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SITTING DAYS—2010

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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 Sidbottom 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
## Members of the House of Representatives

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<td>Wilkie, Andrew Damien</td>
<td>Denison, TAS</td>
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<td>Windsor, Anthony Harold Curties</td>
<td>New England, NSW</td>
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<td>Wyatt, Kenneth George</td>
<td>Hasluck, WA</td>
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<td>Zappia, Tony</td>
<td>Makin, SA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
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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**

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<th>Minister</th>
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<tr>
<td>Prime Minister</td>
<td>Hon. Julia Gillard MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deputy Prime Minister, Treasurer</td>
<td>Hon. Wayne Swan MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government</td>
<td>Hon. Simon Crean MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Jobs and Workplace Relations and Leader of the Government in the Senate</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Chris Evans</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth</td>
<td>Hon. Peter Garrett AM, MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy and Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Stephen Conroy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Foreign Affairs</td>
<td>Hon. Kevin Rudd MP</td>
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<td>Minister for Trade</td>
<td>Hon. Dr Craig Emerson MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Defence and Deputy Leader of the House</td>
<td>Hon. Stephen Smith MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Immigration and Citizenship</td>
<td>Hon. Chris Bowen MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Infrastructure and Transport and Leader of the House</td>
<td>Hon. Anthony Albanese MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Health and Ageing</td>
<td>Hon. Nicola Roxon MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs</td>
<td>Hon. Jenny Macklin MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities</td>
<td>Hon. Tony Burke MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Finance and Deregulation</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Penny Wong</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Kim Carr</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attorney-General and Vice President of the Executive Council</td>
<td>Hon. Robert McClelland MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and Manager of Government Business in the Senate</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Joe Ludwig</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Resources and Energy and Minister for Tourism</td>
<td>Hon. Martin Ferguson AM, MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency</td>
<td>Hon. Greg Combet AM, MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for the Arts</td>
<td>Hon. Simon Crean MP</td>
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<td>Minister for Social Inclusion</td>
<td>Hon. Tanya Plibersek MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Privacy and Freedom of Information</td>
<td>Hon. Brendan O’Connor MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Sport</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Mark Arbib</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Minister of State for the Public Service and Integrity</td>
<td>Hon. Gary Gray AO, MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister to the Treasurer and Minister for Financial Services</td>
<td>Hon. Bill Shorten MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>and Superannuation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Employment Participation and Childcare</td>
<td>Hon. Kate Ellis MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Indigenous Employment and Economic Development</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Mark Arbib</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Veterans’ Affairs and Minister for Defence Science and</td>
<td>Hon. Warren Snowdon MP</td>
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<td>Personnel</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Defence Materiel</td>
<td>Hon. Jason Clare MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Indigenous Health</td>
<td>Hon. Warren Snowdon MP</td>
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<td>Minister for Mental Health and Ageing</td>
<td>Hon. Mark Butler MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for the Status of Women</td>
<td>Hon. Kate Ellis MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Social Housing and Homelessness</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Mark Arbib</td>
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<tr>
<td>Special Minister of State</td>
<td>Hon. Gary Gray AO, MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Small Business</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Nick Sherry</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Home Affairs and Minister for Justice</td>
<td>Hon. Brendan O’Connor MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Human Services</td>
<td>Hon. Tanya Plibersek MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cabinet Secretary</td>
<td>Hon. Mark Dreyfus QC, MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Kate Lundy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer</td>
<td>Hon. David Bradbury MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for School Education and Workplace Relations</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Jacinta Collins</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on Digital Productivity</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Stephen Conroy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Trade</td>
<td>Hon. Justine Elliot MP</td>
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<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Pacific Island Affairs</td>
<td>Hon. Richard Marles MP</td>
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<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Defence</td>
<td>Senator Hon. David Feeney</td>
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<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Immigration and Citizenship</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Kate Lundy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure and Transport and Health and</td>
<td>Hon. Catherine King MP</td>
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<td>Ageing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Carers</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Jan McLucas</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Community Services</td>
<td>Hon. Julie Collins MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Sustainability and Urban Water</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Don Farrell</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister Assisting on Deregulation</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Nick Sherry</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry</td>
<td>Hon. Dr Mike Kelly AM, MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister Assisting the Minister for Tourism</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Nick Sherry</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency</td>
<td>Hon. Mark Dreyfus QC, MP</td>
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SHADOW MINISTRY

Leader of the Opposition
Hon. Tony Abbott MP
Deputy Leader of the Opposition and Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs and Shadow Minister for Trade
Hon. Julie Bishop MP
Leader of the Nationals and Shadow Minister for Infrastructure and Transport
Hon. Warren Truss MP
Leader of the Opposition in the Senate and Shadow Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations
Senator Hon. Eric Abetz
Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate and Shadow Attorney-General and Shadow Minister for the Arts
Senator Hon. George Brandis SC
Shadow Treasurer
Hon. Joe Hockey MP
Shadow Minister for Education, Apprenticeships and Training and Manager of Opposition Business in the House
Hon. Christopher Pyne MP
Shadow Minister for Indigenous Affairs and Deputy Leader of the Nationals
Senator Hon. Nigel Scullion
Shadow Minister for Regional Development, Local Government and Water and Leader of the Nationals in the Senate
Senator Barnaby Joyce
Shadow Minister for Finance, Deregulation and Debt Reduction and Chairman, Coalition Policy Development Committee
Hon. Andrew Robb AO, MP
Shadow Minister for Energy and Resources
Hon. Ian Macfarlane MP
Shadow Minister for Defence
Senator Hon. David Johnston
Shadow Minister for Communications and Broadband
Hon. Malcolm Turnbull MP
Shadow Minister for Health and Ageing
Hon. Peter Dutton MP
Shadow Minister for Families, Housing and Human Services
Hon. Kevin Andrews MP
Shadow Minister for Climate Action, Environment and Heritage
Hon. Greg Hunt MP
Shadow Minister for Productivity and Population and Shadow Minister for Immigration and Citizenship
Mr Scott Morrison MP
Shadow Minister for Innovation, Industry and Science
Mrs Sophie Mirabella MP
Shadow Minister for Agriculture and Food Security
Hon. John Cobb MP
Shadow Minister for Small Business, Competition Policy and Consumer Affairs
Hon. Bruce Billson MP

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

Shadow Minister for Employment Participation
Shadow Minister for Justice, Customs and Border Protection
Shadow Assistant Treasurer and Shadow Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation
Shadow Minister for Childcare and Early Childhood Learning
Shadow Minister for Universities and Research
Shadow Minister for Youth and Sport and Deputy Manager of Opposition Business in the House
Shadow Minister for Indigenous Development and Employment
Shadow Minister for Regional Development
Shadow Special Minister of State
Shadow Minister for COAG
Shadow Minister for Tourism
Shadow Minister for Defence Science, Technology and Personnel
Shadow Minister for Veterans’ Affairs
Shadow Minister for Regional Communications
Shadow Minister for Ageing and Shadow Minister for Mental Health
Shadow Minister for Seniors
Shadow Minister for Disabilities, Carers and the Voluntary Sector and Manager of Opposition Business in the Senate
Shadow Minister for Housing
Chairman, Scrutiny of Government Waste Committee
Shadow Cabinet Secretary
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary Assisting the Leader of the Opposition
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Roads and Regional Transport
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary to the Shadow Attorney-General
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Tax Reform and Deputy Chairman, Coalition Policy Development Committee
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Education
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Northern and Remote Australia
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Local Government
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for the Murray-Darling Basin
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Materiel
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for the Defence Force and Defence Support
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Primary Healthcare

Hon. Sussan Ley MP
Mr Michael Keenan MP
Senator Mathias Cormann
Hon. Sussan Ley MP
Senator Hon. Brett Mason
Mr Luke Hartsuyker MP
Senator Marise Payne
Hon. Bob Baldwin MP
Hon. Bronwyn Bishop MP
Senator Marise Payne
Hon. Bob Baldwin MP
Mr Stuart Robert MP
Senator Hon. Michael Ronaldson
Mr Luke Hartsuyker MP
Senator Concetta Fierravanti-Wells
Hon. Bronwyn Bishop MP
Senator Mitch Fifield
Senator Marise Payne
Mr Jamie Briggs MP
Hon. Philip Ruddock MP
Senator Cory Bernardi
Hon. Teresa Gambaro MP
Mr Darren Chester MP
Senator Gary Humphries
Hon. Tony Smith MP
Senator Fiona Nash
Senator Hon. Ian Macdonald
Mr Don Randall MP
Senator Simon Birmingham
Senator Gary Humphries
Senator Hon. Ian Macdonald
Dr Andrew Southcott MP
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<th>Name</th>
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<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>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Environment</td>
<td>Senator Simon Birmingham</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Citizenship and Settlement</td>
<td>Hon. Teresa Gambaro MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Immigration</td>
<td>Senator Michaelia Cash</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Innovation, Industry, and Science</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Richard Colbeck</td>
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<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Fisheries and Forestry</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Richard Colbeck</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Fair Competition</td>
<td>Senator Scott Ryan</td>
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Wednesday, 24 November 2010

The SPEAKER (Mr Harry Jenkins) took the chair at 9.00 am, made an acknowledgement of country and read prayers.

COMMITTEES
Selection Committee
Report No. 8

The SPEAKER (9.01 am)—Order! I present the Selection Committee’s report No. 8 relating to the consideration of private members’ business. The report will be printed in today’s Hansard and the committee’s determinations will appear on tomorrow’s Notice Paper. Copies of the report have been placed on the table.

The report read as follows—

Report relating to the consideration of private Members’ business

1. The committee met in private session on Monday, 22 November and Tuesday, 23 November 2010.

2. The committee decided to defer its determination of the order of precedence and times to be allotted for consideration of committee and delegation business and private Members’ business for the next sitting Monday, anticipated to be on 21 February 2011, until its meeting on the next sitting Tuesday, anticipated to be on 8 February 2011.

3. The committee determined that the Competition and Consumer (Price Signalling) Amendment Bill 2010 be referred to the Standing Committee on Economics for report by 30 May 2011.

4. In addition to items previously recommended, the committee recommended that the following items of private Members’ business be voted on:

Orders of the day

ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION AND BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION (PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY) AMENDMENT BILL 2010 (Mr Hartsuyker): Second reading—Resumption of debate (from 22 November 2010).

DETENTION FACILITY AT INVERBRACKIE, SA: Resumption of debate (from 22 November 2010) on the motion of Mr Briggs:

That this House:

(1) notes:

(a) the announcement on 18 October 2010 by the Prime Minister and the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship about the commissioning of a detention facility at Inverbrackie in South Australia costing $9.7 million to accommodate 400 people, consisting of family groups who are undergoing refugee status assessment;

(b) that the Prime Minister and the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship failed to consult with the State Government of SA, the Adelaide Hills Council and the local Woodside community on the commissioning of this facility; and

(c) that the Prime Minister visited the Adelaide Hills on the Sunday 17 October 2010 immediately prior to the announcement and made no mention of the plan to commission the detention facility at Inverbrackie;

(2) provides a reference to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration to undertake the following inquiry:

(a) that the Joint Standing Committee on Migration inquire into the commissioning of a detention facility for 400 people comprising family groups at Inverbrackie, including:

(i) the suitability of the site for locating a detention facility for the purpose of accommodating family groups in comparison with alternative options available to the Department of Immigration and Citizenship;

(ii) the impact of the operation of the facility on the local community, including on health, education, recreation, transport, police and other community services;
(iii) the impact on defence operations, personnel and family groups based at the Inverbrackie facility;

(iv) the impact of the facility on the local economy and small business;

(v) the level of community support for the commissioning of the facility;

(vi) the level of cost and extent of services and facilities provided to clients at the detention facility; and

(vii) potential risks that need to be managed for the successful operation of the facility;

(b) that the Joint Standing Committee on Migration undertake public hearings in Woodside, SA and Canberra, ACT to facilitate the participation of community members, local service providers, council officers and state and federal departmental officials to assist the Committee with its inquiry; and

(c) that the Joint Standing Committee on Migration report back no later than the first sitting week of Parliament in 2011; and

(3) calls on the Government to postpone commissioning the detention facility for 400 people including family groups at Inverbrackie, until such time as the Committee has reported and the Government has provided a response to that report to the Parliament.

NATIONAL CURRICULUM: Resumption of debate (from 22 November 2010) on the motion of Mr Pyne:

That this House:

(1) expresses its concern that the Government’s deadline to have the national curriculum available for implementation from January 2011 will result in a substandard curriculum; and

(2) requires the Government to delay the implementation of the national curriculum until January 2012 for K 10 in the areas of English, maths, science and history.

HOME INSULATION PROGRAM: Resumption of debate (from 22 November 2010) on the motion of Mr Hunt—

That this House:

(1) notes that the Australian Government has not released figures for the full rate of defects discovered under both the Home Insulation Safety Plan and the Foil Insulation Safety Program;

(2) calls on the Australian Government to release the full rate of defects discovered under both the Home Insulation Safety Plan and the Foil Insulation Safety Program, including the:

(a) number and percentage of roofs:

(i) found to be unsafe;

(ii) found to be faulty or substandard;

(iii) found to be flawed, unsafe or substandard in any way; and

(iv) rectified;

(b) cost of repairing the faulty, substandard or unsafe insulation; and

(c) total amount of money paid by the Australian Government to insulation companies for faulty, substandard, flawed or unsafe insulation; and

(3) calls on the Australian Government to release information on the asbestos problem discovered under the Home Insulation Program, in particular:

(a) the number of roofs containing asbestos that received insulation;

(b) any specific warnings of asbestos risk given to installers prior to fitting the insulation; and

(c) steps being taken to manage the asbestos risk for safety inspectors assessing roofs.
DELEGATION REPORTS

Australian Parliamentary Delegation to the 122nd Inter-Parliamentary Union Assembly Bangkok, Thailand and Bilateral Visit to the People’s Republic of China

The SPEAKER (9.01 am)—I am pleased to present the report of the Australian parliamentary delegation which participated in the 122nd Inter-Parliamentary Union Assembly held in Bangkok, Thailand, and also undertook a bilateral visit to the People’s Republic of China.

At the 122nd IPU Assembly, the delegation was an active participant in the proceedings. The report outlines the various presentations and meetings that featured on the delegation’s agenda. It contains the various resolutions that were agreed to at the assembly, including those on the global fight against organised crime, including people trafficking and drug trafficking; the role of parliaments in accelerating the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals; youth participation in the democratic process; improving disaster risk assessment, prevention and mitigation; and the human rights of parliamentarians.

The assembly’s overall theme, ‘Parliament at the heart of political reconciliation and good governance’, provided the delegation with the opportunity to raise awareness about our parliament’s efforts to advance reconciliation with Australia’s Indigenous peoples, including through the Apology to Australia’s Indigenous Peoples.

Nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament were also discussed extensively at the assembly, with Australia serving on the panel for a special presentation on this subject. We participated in meetings with parliamentarians from countries that have yet to ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. Our message was clear: parliamentarians have an important role to play in advocating for and building consensus towards a world free of nuclear weapons.

Ongoing discussions about reform of the Inter-Parliamentary Union also featured at the assembly, along with debate about the links between the IPU and the United Nations. I am pleased to advise that Australia recently accepted an invitation to serve on the Advisory Group of the IPU Committee on United Nations Affairs. This is an indication of the effort that has been put in by the various delegations, especially over the term of the last parliament.

In acknowledging my fellow members of the delegation, I give my thanks to the deputy leader of the delegation, Senator Judith Troeth, who was deputy leader to a number of the delegations in the 42nd Parliament; Jill Hall, who has attended two assemblies in that period; Roger Price, the former member for Chifley and former Chief Government Whip, who was the constant within the delegations throughout the 42nd Parliament; and Patrick Secker, who has also contributed on two or three of the delegations to the IPU in the last parliament. At the IPU we were joined by Senator Julian McGauran.

As I have said, the contribution that Australia’s parliament, as the parliament of a middle power, has made to the IPU is considerable. The fact that we have been invited to serve on the Advisory Group of the IPU Committee on United Nations Affairs is reflective of our efforts.

Following the IPU Assembly, the delegation undertook a bilateral visit to the People’s Republic of China. This provided an opportunity to further develop and strengthen parliamentary links with the National People’s Congress. The very warm welcome the delegation received indicated the strength of our bilateral relationship with China. The delegation was pleased to meet with China’s Vice-
President, Xi Jinping, and National People’s Congress Chairman, Wu Bangguo, who both emphasised the importance they attach to further developing relations between our two legislatures. A roundtable meeting with representatives of the National People’s Congress helped to set future directions for strengthening parliamentary ties.

