it takes and as long as we are around. What really frightens us is that we do not know who will take care of him when we are gone. His siblings, whilst very supportive, have their own families to care for and could not offer the necessary time required.

The government already provides a vehicle to assist but its practical operation is imperfect, in fact some would say almost impossible. In 2006, the Howard government created special disability trusts where families can make provision for the care and accommodation needs for severely disabled dependants in trust. With little or no impact on social security benefits the
concept has much potential, but drawbacks have been identified and need to be urgently rectified by the government so that more families can benefit from this trust arrangement.

Carers should be able to look to the future with at least some degree of certainty. A dramatic increase in funding is required so that accommodation is available to those that need it the most. Also, as the need for care and associated costs grow, I believe we must examine a national disability insurance scheme. I made an addendum to the carers report on this particular matter. Whilst there is much work needed on the design of a particular scheme, as a submission from MS Australia to the carer inquiry noted:

A disability insurance scheme with a capacity to fund rehabilitation and a lifetime of care is a necessity for Australia’s health system from both a financing and a service delivery perspective.

Such a system would have a profound impact on carers and go far in alleviating the low workforce participation rate, especially amongst women, and help redress the cumulative negative flow-on effects. A national disability insurance scheme would also help to relieve the burden on the growing number of young carers in Australia. Surprisingly, 13 per cent of primary carers are aged 15 to 34 years. In raw numbers that is estimated to be 40,000 young carers in Western Australia alone. These young Australians are compromising their studies, work and social lives to provide family care. One example is Alishya Purss, who cares for her father who has depression and frontal lobe brain damage. In her submission to the inquiry she noted:

My friends would not understand what I do, as not every 19 year old does what I do. Socially, it is hard to go out on weekends and I used to be an active volunteer in my region in regards to Red Shield appeals, Salvation Army door knock appeals and blood donations. I can no longer contribute to society as I could before.

While the evidence overwhelmingly shows that the parliament must continue to work to address the physical, financial, social and psychological impact of caring, addressing these needs in a holistic manner is vital and is in the interests of the people being cared for as well. There is still considerable work that needs to be done. The needs are as complex as they are individual. As a result, we need a system that is flexible and coordinated. It became apparent to me in the course of the inquiry that for too long the welfare of carers has been compartmentalised and departmentalised, with carers finding themselves in the middle of a bureaucratic maze. For all carers, dealing with a complex system is the last thing they need.

In conclusion, we will only get a solution through a whole-of-government approach. The carers report asked the question, ‘Who cares?’ If we as decision makers are to answer, ‘We care,’ then we need to be more responsive, match rhetoric with reality and exercise our collective and political will.

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (11.03 am)—I speak in support of the Carer Recognition Bill 2010. Carers Queensland tells me that in my electorate of Blair, which covers most of Ipswich and the Somerset region in South-East Queensland, there are more carers than in any other federal electorate in Queensland. For a long time in the Ipswich and West Moreton community there has been a very large number of people suffering from disability. This came about as a result of the presence of the Challinor Centre in Ipswich before de-institutionalisation took place some years ago to place people with mental disability into the community in domestic settings where they could be cared for by themselves or with the wonderful support of local community organisations—churches and charity organisations or care organisations such as Blue Care and others in the local area. For a long time Ipswich has been, because of

MAIN COMMITTEE
low-cost housing, a place where people who are challenged, vulnerable and in difficult circumstances have come to live.

I have heard this figure quoted on numerous occasions this morning: 2.6 million Australians providing care for family members or friends with a disability, mental illness or chronic condition, or who are frail aged. In point of fact it is a lot more. The figures they quote are from the Australian Bureau of Statistics from 2004; now it is 2010 and there are many more than that. I heard quoted on numerous occasions as well, here and elsewhere, that there are approximately 500,000 of those people who are primary carers—providing the most care. That figure, again, is six years old and inadequate.

There are many people who do two jobs. One is caring for little ones—their own children—and caring for their parents or uncles and aunties who are suffering because they are frail aged or who have, by virtue of illness, injury, sickness or disease, circumstances where they cannot provide for themselves in a domestic setting. Sure, we provide HACC funding, and a record amount of that, and we have great Commonwealth respite centres in this country, including one in my electorate, which I will talk of in a minute. But it is simply not enough. The intergenerational report said that by 2050 we are going to have 2.7 Australian workers for every person over the age of 65 years. It is five now and it was seven in the 1970s for every person who was 65 or older.

As people get older their bodies cannot cope with the rigours of life, and they find themselves in circumstances where they cannot do everything they wish they could or that they once did. According to Carers Queensland, carers provide about $30.5 billion worth of care each year. As Carers Queensland tells me—and their website makes it very clear—our health and hospital system simply could not survive without carers because we would have to pay for doctors, nurses and allied health professionals without them.

I also want to commend the government for their Young Carers program and the assistance that they have provided. We have provided $25 million to continue to support young carers across Australia. Many young carers also have dual roles because they are in school, they are in TAFE, they are studying or they are working part-time. It is difficult to stay in touch with their friends. It is a daily challenge to provide care for their mum or their dad or, sometimes, their sibling. The Young Carers program provides access to respite care services to help school-age young people take time off for recreation and sport, to enjoy times with their friends and to continue with their study. We understand that caring for a loved one is a massive responsibility and it is not easy. You imperil your financial security in the future, your job prospects are reduced because of the time away, your earning capacity is abated and there are so many things that a carer suffers from themselves because they do it. They do it because of their love, compassion, charity and humanity for those they care for in their families and their friends.

Any sort of support and recognition is important in our community. The fact that this legislation has taken more than the century since Federation to actually be promulgated through this place and signed off by the Governor-General—the fact that it has taken us this long—is a national shame and tragedy. Carers Australia has been calling for this for a long time. Indeed, the Commonwealth government—whoever has occupied the Treasury benches from time to time—has failed with regard to the response to what carers have demanded and called for for
a long time. I am pleased that the Gillard Labor government, of which I am proud to be a member, has responded to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Families, Communities, Housing and Youth report *Who cares?* I think that says it all. If we care we need to recognise those who care.

We have made significant changes to the help given since we have been occupying the Treasury bench: for example, pension increases from 20 September 2009, the introduction of a permanent ongoing carer supplement, the implementation of carer payment, child reforms from 1 July 2009 and the provision through Job Services Australia of assistance to carers entering or re-entering the workforce. I am particularly looking forward to seeing how the national disability strategy will be rolled out in the future.

This bill, as the Parliamentary Secretary for Community Services indicated in her second reading speech, is a first step for our National Carer Recognition Framework. This morning on my local radio station, River FM94.9, I paid tribute to the carers in my community. They get valuable assistance. I have heard many of them at my mobile offices around my electorate talk about the need to recognise what they do. This legislation adopts a very broad definition of ‘carer’—and so it should. It recognises that care, support and assistance can be given to individuals due to disability, a medical condition (including a terminal or chronic illness), a mental illness or frailty due to age. The bill then refers to an individual needing to not be a carer simply because they are a spouse, de facto partner, parent or guardian of an individual and so on.

This statement of principles about how carers should be treated is considered important in the employment arrangements for the Commonwealth Public Service. It is particularly significant that the Public Service of the Commonwealth, in which there are many fine men and women, is to develop internal human resources policies which take into consideration an employee’s caring role, having regard to the Statement for Australian Carers—those principles enshrined in this legislation. It will set a precedent and a benchmark and will be a symbol to other Australian employers, particularly in the private sector, who may not be so benevolent, benign and charitable about how they recognise employees’ obligations to their families and friends who suffer from disability, illness, injury and frailty.

This legislation is not just about the Commonwealth public sector. It has better implications for all of us and our community in general. We provide assistance to Carers Australia. Previous speakers have talked about being advocates in raising community awareness through activities and campaigns. We have provided $200,000 each year through the Department of Health and Ageing to Carers Australia to administer Carers Week—and so the department should.

We have, as I said before, Commonwealth Respite and Carelink Centres throughout the country. There are about 54 of them, one being in my electorate in the heart of Ipswich, and I have been there on numerous occasions. They provide assistance. In addition, we have demonstrated a commitment to carers through our National Respite for Carers program. There was, just a couple of years ago, nearly $200 million allocated in the budget for that. There are some wonderful community based respite services in my area. The respite services in my electorate which have received assistance through one-off funding under the National Respite for Carers Program, to name a few, are the Uniting Church in Australia—West Moreton South Coast Commonwealth Respite and Carelink Centre, Queensland; the Uniting Church in Aus-
tralia Property, Employed Carers Service; Alzheimer’s Association of Queensland, Ipswich Day Respite Centre; and RSL (Queensland) War Veterans Homes Ltd. That assistance improves respite services for carers in Ipswich and surrounds to cover the costs of minor building modifications or the purchase or replacement of equipment and furniture. It is important that we do that.