The delegation’s visit included meetings and inspections in Macau, Guangdong, Ningxia, Beijing and Shanghai. China’s continuing economic development was highlighted throughout the delegation’s visit. By visiting a variety of China’s regions, the delegation came to a better appreciation of the diversity of China as well as the varied opportunities that exist for Australia to invest in and benefit from China’s remarkable growth.

One of the important messages the delegation heard in China was that a growing green industry sector could be worth up to US$1 trillion by 2013. Business representatives with whom the delegation met indicated that Australian companies with green sector expertise should take a serious look at the business possibilities emerging in China.

Another important message was that, with a growing Chinese middle class, the services sector is also growing. Here too Australia has opportunities. It was made clear to the delegation that Australia’s trading future with China does not rest solely on provision of natural resources.

By travelling beyond the major cities of China, the delegation was able to see the work that is being done to improve living standards in rural and regional areas. In one village the delegation visited, it inspected a poverty alleviation project that involved establishment of rural settlements where people from impoverished areas could earn incomes from their own greenhouses.

The delegation also saw the amazing scale of infrastructure that is being built in China to prepare for future growth. Nowhere was this more evident than in Shanghai, where the delegation inspected a deepwater port connected to the mainland via a massive 30-kilometre bridge. The first three stages of the facility, including the bridge, were constructed over a five-year period.

The delegation also inspected the impressive World Expo 2010 site, including the magnificent Australian pavilion. The hosting of this event symbolised the growing confidence in China as it embraces its expanding regional and international focus. The capacity of China to deliver large-scale projects to support large-scale economic development emphasised to the delegation the need for Australian policy and decision making to be in tune with the extremely fast pace of growth and development in China.

The delegation is grateful to the parliament of Thailand for its successful organisation of the IPU Assembly, especially considering the political climate of the time in Thailand. We are also grateful to the National People’s Congress of the People’s Republic of China for the very worthwhile program it arranged for the delegation. Particular thanks are due to Dr Geoff Raby, Australian Ambassador to China; Grant Dooley, consul-general in Guangzhou; Tom Connor, consul-general in Shanghai; David Livingstone, deputy consul-general in Hong Kong; Graeme Meehan; Robert Fergusson; Sarah Noble; Stuart Kerr; and Martine Porter for their efforts in ensuring such a successful program in China.

The delegation expresses its gratitude for the support provided by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, particularly by Eric van der Wal as foreign affairs adviser to the delegation at the 122nd Inter-Parliamentary Union Assembly. The delega-
tion also thanks the Parliamentary Library and the parliament’s International and Community Relations Office for their work. The briefings, advice and assistance with arrangements were all highly appreciated. On behalf of the delegation, I would like to thank the delegation secretary, Andres Lomp, for his diligence and support, and my adviser Debra Biggs for her support of not only me but the delegation in general.

In concluding, I would like to dedicate the report of this delegation to the late Neil Bessell, who for quite some time, as an officer of the Department of the Senate, was the delegation secretary for a number of IPU assemblies. His breadth of knowledge of the IPU—the personalities, the complex political and geopolitical arrangements—was always so helpful and made it easy for successive delegations. His untimely death is something that all people in the IPU family regret. At his funeral, it was very touching to hear the expression of sorrow and condolence from the Secretary-General of the IPU, Anders Johnsson. I think that indicated the value that was placed upon the efforts of Neil Bessell. He was a credit to all those that professionally serve within the Australian parliament. As I said, in a simple gesture I dedicate this report to his memory.

**HUMAN RIGHTS (PARLIAMENTARY SCRUTINY) (CONSEQUENTIAL PROVISIONS) BILL 2010**

**Second Reading**

Debate resumed from 30 September, on motion by Mr McClelland:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

**STATUTE LAW REVISION BILL (No. 2) 2010**

**First Reading**

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr McClelland.

Bill read a first time.

**Second Reading**

Mr McCLELLAND (Barton—Attorney-General) (9.13 am)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Statute law revision bills have been used for the last 30 years to improve the quality of Commonwealth legislation. The bills do not make substantive changes to law but still perform the important function of repairing minor errors in the Commonwealth statute books and improving the accuracy and usability of consolidated versions of Commonwealth acts.

This continual process of statutory review complements the government’s commitment to creating clearer Commonwealth laws. This connection was aptly put in a media article which referred to the previous Statute Law Revision Bill as ‘hoovering up statutory detritus’. There is no doubt that the review process undertaken in the preparation of this bill serves to ensure the statute book contains less clutter, in the form of outdated cross-references, by repealing obsolete acts.

Schedules 1 to 4 of this bill achieve three main ends:

1. correcting minor and technical errors in acts, such as grammatical errors and errors in numbering;
2. modernising the language of a number of acts, and
3. repealing obsolete acts.

By removing or amending such outdated or unclear legislative provisions this bill helps
make the law clearer, more consistent and easier to access.

Schedules 5 to 8 of the bill amend a number of acts to ensure that Commonwealth ministers and departments are referred to consistently, rather than by using specific names.

Currently, when the names of ministers or departments change, or when responsibility for particular legislation is transferred between ministers or departments, the Governor-General makes substituted reference orders under sections 19B and 19BA of the Acts Interpretation Act 1901. The orders allow references to specific ministers or departments in legislation to be read as though they are references to the correct minister or department. This means that, in turn, users of Commonwealth legislation have to read the legislation in conjunction with these orders.

The amendments contained in schedules 5 to 8 will greatly reduce reliance on section 19B and 19BA orders and the need for such orders to be made in the future. This is because the amendments insert more generic references to ministers and departments in Commonwealth acts. For example, instead of referring to the ‘Minister for Finance and Deregulation,’ after these amendments have been passed by the parliament, they will refer to the ‘minister for finance.’ This will be defined as ‘the minister administering the Financial Management and Accountability Act 1997.’ The particular minister with that responsibility may change over time. This will improve the clarity and usability of Commonwealth acts over time.

The Ministerial Council for Corporations has been consulted on the amendments in the bill to the national corporate regulation scheme laws and has approved them as required under the Corporations Agreement 2002.

I conclude by thanking the Office of Parliamentary Counsel for the significant time and effort that went into preparing this bill. This is just one more demonstration of the office’s drafting expertise and commitment to ensuring that Commonwealth legislation is clear, accurate and effective. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate (on motion by Ms Gambaro) adjourned.

**ELECTORAL AND REFERENDUM AMENDMENT (ENROLMENT AND PRISONER VOTING) BILL 2010**

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Gray.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr Gray (Brand—Special Minister of State and Special Minister of State for the Public Service and Integrity) (9.18 am)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I am pleased to present the bill, to amend the Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918 (the Electoral Act) and the Referendum (Machinery Provisions) Act 1984 (the referendum act) to implement two decisions of the High Court of Australia and to give effect to two other matters.

The first of the High Court decisions is Rowe v Electoral Commissioner, as decided on 6 August 2010.

This case relates to the period of time before the close of rolls allowed for voters to either ensure that they are on the electoral roll or update their details following the formal issue of a writ for an election.

The first of the High Court decisions is Rowe v Electoral Commissioner, as decided on 6 August 2010.

This case relates to the period of time before the close of rolls allowed for voters to either ensure that they are on the electoral roll or update their details following the formal issue of a writ for an election.

While the High Court has not yet handed down the reasons for its decision, there is sufficient information to amend the legislation to reflect the High Court’s decision.
The second High Court decision is Roach v Electoral Commissioner, as decided on 30 August 2007, with reasons published on 26 September 2007.

This decision relates to the franchise for people who may be serving a sentence of imprisonment.

Schedule 1 to the bill addresses the Rowe decision and contains amendments relating to the close of rolls.

Schedule 2 to the bill addresses the Roach decision and contains amendments relating to prisoner voting.

In short, the bill will amend the Electoral Act to restore the close of rolls period to seven days after the date of the writ for a federal election and will reinstate the previous disqualification for prisoners serving a sentence of imprisonment of three years or longer from voting at a federal election.

In effect, the last two decisions of the High Court reversed amendments made to the Electoral Act in 2006, to alter the arrangements in relation to the close of rolls and prisoner voting, and restored the arrangements that applied before these amendments.

Consequential amendments to the referendum act will also need to be made to ensure consistency between the two acts.

In this context, a referendum is the formal constitutional amendment process, set out in section 128 of the Australian Constitution.

Two other matters are also addressed by the bill.

First, on 22 June 2009, the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters tabled its report, entitled Report on the conduct of the 2007 federal election and matters related thereto.

The bill seeks to implement the government’s response, of 18 March 2010, to recommendation 47 of the committee’s report.

The amendments would ensure that while prisoners serving a sentence of imprisonment of three years or longer will be disqualified from voting, they may, during this period of disqualification, remain on, or be added to, the electoral roll.

Remaining on the electoral roll will ensure that a prisoner who has served his or her sentence does not have to enrol for a second time, and will, in part, assist the prisoner’s transition back into Australian society.

Second, the bill includes an interpretative provision to ensure that certain references in the Electoral Act to ‘an election for a division,’ or similar expressions, can operate in the event of a half-Senate election held independently from an election for the House of Representatives.

This addresses an anomaly in the Electoral Act.

This bill, though narrow in its scope, is important.

In my view, it is appropriate for the parliament to respond to these two decisions of the High Court of Australia to ensure that the Electoral Act reflects the current state of the law. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate (on motion by Ms Gambaro) adjourned.
The Australian Taxation Office, ATO, proposes to undertake an integrated fit-out of new leased premises at the corner of Smollett Street, Amp and Volt Lanes, Albury, New South Wales. The new premises will replace the existing ATO office located in the Albury CBD. The lease for the existing property will expire in December 2012. It is expected that the relocation into a new building will provide the ATO with considerable advantages in terms of building design, operational performance and operating cost efficiencies and provide long-term viability through improvements in the site’s infrastructure.

The estimated outturn cost of the proposal is $19.17 million plus GST. Subject to parliamentary approval, the proposed integrated fit-out works are scheduled to start in September 2011 and be completed by October 2012. The developer will commence base-building works on site in March 2011 with demolition and excavation for the basement areas being the first tasks. The ATO is expected to take up occupancy of the building in October 2012. I commend the motion to the House.

Question agreed to.

Public Works Committee

Reference

Mr GRAY (Brand—Special Minister of State and Special Minister of State for the Public Service and Integrity) (9.24 am)—I move:

That, in accordance with the provisions of the Public Works Committee Act 1969, the following proposed work be referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works for consideration and report: Facilities for the introduction into services of Land 121 vehicles at RAAF Base Amberley and Damascus Barracks, Meeandah, Queensland and at Gaza Ridge Barracks, Bandiana, Victoria.

The current military transport and logistics wheeled vehicle fleet has reached the end of its useful life. To support the future capability needs of the Australian Defence Force, a new fleet of 6,000 to 7,000 vehicles will be acquired between the years 2011 and 2020. The new fleet will include self-contained loading systems allowing a single vehicle to perform several functions by interchangeable loading modules. This fleet will replace the current Land Rover 110, Unimog, Mac and S-Line vehicles with a mix of unprotected and protected vehicles. The protected vehicles will provide increased personnel protection to reduce vulnerability to improvised explosive devices.

The introduction of a new vehicle fleet will have three distinct facilities requirements including the receipt, inspection, fit-out and dispatch of vehicles; the conversion training of military drivers to operate the new vehicles; and maintenance training to support the sustainability of the new fleet. This project will include the construction of training and administrative facilities at RAAF Base Amberley and the construction of administration, parking and inspection facilities at the gatehouse and entry at Damascus Barracks, Meeandah, Queensland. Training and administration facilities will also be constructed at Gaza Ridge Barracks, Bandiana, Victoria.

The estimated cost of the proposal is $50.291 million plus GST. This includes all delivery costs of management and design fees; construction; furniture, fittings and equipment; contingencies; and allowances for escalation. Subject to parliamentary approval, construction is scheduled to commence in early 2011 and is expected to be completed by early 2012. I commend the motion to the House.

Question agreed to.
Mr GRAY (Brand—Special Minister of State and Special Minister of State for the Public Service and Integrity) (9.27 am)—I move:

That, in accordance with the provisions of the Public Works Committee Act 1969, it is expedient to carry out the following proposed work which was referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works and on which the committee has duly reported to Parliament: Integrated fit-out of new leased premises for the Australian Taxation Office at 12-26 Franklin Street, Adelaide, SA.

The Australian Taxation Office, ATO, proposes to undertake an integrated fit-out of new leased premises at 12-26 Franklin Street, Adelaide, South Australia. The new premises will replace the existing three ATO locations in the Adelaide CBD. The leases for two of these properties will expire in 2012 with the remaining lease due to expire in 2014. It is expected that the co-location into a single new building will provide the ATO with considerable advantages in terms of building design, operational performance and efficiency, long-term viability and maintenance. The estimated outturn cost of the proposal is $54.2 million plus GST. In its report, the PWC has recommended that these works proceed.

Subject to parliamentary approval, the proposed integrated fit-out works are scheduled to start in May 2011 and be completed by 31 October 2012. The developer has initiated work on site with the excavation and pier-drilling of the basement areas already underway. The ATO is expected to take up occupancy of the building in November 2012. On behalf of the government, I thank the committee for its support. I commend the motion to the House.

Question agreed to.

Mr GRAY (Brand—Special Minister of State and Special Minister of State for the Public Service and Integrity) (9.29 am)—I move:

That, in accordance with the provisions of the Public Works Committee Act 1969, it is expedient to carry out the following proposed work which was referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works and on which the committee has duly reported to Parliament: Proposed development and construction of housing for the Department of Defence at Largs North (Bayriver), Port Adelaide, SA.

Defence Housing Australia, DHA, proposes to develop an 8.8 hectare site at Largs North in Port Adelaide. The site is owned by the Land Management Corporation of South Australia, which has invited DHA to undertake the development on its behalf. The proposal will provide an additional 35 homes for Australian Defence Force personnel and their families posted to RAAF Base Edinburgh, Keswick Barracks and the nearby ASC facilities at Osborne where the air warfare destroyer project will be based.

Known as Bayriver, the site will be subdivided into 123 lots capable of accommodating a mix of detached homes and medium density terrace style houses. The lots not required for defence will be sold to the general public, creating a mixed civilian and defence community and reducing DHA’s net outlay. The total outturn cost proposal is estimated at $38.2 million, inclusive of GST and land acquisition, with the net costs reduced through the sales of surplus lots.

In its report, the Public Works Committee has recommended that these works proceed subject to the recommendations of the committee. DHA accepts and will implement those recommendations. Subject to parliamentary approval, development will commence in April 2011 and housing construc-
Housing construction will be completed in November 2012. On behalf of the government, I would like to thank the committee for its support. I commend the motion to the House.

Question agreed to.

Public Works Committee
Approval of Work

Mr GRAY (Brand—Special Minister of State and Special Minister of State for the Public Service and Integrity) (9.31 am)—I move:

That, in accordance with the provisions of the Public Works Committee Act 1969, it is expedient to carry out the following proposed work which was referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works and on which the committee has duly reported to Parliament: HMAS Penguin and Pittwater Annexe Redevelopment, Mosman and Clareville, NSW.

HMAS Penguin is the home of the Royal Australian Navy Diving School, the Army Dive Wing, the recompression chamber facility and the Submarine and Underwater Medicine Unit. The proposed works will provide the Navy upgraded operational and training facilities at HMAS Penguin and Pittwater Annexe to enable Navy to meet its training commitments. The proposed works, estimated to cost $63.34 million plus GST, will include redevelopment of the waterfront, site civil works and the upgrade of base services and infrastructure at HMAS Penguin, along with an internal refurbishment of the Pittwater Annexe. Refurbishment of two historic waterfront buildings at HMAS Penguin will preserve them for future generations. Traffic management will be improved on Middle Head Road, with proposed changes to the base entry.

In its report, the PWC has recommended that these works proceed. Subject to parliamentary approval, the construction schedule is expected to commence in mid-2011 and is expected to be completed by mid-2013. On behalf of the government, I would like to thank the committee for its support. I commend the motion to the House.

Question agreed to.

Public Works Committee
Approval of Work

Mr GRAY (Brand—Special Minister of State and Special Minister of State for the Public Service and Integrity) (9.33 am)—I move:

That, in accordance with the provisions of the Public Works Committee Act 1969 and by reason of the urgent nature of the work, it is expedient that the following proposed work be carried out without having been referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works: Infrastructure and upgrade works at the Immigration Detention Centre at Northam, WA.