The benefits of this legislation are far greater than the simple acknowledgement and recognition of the work of carers. The legislation is far more than simply a statement for Australian carers. It will have implications in the future with respect to the Commonwealth public sector and it will have important implications for the private sector as well. I think it is important, as part of our social inclusion agenda, that we make sure that all Australians, regardless of their domestic and personal circumstances, have access to care and enjoyment in life; have abundant and joyful lives; and can fulfil their potential to the best of their ability and participate in the economic and community life of our country. This legislation says much about where we want to go as a country. It says a lot about what we think of ourselves and the degree to which we Australians demonstrate our humanity to those in the Australian family. I support the legislation.

Dr STONE (Murray) (11.16 am)—The coalition of course support the Carer Recognition Bill 2010, but at the same time we are very disappointed with it, along with the advocates for carers across Australia, because it does nothing more than simply acknowledge that we have amazing, magnificent people in the community whom we call carers. It does not in fact give them a cent more financial support; it does not give them new programs of advocacy or respite. All of that, we are told, will come in time, but this bill says only, ‘This is recognition of the carers who are out there.’

I said they are magnificent people, and they are. There are over 2.6 million unpaid carers in Australia. Carers are of all ages and backgrounds, but obviously it is harder to care for a loved one if you are very young or very old—if you are over 80 and you are still caring for your 50-year-old or 60-year-old son or daughter who has a disability. It is much harder, too, to be a carer if you are in a rural or remote part of Australia even further from services and support. And it is much harder to be a carer if your household has a very low income. Of course, if you are a carer you are less likely to be able to hold a job yourself and you are less likely to be able to compensate in the household for the extra costs of looking after someone who may have special mobility needs or special dietary needs or who needs a house that is modified in some way so they can live reasonably.

We acknowledge today, in Carers Week, that this is an extraordinary group of Australians. There are 2.6 million out there and, but for the grace of God, go all of us. Some in this place in fact may be carers, but I would suggest that if you are a politician—a senator or member of parliament—it is almost impossible to make that 24-hour, seven-day-a-week commitment that perhaps our spouses or partners make for a loved one in the family, or extended family, who needs care.

Currently nearly 80 per cent of assistance required by Australians due to disability, illness or old age is provided by family carers. There are nearly a million carers living outside major cities and, as I have already mentioned, it is even more difficult to be a carer when you are a long way from services. There are 380,000 carers under the age of 26, with 170,000 of those carers under the age of 18. One-third to half of all young carers live in regional and rural Aus-
Imagine trying to be a carer if you are under the age of 18, you do not have a drivers licence and you are in a socially isolated circumstance, perhaps the family farm. Imagine how difficult it is for that young person still to have a fulfilling life themselves and to have a proper education and realise their own potential if they are looking after a disabled parent, brother or sister or a member of their extended family and theirs is the job of providing care. In our Indigenous community, if you are between the ages of 15 and 34 you are almost twice as likely to be a carer as a non-Indigenous person in the same age category is.

Every year carers provide over 1.2 billion hours of care and this is worth some $30 billion annually to the economy. If carers decided overnight to literally stop—if they literally ran out of the capacity to do what they do and said, ‘No more!’—you can imagine the economy having to find $30 billion worth of alternative support for the people they are caring for. Too often we forget the extraordinary load that carers are carrying for our community. A primary carer’s role is the equivalent of a traditional full-time paid job of 40 or more hours a week in the labour market but, as I have said, our carers are not paid a salary. Instead they are paid a benefit, for those who meet the income and assets test criteria, or a carer payment or they may, under certain criteria, get a carer allowance. The carer allowance is not means tested, thankfully, but it is a comparatively small amount.

There are 2 million carers of working age, but they have to leave their jobs or they cannot enter the workforce or they work very substantially reduced hours because of the caring role that they undertake on behalf of the whole of our Australian society. Some 60 per cent of young primary carers, those aged between 15 and 25, are unemployed or not in the labour force. That is 60 per cent compared with 38 per cent of the same age group in the general population, and remember I have already said that Indigenous young people aged between 15 and 34 are almost twice as likely to be carers as non-Indigenous Australians. So imagine the handicap that those young Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians have when 60 per cent of them are not employed. They cannot be employed; they cannot go and get an apprenticeship to develop their future employment skills and make themselves employable because they have this caring function and take up this caring role.

Only 4 per cent of young primary carers aged 15 to 25 are still at school. That is 4 per cent compared to 23 per cent of the same age group in the general population. So they are out of school; they are not in work; they are not doing future education and training. This younger primary carer group was given particular recognition by the coalition when we were in government. We set up special inquiries and we wanted special scholarships for them to help them compensate for their lack of access to further education.

Unfortunately it is this young group of carers who today simply get ‘recognised’—nothing more—and I think that is a dreadful shame. It is an indictment on this place and this Labor government that more has not been done for those young primary carers because, after all, these young people will, in time, be very significantly handicapped in their opportunities to develop their full potential—their full employment potential and their capacity and time to have their own families and to care for many others besides the person they are caring for at this very young age.

Carer payment, as I said before, is subject to an income and assets test, but for a single person it is $658.40 and for a couple it is $496. It by no means compensates for the effort that these people put into looking after people too frail or disabled to be independent. The coali-
tion introduced the carer allowance. We made sure that there was support that was non-taxable, neither income nor assets tested, and paid through the social security income support payment. That was a very important measure we introduced.

When we were in government we particularly understood, as I said before, the significant problem for young carers. On 24 June 2009 Carers Australia released the final report from the Bring it! Young Carers Forum 2008. That report highlighted key messages and directions for the future that they hoped would assist young carers to identify care, study, work and access support.

I strongly recommend that the Labor government reads and responds to that report. Unfortunately we have not had a response. Those younger carers remain out there doing their incredible task, at the same time handicapping themselves for future full engagement in all of the opportunities this great country has to offer. It is one of my deep misgivings and sadnesses that the coalition was not re-elected, because our mental health budget was so significant. Certainly, compared to Labor, it was going to deliver real benefits to those with intellectual handicaps or mental illness, and there would also have been much better outcomes for carers. But we now have a minority Labor government, of course, and all we are getting today is this bill recognising the fact that these carers actually exist. The coalition understood too that respite was so important. We cannot burn out our carers and then expect them to somehow pick up the load.

Ms Hall—Why didn’t you do anything about it?

Dr STONE—The member for Shortland asked why we did not do something about it. I suggest she reads the record. When in government, the coalition developed a package of measures to improve the position of carers. We included more respite and the establishment of the National Respite for Carers Program. We actually did that. In 1999 we introduced the carer allowance. We also gave the first recognition to young carers and their specific needs through respite and information services. We funded the Young Carers Research Project in 2001 and in 2004 we funded the first carers’ summit, which was so important in having those young people step into this place. Some who were in parliament at the time remember that summit and the amazing, magnificent young people who took advantage of the opportunity. They told us what it was like to be looking after their loved ones, their elders in almost every case, and about the difficulties that they faced every day in trying to meet their own personal needs and their future employment and education needs, given that they were 100 per cent, seven days a week, 24 hours a day carers.

During the 2010 election the coalition released a range of policies to further assist people with a disability and carers, including a plan to establish a Commonwealth disability and care ombudsman and a $3 million policy to introduce a young carer scholarship. I commend the recommendations in our policy to the Labor government because they would make a difference to young people. When announcing her ministry, Julia Gillard forgot even to appoint a member of executive with specific portfolio responsibilities for disabilities and carers. What a disgrace! A few days later she rushed to fill the gap with an appointment of a parliamentary secretary. We had expected more because the then parliamentary secretary, Bill Shorten, had assured us that he really cared about the sector, the disability sector in particular. But then Prime Minister Gillard forgot to give someone responsibility for that area when she announced a new set of portfolios—quite extraordinary.
Let me quote from the Carers Alliance, a very important advocacy group. When they heard about this bill, in a media release of 18 March 2010 they said:

Carers Alliance is profoundly disappointed in the Carer Recognition Bill tabled yesterday … It is a very watered down version of what Carers Alliance has lobbied for in our campaign for family carers to be recognised by legal status with rights and entitlements to services … It is unfortunate, but this Bill is not even a first step, it is actually marking time, going nowhere and providing nothing but legislative platitudes. It is most unsatisfactory and very disappointing.

So I suggest the people in government right now go and talk to the Carers Alliance. I suggest you really do make sure that we go beyond the platitudes. Of course recognition is important, but what about legal status? What about better respite support? What about understanding that in my electorate, for example, there are 80-year-old women—and they are invariably women—who have been looking after adult sons and daughters with profound disabilities since their birth, and they are now worried sick about who is going to pick up the caring that they have been offering all of their lives to their sons and daughters if they themselves die.

We simply do not have the accommodation in our communities to replace the caring that parents have been providing in their homes. As the older carers transition into aged care support, we need to have places where their sons and daughters who need care can go during at least the daytime and then for overnight accommodation, before perhaps transitioning to care for 24 hours, seven days a week because their elderly parents will not be able to continue carrying the load.