On 18 October 2010 the government announced that new detention facilities will be developed to take pressure off Australia’s existing migration detention network. As a result of this announcement, the Department of Immigration and Citizenship has identified a site on Commonwealth land in Western Australia to establish a detention facility. The site encompasses part of the Northam training camp, which is a large defence site 80 kilometres north-east of Perth. This facility will be developed to accommodate up to 1,500 single, adult males. The estimated outturn cost of the proposal is $164.5 million plus GST and is inclusive of capital expenditure. Subject to parliamentary approval, construction will commence within four weeks and be completed by mid-2011.

The House would be aware that existing detention facilities are nearing capacity, and it is incumbent on the government to provide appropriate accommodation for irregular maritime arrivals. Because of the pressure on existing facilities and the need to treat people
in a humane way, the government needs to act quickly to engage contractors and begin the necessary work. The proposal to proceed with a construction project without referral to the Public Works Committee is not common. The government very much supports the work of the Public Works Committee and has not taken this decision lightly. I commend the motion to the House.

Question agreed to.

NATIONAL MEASUREMENT AMENDMENT BILL 2010

Debate resumed from 26 October.

Second Reading

Mr GARRETT (Kingsford Smith—Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth) (9.36 am)—I present the explanatory memorandum to this bill and I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The National Measurement Amendment Bill 2010 is a bill to amend the National Measurement Act 1960. This legislation will make changes that have been deemed appropriate for the long-term operation of Australia’s new national system of trade measurement.

The government is committed to reducing the regulatory burdens on Australian business and through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) is pursuing a business regulation reform agenda designed to advance Australia towards a seamless national economy. Trade measurement is one of the regulatory hotspots identified by COAG as an area where overlapping and inconsistent regulatory regimes were impeding economic activity.

Trade measurement is the use of measurement as the basis for determining the price in a transaction. A trade measurement system is the infrastructure needed to ensure that a trade-measuring instrument is sufficiently accurate to give a fair result to both a buyer and a seller. We are all familiar with everyday aspects of trade measurement, even if we do not realise it. Any purchase of, say, fruit and vegetables, or petrol, or precious metals has a price set by the product’s weight or volume.

In Australia, an estimated $400 billion worth of trade based on some kind of measurement takes place annually, with around 75 per cent of transactions being business to business, and 25 per cent between business and consumers. Businesses and consumers have always placed a high degree of reliance on trade measurement systems to provide confidence in all transactions based on measurement.

Clearly, with the level of economic activity involved today, it is vitally important that 21st century Australia has a single efficient and uniform trade measurement system to give confidence across the nation to business and consumers.

The establishment of a national system of trade measurement on 1 July this year was an important part of the government’s business regulation reform agenda. The new national system introduced significant deregulation benefits by reducing the previous eight systems of trade measurement in Australia down to one. The national system will produce long-term benefits to business and consumers by reducing regulatory burdens and compliance costs. These advantages are gained through having a simplified system that operates with nationally consistent rules.

Trade measurement is an example of government establishing the infrastructure that makes it possible for markets to operate both efficiently and effectively in a country as large and geographically diverse as Australia.

In 2008, amendments were made to the National Measurement Act 1960 to give effect to the 2007 COAG decision to create a
In respect of legislating for a national system, the Commonwealth’s approach was to assimilate key features of the model Uniform Trade Measurement Legislation (UTML) used by the states and territories. The 2008 amendments also incorporated consumer protection principles (based on the states and territories fair trading legislation) and allowed for the voluntary use of the internationally accepted Average Quantity System for packaging.

As has been the case in state and territory trade measurement systems, the government performs the all-important inspection function in the new national system to ensure that traders and licensees are maintaining the accuracy of trade-measuring instruments.

Although welcomed by Australian industry as a whole, after the amendments to the National Measurement Act were made in 2008 some industry sectors expressed concerns about the application of a small number of the new provisions. It turned out that the translation of the trade measurement provisions of the state and territory UTML into the Commonwealth environment has resulted in some unintended uncertainty for the measurement industry.

The government takes seriously the concerns of industry and, on balance, decided that there is a need to provide legislative certainty. These amendments will ensure that if a measuring instrument is installed prior to its verification but is of an approved pattern then no offence has been committed. Further, if a measuring instrument is sold to an intermediary before its final installation and use for trade, the strict liability provisions will not make the original supplier liable to prosecution for the supply of a measuring instrument in an unverified state.

The National Measurement Amendment Bill 2010 introduces amendments to the National Measurement Act 1960 which will make these circumstances clear in law. Other amendments will allow for the explicit recognition of prior knowledge and experience in making appointments of trade measurement inspectors, replace or redefine particular technical terms and make some minor clarifications.

The bill will also assist by making greater efficiencies possible in the operation of the national system of trade measurement, by providing a greater role for the Chief Metrologist in determining various procedures of a technical nature that would be administratively complex and slow to be determined by legislative amendments.

This government has resolved to create a seamless national economy unhampered by unnecessary duplications, overlaps and differences in regulation. In particular, we are determined to remove those inconsistencies that create unnecessarily complex and costly burdens on business. This legislation is a
further step in the pursuit of the government’s much needed business regulation reform agenda.

I am pleased to introduce the National Measurement Amendment Bill 2010, a bill that will bring appropriate and desirable changes to the trade measurement provisions of the National Measurement Act 1960. I commend the bill to the House.

Leave granted for second reading debate to continue immediately.

Mrs MIRABELLA (Indi) (9.44 am)—The Opposition has no objections to the National Measurement Amendment Bill 2010. Essentially the changes to which the bill seeks to give expression are uncontroversial. They are a range of minor corrections in the application of the National Measurement Act as it relates to the new trade measurement system. Ideally, these changes should have been introduced prior to the operation of the new national system on 1 July this year, but I do acknowledge that, as can often be the case in the political world, the government was preoccupied with some other pressing party-political issues at the time that were consuming its immediate attention.

The current legislation assigns responsibility for a large number of technical decisions to the minister that need not be referred to him and which are of course more practically assigned to the Chief Metrologist at the National Measurement Institute. It is appropriate that the government seeks to clarify some definitions and regulations and it is also clear that a number of offence provisions need to be altered. Of course, the decision to create a national trade measurement system was made during the years of the Howard government, and we in the opposition support the continued development and evolution of the system. The coalition is happy to vote in favour of the bill and to assist the government in ensuring that all of the unintended consequences, outlined in greater detail elsewhere, are remedied.

Mr HAYES (Fowler) (9.46 am)—I rise today to also speak in favour of the National Measurement Amendment Bill 2010. This bill amends the National Measurement Act 1960 to correct some of the unintended consequences arising from the translation of the trade measurement provisions of state and territory legislation into the Commonwealth legislation. Quite simply, the government has listened to the concerns of industry and business and has acted in a very prompt way to rectify this situation.

Trade measurement is the use of measurement in determining price. The primary purpose of a trade measurement system in this country is to ensure that the pricing of traded goods is based on accurate measurement. Trade measurement covers both business-to-business transactions as well as business-to-consumer transactions. This may appear to be a complex and somewhat irrelevant concept for many who may be, for example, listening in Fowler at the moment, but these are issues that are more familiar to people than they actually realise. Every time we go out and buy our groceries at the supermarket, our meat from the butcher or our seafood from the markets we are relying on accurate trade measurement instruments to determine the correct price on weight for those goods. So in terms of the day-to-day aspects of this piece of legislation, whilst trade measurement might seem unimportant to some people, for those who go and buy food to support their families these are things that are probably taken for granted but which are nevertheless very important.

The trade measurement system contained in this bill ensures that trade-measuring instruments are sufficiently accurate to give a fair price to both buyers and sellers. Essentially, the national trade measurement sys-
tem, which came into effect in July this year, provides confidence to buyers and sellers that the instruments made for trade anywhere in this country are both consistent and accurate. The establishment of a national trade measurement system, which has been implemented by this Labor government, is one step in moving towards a seamless national economy.

The national system came about thanks to an agreement through the Council of Australian Governments and has been welcomed by industry at large. When the legal framework for the national trade measurement system was established in 2008, the weighing sector of the industry highlighted some serious concerns. Those concerns arose as a result of unintended consequences when the strict liability clauses that existed when the state and territory legislation was translated into the Commonwealth arena. The changes to be introduced in this bill will correct and clarify the areas of concern to the weighing industry.

The bill will narrow the circumstances in which some offence provisions may apply by removing doubt about the application of offences to inappropriate people. For example, if a measuring instrument is sold to an intermediary before its installation and used for trade then the strict liability provisions of this bill will not make the original supplier liable to prosecution. It will not be an offence to supply or install an unverified measuring instrument provided there is a reasonable belief that a measuring instrument will be verified before being used for trade between a supplier and seller.

The bill will, however, explicitly state that it is an offence to let for hire or to loan an unverified measuring instrument for the purpose of trade. Whilst the wording is clearer, it is not a new penalty. Such behaviour would have been subject to penalties in terms of its wider wording when originally contained in both the state and territory counterpart legislation.

The bill will also assist in making greater efficiencies possible in the operation of the new national system of trade measurement by: allowing for the explicit recognition of prior knowledge and experience in making appointments for trade measurement inspectors; ensuring that the secretary of the department appoints only competent verifiers of utility meters; making clarifications, replacing or re-defining a number of technical terms; and providing a greater role for the Chief Metrologist in determining various procedures of a technical nature that, quite frankly, would be administratively complex and for which legislative amendments would be very slow and burdensome. A greater role is given to the Chief Metrologist, in that respect, to be able to resolve those matters through regulatory processes.

The government is determined to create a seamless national economy unhampered by unnecessary duplications, overlaps and differences in regulation. We are also determined to remove those inconsistencies that create unnecessarily complex and costly burdens on business. This legislation is another step on that path. It is a step that has been pursued by this government to give business a greater degree of certainty and more support in business regulation reform. I commend this bill to the House.

Ms Brodtmann (Canberra) (9.53 am)—I also rise in favour of the National Measurement Amendment Bill 2010. This bill may not be the most glamorous piece of legislation to come before the parliament, it may not be the most famous and it may not be the most controversial, as the member for Indi has acknowledged, but this piece of legislation is incredibly important to reducing the regulatory burden on Australian business
and the cost of compliance. It is incredibly important to streamlining the way we trade in this country, and it is incredibly important to ensuring business and consumers have access to reliable and uniform measures in all their transactions, no matter where they live.

This bill is the kind of legislation that many in the Australian community rely on every day, but probably only a few people know that it exists and that it is enshrined in our Constitution. I am reminded by this bill of the work I did when I was in Foreign Affairs and Trade in the nineties to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the United Nations. I was not aware, as most Australians were not, of the fact that the UN is involved in a number of laws that control the law of the sea and a range of other areas. These are invisible laws that have an impact on our life every day and that are just there quietly going about their business, as is the work that is being done around this bill. But this legislation impacts on an estimated $400 billion worth of trade each year, so it is very important and significant.

Everyone benefits when correct measurement is applied in trade. Customers benefit by receiving the actual goods they have ordered and paid for, sellers benefit by not giving product away in excess of the stated measurement and the whole community benefits through customer confidence in a trade measurement system that delivers consistency, reliability and verification to international standards—and that is the most important thing.

Going back to mention of the UN, I am reminded of the people who are involved in ensuring that trade measurement is consistent and accurate across the country—the invisible heroes I referred to in my first speech. Those invisible heroes are our public servants, who make up about 50 per cent of Canberra’s population. They are people who are dedicated to the service of his country, to improving people’s lives, to improving the economy, to keeping our country safe, to protecting our children’s toys and to a range of other things. As I said in my first speech, they are often derided by people in this House and by people around Australia. I find that really sad. These people should be lauded for what they do. They are dedicated to improving people’s lives and to public service, as is the gentleman in the advisers box. This bill reinforces the fact that we have this range of invisible heroes who are doing work which is very much buried in everyday life but which has a huge impact on our economy, on business and on the lives of consumers.

Trade measurement—along with ‘lighthouses, lightships, beacons and buoys’ and ‘astronomical and meteorological observations’—is the responsibility of the Commonwealth under section 51 of the Constitution, which says:

The Parliament shall ... have power to make laws for the peace, order, and good government of the Commonwealth with respect to:

... ... ...

(xv.) Weights and measures ...

The need for a harmonised and national trade measurement framework was identified by COAG in 2007 and, I understand, teased out by a working group. That group was chaired by the former member for Melbourne and the member for Rankin and continued the long Labor tradition of economic reform and deregulation, particularly in the business sphere. The group identified the need for a range of reforms to the regulatory environment:

- to accelerate and broaden the regulation reduction agenda;
- to accelerate the existing COAG hot spots—
they have been referred to a number of times this morning—

• to improve processes for regulation making and review; and

• to deliver significant improvements in Australia’s competition, productivity and international competitiveness.

One of the top priorities of that meeting was the need to harmonise occupational health and safety laws. I applaud the Gillard government for its reform in this area.

The transition to a national system of trade measurement came into effect in July this year. The national framework introduced significant deregulation benefits and streamlined and reduced eight different state and territory systems down to one national system. The framework is managed by the National Measurement Institute, whose purpose is to:

… deliver capability for measurement in Australia that is world class, increases national economic efficiency, enhances export trade prospects, empowers sound environmental regulation, and enables effective social and health policies.

When the framework was introduced the former ACT Chief Minister, and now CEO of the Australian Food and Grocery Council, Kate Carnell, said:

The new single national system will allow industry to improve efficiencies through reduced regulatory burdens on manufactured food and groceries.

The CEO of the National Measurement Institute said in his guide to the new trade measurement regulations:

Consumers and businesses alike rightly expect that goods that are sold on the basis of such measures as length, weight and volume, are accurately and faithfully represented. Suppliers of measuring instruments expect clear and comprehensive regulatory requirements. Governments and the economy as a whole require a trade measurement system that establishes and maintains a national and international reputation for equitable trading.

A trade measurement framework gives buyers and sellers confidence that their transactions are accurate and consistent anywhere in Australia; so in December 2008 the National Measurement Act 1960 was amended to make way for the framework. The corresponding National Trade Measurement Regulations were made in September 2009.

The new framework has broad industry support. However, there have been some unintended consequences of the amendments and the government has introduced these changes in response to industry concerns and to reduce uncertainty. This amendment bill addresses these concerns. The bill will narrow the circumstances in which some offence provisions may apply by removing doubt about the application of offences to inappropriate people if a measuring instrument is sold to an intermediary before its installation and use for trade. The strict liability provisions will not make the original supplier liable to prosecution. It will not be an offence to supply or install an unverified measuring instrument provided the measuring instrument is of an approved pattern. If a measuring instrument is sold through an intermediary before its final installation and use for trade, then the original supplier will not be liable to prosecution. The bill will explicitly state that it is an offence to let for hire or loan an unverified measuring instrument used for trade. This wording is clearer, but it is not a new penalty, as such behaviour would previously have been subject to penalty under broader wording.

The Attorney-General’s Department has been consulted regarding the offence provisions in these amendments, as has industry. The bill will also assist by making greater efficiencies possible in the operation of the new national system of trade measurement by allowing for the explicit recognition of
prior knowledge and experience in making appointments of trade measurement inspectors and by ensuring that the secretary of the department appoints only competent verifiers of utility meters. It also clarifies, replaces and redefines a number of technical terms. In making these changes, a careful balance has been struck between the operational and practical needs of those in the industry and the needs of consumers and end users for a fair and reliable system of measurement.

This bill also provides for an expanded role for the Chief Metrologist. The 2008 amendments contemplated a number of technical standards and procedures that were to be set out in the regulation or determined by the minister. However, it has since been found that these regulations may need to be updated on a more regular basis. Given the administrative complexity and nature of the legislative process, and the technical nature of the changes, this bill seeks to provide the Chief Metrologist with powers to make certain alterations. This change is made all the more practical as the Chief Metrologist has the expertise in this area.

This bill represents part of the ongoing commitment by the Gillard government to reducing the regulatory overlap between the states and territories and reducing the regulatory burden on business, while at the same time ensuring a fair, single national framework for business and consumers. In my first speech I mentioned my own experience of too much government intervention in my posting in India. I have seen firsthand the effect of overregulation. I have seen firsthand how economies and innovation can be stifled by too much compliance, red tape and disparity between states and territories. I believe that government and this parliament have a dual role—that is, not only to reduce the regulatory burden on business and the community but also to ensure Australians get the right outcome from its regulations. I believe this bill gets that balance right. I am proud that the Gillard government has committed to reducing regulation and protecting business and consumers. I am also proud that we have listened to the concerns of industry and acted on them to deliver a better system. I hope we continue to listen to industry, continue to streamline our regulatory frameworks, continue to reduce the cost of compliance, continue to protect business and consumers and continue to improve and grow the Australian economy. I commend this bill to the House.

Mr Garrettp (Kingsford Smith—Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth) (10.03 am)—in reply—I would like to sum up by thanking all those who participated in this debate. The government is very pleased with the smooth transition that occurred from 1 July this year from the eight former state and territory based trade measurement systems to the new national system of trade measurement. The new national system is a substantial outcome of the government’s business regulation reform agenda. The advent of a new national system has removed the previous inconsistencies in trade measurement, will reduce costs to companies operating nationally and will allow Australia to adopt new technologies and processes that will assist in making our industries compete better internationally. This is an outcome that all sides of politics, I think, can be pleased with.

The National Measurement Amendment Bill 2010 will amend the National Measurement Act 1960 in order to correct some unintended consequences of the translation of trade measurement provisions of state and territory legislation into Commonwealth legislation. The bill clarifies the application of strict liability offences and narrows the circumstances in which some offence provisions may apply. This will remove doubt about the application of those offences while
upholding the requirement that only verified measuring instruments are used for trade. These amendments will bring the certainty desired by Australian industry. The bill will also improve the operation of the National Measurement Act in a number of respects, including by the delegation, as noted by speakers in this debate, to the Chief Metrologist of the determination of various test procedures.

In closing this debate, I think it is appropriate to mention how Australian industry has reacted to the government’s policy of introducing a national system of trade measurement. I am pleased to report that industry responses have been extremely positive. Accord Australasia, the peak industry group for the consumer, cosmetic and hygiene products sector, for example, stated in a press release earlier this year that the new national system will address the longstanding problem businesses faced in having to deal with separate and often inconsistent requirements of state and territory legislation and that it will introduce greater clarity for industry and assist Australia’s trade position by introducing an average quantity system. In summary, the National Measurement Amendment Bill 2010 will bring legislative certainty to the application of strict liability offences and will assist in making greater efficiencies possible in the operation of the new national system of trade measurement.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

BUSINESS

Rearrangement

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON (Batman—Minister for Resources and Energy and Minister for Tourism) (10.07 am)—by leave—I move:

That order of the day No. 3, government business, be postponed until a later hour this day.

Question agreed to.

CORPORATIONS AMENDMENT (SONS OF GWALIA) BILL 2010

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 29 September, on motion by Mr Bradbury:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr ANTHONY SMITH (Casey) (10.07 am)—The Corporations Amendment (Sons of Gwalia) Bill 2010 will amend the Corporations Act to reverse the effect of the High Court’s decision in the Sons of Gwalia case, which was heard by the court in February 2007. This bill, as we know, was first announced by the government back, I think, in January this year and introduced and reintroduced, following the election, in September. In the Sons of Gwalia case, the High Court held that a compensation claim by a shareholder against the company was not subordinated below the claims of other unsecured creditors by virtue of section 563A of the Corporations Act. The substance of this issue was summed up by the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee, which recently inquired into and reported on this bill. As the Senate committee found, the issue for judicial determination was whether the shareholder should be admitted as an unsecured creditor under the deed of company arrangement, ranking equally with other unsecured creditors, on the basis that he had been induced to purchase shares of the company as a result of conduct prior to its insolvency. Under section
563A of the Corporations Act, the payment of a debt owed by a company to a person in the person’s capacity as a member of a company is postponed until the debts of all other creditors are satisfied.

However, in this case the High Court determined that claims by persons who purchase shares in a company, relying on misleading or deceptive information from the company or material nondisclosures, were not claims ‘as a member of the company’ and therefore were not postponed under section 563A behind the claims of unsecured creditors. As I said at the outset, this bill seeks to reverse that decision. At the time that the decision was made the coalition, then in government, realised the importance of the decision and accordingly referred it to the Corporations and Markets Advisory Committee. At the time the Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer, the Hon. Chris Pearce MP, had referred that off in 2007 for consideration. Throughout the course of 2008 the Corporations and Markets Advisory Committee advised that to overturn the decision would stymie the trend of shareholder empowerment. However, notwithstanding that, the coalition understands that incorporated businesses have found it difficult to obtain credit particularly since the financial crisis and, of course, if this decision were not overturned it would have the potential to raise the risk and cost of lending, which in turn would increase borrowing costs—and I know my friend and colleague the member for Dunkley is well aware of these issues as well within his shadow portfolio of small business. This would particularly be the case for companies in financial distress. As well, as the parliamentary secretary has pointed out and as, before him, the former Assistant Treasurer has pointed out, the decision could also delay the external administration of companies as it became necessary to work out which shareholders were ranked alongside unsecured creditors, and the confusion about the rights of creditors and shareholders could provoke costly legal action against a company. Were that to occur, that would ultimately be borne by creditors and other shareholders.

The bill contains, as the parliamentary secretary pointed out in his speech in the second reading debate, three core measures. The first states that claims in relation to shares are to be ranked equally and after all other creditors’ claims. Secondly, the bill removes the rights of persons bringing claims regarding shares to vote as creditors in a voluntary administration or a winding-up unless they receive permission from a court and, finally, it provides that any restriction on the capacity of a shareholder to recover damages against a company, based on how they acquired the shares, is removed. In practice, as was pointed out by the government, these measures would ensure that shareholder compensation claims are paid from the pool of funds available to shareholders rather than out of a pool available to unsecured creditors.

Fundamentally, shareholders assume a higher level of risk and obviously they have the potential for reward, whereas unsecured creditors are in a different situation. Shareholders are part-owners of the company and they are in a different situation. The parliamentary secretary, Mr Bradbury, summed that up in his speech very well and it is a principle that this side of the House shares. The bill was sent off to a Senate committee, which looked at it very closely. The recommendation of the Senate committee was that the bill be passed subject to a number of technical amendments. It is my understanding that the government has picked up all of those technical amendments. They were circulated yesterday, and I will address the substance of each of those before the third read-
Mr RIPOLL (Oxley) (10.14 am)—It is a pleasure to be able to speak on the Corporations Amendment (Sons of Gwalia) Bill 2010 and it is good to hear that not only does this bill go through a Senate committee process, where a number of technical amendments have been made and accepted by government, but the opposition also supports what this bill does. In effect this bill reverses the High Court decision in the Sons of Gwalia v Margaretic case. The main effect of the bill is that all claims in relation to the buying, selling, holding or otherwise dealing with shares are to be ranked equally and after all other creditors’ claims. The bill is widely supported, obviously, within the parliament but also outside the parliament from a range of significant stakeholders. It is important that we get this right, and it is important that we have a consistent approach to the liabilities and risks that shareholders take and to who sits in the line of those to be paid in the event of a collapse of a particular company.

The bill contains three key measures. It provides that all claims in relation to the buying, selling, holding or otherwise dealing with shares are to be ranked equally and after all other creditors’ claims. It also removes the right of persons bringing claims regarding shareholdings to vote as creditors in a voluntary administration or a winding-up unless they receive permission from the court. They will also not be entitled to receive reports to creditors unless they make a request in writing to the external administrator. It eliminates the restriction on the capacity of a shareholder to recover damages against a company based on how they acquired those shares or whether they still hold those shares.

In comparing the current law with the proposed new law all claims against an insolvent company arising from buying, selling, holding or otherwise dealing with a shareholder are to rank equally and to be postponed until all other claims are paid. That is an important principle ensuring the availability of credit and the proper assignment of risk. The current law in accordance with the Sons of Gwalia v Margaretic case states that some shareholder claims, for example compensation claims, would not be postponed by section 563A of the Corporations Act. Instead they would rank equally with unsecured creditors in any distribution to creditors after secured credits and payments to priority creditors. The proposed new law will ensure that persons bringing subordinated claims would not be able to receive communications to creditors from an external administrator without making that request in writing nor would they be able to vote in an external administration without the leave of the court.

The current law also means that persons bringing subordinated claims are treated as creditors themselves and are entitled to receive communications to creditors from external administrators. This is obviously a complex set of arrangements and currently is done without making a written request. The proposed new law places a restriction on the ability of a shareholder to recover damages against a company based on how they acquired the shares or whether they still hold the shares. The current law also states that a person’s capacity to bring a claim for damages could be affected by how they acquired the shares and whether they still hold them. This was particularly the case in the High Court ruling.

What this bill ultimately does is benefit both creditors and shareholders because it reduces higher financing costs. It also helps facilitate the provision of credit to companies in an efficient way for the economic development of the nation. If credit is more avail-
able it will also increase the chances of a company actually staying in existence in the first place. It also reduces the risk premiums charged to the extent of onerous terms and conditions placed on companies by credit providers.

The bill reduces the costs and complexity for insolvency practitioners to carry out external administrations and a range of other cost savings which are passed onto creditors. The bill improves the efficacy of external administration in terms of both the reallocation of capital to productive uses and the promotion of business rehabilitation. When shareholders invest in a company in the hope of sharing in the company’s future profits, they do this knowing that there is a risk, and they share in that risk in a particular manner.

Creditors do not get the chance to share in these profits. They provide a good or a service and invoice the company for payment on that basis. It is a different relationship and a different set of risk terms that are applied and it should be clear in the line of risk who takes what risk at what point and how that ought to be administered. Shareholders who have been misled should have the right to recover some of their losses but not to the detriment of creditors.

This is a good bill and is supported by the parliament and I commend it to the House.

Ms SMYTH (La Trobe) (10.19 am)—I rise to support the Corporations Amendment (Sons of Gwalia) Bill 2010 and remark that, while we have seen this legislation considered for a period of time now, it is very appropriate that a considered response be given by the government to something which affects such a wide range of stakeholders. Obviously in the context of a global financial crisis any impediments to companies accessing credit, and reasonably priced credit at that, is particularly important. I am pleased to be able to speak in relation to the bill today.

As we have heard in the debate thus far we know that this is largely a question of appropriate risk allocation. We know that shareholders make a conscious decision, as has been said in this debate, to invest money in a company in the hope of sharing in that company’s profits. In doing so they are certainly entitled to expect appropriate disclosure from the company and they are certainly entitled to the protections that both the Corporations Act and common law provide. But in doing so they must also accept that they are taking a risk in making that investment.

Creditors by contrast, however, are not consciously exposing themselves to the same degree of risk. They are dealing with companies on a contractual basis, and in many instances those creditors can be small businesses or trade creditors that are simply owed money for work they have already done or for materials or services they have already supplied. It is appropriate that this bill redress the risk profile and balance that has, arguably, arisen as a result of the High Court decision in Sons of Gwalia. It should go without saying, of course, that shareholders who are misled in making their investments should correctly be able to seek a remedy. It should not mean, however, that creditors engaged in their usual commercial dealings with a company should be disadvantaged relative to those shareholders in circumstances where that company becomes insolvent.

This bill will give effect to the government’s decision to reverse the outcome of the Sons of Gwalia and Margaretic case. It will amend the Corporations Act to reform the treatment of shareholder claims against companies that become insolvent. As we have heard, section 563A of the Corporations Act subordinates any claims made by a person in
their capacity as a member of a company, whether by way of dividends, profits or otherwise, below the claims of other unsecured creditors against the company. Prior to the High Court’s decision in Sons of Gwalia, the common understanding of that provision and its operation was that all shareholder claims against a company in external administration which related to their shareholding were made in the ‘capacity as a member of the company’ and were postponed by section 563A.

The High Court’s decision obviously determined that a compensation claim for corporate misconduct made by a shareholder against a company was not subordinated by this section. The provision, as currently interpreted through the High Court’s decision, would have the effect of undermining the traditional distinction between debt and equity. The effect of that decision is that shareholders with compensation claims for corporate misconduct against a company are, irrespective of whether the claims arise in relation to their shareholdings or not, entitled to share in any proceeds of an external administration with the same priority as other creditors. In particular, as was the case in Sons of Gwalia, compensation claims against listed companies arising from the provision of misleading information or the failure to disclose information will gain equal ranking with creditors. This bill gives effect to the government’s stated purpose of reversing the High Court’s decision. The bill changes that position so that any claim brought by a person, not just a shareholder, against a company, which arose from the buying, selling, holding or otherwise dealing with a shareholding is to be postponed in an external administration until after all other claims have been paid.

For the avoidance of doubt, the bill also abrogates the rule in the decision on Houldsworth and the City of Glasgow Bank by providing that how a person acquired shares and whether they still hold them would not restrict their ability to bring a claim for damages. The decision in Sons of Gwalia has had the effect of shifting the losses suffered by shareholders due to a company’s misleading conduct or nondisclosure to the company’s unsecured creditors. By reducing the likely return to unsecured lenders in an insolvency, the decision increases the potential risk to which creditors may find themselves exposed. The necessary consequence of this is an increase to the costs of unsecured debt and a reduced availability of credit, particularly for less well-established companies.

In order to remedy this, the bill provides that all claims in relation to the buying, selling, holding or otherwise dealing with shares will rank equally and with lower priority than all other creditor claims. So, to the ultimate benefit of both shareholders and creditors, this bill will remove an area of uncertainty that currently results in higher finance costs for businesses. It will reduce the costs and complexity associated with running insolvency administrations and, as I mentioned earlier, it will redress the risk imbalance that is currently in place as a consequence of the Sons of Gwalia decision.

The second function of the bill before us is to streamline the manner in which shareholder claimants are treated in an external administration. Those who seek to bring claims regarding their shareholdings will not be able to vote as creditors in a voluntary administration or a winding-up unless they receive permission from the court. They will also not be entitled to receive reports to creditors unless they make a request in writing to the external administrator.

Finally, the bill places a restriction on the capacity of a shareholder to recover damages against a company based on how they ac-
quire the shares or whether they still hold the shares. The Sons of Gwalia decision was handed down in January 2007, and we know that many industry participants are keenly awaiting this bill. The global financial crisis that affected us all certainly highlights the importance of addressing any restrictions to companies accessing credit. The reforms that the government now proposes restore the order of priority for distributions of assets in corporate insolvencies to the position that we all understood existed prior to the Sons of Gwalia decision. In doing so, the bill will improve access by companies to credit, ensuring continued employment and economic growth.

Mr BRADBURY (Lindsay—Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer) (10.26 am)—in reply—I wish to thank all of the honourable members who have contributed to the debate, in particular I acknowledge the member for Casey and the member for Oxley, and also the member for La Trobe for her very valuable contribution to the debate on the Corporations Amendment (Sons of Gwalia) Bill 2010. The bill will postpone shareholder compensation claims made in an insolvency administration so that they will rank equally with the other shareholder claims. Subordinating these claims will facilitate the provision of affordable credit to companies, particularly those in financial distress. The reform will reduce complexity and costs in external administrations and improve the prospects of rehabilitating insolvent companies through formal insolvency procedures.

The bill also provides that a person bringing a subordinated claim will not have an entitlement to a copy of any notice, report or statement to creditors unless they make a written request to the external administrator for a copy. The bill similarly provides that they will not have a right to vote as a creditor of the company unless given leave by the court. The bill also ensures that a person’s ability to bring a claim for damages against a company will not be restricted by how they acquired the shares or whether they continue to hold the shares when bringing the action.

On behalf of the government, I would like to thank all the stakeholders for their contributions at various stages. I acknowledge, in particular, the very valuable contribution of the Law Council of Australia that has been taken up in part by the recommendations of the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee. On 30 September 2010, the Senate referred the bill to the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee for inquiry and report. On 18 November 2010, the committee delivered its report recommending that the bill be passed, subject to a number of drafting concerns. I thank the Senate committee for that report. I intend to amend the bill to take account of the committee’s recommendations, and these amendments have previously been circulated. I am advised by Treasury that each of these concerns has now been addressed in the government’s amendments to the bill. The government is committed to ensuring that the bill achieves its intended policy objectives.

In conclusion, this bill will address a range of negative impacts on access to finance by companies and the conduct of external administrations, arising from the Sons of Gwalia decision. This will consequentially benefit creditors, shareholders and employees of Australian companies.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Consideration in Detail

Bill, by leave, taken as a whole.