All of those needs are out there, particularly in rural and regional Australia and in Indigenous communities. The bill before us from this government simply says: ‘Yes, we know these carers exist. Look, we are going to have a recognition bill.’ I say that you have got to do much more than that. The social inclusion agenda of the last government was a farce. The now Prime Minister carried that portfolio and I cannot think of a single thing she did to reduce social exclusion or to promote social inclusion in this society—not a single thing. All we saw was rural and regional people getting more and more distant from the resources and opportunities available in metropolitan Australia. We saw Indigenous Australians more isolated and disadvantaged, and I do not think that is fair.

Ms HALL (Shortland) (11.31 am)—If I had followed the member for Pearce I would have found myself agreeing with most of what she said, but I think the member for Murray has a very distorted vision of what the Howard government did when it was in power. Unlike the member for Murray, I did not just read the media release from the Carers Alliance—I actually spoke to them when the Parliamentary Friends of Epilepsy conducted an inquiry into the needs of people with epilepsy. I know the issues that are important to them. From my work in the electorate and from the number of people I have seen, I am also very aware of the challenges facing carers and the multitude of needs that they have.

I would also like to address the issue that the member for Murray raised about the Howard government introducing the carer allowance. The Howard government changed the name of the carer allowance. It was previously available but it was called by a different name. That was a very dishonest contribution to this important debate on the Carer Recognition Bill 2010.

I would like to acknowledge the work that the former member for Canberra, Annette Ellis, did in this area. She was totally committed to carers, to people with disabilities and to older people in our community. She chaired the Standing Committee on Family, Community, Hous-
ing and Youth inquiry, whose report, *Who Cares?...report on the inquiry into better support for carers*, was tabled during the last parliament. I know that she was passionate about this issue and passionate about ensuring that carers and those they cared for had a better deal.

This bill is committed to enshrining in law the Australian government’s recognition of the exceptional contribution made by carers throughout Australia. This is the first tranche in putting together a national carer recognition framework. This bill is the first element of that framework. It is not the answer; it is not the complete framework. It is the first part of our commitment to delivering to carers, and it responds to that wonderful report that so many members in this parliament put an enormous amount of effort into.

This legislation establishes a broad framework and encompasses the definition of carer. There are many definitions of carer and, whilst you have got a number of definitions, it muddies the waters. This legislation adopts a broad definition of carer. I think it is important that it is not narrow. It looks at encompassing all people who provide personal care, support and assistance to individuals who need support due to their disability and medical condition. That includes terminal or chronic illness, mental illness and fragility due to age.

A person will not be a carer for the purpose of this legislation simply because they are a spouse, de facto, parent or guardian. In other words, another person could be the carer for somebody even if they have a spouse or de facto. A person who provides support under a contract for services or as a volunteer for a community organisation is not entitled to be considered a carer under this legislation or because they live with an individual. I am sure all members of this parliament can cite examples where a carer lives in a separate dwelling, suburb even, and provides care to one or two individuals who live in a house. Quite often it will be a daughter or a son that is providing care to their parents or it could a be young person that is being provided support by a parent that lives at a different address.

I think it is important that the definition of a carer be flexible because, by putting in place a broad definition of carer, it ensures that people are not excluded from being considered as a carer on a technicality. That has happened in the past.

This bill also establishes the Statement for Australia’s Carers, which states key principles of how carers should be treated and considered. It establishes that all public service agencies should have an awareness and understanding of the Statement for Australia’s Carers and develop internal human resource policies, insofar as they may significantly affect an employee’s caring role with due regard to the statement.

The bill also establishes that public service agencies should take action to reflect the principles in the statement for carers in developing, implementing and providing or evaluating care, supports; consult with carers and involve them in the development or evaluation of care supports; and report on the compliance with the obligations established. It also establishes that associated providers should have an awareness and understanding of the Statement for Australia’s Carers and take action to reflect the principles in the statement in developing, implementing or providing evaluation of care supports.

This is a very important piece of legislation. There has been consultation with carers and it is very important that all stakeholders be involved in the development of legislation like this. For far too long, carers have provided the care, asked for nothing and often worried about the consequences of not being around to provide care particularly where parents will be caring for
their children in the future. Carers do a number of things—feeding, bathing, dressing, admin-
istering medications, transporting, banking, shopping and paying bills. Most importantly, car-
ers provide emotional support, day in and day out. That is why respite—which the member 
for Murray raised—is so important. Often the provision of respite can help the carer maintain 
that role.

One of the most mind-blowing experiences for me was when I visited a family in my elec-
torate with a young daughter who had developed muscular dystrophy. The mother was provid-
ing 24-hour care for her daughter—total love, total commitment. She would be up half a 
dozen times a night ensuring that her daughter continued to breathe. She was three or four 
years old and had developed muscular dystrophy at a very young age. Previous to that she had 
been a very happy young girl, running around and walking. Within a very short period, she 
was confined to a chair and needed intensive nursing care around the clock. The only thing 
which kept this mother going was respite care. I worked hard to increase her respite time.

This was when the coalition government was in power. I met with a number of parents who 
had children with profound disabilities and because of the definition ‘disability’ they were 
excluded from receiving the carers allowance. One mother whose child had a tracheotomy 
took her child to Centrelink and it was only when the Centrelink staff saw the child that they 
were prepared to pay carers allowance. This child was similar to the young girl I mentioned 
previously who had muscular dystrophy. This child had a different disability but needed inten-
sive care and because the boxes were difficult to tick—it was a narrow definition—it meant 
that the carers allowance was not payable. Coming back to the definition of ‘carer’ I think that 
having a broad definition of ‘carer’ is very important. If you do not have that broad definition, 
it is going to inadvertently exclude people. The last thing we, as a parliament, want to do is to 
exclude anybody who is providing care for vulnerable people—people with a disability, peo-
ple who are old, frail or have a terminal illness—from receiving support.

The former Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children’s Services, Bill Shorten, 
did an enormous amount of work in this area. I feel it is important to acknowledge the work 
that he did in relation to people with disabilities, which flowed on to providing support for 
carers and helping them in their roles as carers.

I would like to congratulate Minister Macklin on this legislation and not only on this legis-
lation. As I said at the commencement of my contribution to this debate, this is the first step in 
her total commitment to carers, to support them in the long term and bring in a tranche of im-
provements to legislation to ensure that all governments, across all areas, work together and 
are committed to acknowledging carers in all legislation. This is groundbreaking legislation 
for carers. It is the first step, and there will be many more because this government is commit-
ted to carers. I know that members on the other side of this House are also committed to car-
ers, particularly people like the member for Pearce, who has a long history of working to en-
sure that carers and those they care for have good quality of life. I commend the legislation to 
the House.

Mr HUNT (Flinders) (11.46 am)—It is a great honour to address this bill, the Carer Rec-
ognition Bill 2010, in relation to carers and the way in which they are treated and respected 
within our society. I want to proceed in three phases. I want to, firstly, address the essence of 
the bill and the status of carers in Australia; secondly, look at the particular circumstances of
children who operate as carers of parents with mental illness; and then, thirdly, address the maltreatment of one particular person, Robert Rice, and call for action on that immediately.

Let me deal first with the circumstances of carers in Australia. We know that there are at least 2.6 million unpaid carers in Australia. Their work is profound. The role that they play is socially critical. Yes, they take financial pressure off the Commonwealth but, much more importantly, they provide a human service and they help to create a strong society with a tendency towards greatness if they are given the ability and the support they need. Seventy-nine per cent of assistance required by Australians due to disability or illness is provided by these unpaid carers. If we take the entire state system and multiply that by four, that gives us the scope, the scale, the magnitude, of the work of the voluntary carer—the unpaid carer. So that is vitally important. The way in which we support them through the carer payment and the carer allowance, advances made under the previous government, is a sign of our health as a nation. This bill is a valuable step forward, although it is primarily about definitions and words and not about money. That, I accept, is the stage we are at. But the bill builds on the definition of ‘carer’ to broaden it, and that is a welcome element.

We know that there are 380,000 carers under the age of 26—young people who care for people with illnesses including congenital conditions and mental health illnesses. Of those, 170,000 are under the age of 18. That brings me to the issue of carers who are children looking after parents with mental illness. I was recently approached, on the basis of my own family circumstances, to be the patron of the Satellite Foundation. It has been a great opportunity. As a standard Australian male I did not talk about my mother’s circumstances for two decades, but an event led me to do so and that in turn led to my association with the Satellite Foundation.

What I would commend to the House is a proposal as an individual member of this parliament, not as a member of the Liberal Party or as a member of another party. It is not my party’s policy and it is not the Labor Party’s policy; it is something which I will seek to be policy on a non-partisan basis right across the House. My proposal is that there should be for young people who are caring for parents with a mental illness a program which would involve what I would call ‘camps and counselling’. It is a four-year program which we launched with the Satellite Foundation. They have valued this program at appropriately $5 million per annum. That is a starting point. We are happy to negotiate with either side of the House. At $5 million per annum over four years, the program would provide up to 8,000 places for either counselling or camps for children across the country who are taking care of parents with a mental illness.