Mr BRADBURY (Lindsay—Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer) (10.30 am)—I present a supplementary ex-
Mr BRADBURY— I move:

(1) Schedule 1, page 3 (after line 15), after item 1, insert:

1A After subsection 411(5)

Insert:

(5A) If the compromise or arrangement:

(a) involves creditors of the Part 5.1 body with subordinate claims (within the meaning of subsection 563A(2)); and

(b) is approved by the Court;

those creditors are also bound by the compromise or arrangement despite the fact that a meeting of those creditors has not been ordered by the Court under subsection (1) or (1A).

(2) Schedule 1, item 2, page 3 (lines 19 to 27), omit subsections 563A(1) and (2), substitute:

(1) The payment of a subordinate claim against a company is to be postponed until all other debts payable by, and claims against, the company are satisfied.

(2) In this section:

claim means a claim that is admissible to proof against the company (within the meaning of section 553).

debt means a debt that is admissible to proof against the company (within the meaning of section 553).

subordinate claim means:

(a) a claim for a debt owed by the company to a person in the person’s capacity as a member of the company (whether by way of dividends, profits or otherwise); or

(b) any other claim that arises from buying, holding, selling or otherwise dealing in shares in the company.

(3) Schedule 1, page 3 (after line 27), after item 2, insert:

2A Subsection 563B(2)

Omit “debts owed to members of the company as members of the company (whether by way of dividends, profits or otherwise)”, substitute “subordinate claims (within the meaning of section 563A)”.

(4) Schedule 1, item 3, page 4 (line 2), before “A person”, insert “(1)”.

(5) Schedule 1, item 3, page 4 (line 8), after “company,”, insert “at a meeting ordered under subsection 411(1) or”.

(6) Schedule 1, item 3, page 4 (after line 10), at the end of section 600H, add:

(2) In this section:

external administration includes the following:

(a) voluntary administration;

(b) a compromise or arrangement under part 5.1;

(c) administration under a deed of company arrangement;

(d) winding up by the Court;

(e) voluntary winding up.

This is a matter that has received much consideration from the Senate committee and a number of useful contributions were made to that process, in particular from the Law Council of Australia. The amendments as proposed seek to address some of the technical and drafting matters that have been identified by the Law Council in relation to this bill.

Specifically there are a number of amendments that go to finer technical and drafting considerations but of interest to note to the House are the provisions that relate to those external administrations that would otherwise fall within the terms of a scheme of arrangement. One of the issues that had been raised was the context of a scheme of arrangement where particular creditors or
individuals, in this case subordinated interest holders, were not granted the opportunity to be bound by a vote by virtue of these provisions. The intention of these amendments is to ensure that, notwithstanding that, they will be bound by the terms of this process. This is something that was raised by the Law Council and we acknowledge that it is an issue that should be addressed. These amendments seek to address that specifically.

Mr ANTHONY SMITH (Casey) (10.32 am)—As the parliamentary secretary has outlined, this bill was sent to a Senate committee and the Law Council of Australia in particular made a number of important suggestions regarding technical amendments. They have been outlined in the Senate report. They are as follows: the inclusion of debts as well as claims in relevant proposed new sections to ensure the consistent use of terminology in the Corporations Act; secondly, the amendment of proposed new subsection 563A(1) to clarify the types of claims which rank above subordinated claims; thirdly, the amendment of proposed new paragraph 563A(2)(b) to clarify that a claim by a person against a company must arise from that person’s involvement in dealing in the relevant company’s shares; fourthly, the amendment of current section 563B of the Corporations Act to clarify that statutory interest on non-subordinated claims will rank above subordinated claims under proposed section 563A; fifthy, the insertion of a new definition of the term ‘external administration’ in proposed new section 600H; and, finally, amendments to ensure that the bill does not disturb the effective operation of the creditors’ schemes of arrangement.

It was important that the Senate committee examine this bill. It reported on 18 November. The parliamentary secretary has just told the House that Treasury has advised him that all of the suggestions from the Senate committee have been picked up with the government amendments, which were circulated I think yesterday and just moved by the parliamentary secretary. We support these amendments and we make the point again that this is another very good example of why the government should not rush with legislation but should ensure that it gets its drafting right and should not rush ahead of Senate committees. As it turns out, the Senate committee reported just a few days ago prior to this debate. That is not always the case. I say to the new parliamentary secretary it is a good practice he has adopted and it is one that he should try and encourage his colleagues to adopt on so many other pieces of legislation.

This legislation was first introduced by the former Assistant Treasurer, Mr Bowen, I think in January of this year and was reintroduced in September by the parliamentary secretary following the election. So it is strange that it took so long for those recommendations on amendments to be accepted by the government. Perhaps they only found out about them during the course of the Senate inquiry, and if that is the case then that again reinforces the importance of those Senate inquiries on pieces of legislation.

Question agreed to.

Bill, as amended, agreed to.

Third Reading

Mr BRADBURY (Lindsay—Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer) (10.36 am)—by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.
Mr HOCKEY (North Sydney) (10.37 am)—Mr Deputy Speaker Thomson, may I take the opportunity to wish you a very merry Christmas and a happy new year. There is goodwill all round here, except for this Federal Financial Relations Amendment (National Health and Hospitals Network) Bill 2010. This bill enables the Commonwealth government to retain part of the GST for dedication to the National Health and Hospitals Network fund and about $50 billion in GST revenue over the current forward estimates will be rebranded as increased federal government spending on health. This bill does not provide the details of the new health arrangements. It simply delineates the financial aspects of the government’s new health policy.

Under the agreement, the Commonwealth will cover 60 per cent of the costs of the public hospitals and 100 per cent of a range of other healthcare services in return for the states handing over about one-third of their GST, although the exact proportion differs between states. So this is simply about shifting money from the states to the Commonwealth. Ironically, it comes from the Commonwealth, it goes to the states and now it is going back to the Commonwealth, and this is dedicated reform, according to the Labor Party in government. States will also be eligible for additional money called top-up payments.

There is no detail about the criteria under which these new payments will be provided. These will be at least $15.6 billion, although the minister can specify a lower amount. The payments will not commence until 2014-15. How convenient that might be. It just happens to fall outside of the existing four-year budget. It is amazing how these additional payments just pop up at a date well after the next budget forward estimates.

The motivations to fix the hospital system are noble—we all want to have a better hospital system—but the policy prescription is inadequate. The hospital system needs good public policy, but a simple cash grab by the Commonwealth is not the answer. The government’s new health policy aims to achieve accountability by better delineation of health responsibilities. However, the new model adds an extra layer to the administration of the health system and will not end the blame game that is the nature of health care in Australia.

Measures such as the local hospital networks sound good in practice but will do nothing to alleviate incompetent management in some hospitals. The litmus test for these health reforms will be better and more accountable service under this new system. The government has failed miserably to prosecute this case. We all know that the Labor Party just cannot manage money. The Minister for Resources and Energy knows that, and so do the Australian people. This bill drives a massive increase in revenue for a Commonwealth government that has proven itself incompetent and wasteful in the delivery of services. The total revenue redistribution that is shuffling money here and shuffling money there of $50 billion over the forward estimates involves a substantial amount of effort and it will lead to a significant increase with little planning as to how it is spent.

We are concerned about the lack of detail in this bill. Nowhere in the bill or in the explanatory memorandum is there mention of the precise amount of the GST to be taken
from the states. If it was about a third, as indicated by the Treasurer in his second reading speech, it would be about $56 billion in additional federal revenue over the three years of the forward estimates—just a lazy $56 billion lying around which the federal government is just plucking out of the states. In the Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook, released a week after the Treasurer presented his second reading speech on this bill, it was said to be $44.6 billion over three years of the current forward estimates, excluding Western Australia. At this stage the amount involved looks to be around $50 billion. Under the proposed section 6A, the minister determines the amount of GST revenue to be paid by legislative instrument. This decision of the minister cannot be disallowed by parliament. This is an incredibly dangerous precedent for the federal government, which has shown time and time again that it will use any means necessary to pay for its reckless spending. I nearly choked on my oxygen yesterday—

Mr Billson—Your weeties.

Mr Hockey—It was well past weeties time. I choked on my oxygen in question time yesterday when the Prime Minister said somehow the Liberal Party is the party of higher taxes. The Prime Minister so conveniently forgets that she was a member of a cabinet that dared not speak its name under the previous Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, that introduced a new tax on alcohol, a new and higher tax on motor vehicles and higher taxes on cigarettes and made significant changes to taxation arrangements for a whole lot of different areas that were enjoying certain concessions. Of course, the Prime Minister forgot that yesterday, and the Prime Minister forgot that she is now contemplating a carbon tax and that she was advocating an emissions trading scheme and a mining new cost. Of course, the Prime Minister forgot old Marn’s mining tax, but there have been so many versions of it that it is hard to keep up. It is just a lazy $10 billion, isn’t it, Marn? What are you going to do with the royalties there, son?

Mr Martin Ferguson—Industry has signed up to it.

Mr Hockey—And industry has signed up to it. Is that right? Twiggy Forrest, Gina Rinehart and a whole lot of other people who would consider themselves from time to time part of the mining industry would say that industry has not signed up. We really look forward to seeing that bill in this place. I know there is a history in the Labor Party of giving ministers hospital passes. Look at poor old Peter Garrett on the receiving end of pink batts and green loans. What about the former Minister of Education, Julia Gillard, who was on the receiving end of the BER program that she thought was a great idea—such a great idea that she had to commission an independent inquiry into it? But there is more to come out of that today, I suspect. Now we have a Minister for Resources and Energy who thinks that it is a great idea to tax the resources industry. Mr Deputy Speaker, I know I am indulging here a little—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr KJ Thomson)—You are right about that.

Mr Hockey—But I do want to give a little bit of career advice to the Minister for Resources and Energy: take up that ambassadorial appointment before the end of this term, old buddy. You do not want to be the one in this place to miss out on the opportunity to get your mining tax through. You will be blamed. So while you have some leverage on the Prime Minister, take that ambassadorial appointment.

The Deputy Speaker—The member for North Sydney will return to the bill.

Mr Billson—Martin the Mountie could go to Canada and follow up his love for mining.
Mr HOCKEY—That is right. Canada is nice. Martin always gets his mounties, does he?

Mr Billson—he has done more for mining in Canada than in Australia.

Mr HOCKEY—Anyway, some states will have to sacrifice up to 50 per cent of their GST revenue. I do not think they are very happy about that. Quite frankly, Western Australia is so unhappy about it that it has not agreed. So this is only partially a bill for part of Australia because that great chunk of Australia on the other side of the black stump is not prepared to give up its GST. In the case of the ACT, Treasurer Katy Gallagher’s office confirmed that the territory would be handing back between 48 and 50 per cent of its GST to Parliament House.

Mr Billson—it will not have to travel very far.

Mr HOCKEY—No, it will not. Queensland health minister Paul Lucas’s office said ‘the state would be handing back 39.3 per cent of its GST’. And the Queensland shadow health minister claims that Queensland will be forced to hand over 42 per cent of its GST in 2012-13.

What happened was that the Labor Party started running out of money. They not only spent all of the surplus but also raided the net assets of the Commonwealth. They started borrowing money because they ran out of money to pay for pink batts and school halls. They imposed their alcopops tax and their tax of motor vehicles at exactly the wrong time. Of course, that did not work because they started to run out of money again. They then introduced the mining tax into the public debate. When they ran out of all of that money and started borrowing $100 million a day they raided the GST cookie jar, which is the money that goes to the states.

This mob has spent everything that moves and you have to ask yourself, ‘Where does it go?’ It goes to the states. As Margaret Thatcher said, the problem with socialism is that sooner or later you run out of other people’s money. That is exactly what this mob are doing—they are running out of taxpayers’ money. Despite handing over significant sums of money, there is no guarantee that the states are going to end up with improved health care.

The bill is premature in discussing final arrangements because they are not finalised. The explanatory memorandum to the bill notes:

The extent of expenditure covered under the Commonwealth’s new funding commitments will be finalised with participating States as part of the implementation of the NHHN reforms. This is not covered in the amendments to the FFR Act.

So this worsens the blame game in health funding that the agreement was meant to stop. This suggests that in late 2010 the government has not finalised the figures for how much money will be provided to hospitals and health care facilities. This is quite a dangerous precedent for our parliament, especially with the upcoming election in New South Wales and the Victorian election this Saturday, where the state oppositions have expressed strong concerns over the new health arrangements. I quote the shadow Treasurer in New South Wales, Mike Baird—a very good man—who said this:

The GST is efficient and stable and grows with the economy. Do the Premier and the Treasurer of this State think this State is no longer going to grow, so they are happy to give away the GST? That could be their argument. Why did John Brumby and Colin Barnett argue so strongly? Colin Barnett continues to argue strongly that he does not want to give up the GST but is happy to contribute to the new program. We understand that health costs are rising at a rate that is unsustainable for the States to manage them, and the States want the Federal Government to contribute. We are happy to make a contribution but not from our growth tax. Why should we give away our
growth tax, which is the only tax that grows with the economy? The National Health and Hospitals Network agreement contains some good points. What is the State’s GST contribution that this Labor Government has signed up to? There is nothing mentioned in that agreement, no percentage amount. That means that the amount we are going to give in GST is a blank cheque.

It is a blank cheque. I was in this place sitting in the position where old Martin is now—

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER**—The member for North Sydney will refer to members by their titles.

**Mr HOCKEY**—Sorry, the Minister for Resources and Energy. As Minister for Financial Services and Regulation, I sat in that chair for three days—I think that is why it has a little sag in it—as we passed through all of that GST legislation which the Labor Party opposed root and branch. In fact, the former Prime Minister, the member for Griffith, described the day the GST came in as ‘fundamental injustice day’. He so hated the GST that he wanted to collect it himself.

That is why he negotiated this health agreement.

I say to the Minister for Resources and Energy that eventually your history catches up with you. On this occasion there must be just a tinge of embarrassment at the hypocrisy of the Labor Party once so desperately opposing the GST but now wanting to take it themselves. That is how opposed the Labor Party were to the GST. They thought it was a very bad tax.

You may remember that Kim Beazley, the former member for Brand and Leader of the Opposition, said something to this effect to his caucus: ‘We are going to surf the wave of GST all the way into government.’ The members for Dunkley and Bonner remember that. If I was the Minister for Resources and Energy or the Treasurer, I would pick up the phone to the now ambassador in Washington and say, ‘Hey old mate, are you going to be embarrassed if we now try to claim the GST for ourselves given that we were so opposed it?’ In fact, the Minister for Resources and Energy here at the table voted against it. Do you remember that vote?

**Mr Martin Ferguson**—I remember you and Work Choices.

**Mr HOCKEY**—He does remember that vote. I am so pleased he recalls that vote. I know there is some fading memory there. Of course, former ACTU presidents have selective memories, especially in this place. I would say, though, that he is not a bad guy, the old minister for resources, the old charmer. In the deep, dark recesses of his memory, he will recall that he voted against the GST. But, I would say this to him: give that part of your brain a little bit of oxygen, give it the opportunity to rebirth and remind yourself of the fact that you voted against the GST, and now you are voting for legislation that wants to claim it back.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER**—Order! The member for North Sydney will address his remarks through the chair.

**Mr HOCKEY**—You are the same, Deputy Speaker. I remember those battles well.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER**—The member for North Sydney will not engage the chair in debate.

**Mr HOCKEY**—I remember the battles with the member for Wills. The member for Wills was one of the strongest advocates for the Labor Party’s position and he was formidable in the debate.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER**—The member for North Sydney will return to the bill.

**Mr HOCKEY**—I was on the receiving end of all of that at question time. The Labor Party would come into the House with packets of salad and Hockey Bear pyjamas. Remember the Hockey Bear pyjamas?
Mr Martin Ferguson—Yes.

Mr Hockey—That’s right. And they brought in bottles of Coca-Cola. They would say: ‘Look at the price. Look at these Hockey Bear pyjamas, they are going to go up 10 per cent. How much is a packet of salad going to cost after the introduction of the GST?’

Mr Martin Ferguson—With mayo and without mayo.

Mr Hockey—Yes, with mayo, without mayo, with salad dressing and so on. I do recall those moments. These dispatch boxes still exist but, sadly, the minister for resources—who obviously drifts in and out of the political Alzheimer’s club—fails to recall the strength of the advocacy of the Labor Party against the GST at that time. Now they are taking the GST off the states.