I recently visited the Weston family in Ringwood. I will use their name because they were photographed and allowed themselves to be considered in the Australian newspaper. They are very fine people. The family consists of mum and dad and five kids. The middle child, Ethan, has quite significant Down syndrome conditions. Mum has suffered from some very, very traumatic mental illnesses but has been a great survivor. Dad is caring and the kids also have a very important caring role. These are the sorts of people who should have access to an ongoing process of constructive counselling, camps and retreats, a place of respite, on an annual basis—not as victims but as people who need to have support on the journey and to know that they are not alone.
To be able to help these people and thousands of other young carers is a profoundly important step forward. It is the niche within mental health that I wish to focus on. There are many people in this parliament and outside of this parliament who are doing great work, but I believe this is a gap. Over the course of this term, I want to work with both sides of parliament to achieve that allocation of funding. It is important, and I am very hopeful that we can do it on a non-partisan basis, with universal support. That would be a small step forward for the many thousands of children who, through no fault of their own, have an enormous weight to bear way beyond that of their years.

The third element that I want to raise in this speech is about a particular person who has been, in my view, badly treated under the current government. Robert Rice is an Australian veteran. He served with distinction in Bougainville and in Afghanistan. He is not a carer in the traditional sense, but as this bill is about the definition of 'carer' I think it is important that we consider his circumstances. As a decorated veteran from Bougainville and Afghanistan, he sought to make his way in small business. He was drawn into the government’s Green Loans program and paid $3,000 to go through the training and then, within a matter of days after making that outlay and completing that payment, the program was cancelled. He believed that it would be restarted, but that never occurred. He therefore lost possible income, and he has just had to sell his campaign medals. This Australian veteran, who, because of a government program, has had to sell his campaign medals, is a symbol of the thousands of assessors who trained, worked and sought to do something for the environment and then were betrayed by the government.

The message is very clear: there must be redress for Robert Rice so that he can regain his campaign medals and there must be redress for the other Green Loans assessors who are out of pocket. I would urge the Prime Minister to take up by the end of today Mr Rice’s case and the case for compensation, on a modest scale, for those assessors, those Australian small business people, who sought to do the right thing. I am happy to draw to a conclusion and to commend the bill but to seek action on behalf of Mr Rice.

Ms O’Neill (Robertson) (11.55 am)—It gives me great pleasure to speak today to this important piece of legislation—the Carer Recognition Bill 2010. This is Carers Week, so the timing of this debate could not be better. In the week that we shine the light on the work of carers around the country, it is perfect that we move in this House to establish a legislative framework for those who give care voluntarily to others in need. The purpose of this legislation is to increase the recognition and awareness of informal carers and to acknowledge the valuable—indeed, I would argue, invaluable—role that they play in our community.

I feel uncomfortable reducing the act of caring to a crude dollar value, because caring is so much more important than that. It is significant, however, and worth noting, as others already have in this debate, that Access Economics puts the annual replacement value of informal care provided by unpaid carers at more than $40 billion. When he spoke of that research earlier this week, the Minister for Mental Health and Ageing, the member for Port Adelaide, said that this research shows a 33 per cent increase in the value of replacement care over the past five years. That is a factor that Access Economics attributes largely to our ageing population. A figure of $40 billion is breathtaking on its own; but the overall dollar value and its growth really brings home to me how important our national response to our ageing population is
going to be, particularly in the context of the kinds of demographic challenges outlined in this
year’s *Intergenerational report*.

Throughout this year, I have heard many on the Labor side talk seriously about the chal-
lenges. We have heard all the projections that the number of older people aged between 65
and 84 years will more than double and that the number of very old people—85 and over—
will more than quadruple between now and 2050. Especially this week, Carers Week, we
should all reflect on how much of this burden of care will be borne by carers.

There is really no price we can put on the work of carers in our community. Setting aside
crude dollar values, the sheer number of carers in our community is quite staggering. In my
state of New South Wales there are said to be something of the vicinity of 750,000 carers.
That is about one in 10 people. All of us know several carers. They are people who give from
the heart. Carers can be relatives, friends or neighbours, and there are few boundaries when it
comes to giving care. Carers Australia has this year again made the theme of carers week
‘anyone, anytime’. The motto reminds us all that anyone at anytime could become a carer or
indeed become the subject of care.

This legislation establishes a broad definition of who is a carer. The Statement for Austra-
lia’s Carers in schedule 1 of this bill gives 10 key principles of how carers should be treated
and considered. They range from the basic principle that ‘all carers should have the same
rights, choices and opportunities as other Australians’ to stating that ‘support for carers should
be timely, responsive, appropriate and accessible’.

The legislation does not create an enforceable right or obligation. It is a framework to in-
crease recognition and awareness of informal carers. It does, however, create an obligation on
Public Service agencies and associated providers to take all practicable measures to ensure
their employees have an awareness and an understanding of the Statement for Australia’s Car-
ers.

The bill will also establish reporting requirements for the Australian Public Service. I sin-
cerely hope and expect that this will lead to carers leave becoming easier to access for mem-
ers of the Australian Public Service and associated providers. This service has a responsibil-
ity to be a model employer when it comes to granting carers leave. Anecdotally, I hear that it
does not always live up to its responsibility in this regard. I hope this legislation leads to an
improvement in that area. I know that carers in the Australian Public Service will be watching
closely and waiting for that consultation to occur.

Creating a national workplace culture in which carers leave is seen as a matter of course
not a privilege to be dispensed according to whim of the HR line manager is something all
political parties should encourage. So why, some may ask, do we need a statement of prin-
ciples? From an educational perspective, I think the answer is because our values need constant
reinforcement. I definitely understand that there is power in words to articulate our beliefs.
This piece of legislation seeks to articulate a new understanding that is growing in Australia
about the place of carers. Principles are indeed the way that we express our beliefs in such a
way to form a model for how we might enact those beliefs, how we might bring those beliefs
into the public place. It provides us with a core document upon which we can reflect, a docu-
ment that provides a range of statements against which we must measure our success, as we
move towards enacting them every day.
Research I have read most recently about the centrality of beliefs and the way we interact in our world indicates that without words that express our values, without considering our values and articulating them, and understanding them deeply, we can get caught in older sets of beliefs that can contain our possibility to respond to new challenges. In this piece of legislation, we have an articulation of beliefs against which we will measure our success. When we are in complex situations, research tends to show that we return to our beliefs. This piece of legislation is a very appropriate 2010 articulation of our deep belief, our growing understanding as Australians, of the place of carers and the role they play in our society.

Pardon me, Madam Deputy Speaker Bird, for waxing lyrical a little academically, but it is a field in which I have pursued some study. In short, defining what we want our values to be, putting them down on paper, debating them in our legislature and passing legislation are all important steps in the public process of prioritising the role of carers in our society. From a government policy perspective, this bill is the first element in the development of a national carer recognition framework, which is central to the government’s response to last year’s House of Representatives standing committee report on carers. It would be remiss of me not to note the contribution here of the former member for Canberra who chaired that committee and the deputy chair, the member for Pearce, who spoke earlier in this debate today. The acknowledgement of carers is an area I anticipate will enjoy strong and constructive bipartisan support and I look forward to engaging with my colleagues on advancing the interests of carers as best we can.

I note that this legislation will not exclude similar state or territory laws. Other states such as South Australia, Western Australia, the Northern Territory and Queensland already have their own carers charters. My state, New South Wales, passed its own Carers Recognition Bill through its parliament on 12 May this year with bipartisan support. I am pleased to note that the New South Wales act even established a Ministerial Advisory Council for Carers. The state Minister for Disability Services, Peter Primrose, is the chair of that council. Those who know Peter know he is one of the great gentlemen of the Labor Party movement. Peter and his wife, Jan, have given political care to many of their fellow party members over many years. I am very pleased to hear that the New South Wales carers advisory council that Peter will chair has committed to having diverse membership—Aboriginal carers, carers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, people caring for a family member with a physical or intellectual disability, young and ageing carers, those caring for people with mental illnesses, carers of people with a chronic illness and carers from both rural and remote areas. Our intention at federal government level is, of course, not to curtail any positive initiatives such as these and that others may pursue in their respective jurisdictions.

Before I conclude my remarks on the legislation, I would like to close by congratulating Central Coast carer groups who have been marking Carers Week and to acknowledge the great work that they do in our community. I have spoken to a number of their representatives and conveyed my best wishes. The parent support group at Glenvale Special School in Narara, which is in Robertson, have marked Carers Week—meeting just yesterday at the school—and next week will be holding a carers barbecue to support the work the parents to. Glenvale has its main campus in Narara in the seat of Robertson and a smaller campus at The Entrance North. The latter happens to be in the member for Dobell’s electorate. As with many
aspects of regional life on the Central Coast, caring has no borders. I am sure the member for Dobell will not mind me congratulating the parents and supporters of Glenvale on his behalf.

Back in Robertson in Kincumber, the Kincumber Carers Support Group held a pamper morning yesterday. June Galea, a local community worker, was critical in gathering together five local therapists who offered their services to support carers. In June’s own words, she said that carers were so used to giving that they had trouble actually receiving the care that was on offer to them. I am pleased to note that DADHC and Carers NSW provided $250 towards lunch for the day. The member for Blair indicated the funding line that allows such a celebration to occur. Our local carers were able to enjoy a morning tea, enjoy a fully catered lunch and also in between had access to reiki massage, neck and shoulder massage, manicure and pedicure. I am thinking it might have been a very nice place to be yesterday to be a carer at Kincumber. Kincumber is an area the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs knows well, because she came there not long ago and officially opened the men’s shed, a terrific venue, where there is also a lot of care given.

Carers in my region also a celebrated Carers Week yesterday with the Walk of Pride. This was the mental health carers ARAFMI group, who coordinated through Rhonda Wilson. This is the second year that the march has actually happened and it follows on from an example they saw from the Newcastle area. ‘Proud to care’ is the motto that they wanted to convey. They aimed not only to signify that they are engaged in caring and that they are proud to care but to reduce stigma about mental health and mental ill health, in particular, in the community. We want to make sure the community better understands mental health and through that they find a way, again, to support the people they are engaged in caring for.

I will conclude with one final anecdote about a Central Coast man who sought out my help. I met him on the street as I was campaigning in the most recent federal election. To secure his anonymity I am simply going to call him ‘Jack’ and his lovely wife ‘Jill’. Jack and Jill married later in life and have a great affection for one another. Jill was a disabled person when they married. Jack understood fully the care that that would entail. Most recently Jill had a fall and was hospitalised. The greatest fear that Jack and Jill have was that their lives would be very much impacted by a shift to a nursing home for Jill rather than being able to bring her home.

The critical incident made them aware that they needed to find a new hoist mechanism at home. The search for that equipment and assistance in seeking funding to provide that in their home and maintain care has taken up all of their time. I am pleased to have been able to support them in some way towards that end. The journey continues. But this fine gentlemen’s love for his wife, his courage, his determination, really serves as an inspiration to all of us in our work in advancing the interests of carers across the country. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr RIPOLL (Oxley) (12.09 pm)—It is a great pleasure to speak on the Carer Recognition Bill 2010 and also a pleasure to hear the contributions of others on this bill. It is a really important bill and gives people an opportunity to talk about some exceptional people in their own electorates and what this bill represents in terms of what they do throughout their whole lives. I too, like many others in this place, have had the great privilege of coming into contact with carers and with carer families who look after family members and other people. It is very humbling to meet and talk with them about their circumstances and the issues they face on a
day-to-day basis, and to understand just how deep the commitment is to become a carer, to care for somebody else. It requires an enormous amount of commitment and effort. So it is just a small and humbling experience for me to be able to support this Carer Recognition Bill and talk a little bit about why this government supports the principles in the bill—as I believe everyone in this parliament would support them—and what they mean to carers.

The Carer Recognition Bill 2010 establishes a legislative framework around the idea that we need to increase recognition and awareness of informal carers—those who are not in a paid or structured career; those who are not directly employed to care for somebody else—and acknowledges the very valuable contribution that they make to society. While this bill is particularly about that, I want to note that I also have a little place in my heart for all the people who are professional carers—people who work in facilities looking after the frail, the aged and people with disabilities. I have come into contact with many of those people as well, and realised that, much beyond their professional contribution, much beyond what they are actually paid to do, they make a personal contribution. They become personally attached, many times, to the people they care for, and feel a deep connection with and affection for those people. They will often do things well and truly beyond the call of duty.

I want to make just a brief mention of Di Bates in my electorate and the organisation she started four years ago called Daniel’s Shield. She started awards to recognise the work of carers. She felt that there was a gap. She felt we should in some way recognise or pay tribute to people who care for others. The work that she has done has been absolutely fabulous. I was at the most recent awards, just weeks ago, and really got to see and understand just how much work, effort and care goes into being a carer, whether you are a professional carer—someone who is paid to do it—or an informal carer. And informal carers are the people we are recognising in this bill. So I have a great deal of respect for all of those people who consider themselves carers, and I will talk about the definition of ‘a carer’ in a moment.

What this bill does is to establish a definition of a carer. I think that is important, so that people can not only relate to what this bill is about but also consider themselves fully in that sense: ‘I am a carer; I define myself as a carer—but so does legislation; so does the government. I am properly recognised for what I do.’ The bill also establishes—I think very importantly—a statement for Australia’s carers. That will state key principles for how Australia’s carers should be treated themselves, and how they should be considered. I think that is something that has been lacking.

Often, we do not quite understand that relationship that a carer has with government departments, with agencies, with the commercial world, with other people and with the community, and that has been a problem for many years. This bill will remove those problems over time, and I think those principles will be something that carers themselves will enshrine, and hopefully others will as well. The way that this bill does that is by establishing the principles and providing that all public service agencies should have an awareness and understanding of the Statement for Australia’s Carers and then develop, internally, their own mechanisms and systems to make sure they can adhere to those policies and to make sure that, if they are dealing with people or if people are employed through those agencies, they understand the role that they play as carers. I think that is a very important step towards making sure that we do give due regard to the role of carers and to this Statement for Australia’s Carers.
This bill also establishes that the Public Service care agencies should actually take direct action. What they should do is reflect in their policy and in their work the principles in this Statement for Australia’s Carers. They should do that when they are providing or evaluating care support and in the way they consult with carers to involve them in the development and/or evaluation of care support. They also have an obligation to report on their compliance. It also establishes that associated providers should have an awareness and understanding of this. So this is about other people and other providers who also interact with carers.

These are very real issues. I recall on many occasions talking to carers about some of the problems they face. Often it is that no-one understands their role—that government agencies do not understand and that care provider associations in the community do not understand. They do not understand their responsibility and the role that they actually play. It is almost as if they are sidelined in the process of a particular service or a matter that needs to be dealt with for the person they are caring for. The principal person who should be part of that process is the carer themselves. They will have the deepest relationship with and the best understanding of the person they are caring for. They will have their best interests at heart. So what this recognition bill does is to help provide mechanisms for that and make sure that the Statement for Australia’s Carers is reflected in the developing, implementing and providing of evaluation, care and support.

It is not intended that this bill establishes in any way a particular charter, a carers’ rights definition or any enforceable obligations binding on carers or entities affected by this legislation—or, for that matter, the Commonwealth. It is not intended to do that. It is intended to be about setting a base of values, of recognition, of bringing forward the connection between what carers do, the people they look after and the services that are provided—and giving them some scope and some definition around what it is they do and the role that they play.

For the purposes of this act, a carer is an individual. A carer is defined in this act as an individual who provides personal care, support and assistance to another individual who needs that support because of a range of things—either their disability; their medical condition, whether that be terminal or chronic illness; whether they have a mental illness or whether they are frail and aged. An individual, though, is not a carer in respect of care, support and assistance that he or she provides if that is under a contract for the provision of services or in the course of doing voluntary work for a charitable, welfare or community organisation—or for that matter as part of the requirements of education or training. We set out to make this clear so that there is no confusion about who this relates to and the different obligations that organisations will have as opposed to individuals. This really is about informal carers rather than those who are employed in some particular capacity or who volunteer for a particular organisation who may receive funding as a matter of course for their work.

In summing up, there is a range of things that I think are important in terms of what this statement for Australian carers is. All carers should have the same rights, they should have the same choices and opportunities—regardless of their age, sex, disability, political beliefs and so on—as every other Australian. It is important that we acknowledge that, and that they understand that we acknowledge that. Regardless of their ethnicity, their heritage or their cultural background everyone should have these same rights and those rights should be recognised. Children and young people who are carers should also have the same rights as all other children. These young people should be supported to reach their full potential as well. It is the
case that some young people end up being carers. Often they are sidelined in the process of care because of their age, and that should not be the case; they should have the same opportunities that other young people have.

The valuable social and economic contribution that carers make to society should also be recognised and supported. I think we can all play a role in that. I think we can do it in our own electorates. We can do it when we hold community events and when we have our own community awards. I host the Oxley community awards in my electorate, where I look to recognise people in the community who by any other means do not really get recognised. Sometimes they are people without a voice or people who are not formally recognised in any particular other way. Over the years in doing these awards I myself have been the one who has been enriched. I have managed to bring together or in a way provide a forum for people who are quite isolated in the community so that they can understand that there are other people like them, there are people in the community who do great deeds for others. We recognise also the relationship between carers and people who are themselves cared for.

This is a good bill. I know it will be supported by everyone in the parliament. It is the right course of action as part of this government’s 10-year plan to recognise fully the work of carers in this country.