The reason we gave the GST to the states was that the states had growth areas of expenditure—granted, it is the case that health is an area of growth. Having worked in state government, one of the challenges for the states is that their revenue does not grow at the same speed as their necessary expenditure on health, education and so on. But, this is the point that Colin Barnett is making: if the federal government is going to provide assistance to the states in this area of significant growth—health expenditure—then the federal government should do it out of its own sources of revenue and not out of the revenue that is allocated to the states. I fully accept the concern of Western Australia in that regard, particularly given—whether it right or wrong—that Western Australia has a current concern about the Grants Commission formula.

Deputy Speaker, as someone who is familiar with this, you will appreciate that I have to move the following second reading amendment:

That all the words after “that” be omitted with a view to substituting the following words:

“the House declines to give the bill a second reading until:

(a) there has been laid on the table of the House a copy of an agreement reached between the Commonwealth and each of the states and territories about GST handback in relation to the measures in this bill;

(b) each of the states and territories has signed that agreement; and

(c) given that the state opposition parties in New South Wales and Victoria have signalled that they do not support the current agreement, the people of those states have voted in their upcoming state elections”.

This is a very important point. The government are asking us to vote on a bill that will be immediately undermined should there be a change of government in Victoria on Saturday or in New South Wales in late March next year. Therefore, now is the time to put in place a framework that ensures that not only does the government deliver on all the preconditions for this bill upfront but also the government does not go down the path of trying to legislate for something that will not be able to be delivered.

I make another key point. The GST was introduced to try and reduce the serious vertical fiscal imbalance in Australia by providing a large and growing revenue stream to the states. This is a very important point: the coalition are firmly of the view that governments should be responsible for raising the revenue that they choose to spend—this is a key principle. It is easy to spend other people’s money. It is hard to spend the money that requires political pain to raise it. That is why exacerbating vertical fiscal imbalance in Australia with this bill is a bad decision.

Even though the Commonwealth government collects the GST on behalf of the states,
all the revenue goes to the states. Therefore, the states should be in the business of determining exactly where that money goes rather than having a fixed formula where only a part of the GST goes to the states. Most significantly, the states were the ones at the end of day that supported the GST through the Senate. I remember the impact on negotiations with the Democrats to get the GST through the Senate—as my colleague the member for Casey, who at that time was working for the Treasurer, will recall. It was significant for the Democrats to get their support that the revenue was going to the states.

Not all the states abolished all the taxes that were part of the GST deal. What a surprise that the New South Wales Labor government did not keep a deal! The only deals they keep are in relation to jobs for their own people, but they do not keep a deal between states. To be fair to old shoebox over the table, the minister for resources, he knows as I know that Kristina Keneally rejected the national approach to occupational health and safety and so there is a broken deal there. I think the minister for resources would be very keen for New South Wales to keep its commitments.

Mr Martin Ferguson—Have you run out of steam? You have morning tea on your mind.

Mr HOCKEY—No, I am just wondering. I am curious. I would say to the minister for resources: if you want to keep your deals then the key aspect of that for this bill is that the states continue to receive the revenue out of the GST rather than having it shanghaied by the federal government.

In conclusion, the opposition in both Victoria and New South Wales have expressed serious concerns about this agreement and there are still enormous uncertainties about the terms of this agreement. As well, this is a government that is more and more addicted to spending and looks all the time for new revenue-raising sources. Look no further than today. Yesterday the Assistant Treasurer said that he was going to investigate applying the GST to online purchases and then he scurried out onto ABC TV today and desperately tried to recover the situation by saying, ‘We’re not going to place a tax on online purchases.’ That is the way the government’s tax policy is framed. It cannot hold a policy on tax from midnight to dawn, let alone hold a policy on tax from budget time to election time, like the mining tax, or hold a policy on tax for six months in relation to carbon emissions.

This is a confused government. It does not know what it stands for and therefore is incapable of delivering policy that people believe in. So when it comes to this initiative on health, with a lack of detail in the bill and a lack of certainty in relation to tens of billions of dollars, the coalition will oppose this bill because it is bad policy and we would ask the parliament to support our second reading amendment, which defers any further consideration of the bill until such time as additional information is provided by the government.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr KJ Thomson)—Is the amendment seconded?

Mr Anthony Smith—I second the amendment and reserve my right to speak.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM (Braddon) (11.02 am)—If you listened to the previous speaker, the member for North Sydney, you would not know what this debate was about but you would know what the opposition are about because, apart from the blowhard performance, which he traditionally puts on and has replicated before this, he talked obstruction, deferral and delay over and over again. Every comment made about legislation in this place by those opposite is for obstruc-
tion, deferral and delay. They are Her Majesty’s opposition and it is their role to avail themselves of and critically appraise legislation, but that is not what I heard from the shadow Treasurer in dealing with this financial bill. All I heard was waffle, waffle, waffle and no detailed discussion of the bill.

Australia’s health system has suffered from inadequate funding arrangements and unclear accountability for too long. Everybody in Australia knows this. We have many good things in our health system and we have terrific health providers, but funding has been inadequate and/or inefficiently accounted for and used. The Federal Financial Relations Amendment (National Health and Hospitals Network) Bill 2010 is about trying to fix this. The new funding arrangements for Australia’s health and hospitals system—for the record, because you did not hear it from the opposition Treasury spokesperson—will ensure for the first time that federal governments properly fund Australia’s public hospitals, reversing the Commonwealth’s declining share of hospital funding, which occurred in particular under the regime of John Howard and now opposition leader Tony Abbott’s time as health minister. Indeed, the decline has gone from a 45 per cent federal government contribution to 38 per cent. This legislation is intended to fix that.

Secondly, the bill will ensure that for the first time the Commonwealth will fund hospitals for each service they provide rather than through block grants—that is, meeting increases in demand and helping to take pressure of hospital waiting lists. The third intention of the bill is to allow the Commonwealth, as the dominant funder, to introduce new national standards for public hospital services, ensuring all patients receive timely and high-quality services. Fourthly, it will drive improvements in primary care and prevention, because the Commonwealth, as the dominant funder of the hospital system, will have an incentive to provide better primary care and prevention services to take pressure off our hospital system.

As I mentioned earlier, the Commonwealth’s share of funding for hospital services has dropped from 45 per cent to 38 per cent, so the legislation represents the first time that we will be guaranteeing a fixed share of hospital funding into the future. That is the historic element of this legislation not discussed by those opposite, merely obstructed.

It is also important to note that this legislation builds upon significant investments in the health system initiated by this government. For instance there was a 50 per cent increase in hospital funding negotiated at the end of 2008, when we came into government, and there is the $7.4 billion health reform package which sits on top of that record investment in hospital services. This includes the delivery of 1,300 more hospital beds; training for more than 5,500 GPs over the next decade; more nurses, more practice nurses and hundreds of extra specialists going to rural and regional areas; expanding primary care facilities with small infrastructure grants for more than 400 GP clinics and an additional 28 new GP clinics across the country; and our world-leading preventative health measures such as the introduction of plain packaging for tobacco, which is aimed at reducing smoking levels, to take pressure off our hospitals over the longer term. That is at the essence of this legislation.

Under the agreement proposed by this legislation the Commonwealth government will relieve the states and territories of $15.6 billion in growth of health costs from 2014-15 to 2019-20, allowing them to invest in other essential services. That is at the core of this financial arrangement. In turn, the efficient pricing arrangements will mean that Australia will get value for money from our health
dollars to deliver services as effectively and efficiently as possible. We are asking those opposite to support this historic legislation.

The member for North Sydney has already indicated a number of amendments to this legislation, merely delaying this legislation into the future. If they have any concern for health in this country and understand the economics and the projected growth of health services, they will know that what we are proposing is the most sensible, efficient, effective and transparent method to deal with increasing costs—that is, for the Commonwealth to take on that responsibility. Taking on that responsibility would give us the ability, through our funding arrangements, to leverage better standards of services provided by state and private practitioners. That is at the heart of this legislation.

There are many other aspects of health reform which will be affected by this legislation. When I look at our record of only three years on health, I think it is remarkable. There is a lot more to do and that is why this legislation is coming in as part of a tranche of health reforms. We have increased the capacity of our health system to deal with the needs and demands placed on it, particularly with training more doctors and nurses and providing more beds. The government is investing $1.2 billion as part of our National Health and Hospitals Network—in doctors, nurses and allied health professionals. We will also be investing more than $1.6 billion for more than 1,300 new subacute beds, to reduce bottlenecks and capacity constraints in our systems. These beds will be delivered in areas like rehabilitation, palliative care and, importantly, mental health services so that people can get the care they need.

We are also investing heavily in connecting care services. I look forward to a local hospital network system developing in my state where I see essentially the need for three hospital networks reflecting the three subregional parts of my state—the north, north-west and the south. I look forward to working with the Minister for Health and Ageing and with my federal and state colleagues to bring about an efficient, effective local hospital network system in Tasmania based on the three regions. The soon to be established Medicare Locals program, which will work with local GPs and allied health and community health providers, will drive local integration and coordination of primary health services and improved access to care. On top of this, we are investing $466 million to establish a commonsense, integrated health record system by establishing personally controlled electronic health records, hopefully not only making it more efficient and effective but also reducing mistakes and duplication, ensuring that, with patients’ consent, doctors have information when they need it—a very important reform.

We also want to make it easier for people to have better access to services. That is why we are establishing a national after-hours GP and primary care service. Anybody calling their GP out of hours will be referred to a nurse or a GP on the phone and, if necessary, will then referred to local after-hours GP services coordinated by the Medical Locals program—that is, the Medicare area networks set up to assist people to integrate GP, primary and preventative services in our regions.

The government will also invest $355 million in more GP superclinics and expanded GP clinics in about 450 locations across Australia. I have two GP superclinics in my region of Braddon in North-West Tasmania, one of which is completed and the other is well on the way to completion. This has added greater capacity in my region for people to access integrated healthcare services. I cannot think of any more commonsense approach than to connect the health providers
that provide health services in my region to
each other. It will lead to better health care
and better management of health services for
individuals. That is part and parcel of our
policy. That has been opposed by those op-
posive but I should not be surprised, because
they have opposed everything of note that we
have put up for health services and commu-
nications for this country.

Our government will invest $750 million
so that emergency department patients will
have, hopefully, the guarantee that they will
be treated, admitted or referred within four
hours where clinically appropriate. That is a
very tall order and to get that consistently
across the nation will be difficult, but we are
investing in that and we are seeking to make
that happen. The government will also invest
an additional $800 million for elective sur-
gery to help back a target of 95 per cent of
elective surgeries being delivered within the
clinically recommended time, with a guaran-
tee that patients facing excessive waits
should have their elective surgery fast-
tracked. Again, this is a difficult target and
one which we must strive to achieve.

This government is determined to tackle
preventative health. We have tried to do this
by taking world-leading action to combat
tobacco, which contributes to the death of
15,000 Australians a year. The government
will introduce plain packaging for all to-
bacco products—a world first, again—in
addition to raising tobacco excise, which we
hope will result in 87,000 fewer smokers.
The government will also invest $449 mil-
ion to improve care for people with diabe-
tes, which is fast on the way to becoming
one of our major disease burdens.

On sustainability, this government is seek-
ing through this legislation to be the domi-
nant funder of Australia’s public hospitals,
funding 60 per cent of hospital activity and
capital, plus 60 per cent of training and re-
search costs in public hospitals. These
changes will mean that one government will
have dominant funding responsibility for all
parts of the health system, ending the blame
game and the perverse incentives for buck-
passing and cost shifting. This legislation
will play a historic part in achieving these
aims.

Mr RANDALL (Canning) (11.17 am)—I
am pleased to speak today on the Federal
Financial Relations Amendment (National
Health and Hospitals Network) Bill 2010.
Let us understand why we are here today. We
are here because before the 2007 election the
former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd made a
threat that if the hospitals and health net-
works of the states did not get their act to-
gether he was going to take them over, 100
per cent. In fact the threat was made a num-
ber of times. He threatened that the Com-
monwealth would use its powers to take over
state health jurisdictions. What we have here
today is a watered-down version of that. We
have a watered-down version because of the
fact that the former Prime Minister no longer
holds the same position and his deputy then,
who I suspect supported everything he said,
has now come to the conclusion that this is
the fall-back position.

Today, on what I understand is the third
anniversary of the election of the Rudd gov-
ernment, we are no better off. If the Austra-
lian people were to ask themselves whether
they were better off or worse off after three
years of Labor, they would have to say they
were worse off—substantially worse off.

Mr Sidebottom—Go to Greece, Portugal,
Ireland, Spain.

Mr RANDALL—I hear the interjection
from the member for Braddon, and he would
say these sorts of things because Tasmania is
the biggest beneficiary of this proposal. Of
course, Tasmania needs to be because it is a
leech on the teat of the Australian economy,
supported by states like Western Australia. We are sick and tired of propping up mendicant states like Tasmania and the largesse that goes to people like the member for Braddon who has just bragged about having two superclinics in his electorate when other electorates around Australia are in need of all the support they can get. My electorate, for example, does not have a GP superclinic and there is not one earmarked. And we do not want one. I have had the doctors in my area come to me and say, ‘Please don’t allow the Commonwealth to waste money by putting a GP superclinic in our area.’ We have got a very good set of hospital services and GP clinics funded by GPs themselves, and they do not want to be imposed on or competed against by a taxpayer-funded GP superclinic in the electorate of Canning, thank you very much.

We oppose this bill—we have to oppose the bill—because as it is an unfair bill. For years Labor opposed the GST. They went to three elections, starting from Paul Keating, opposing the GST. They did not want a GST. You will remember Kim Beazley, a former Western Australian colleague now enjoying his sinecure in the United States, going on about roll-back. If they got in they were going to roll the GST back. They thought it was terrible. The Rudd-Gillard governments have since been elected twice. I use the term ‘elected’, but we actually have more seats on this side. I remind the House on the third anniversary of the Labor government that it was ‘selected’ by the Independents after the last election because it failed to get enough seats. After three years the government has had an opportunity to roll back the GST and it has not.

In this bill the government is now saying, ‘The states have got the GST’—because we know that every cent raised by the GST goes back to the states as a growth tax—and we want to help ourselves to some of that.’ I say to the states: beware. Beware of the Commonwealth dipping its hand in your little back pocket and taking your money away from you because they will continue to erode that growth tax that was given to you as a reform of Commonwealth-state financial relationships. Remember the great Paul Keating saying:

Never get between a Premier and a bucket of money.

That is why we had to have a sustainable way of financing the states. Under the GST arrangements, every cent collected by the GST goes back to the states. This bill is opposed by many people. John Brumby put up a false front for a while, trying to ratchet up a better deal before he agreed to it. Mind you, no-one has signed any agreement yet. That was confirmed by the Prime Minister as reported in an article in, dare I say, the Australian on 19 November. The article by Sue Dunlevy and Matthew Franklin, referring to the government, says:

… it confirmed yesterday it had not secured a single signature agreeing to change the state, territory and federal tax arrangements.

Not one signature. The article goes on to say:

Six of the eight state and territory governments have “agreed in principle” to the reforms but Western Australia and Tasmania are holding out.

I say to you that Western Australia will not agree to sign on, not at all. Being a Western Australian member, I have been present on many occasions when Colin Barnett has confirmed and reconfirmed this. We will not sign on. The WA Minister for Health, Kim Hames—he is the member for Dawesville, which is in my electorate, and he is somebody I have a lot to do with—continues to reiterate that we will not sign on. Yes, we will voluntarily hand over 30 per cent of our GST, but we are not going to formally give away the opportunity for growth in this tax revenue, because, as I will
point out shortly, we are essentially being duded under the GST arrangements in any case. This bill is an attempt by the Commonwealth to claw back some revenue from the states and it plans to do that progressively over the years.

The tables in the Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook, MYEFO, are quite interesting. When we were first told about this, the contribution from the states was going to be 30 per cent. Now we find out that there is going to be quite a bit of variation between states. New South Wales is pretty much on track for 30 per cent. Their total GST revenue in 2010-11 is going to be about $14½ billion. In 2011-12, it will be $15.8 billion. Out of that, they will pay $4,774 million. The MYEFO table goes through each state. Victoria, for example, would be $2.8 billion in 2011-12, which is 25 per cent of its GST; Queensland is $3.54 billion, which is 40 per cent; South Australia is $1.229 billion, or 26 per cent; Tasmania, 20 per cent—the member for Braddon should hang his head in shame; they are barely contributing—the ACT, 50 per cent; and the Northern Territory, only 14 per cent due to its status as a territory etcetera.