Mr GEORGANAS (Hindmarsh) (12.20 pm)—I too rise in support of the Carer Recognition Bill 2010. In this bill we recognise: people’s love and dedication for their loved ones; people’s desires to see their family members live as normal a life as possible; people’s commitment to their parents, their spouse, their children, their brothers and sisters; and people’s loving sacrifice of time, energy and a large part of their own lives to the health and happiness of those for whom they care.

In our electorates we all hear stories of people who put their lives on hold to work very hard in the home, caring for their loved ones—these are stories of unswerving dedication, acute expressions of love. Some stories we hear are absolutely jaw-dropping. In some instances, such stories are almost painful to hear and bring a tear to the eyes of all of us. But mostly such stories show the dedication and the work—performed day in, day out, year after year—which is nothing short of awesome, and it is inspirational to many people.

It is always sad to learn of the condition of a person who requires care, whether the person is aged, in ill-health, suffering a progressive disease or mentally ill. Many of us empathise with the person requiring care and feel for his or her loss or absence of independence. It can be very sad to see people in need of care. This may especially be the case where memories are fresh of a strong, independent person whose life is now a shadow of what it was in his or her prime.

There are also the young—the children, who through no fault of their own have happened upon circumstances which severely limit their life options, their ability to grow as a person, the possibility of a long and healthy life. The loss or absence of what most of us take for granted can be sad. I believe when we consider carers—what they do and how they must approach their work—we should consider how they too suffer pain in seeing their loved ones suffer.

Carers endure the work itself—sometimes thankless work, even dangerous work at some points. But, as if that were not enough, they may also have to endure the slow slipping away
of their loved one over many years. Such an experience could be the worst that anyone anywhere might endure. I am sure we have all had contact with carers in our electorates. We have heard heart-wrenching stories of painful experiences that last for years and we are all amazed at the resilience of these carers. We stand in full admiration of carers' commitment to their loved ones.

Nothing could be more appropriate than this parliament—and governments and councils across the land—expressing its support for those who deliver so much support themselves. Nothing could be more just than recognising and supporting the work and sacrifices made by carers. There has been some recognition of carers and some support for them in the work they do. Some of this recognition has been introduced by the current government and is inherently positive, and this is very good. But I believe nothing can surmount what many carers go through. Nothing will outweigh the pain and heartache of loving a family member who has always loved you but now does not even know your name. That is why this bill is extremely important. I support the bill and commend it to the House.

Ms Collins (Franklin—Parliamentary Secretary for Community Services) (12.25 pm)—in reply—Australia's carers, through their dedication and hard work, enrich community life and are an inspiration to us all. The government is determined to give carers the acknowledgment of their role which they so clearly deserve. The need to give recognition to carers was emphasised when the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth tabled its report Who Cares...?: Report on the inquiry into better support for carers. Central to the government's response to this inquiry was the commitment from the Commonwealth to lead the development of a national carer recognition framework. The Carer Recognition Bill 2010 is the first element of the framework. It formally acknowledges the vital contribution that carers make to Australian society and complements carer recognition legislation already in some states and territories.

There are several key elements to the bill. Firstly, the bill establishes a broad and encompassing definition of 'carer'. This definition captures the diversity of carers and care relationships. Importantly, the bill sets out a statement for Australia's carers. The statement contains 10 key principles that set out how carers should be treated and considered in policy development and program and service delivery. This includes the fundamental principle that all carers should have the same rights, choices and opportunities as other Australians.

All public service agencies will be required to take all practical measures to ensure their staff have an awareness and understanding of the principles in the statement. This includes the direction that all public service agencies should have due regard to the statement for Australia's carers. The statement contains 10 key principles that set out how carers should be treated and considered in policy development and program and service delivery. This includes the fundamental principle that all carers should have the same rights, choices and opportunities as other Australians.

All public service agencies will be required to take all practical measures to ensure their staff have an awareness and understanding of the principles in the statement. This includes the direction that all public service agencies should have due regard to the statement for Australia's carers when developing human resource policies that significantly affect an employee's caring role. Public service agencies with responsibilities for policies, programs and services that affect carers and the people they care for will have additional obligations under the legislation. These agencies need to ensure that their staff take action to reflect the statement's principles when developing, implementing, providing or evaluating policies, programs or services directed to carers or the people for whom they care. These agencies will also be required to consult with carers and the bodies that represent them in the development and evaluation of relevant policies, programs and services. These agencies will be required to report publicly in their annual reports on their compliance with their obligations under the legislation.
Critically, the legislation also extends to associated providers, people or bodies contracted or funded by Australian government public service agencies with responsibility for policies, programs and services that affect carers and the people that they care for, and their immediate subcontractors. These associated providers will need to ensure staff and agents have awareness and understanding of the statement’s principles and take action to reflect the principles when they develop, implement, provide or evaluate policies, programs or services.

The bill supports the work the government is undertaking to reform the system of supports for carers and the people for whom they care. It recognises that carers should have the opportunities and the capability to enjoy optimum health and wellbeing, and social and economic participation. Implementation of the bill will drive increased awareness and understanding of the role and contribution of carers as well as drive a much-needed cultural and attitudinal shift so that carers’ interests are taken into account by public service agencies and service providers.

The bill recognises in law the valuable social and economic contribution as well as the many personal sacrifices that carers make. It delivers on the government’s commitment to provide better support for carers so that they have the same opportunities as other Australians to live healthy, happy lives and reach their full potential.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Ordered that this bill be reported to the House without amendment.

BUSINESS

Ms OWENS (Parramatta) (12.29 pm)—I move:

That the Commission of Inquiry into the Building the Education Revolution Program Bill 2010 and the Evidence Amendment (Journalists’ Privilege) Bill 2010 be returned to the House for further consideration.

Question agreed to.

ADJOURNMENT

Ms OWENS (Parramatta) (12.30 pm)—I move:

That the Main Committee do now adjourn.

Agriculture

Ms MARINO (Forrest) (12.30 pm)—Australia’s farmers have an international worldwide reputation for producing safe and high-quality food products. In the OECD’s ‘Food safety performance world ranking 2008’, Australia was one of the top five performing countries, all of whose food safety standards were rated as superior. The top five were the UK, Japan, Denmark, Australia and Canada. The other OECD countries tested were rated average or poor. Can you imagine the results if the same test with the same standards was applied to non-OECD nations? There is no doubting the quality of Australia’s food production. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade advises that Australia has a worldwide reputation for producing superior quality premium food and Australian food producers are committed to providing the highest international standards of quality, management and food safety. But how are Australian farmers recognised and rewarded for the work they do to achieve this?
The income derived from food production certainly does not reflect the investment, the work or the risk involved. The income and profits of Australia’s food producers is lower than other industries. Farm incomes compare poorly to the average Australian income, as demonstrated in this graph I have that shows that farming families are overrepresented in incomes from $200 to $1,000 a week and from $10,400 to $52,000 a year. It should be noted that, in the general category, pensioners and welfare recipients are included and dominate in the $200 to $400 category. But the number of farming families on the equivalent of welfare incomes, despite working, is surely a significant and pressing issue for this House and this parliament.

The number of farming families with a negative income is, in my view, a national disgrace. The low comparative level of income is particularly important when the cost of capital is considered. A return on investment of two per cent is considered completely inadequate in business circles but represents an average return to farms. This is another driving force pushing farmers out of food production—and this is for our innovative, progressive farmers. According to the Western Australian department of agriculture, the broadacre region of Western Australia averaged a rate of return to capital of around two per cent from 1989 to 2002-03. In comparison, the business world usually works on a minimum acceptable rate of return, or hurdle rate, of 12 per cent.

The good news is that should the Labor Party plan to apply a superprofits tax to farmers, as they proposed for miners, which would kick in at almost six per cent, almost no farmer would have to pay. The bad news is that poor returns on investments are driving the current generation of farmers out of food production industries and, unfortunately, keeping the next generation away. The number of farmers, especially on family farms, is declining and that is a concern for all of us. The ABS have reported that farming families may leave agriculture for a variety of reasons that include personal or retirement, economic, industry restructuring or environmental such as drought. They said that between 1986 and 2001 the number of farmers leaving agriculture was greatest during periods of high commodity prices as land values were high and neighbouring farms had the financial capacity to expand. The decline in the number of farming families from 145,000 in 1986 to 120,000 in 1991 was partly influenced by favourable economic conditions. The lower commodity prices in broadacre industries through the 1990s resulted in some farmers delaying their decision to retire, leaving farming or handing over farming to their children. As a result, the number of farming families declined by smaller amounts between 1991 and 1996 and between 1996 and 2001. This indicates that poor economic returns are a driver of farmers exiting the industry, resulting in farm consolidation and the semi-urban encroachment.

It is apparent that many farmers are struggling to make commercial returns. They are also struggling to sell their farm asset, having to wait for a good year to achieve both. Many have to wait for upturns of economic cycles to be able to attract prices to make selling feasible. In layman’s terms, farmers are hanging out for a good season with reasonable prices, not to get ahead to prepare for the future but just so they can sell the family farm and get out. I would ask: is this the legacy that we want to leave with our farming community and our nation?