But all of those figures grow over time. By the time you get to 2013-14, it goes up to 31 per cent for New South Wales; Victoria stays the same; Queensland goes from 40 to 44 per cent; South Australia goes from 26 to 27; Tasmania from 20 to 21—barely a contribution, as I said—and the contribution from the territories also grows, as I indicated. Interestingly, under Western Australia the figure is zero, because we are not contributing—we are not going to sign on. We are happy, as I said, to rebate the GST, but we are not going to get caught up in this growth grab from Canberra, this attempt by them to continue to dip their hands in our pockets. The Premier made his position very clear, as reported in an article by Paul Kelly in the Australian on 30 October. In that article, Colin Barnett is reported as saying: … that he would never surrender a third of Western Australia’s entitled GST revenue to the commonwealth, under the terms of the federal government’s national health agreement.

Is it any wonder? Western Australia has a very bad hand dealt to it by the Commonwealth Grants Commission through the GST arrangements. We get 68c in every GST dollar returned to us—only 68c. Victoria, I understand, gets back roughly 89c in the dollar, Queensland 91c and New South Wales 93c. It is unfair and we are continually being ratcheted back. The article goes on to report Colin Barnett saying:

This situation has become simply unacceptable to me … It is unacceptable to all Western Australians. And the public understands this. Yet projections over the next three years are that this return will fall to 54c and keep heading south.

So why would we sign on to something as ridiculous as this when, as he said, the Minister for Health and Ageing, Ms Roxon, has been threatening him about not handing over other money? She told the Premier that he would pay the price, but he told her that he was unwilling to pay the price because the amount he was forfeiting—$356 million over four years, or $90 million a year—was, he said, only ‘enough to run our health system for five days’. So of course we do not mind going it alone, because we are not going to be led by the nose.

The most disappointing thing about all of this is that, as I said earlier, this legislation is in this House before everyone has signed on. Worse than that is that there is an election in Victoria this weekend and the opposition have said that, if elected to government, they will not sign onto this. In New South Wales, similarly, the opposition have said that they want to have a further look at it. So we are now getting ahead of the game, imposing the will of the Commonwealth on people in
states where there is a huge chance—certainly in New South Wales—that the state government may change.

When I was doorknocking during the election campaign, one of the main things, apart from the issue of the further attack on Western Australian through the mining tax, people were saying to me was: ‘Whatever you are doing, make sure Colin Barnett holds his ground on this GST. We do not want WA people handing over this money to the Commonwealth.’ How can a bureaucracy from this far away, over 3½ thousand kilometres, administer, or even attempt to administer, health arrangements in Western Australia? We are out of sight, out of mind. Somebody, in fact, today referred to Western Australia as the other side of the black stump. You might say that, but do not forget the fact that we contribute a massive and disproportionate amount to Commonwealth revenues. We might be out of sight and out of mind, but you certainly want us to continue doing what we are doing.

In the last few moments, I just want to mention the fact that, as the member for North Sydney said, this is essentially saying to the Commonwealth government, Prime Minister Gillard and Minister Roxon: ‘Here’s a blank cheque from the states. We’ll sign on and you can grow the amount that you take away from us.’ We are not going to be doing that sort of thing. The member for Denison went on about GP superclinics, and I have addressed the fact that we do not want one in Canning because our doctors are running their GP services very well. He talked about after-hours GP services. We have had after-hours GP services operating out of the Armadale hospital for years, funded to some degree by the Commonwealth. So this is nothing new. We are doing very well, if you don’t mind, so we certainly do not want the Commonwealth imposing themselves on us.

We are actually quite leading-edge in the way that we run our health system in Western Australia. We were the first state to introduce the four-hour waiting program in emergency departments, based on the British model. If you are in an emergency department of a hospital, rather than being parked on an emergency bed somewhere in the corridor, you have to be admitted to a bed. All the ramping that goes on regularly in hospitals is another issue that has to be addressed. So the four-hour waiting rule has been introduced in Western Australia and—surprise, surprise—I see the Commonwealth and other states starting to say, ‘It wouldn’t be a bad idea if we could do this throughout the rest of Australia because it sounds as if it’s the right thing to do.’ We did not need to pinch anyone’s GST to do that in Western Australia; we are quite happy to fund it ourselves, if you don’t mind.

But what we do object to in this bill, which is just another attack on Western Australia, is the money it wants to leach off us again. As I said, thank goodness for the geniuses who thought up the mining tax before the last election. That is why you only have three seats out of 15 in Western Australia, so keep it coming. I will be happy to make sure you have that policy leading up to any future election, whether it is in three years or before that, because Australians have a deep affection for the mining industry in this country. It is a bit like the deep affection we had many years ago for riding on the sheep’s back. Now we are riding on the mining industry, and any tax or any attempt to slaughter it for short-term gain is not held well by Australian people. They want it to continue to grow and make us prosperous, because the prosperity of this country comes from our resources, and this is a time when the rest of the world wants to soak up many of our resources. So we oppose this bill because it is an opportunity for a government that cannot stop its
reckless spending and we will not sign on to it.

Mr HAYES (Fowler) (11.32 am)—There is one thing that can be said about the electorate’s attitude to health and hospitals, and that is that it does need to be improved. Regardless of the position of the member for Canning, whom I have a lot of respect for in this House, I have to say he gilded the lily when he tried to advance the argument that everything is well in health and hospitals in his own state. Perhaps he should start looking at the statistics.

Since the Labor government announced its plans for a health and hospital network, I have had the opportunity to be out there campaigning, doing what most local members do, such as holding street meetings. One of the hottest topics at street meetings, when people come up to mobile offices, is health and hospitals. It is not surprising. I live in an area with plenty of families. If you ask any parent what is important to them, it is the health system. My constituents want me to know that they are not content with the current arrangements. Going to emergency services in the local hospital at either Liverpool or Fairfield to find you are waiting for hours, not having after-hours healthcare facilities when they need it—these are the things that mums and dads talk about. And it is not just me. Let’s face it: everyone who goes out and consults with their constituents knows that that is the truth.

The fact is that people are generally happy that, for the first time, a government has come out and said: ‘We are going to make a major investment in the health and hospital system. We are going to invest in training more doctors.’ You know what the record of those opposite was when it came to doctor training. They actually slashed it in half when they had a chance to do something about it. We are doing something about dis-proportionately advancing the number of trained nurses in this country and ensuring that our local experts have a greater say in the way hospitals are run. This is not about setting up some situation of quasi-local boards and all the rest of it; this is about making sure that our medical professionals and practitioners in the field have a say in the way medical resources are distributed within their sphere of influence.

I would have thought that was something the other side would want to take some pride in as well. Do not forget that it was not all that long ago that the current Leader of the Opposition was the health minister. He actually championed this position in this place. He went out on a limb to say that the federal government should take over hospital funding. They wanted greater control of that. It is a pity he could not control that in his party room, but that is not surprising. I suppose. The thing is that this was an initiative that Tony Abbott at one stage wanted to take credit for within his own party. I have to say, they have done many spellbinding backflips over on that side of the House, but this is really one that must be looked at in the cold light of day. People just cannot come into this place, have a position and then completely turn 180 degrees from it—unless you want to believe that we are all a bunch of politicians and it is all about garnering a vote. I would not want to say that is the spirit of everyone in this place. I know winning elections is important, but maybe following your beliefs should trump that notion.

The Federal Financial Relations Amendment (National Health and Hospitals Network) Bill 2010 implements the financial details needed to ensure that the government can get on with the necessary business of improving health and delivering the government’s health reform program. I will go into some detail about that, but firstly I would like to take a little bit of time to talk about
something that is pretty special in my electorate at the moment because the government has just called for tenders for the new $15 million GP superclinic at Liverpool. Liverpool Hospital is certainly a fantastic resource that we have. It is currently being expanded at a rate of knots. I have one of my sons working on that, so I get to see a fair bit and hear about the construction on that site. When completed it will be the biggest hospital in the Southern Hemisphere. But—and wouldn’t you know it?—one of the bottle-necks at that hospital is the issue of access to its emergency clinics. One of the reasons why I personally lobbied for a GP superclinic in this area, notwithstanding the fact that we have this huge hospital being extended, is to do with the fact that in the south-west of Sydney we need to take the pressure off hospitals, such as Liverpool and Fairfield, and this is one way of doing it.

According to the latest statistics from the Primary Health Care Research and Information Service, the Liverpool and Fairfield area has 198 GP practices. It is estimated there are about 400 doctors serving a population of 397,000 people, so that is about one doctor for 980 people. Those surgeries do not operate all hours and, as a consequence, when kids are ill their mums and dads front up with them at either of the two hospitals, Liverpool and Fairfield. With the population of south-west Sydney due to grow by 100 per cent over the next 30 years, it is absolutely time that we made a significant investment in health care, just as we need to do more about training and maintaining doctors in the area. But we must provide services and one of those which I think will be greatly valued in my area is the establishment of the GP superclinic. Without the government’s commitment to it—and it is a pretty ambitious project and is certainly a very well needed piece of infrastructure—we would not be able to have more flexible and deliverable health services for the people of Fowler.

A colleague out there is Dr Andrew McDonald, the state member for Macquarie Fields and the Parliamentary Secretary Assisting the Minister for Health. He has rightly flagged the potential of this superclinic to be used for the training of medical students, particularly those from the University of Western Sydney. Andrew should know about that as, apart from being a state member of parliament, he is a paediatrician. This bloke goes out and works pro bono one day a week, in many of the housing commission suburbs of his electorate, as a doctor. So I actually rate highly what he does and, apart from that, he is also an associate professor of medicine at the medical school of the UWS. I take note when a person like that comes out and speaks. He is not just another politician; he is a person who genuinely cares for his community, and you see that in the way he handles not only his portfolio but his role as a doctor, being someone who cares about the community generally. So that is his view of what the superclinic is capable of delivering in the south-west of Sydney. The superclinic will substantially relieve the patient load in one of our state’s biggest emergency departments, that of Liverpool Hospital. I am happy to report that as the tenders have been called a number of local doctors have been looking at arrangements and consortiums and at how they are going to tender, so we are looking now at advancing that position in the short term.

Another commitment that we have made is to invest more than $51 million to improve health services in my electorate, including $46.9 million to build the Ingham Health Research Institute at Liverpool. Attached to the Liverpool Hospital, this major research centre is called after the Ingham family, our local poultry group and probably the owner of many racehorses. This group was behind...
the foundation of this research institute—one of the primary research institutes for cancer therapies in the country. I am happy that is being developed to operate in conjunction with Liverpool Hospital. In addition to those investments, we have also committed money to ensure that elective surgery waiting lists can be shortened and to improve after-hours GP services. It is not simply about the GP superclinics; it is also about being able to have doctors look at extending their hours and also putting on casual doctor services to ensure that the needs of my area are being adequately taken care of in that respect. This is all a substantial investment in local health care and it sends a very strong message that this government is not prepared to leave the health system in a business-as-usual situation.

As a parent, I hope that my kids and, happily, their children will have access to world-class healthcare services not on the books but when they need it. That is what we are striving to deliver. I am sure the vast majority of parents would also have the same view. I strongly urge members on the other side of the House to put politics aside and support this bill today. So far I have heard members opposite wanting to criticise the Gillard government’s national health and hospitals plan, and I wonder what fuels that criticism. I mentioned a little earlier the Leader of the Opposition’s foray into this area, particularly when he was the health minister, so those opposite do have form in looking positively at things like this to deliver services to a community. So I am urging them not to turn their back on that. If it was good enough for the Leader of the Opposition, when he was the health minister, to try to champion an argument within his own party room that this was an area in which the federal government should become inextricably involved, then you would have to ask what, other than party politics, is fuelling this criticism that they have? I think that is what it really boils down to. This is rank opportunism and politics.

We are here for one reason, regardless of which side of the House we get to sit. We are here to serve the community. We are here to actually look at what is good for communities here and now, or, perhaps, for the next election and we are here to give long-term legacy to communities that we have the honour to represent. I would ask members opposite to start thinking about that as opposed to looking at cheap and rank political positioning when it comes to something as significant as this bill.

In a recent survey that was conducted by New South Wales Health in Liverpool, Liverpool Hospital had one of the lowest patient ratings in respect of people who attended emergency service departments. Regrettably the figures showed that eight per cent of patients rated their experiences as poor and 18 per cent rated them as fair. At Fairfield Hospital, which is another service in my electorate, five per cent of patients rated their experiences at emergency service departments as poor, with 12 per cent rating them as fair.

I do not mention these figures to embarrass or offend the hardworking staff at either of these hospitals. The staff do a fantastic job with the resources they have and with the constraints they work under. However, I do raise them as further proof that the National Health and Hospitals Network is needed. This is not to point the finger at the New South Wales government-run system, as any other government would probably do the same. I want to make the point and reiterating it that, when it comes to a matter as important as health and hospitals, we cannot be content with the business-as-usual approach.

This country’s health system is struggling to keep up with an ever-increasing growth in demand, which is fuelled by a growing and
ageing population. We all know that. That is why we need to reform our funding arrangements for health care in this country. That is what this bill entails. This bill will reduce pressure on increasing healthcare costs and will help the budgets of our states and territories into the future. Through this bill the government will become the major funder of health and hospital systems in Australia. It will take full funding and policy responsibility for primary health and aged care. It will be responsible for taking health and hospitals into the 21st century.

We are in a situation where we are seeing an extraordinary number of people with disturbing health problems. In my electorate 22,000 people over the age of 15 have been diagnosed with obesity, 11,000 people have type 2 diabetes, 26,000 people suffer from high cholesterol, and 30,000 people suffer from asthma. It is absolutely overwhelming and we must take steps now to relieve that pressure on our health and hospital system. I commend the bill to the House. (Time expired)

Ms MARINO (Forrest) (11.47 am)—I rise to support the shadow Treasurer’s amendments. As we know the Federal Financial Relations Amendment (National Health and Hospitals Network) Bill 2010 strips unspecified amounts of GST funding from the states to be retained by the Commonwealth simply so that the Labor government can make the false claim that it will be the dominant funder of health spending. And I suspect that the other reason is to make a grab for future state wealth through their individual increased GST revenues—their growth source.

This measure simply re-badges $56.1 billion of GST revenue—perhaps, because there are several different figures out about that now—over the current forward estimates, although this figure, as I said, may not necessarily be accurate at all. In the MYEFO released a week after the Treasurer’s second reading speech on this bill, it was said to be $44.5 billion. And recently we have heard sums of perhaps $50 billion. This demonstrates the problems with this particular bill as there are no definites.

Perhaps the Treasurer of Australia could clarify this for the parliament. We should actually not be voting on legislation that does not specify the exact amount of GST that the Labor government will retain by this measure nor should we vote on legislation which is in breach of the GST agreement between the states and territories. It is an abuse of parliamentary process that we in this House are expected to vote on this before all state and territory governments have signed agreements with the Commonwealth about what amount to hand over. This is an agreement to hand over a significant but, as yet, unknown share of their GST to the Labor government.

It is an attack on our Federation and an undermining of the financial independence of the states. It is an embarrassment to the parliament that passes it and an abrogation of duty by state governments that have agreed to it. I only hope that people in these states hold their individual governments to account for their decision to sign the health agreement. This is not a bill about health reform. It is, as I said, all about federal-state financial relations and federal financial control.

Being a proud Western Australian, I acknowledge the strength and foresight of Premier Colin Barnett in not agreeing to this latest Labor mess. He is the only state Premier in Australia not to abrogate the rights of his state or, indeed, his people. Colin Barnett and our health minister Kim Haines both know that, if this was genuine health reform, the Prime Minister and Treasurer would have agreed to WA’s offer to commit an equivalent amount of WA revenue into health reform.
The Western Australian state government funds over 60 per cent of the operating costs of our public hospital system right now. It is the dominant funding source.

The Labor government’s proposal to become the major funder by simply increasing the Commonwealth funding from 35 to 60 per cent is, by sleight of hand, using the state’s own GST revenue to do so. They are taking at least one-third—at least, we do not know yet—of these funds, re-badging it as federal funding and then making the claim that the 60 per cent is all Commonwealth funding. Clearly the Labor government is proposing that any additional funding needed for the health system will come directly from the states through those increased GST revenues. And once again WA, if it agreed, would be the loser and would continue to prop up other states. Our GST share is already down to 68c while New South Wales is receiving 95c under the Grants Commission formula.