I support our farmers and our food and fibre producers. I recognise that the farm gate price for our agricultural products has really lost touch with the retail price. Labor government cuts to a range of programs, including the agricultural research of the department of agriculture budget, eliminating the farm business training programs, slashing 25 per cent from environ-
mental stewardship programs and the abolishment of $54 million from the national food innovation strategy—these are all factors that contribute to the issues affecting farmers now and in our future.

As I said, when you look at the retail price it certainly makes it extremely difficult for our growers to be commercial in this environment. Recently I saw $2 and eight or nine cents for a two-litre carton of milk in a supermarket. That is great, but when you look at what that translates back to the grower we have a problem. (Time expired)

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)**—The honourable member’s time has expired, and the honourable member was somewhat fortunate because there was a problem initially with the clock. I think the honourable member got 6½ minutes. Having said that, she obviously had all the material necessary to fill that period of time!

### Forestry

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM** (Braddon) (12.36 pm)—Colleagues may remember from my question in question time on Tuesday that sections of the forest industry and the environmental movement signed the Tasmanian Forests Statement of Principles, a document that sets the scope for nine to 12 months of negotiations to end the acrimonious debate over forestry.

To reach a lasting solution will require enormous goodwill, faith and trust from all parties. I know that there are sceptics about the possibilities of a lasting agreement and peace in our forests. Indeed, given the long history of our forests being used as a political battleground by and for a variety of interests and causes, and the ability to contain these battles within the geographical confines of our island state for the purposes of media and activist propaganda, it is little wonder that such hard-nosed scepticism exists. However, I, along with others such as the managing director of Forestry Tasmania, Bob Gordon, are on the side of the angels and believe an agreement is possible—an agreement to grow the forest industry and to finally achieve global recognition for Tasmania’s stewardship of the forests.

I was pleased to note the positive response of Forestry Tasmania to the statement of principles, and its willingness to sit down with ENGO negotiators, in good faith, to work through the process of implementing a moratorium of some 39 coupes outlined in the agreement. This will be a contentious process, and I am encouraged by the willingness in good faith of Forestry Tasmania to make this happen. However, it is a process requiring good faith on all sides, and it is important that forest contractors are not financially disadvantaged if current contractual arrangements are affected by locking up coupes. I am pleased to note Forestry Tasmania’s stated commitment to fully consult with the Tasmanian Forest Contractors Association and the relevant unions.

According to Forestry Tasmania estimates, the cost of relocating will be in the order of $5,000 for each contractor, and the Tasmanian government has confirmed that it will cover those costs if and when they are asked to relocate. In a demonstration of good faith, Bob Gordon has argued that by implementing the moratorium as quickly as possible it will remove the burr under the saddle, as he puts it—one of the irritants that can inflame passions and prevent open and meaningful dialogue. I would add, however, that one of those irritants will be issuing a media release of what you are going to do before you consult with the parties affected by it. I would certainly put that warning on notice.
I note also that as another gesture of goodwill in this process, and to leave the conflict of the past behind, Forestry Tasmania has asked the Tasmania Police not to proceed with charges brought against 11 of the 21 people charged over the so-called Mother’s Day protest in the Florentine who are due to appear in court on trespass charges on Monday of next week.

Importantly, Forestry Tasmania has clearly stated its intention to show good faith in their current customers, with a significant number residing in my electorate. Indeed, I note that Bob Gordon clearly asserts in his report in the latest edition of Branchline of Wednesday 20 October:

… the Statement of Principles indicate a clear commitment by the ENGOs to deliver a sustainable quantity and quality of wood supply to keep the saw and rotary peeled veneer mills going. There’s also a clear commitment that Forestry Tasmania will be allowed to meet its contractual obligations.

We have arranged meetings with sawmillers this week. We believe there will be sufficient sawlog resource to provide certainty for sawmills other than those operated by Gunns.

I spoke on forestry and its importance to Tasmania and my region only last Monday evening and finished by saying how crucial it was that the agreement honour existing wood supply contracts to sawmillers and processors in my region, such as Ta Ann and Britton Timbers, located at Smithton. Like Forestry Tasmania, I expect these contracts to be honoured and resource security guaranteed into the future. I agree with Bob Gordon that the industry is on the cusp of a period of considerable uncertainty. Great change is indeed upon us, but as Bob himself says, ‘Properly managed, we can achieve an orderly transition to a new era of cooperation, and hopefully growth.’ I too want to see the industry grow in peace, and part of this will require certainty for and support of value-adding enterprises such as Ta Ann and Britton Timbers.

I acknowledge the work of people like Michael O’Connor from the CFMEU, Environment Tasmania, the Wilderness Society, the Australian Conservation Foundation, the Forest Contractors Association and others in bringing about the principles of the agreement and I look forward to them being implemented in good faith and goodwill. (Time expired)

Mental Health Services

Ms O’Dwyer (Higgins) (12.41 pm)—I rise to speak on a recent decision by the Rudd-Gillard, now Gillard, government which will severely affect access to mental health services both nationally and in my electorate of Higgins. Under the Better Access to Mental Health Care program, social workers and occupational therapists have been able to bulk-bill clients with non-acute mental illnesses. But in changes announced in the last federal budget the government has decided to scrap this rebate.

The previous coalition government introduced the Better Access to Mental Health Care program in 2006. The program has successfully created an integrated mental health network that provides a greater range of services for those suffering from mental health problems as well as more choice and vastly improved accessibility. The program added new healthcare items and services to the Medicare Benefits Schedule to allow patients to claim Medicare rebates on mental health treatment with registered providers. The program has provided a structured framework for GPs to undertake early intervention, assessment and management of patients with mental disorders. It also provided people with a network of psychiatrists, clinical psychologists and social workers to enhance the accessibility of mental health services.
The new framework has provided marked benefits to the health and wellbeing of our community over a long period of time. The health and happiness of our community is important not only for the social benefits that it brings but also for our economy. Mental illness impacts directly on the productivity of our workforce—from the number of days that people are absent from the workforce, through to people actually being able to commence and continue working at all. It is vital that mental health patients have the best possible choice and range of services.

In Labor’s last budget it removed social workers and occupational therapists from the Better Access to Mental Health Services program. The role that social workers and occupational therapists play in our health system is vital. They offer an important range of skills and expertise that are tailored to the specific needs of the patient. Often they will be in a better position to understand the issues facing the patient and the appropriate methods of treatment. They are also very cost effective. Labor’s decision to remove these important services from the budget was an ill-considered one and will have a dramatic and direct impact on vulnerable mental health patients. It is unfortunate that Labor’s reckless debt and spending and its fiscal mismanagement have led to cuts in such an important area. I believe that the long-term costs of this decision will far outweigh any short-term budget saving that the government was hoping to achieve.

Families in my electorate of Higgins have raised with me serious concerns about access if these cuts are allowed to proceed. One mental health service provider in my area is the Delta Centre, which provides services in Malvern. It offers to hundreds of people in the local area a variety of Medicare covered mental health services by highly experienced and trained occupational therapists and social workers. If the cuts proposed by the government proceed as planned, the loss of mental health services and expertise and the reduced access to services will be felt not just in my electorate but throughout Australia.

By contrast, we in the coalition have a vision for mental health care. I was proud of the coalition’s widely praised $1.5 billion Real Action Plan for Better Mental Health. The National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing in 2007 found that one in five Australian adults experience mental illness in any year. One in four of these people experience more than one disorder. The survey also shows clearly the importance of health providers in treating mental health problems. One in three people with a 12-month mental disorder used health services for mental health problems over the course of the 12 months. This amounts to 1.1 million Australians who rely on these services for treatment. The coalition’s policy focused on early intervention and early access is one that recognises the depth of mental health problems in our community and the debilitating effect that they can have on those who suffer from them and the families that support them.

Mental health issues can affect people regardless of the socioeconomic background that they might have. Our policy is one that puts mental health on the same level as physical health as a factor that determines the overall wellbeing of individuals. The coalition’s plan to build a new system of care will take pressure off existing health services. It is a pity that the government did not embrace it. (Time expired)

**Dobell Electorate: Water**

Mr CRAIG THOMSON (Dobell) (12.46 pm)—I rise to talk about the water supply on the Central Coast, what this government has done to droughtproof the Central Coast and also some misguided actions that have been taken by the Wyong Shire Council. First of all, it is
welcome news that we all received yesterday: New South Wales is now over a nine-year drought. It is stark contrast when we look back to April of 2003, when drought was declared over 99.5 per cent of the state. In my electorate, following a 12-month campaign that I ran in 2007 along with the local community, the federal government is investing large sums of money to droughtproof the Central Coast. The government has recognised how past and future droughts will affect my region in terms of its water supply and the people who rely on that water supply. At one stage only a few years ago, the Central Coast storage levels for water were down to 10 per cent. They are still only at 30 per cent, so we are still very low for a population of over 300,000.

This government is investing over $80 million into the Mardi-Mangrove pipeline, for which construction is well underway. One-third of the pipeline has already been built and it is on track to be finished before June of next year. This is the largest water infrastructure investment on the Central Coast since the dam at Mangrove Creek was originally built. Once completed next year, the pipeline will be able to send a more consistent supply of water to the major dam at Mangrove Creek and help to build up the water storage areas. This will happen during times of rainfall, when higher volumes of water can be pumped out of the rivers and streams to increase the flows.

The projections of what the effects will be for the Central Coast are quite dramatic. Based on previous rainfall and stream flow levels, the total storage levels could be as high as 80 per cent within five years once the pipeline is commissioned. This is just based on average rainfall. Even if rainfall is low, as were the levels during the last nine years of the drought, the dam levels will still rise to 55 per cent within five years—almost double what we have now. So what this government has done is invest money in water infrastructure to make sure that the people of the Central Coast have that most precious resource: water secure for the future.

With this in mind, it is absolutely amazing that there are some people in local government who still believe that we need a desalination plant. Only this week the local paper is reporting that local council are about to spend $530,000 to keep alive a development approval for a desalination plant at Toukley on beautiful Soldiers Beach. This is not only unnecessary but also a gross waste of ratepayers’ money. It is $530,000 that could be used for a whole manner of things, not least of which would be to fix up some of the roads in the Wyong shire that we have terrible trouble with, and it is also going to spoil one of the most pristine beaches on the Central Coast. This is something that we simply cannot allow to happen.

As I have outlined, we have gone from a situation where our water supply was in jeopardy to a situation where, because of the government’s investment of $80 million to build the Mardi-Mangrove pipeline, the water supply of the Central Coast is secure for the future. To waste over $530,000 of ratepayers’ money on this development application is an incredible decision that totally ignores the investment that this government has made that is going to secure the water supply. If rainfall patterns continue in the normal manner we will have dam levels at 80 per cent, up from the 30 per cent they are now, within five years. If, by some amazing chance, the council decided not only to keep the development application open but to go ahead with the desalination plant on the beach, we could be spending up to $50 million of ratepayers’ money on an absolutely unnecessary desalination plant that is not required.

Wyong Shire Council need to acknowledge the work that the government has done in terms of making sure the water supply of the Central Coast is secure. They need to get their thinking
into a more modern stance, and they need to make sure that ratepayers’ money is spent properly, such as on fixing the roads rather than wasting the money on a desalination plant that is totally unnecessary.

Higher Education

Dr STONE (Murray) (12.52 pm)—I rise to talk about the terrible problems that rural Australians are having in being able to afford to have their children leave home to go quite long distances to take up tertiary studies.

In beginning these remarks, I must say that I am so pleased that just hours ago the Australian Electoral Commission put out a new proposal for redistribution of electoral boundaries in Victoria. Where they first proposed the abolition of the Murray electorate, in their latest proposal they are now proposing to reinstate the seat of Murray understanding the unique circumstances that face that part of the world particularly in terms of the irrigation footprint that covers all of the Murray electorate. That is part of our problem: a lot of other government agencies do not understand that a unique set of circumstances affect the lives of people who live beyond the tram tracks. For example, the Goulburn Murray Local Learning and Education Network put out data looking at what had happened to the 2007 school leavers and what was happening in the beginning of 2008. Twenty-nine per cent of school leavers from the Goulburn Murray region went on to university. Hold that figure: 29 per cent went to university. This compares with an average of 44 per cent for the rest of the state. That is a difference of more than 10 per cent. Of course, the Goulburn Murray region is not at the back of Bourke; it is only two hours from Melbourne.

When we look at the numbers of school leavers looking for work, 6.8 per cent of school leavers in the Goulburn Murray area were looking for work compared with only 3.8 per cent of school leavers in the rest of Victoria. That is because the school leavers in the Goulburn Murray area were not in training, they were not in apprenticeships or VET; they were looking for work. The study asked parents and school leavers why they were not studying. It is no surprise that 43.1 per cent responded that financial pressures on the family were the reason that tertiary places had not been taken up. That is 43 per cent of families in my electorate compared with only half that number, or 26 per cent, of families in the rest of Victoria saying that financial pressures had kept their sons and daughters out of university. I think that is a shocking statistic and an indictment of this government.

In addition to the 43 per cent who said that financial pressures on the family meant that their kids could not go to university, 46 per cent said that the cost of study was the reason their family’s children could not go to university. Hold that figure in your mind: 46 per cent compared to just 31 per cent of the rest of Victorian families saying that the cost of study had created the barrier for them in terms of their students taking up their tertiary offers.

With that data, cast your mind forward to what Labor have done about helping country students be able to afford to go to tertiary training away from home. What have they done? They have made it so much worse. They have said that the coalition criteria for achieving independent youth allowance status would be only accessible for what they call ‘outer regional’. The inner regional areas are going to have to put up with the fact that they will have to work for two years at least in their gap year. They will have to have the equivalent of full-time work, basically. They really cannot find the equivalent of full-time work in my part of the world.
I want to commend the member for Forrest, who brought forward a motion the other day condemning this situation. To give an example, those who know Victoria will know the absurdity—indeed, the obscenity—of the fact that ‘inner regional’ includes towns like Boort, Dingee, Inglewood, Cobram, Barmah, Prairie, Bridgewater and Rheola. These are tiny towns, with the nearest larger town in some cases scores of kilometres away. They are now called ‘inner regional’. Those students cannot access support to go to university. Those families in and around those towns have gone through the worst drought on record, they are now facing a locust plague, and this government is now arranging to take 45 per cent of their water away, so they have no future in terms of economic self-sufficiency. This government is making it impossible for those students to break out of future poverty by being able to access their tertiary education offer. I think that is disgraceful. I hope this government will understand very quickly that there are human rights involved in this. Why can’t country students in Australia who have the results take up their offers and be able to have support to cover the $20,000-plus it costs for students to study away from home? (Time expired)

Mr GEORGANAS (Hindmarsh) (12.57 pm)—I would like to bring to the attention of the House the significant opportunity Tourism Australia has facilitated to support Australia’s $33 billion tourism industry by successfully securing a visit by Oprah Winfrey to Australia. Oprah will film at least two episodes of Oprah’s Ultimate Australian Adventure, which will be part of The Oprah Winfrey Show’s final season. These episodes will go to air in the US in early 2011 before being broadcast globally.

A US-wide 60-second advertising spot during the airing of any of the show’s final season’s episodes would cost in the vicinity of $US600,000. Coverage of Australia in these episodes will total close to two hours. The Oprah Winfrey Show is seen by more than 40 million viewers in the US each week and screens in 145 countries globally. Oprah’s visit has already generated almost 10,000 stories in the Australian media worth an estimated $17 million in equivalent advertising space. The announcement of the trip received coverage across the US and the world, with more than 1,000 stories generated in the US alone. This is all a clear indication of what is to come. This visit will provide a priceless coverage of Australia in the international media and promote Australia as an attractive holiday destination. It also complements Tourism Australia’s successful ‘There’s nothing like Australia’ campaign.

Of course, in my own electorate, which is the second-largest tourist destination in South Australia, businesses are constantly striving to attract and provide for over two million visitors annually. I know that Oprah’s visit will enhance that. I am very grateful for the work of the traders’ association tourism forum in my electorate who, with the strong support of local Councillor Tim Looker, constantly strive to maintain the vibrancy and attractiveness of the area. It is a never-ending effort and a major event or a high-profile visitor lifts both income and the spirits of local businesses.

I would also like to acknowledge one of the jewels in the crown of South Australian tourism in my electorate—Adelaide Shores. The Adelaide Shores is a great area in the western
suburbs on the beach side of my electorate, which is near West Beach, and has sporting facilities and a whole range of other things of a recreational nature.

I have many bowling clubs in my electorate. I take this opportunity to note the resilience of the members of the Glenelg community, specifically members of the Holdfast Bay Bowling Club of Glenelg North. On Saturday, 2 October four arson attacks were perpetrated in Glenelg North. One attack was focused on the Holdfast Bay Bowling Club, causing $100,000 in damage and destroying 70 years of club memorabilia and history. It was a shocking and senseless crime. Thankfully, the alleged perpetrator was caught and charges have been laid. All members of the club would naturally be deeply aggrieved by this attack—the assault on their space, the building and club room, containing all of the dedication shown to the club by many thousands of Glenelg residents over the past 70 years. I would like to make a special mention of the club president, Wally Tarca, a terrific person and member of our community. His commitment to our community through the social and physical foci and the Holdfast Bay Bowling Club is held in high esteem. The resilience he has shown in the face of this attack and the destruction it caused warrants our community’s praise and thanks.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—That was a very impressive effort, honourable member for Hindmarsh.

Mr Georganas—Thank you, Deputy Speaker.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—I was prepared to give you the extra couple of minutes because it was not your fault we had a problem with the clocks.

Question agreed to.

Main Committee adjourned at 1.01 pm