So how would Western Australia keep funding our remaining 40 per cent share of public hospital costs when the growing source and base revenue, at least 30 per cent of the GST, would be in the control of the federal government? We would still have to fund our other 40 per cent share. This bill provides no clarity or certainty on exactly how much GST revenue the states will actually have stripped away by the Commonwealth. This is an open-ended deal in which the Treasurer has loosely said that the states and territories will dedicate around one-third of GST revenue. ‘Around one-third of GST’—that is bound to give the states a great sense of confidence, as it obviously did for Colin Barnett. After all, to a federal Labor government addicted to spending, what is a few billion dollars here or there, as we have seen? Let’s face it, of all the billions of dollars splashed around, wasted or rorted in stimulus packages, not one cent went to health.

I cannot believe that any state premier or government would have signed even an in-principle agreement without knowing exactly what amount of GST is to be taken from their state. A government that has been unable to give away free pink batts and unable to run a green loans scheme, Fuelwatch, GroceryWatch or the BER program is saying: ‘Trust us. Sign up now and we’ll let you know later what it is going to cost you.’ Added to the open-ended nature of this is the fact that, under proposed section 6A, the minister will determine the amount of GST revenue to be paid, and here lies the danger and the very real problem for the states and territories. That is why they should not sign even an in-principle agreement. This decision of the minister cannot be disallowed by the parliament. Simply put: this will be the only opportunity for the parliament to pass judgment on these arrangements. As with the Home Insulation Program and the NBN, there will be no scrutiny—just trust Labor to get it right. I will say again for the states and territories that have already signed the in-principle agreements: the decision of the minister cannot be disallowed by the parliament. I just wonder whether those premiers are actually aware of that. Are the people in the states aware of it? I ask: have you discharged your responsibility to your states by signing an open-ended agreement? The federal minister will determine the amount of GST revenue that your states are going to lose. It is an open-ended deal.

Given the constant repeated waste and mismanagement of taxpayers’ funds and the government’s addiction to spending, having an open-ended deal is like a red flag to a bull to a debt and deficit government, particularly one that proposed to fix hospitals by 2009. Figures taken from MYEFO show percentages from 14 to 50 per cent—and perhaps 60 per cent, we have heard—of GST revenues. That is what will be removed by the Com-
monwealth. The states that have signed have clearly signed up blindly or were oblivious, or perhaps not caring, of the amount of GST that will be stripped from their revenue streams and future growth or, worse, unwilling to stand up for their state’s rights. I wonder how the signatory states are feeling right now when they look at this bill and I wonder whether they are having second thoughts. We know that ACT Treasurer Katy Gallagher’s office has confirmed that the territory would have to hand back 48 to 50 per cent of GST, and Queensland’s Minister for Health and the shadow health minister believe that their hand-back will be between 39 and 42 per cent of GST in 2012-13.

It is absolutely extraordinary and sets a dangerous precedent that states would sign up to this when the explanatory memorandum states that the funding commitments are yet to be finalised. No wonder Colin Barnett said no. This is an open-ended deal and Premier Barnett, in strongly representing Western Australia’s interests, has said that he believes that the handover of any part of the GST will eventually lead to the Commonwealth having 100 per cent control of the growth revenue stream of the GST, which affects the ongoing sustainability of states. Given the growth and development in Western Australia, this would be literally like letting the fox in with the chickens. I can imagine Treasurer Wayne Swan in charge of Western Australia’s revenue. It does not bear thinking about. We only have to look at the Labor government’s proposed mining tax, which is basically a tax on Western Australia, and the carbon tax on top. Add the GST grab and Western Australia will simply be a mendicant state, begging at federal Labor’s feet—something I know this government would very much like to achieve and is, by way of this agreement, trying to achieve.

I will be very interested to see how the government progresses with this health bill, given those changes to GST arrangements require unanimous agreement by the Commonwealth and every state and territory noted in the Treasury incoming government brief. This is the same advice that told the Treasurer to resolve this issue before the reintroduction of this legislation, but the Treasurer clearly has not listened. He has not resolved this issue and has not achieved unanimous agreement, but he has reintroduced the legislation. I also understand that not one single state or territory has actually signed over its share of GST revenue to the Commonwealth. Again it is clear that the Treasurer should not have progressed with this legislation until he had unanimous, signed agreements from all states and territories. As well as the people of New South Wales and Victoria having had an opportunity to pass judgement through their elections on Labor state governments who have agreed in-principle to abrogate their state rights with this deal, we have moved a second reading amendment to this effect.

In Western Australia we owe much to our historic strong leaders. In 1897, over 107 years ago, WA Premier Sir John Forrest, after whom my seat is named, was one of the greatest leaders of our state. He was a driving force in amending the legislation that eventually became the Australian Constitution. He did so to protect our state’s rights. He was concerned that the state of Western Australia would effectively become mendicant to the Commonwealth of Australia. He would have been equally as concerned today with this bill. The problem then was the same as this: one of finance. There is no doubt that whoever holds the purse strings dictates what can or will be done. John Forrest fought hard to negotiate fair funding arrangements for his state and I will continue to do so, as will members on this side of the House.
The Labor Party has clearly agreed to strip GST revenue from the states and territories. On 31 October 2010, the Western Australian Labor leader Eric Ripper—not everybody agrees with this—was reported as calling on the federal government to urgently address the state’s share of the GST and rejected the Gillard grab for our state’s GST. Mr Ripper said:

There’s an issue here that needs to be fixed and the Gillard government has got to look at addressing this GST share issue for WA.

The report stated:

WA’s share of the GST is one of the reasons Mr Ripper is opposed to the state signing up to a national health reform agreement, which would see it hand over 30 per cent of its remaining GST revenue.

Mr Ripper further said:

We can’t accept the GST claw back, which in WA could even be as much as 60 per cent of our remaining GST which is already far too small and unfair.

So in Western Australia even the local Labor Party opposes this deal. I hope the remaining Labor members in this chamber from WA take note of this and support their state leader by joining with us in our move. In the state of Western Australia, the people and our political parties demand it. But in spite of the Labor government taking over the states’ GST to fund health and hospitals, they claim to be the majority funder by only using the states’ own GST for the purpose.

Even though this bill does not provide details of the new health arrangements, we do know that it will be a massive new, expensive, ever expanding, gross and likely incompetent bureaucratic beast under this Labor government and there has been a failure to deal with practical issues. We are yet to see the details and this bill fails to provide any of the details. What we do know, however, is that the government is committed to centralising planning and control, and that is a concern. There are very many valid reasons against it. In March the health minister admitted that this health plan may end up increasing taxes and costing jobs in the health sector. We do know that there will be four new health bureaucracies created at a federal level and one in every state on top of an undecided number of local hospital networks and primary healthcare organisations. So, unfortunately, I can see where the states’ GST will be going. As I said, there are many valid reasons not to support the legislation in this form. If this is put to a vote now, this is of real concern. I support the amendments put by the shadow Treasurer.

Ms ROWLAND (Greenway) (12.01 pm)—I am very pleased to rise and speak in support of the Federal Financial Relations Amendment (National Health and Hospitals Network) Bill 2010. It is a subject very close to my heart. My interest in public health is a long one. Ten years ago I put my hand up to be a community representative on the then Western Sydney area health service and I learned a lot about the fundamentals of health economics. I learned about emergency department access blocks, I learned about triage and I learned about bed funding. I learned about preventive health and that sometimes the most effective spending is the spending that keeps people out of hospital, preventing them from having to actually need treatment in the first place.

The Labor Party has always been the party of health reform. We have also promoted the importance of a universal and quality healthcare system. The Curtin Labor government began funding public hospitals for the first time and it was the Chifley Labor government that introduced legislation to create a public health system, paving the way for the creation of Medibank and subsequently Medicare. The Whitlam Labor government legislated for the introduction of Medibank, a precursor to a universal public health system.
And the Hawke and Keating Labor governments enshrined universality into the heart of our healthcare system by introducing Medicare. I am proud to be a member of a government that is continuing Labor’s strong tradition of health reform.

In contrast, the Liberal Party make it quite clear that they do not share this belief in the importance of universal health care, and it is evidenced by their negativity in this debate today. They have a history of repeatedly scrapping vital health programs and cutting funding for health services—a shameful tradition that would have continued if they had won the last election. The health policies of Robert Menzies simply led to uncapped fee-for-service medicine and inadequate rural medical services. The coalition constantly opposed the Whitlam government’s legislation to introduce Medibank and when they were in government from 1975 to 1983, they undermined the scheme, removing any semblance of universality.

When in government the then opposition displayed absolute contempt for our health system. Bulk-billing rates plummeted and $1 billion was cut from our public hospitals. The blame game not only continued, it became worse, to the detriment of constituents. And Australia was left with a shortage of 6,000 nurses and a queue of 650,000 people on public dental waiting lists, with 2,300 older Australians being left in hospital beds every night because of the shortage of aged care beds. Had they won the last election, they would have cut GP superclinics, which are designed to take pressure off hospital emergency departments and provide quality health care when it is needed. This would have hurt residents in my electorate of Greenway, where a $15 million GP superclinic is being built in Blacktown. I am very pleased that the tender process for this very important project has in fact commenced, and it is being widely welcomed by the people of Greenway. Indeed, the Liberal Party showed a complete and utter disregard for the healthcare needs of residents in Western Sydney. We are always the afterthought in their eyes. The local Liberal Party candidate, for example, claimed that an Abbott government would not cut the proposed Blacktown GP superclinic, completely contradicting his own party’s policy. He refused to participate in a community health forum organised by nurses at Blacktown Hospital, which I was very happy to participate in. The contrast between the Labor and conservative parties on the issue of health care could not be clearer and it is on display in this debate.

This debate also gives me the opportunity to again discuss something very close to my heart—the issue of Blacktown Hospital. For the benefit of those here, it is very useful to take into account the enormous scale of Blacktown Hospital, serving residents in Blacktown, which is the largest local government area in New South Wales and I think now the third-largest in Australia. Each year Blacktown Hospital treats more than 35,000 people in its emergency department. It has approximately 24,500 patients staying at least one night in hospital. It performs 8,000 surgical procedures, provides 214,000 outpatient services and assists with the birth of more than 3,300 babies—a rate that continues to increase as Greenway continues to be Australia’s nursery. The catchment area is absolutely enormous and, taking all that into account, it is therefore with responsiveness to the people whom I represent in this place that I am very pleased that we are having a $15 million GP superclinic built. We have the $17.6 million construction of the University of Western Sydney’s clinical school and research and education centre at Blacktown Hospital, which will train more doctors and nurses and health professionals in Western Sydney and, importantly, will train local students. Local students being trained locally
means that they are more likely to stay and
serve the people with whom they live. There
is $4.2 million for 18 additional beds at
Blacktown Hospital, which includes six new
acute beds, and $854,000 for new equipment
at Blacktown Hospital, including a new defi-
brillator, heart monitoring and breathing ma-
chines and urological equipment. Given all
these things, I am very pleased that I am able
to look my constituents in the eye and say
that I am doing my bit to deliver for them the
health services they need.

I am very pleased to support the bill be-
fore the House because I know that it will
continue Labor’s proud tradition of health
reform. This bill represents transformational
reform, and nothing represents transforma-
tional reform more than the benefits of the
National Broadband Network. I draw the
attention of the House to a public document,
a report commissioned by the Department of
Broadband, Communications and the Digital
Economy on the impact of high-speed
broadband for e-health. Some very interest-
ing and instructive items come out of this
report.

The department requested this report on
the financial and externality impacts of ubiq-
uitous high-speed broadband—in other
words, what the NBN precisely is—and, in
particular, the impacts that would result from
the increased use of things such as telemedi-
cine for remote consultations, remote home
based monitoring of chronic disease patients
and the aged, and remote training of health
professionals. The conclusion that this study
came to was that the estimated steady-state
benefits to Australia from wide-scale imple-
mentation of tele-health using ubiquitous
high-speed broadband may be in the vicinity
of $2 billion to $4 billion per annum. Every
year those benefits will accrue to the Austra-
lian public. When you multiply that and
think about how that money could be in-
vested in hospitals, you can see that this one
aspect of the NBN has benefits that clearly
mean that the quality of people’s lives is go-
ing to be very directly impacted in a positive
way.

I draw the attention of the House to a cou-
ple of items raised in the report. I did men-
tion chronic disease. Over two-thirds of
health expenditure in Australia is consumed
by chronic disease. The report very interest-
ingly points out that chronic conditions are
ideally suited to remote monitoring. Condi-
tions commonly covered by remote monitor-
ing include cardiovascular disease—the
Blacktown local government area has one of
the highest rates of cardiovascular disease in
New South Wales—diabetes, cancer, infec-
tions, skin injuries, and the list goes on.

These are benefits in terms of not only
chronic disease but also, in a very real sense,
social inclusion. The Australian e-Health
Research Centre has pointed out that using
tele-ophthalmology for diabetes prevention
in remote settings is particularly well suited
to delivery over high-speed broadband net-
works. This is significant given Australia’s
Indigenous population has one of the highest
rates of diabetes in the world. So when we
talk about social inclusion, when we talk
about bridging the gap, we can see how high-
speed broadband for tele-health can directly
benefit those in our society who are the most
vulnerable and continue to be the most vul-
nerable.

This bill implements significant changes
to federal financial arrangements in order to
implement key aspects of the National
Health and Hospitals Network agreement
that was endorsed on 20 April 2010. As we
have heard, the Commonwealth will take
responsibility for funding the majority of
Australia’s health and hospital systems. This
is vital in order to stop the blame game. As I
go around my constituency on a daily basis I
am continually told that the blame game
must stop. The blame game between the state and federal governments needs to end in order for constituents to have the highest quality health care system.

Unless we address these health funding arrangements, our health and hospital system will simply struggle to keep pace with our growing and ageing population. The *Intergenerational Report* released in January of this year shows that the proportion of our population aged over 65 is forecast to increase from 14 per cent this year to 23 per cent by 2050, and 5.1 per cent of the population is projected to be over the age of 85 by 2050. This will lead to an increased number of people requiring services and treatment to help with dementia, mobility, hearing, eyesight and general frailty. Meeting these needs will require not only additional services but also more expenditure in the area of health. The report also highlights that the ageing population and population growth itself will account for approximately 40 per cent of the expected increase.

State and territory governments cannot deny reality. Their revenue levels do not grow as fast as hospital costs. State government budgets will simply be crippled by the weight of rising health care costs and the quality of our system will suffer as a result. Indeed, some commentators have warned that entire state budgets risk being consumed by health and hospital costs unless reform is undertaken. That is why this government is taking action to reform our health system.

The Commonwealth will dedicate one-third of total GST allocations to health and hospital spending and will fund 60 per cent of the efficient price for all public hospital services and 60 per cent of capital, research and training in our public hospitals. The Commonwealth will also assume full funding and policy responsibility for GP and primary healthcare services and for aged care services.

I am very pleased to speak in support of this bill because I know that residents in my electorate of Greenway will directly benefit from these significant reforms. As I have said, unless the reforms occur we will not have a health system that will be able to cope into the future. In fact, one week after the COAG agreement was reached the Commonwealth and New South Wales governments announced the additional 18 new beds that I mentioned, totalling $4.2 million, for Blacktown. I was present when that was signed, in the old building of Blacktown Hospital where I was born so it was certainly a very significant day for me and here we are at a very significant point in reforming Australia’s public hospital systems.

It is crucial that the National Health and Hospitals Network bill is passed by the parliament to ensure that west and north-west Sydney continue to benefit from the additional resources that will flow. I am extremely concerned that failure to pass this bill will have hugely significant negative implications for Australia’s health and hospital system. The opposition’s refusal to support this legislation will directly hurt my local community.

Let us be clear: a vote against this legislation is a vote against more funding to provide more hospital beds, more doctors and more nurses for communities across Australia; a vote against this legislation is a vote against addressing the significant challenges posed by the ageing population; a vote against this legislation will simply place short-term political opportunism ahead of the national interest. As I said at the outset of my contribution, there is a fundamental difference between Labor and Liberal governments when it comes to health care and certainly it is on display today. We on this side
of the House believe in and value the importance of a quality healthcare system. Those opposite do not. This legislation ensures our proud legacy of health reform continues.

I will go into the break being able to look my constituents in the eye and say that I have put up my hand to ensure that we end the blame game when it comes to hospital funding, that I did my bit to ensure that they received the highest quality health care. I urge those opposite to do the same today so that they can go back in the break and do the same in their own electorates.

Dr Stone (Murray) (12.15 pm)—Unfortunately, the member for Greenway is misguided in her hopes for the Federal Financial Relations Amendment (National Health and Hospitals Network) Bill 2010. She is quite wrong in proposing that this bill would lead to major changes in health service provisions in her electorate or anywhere else in Australia. This bill is not about any proposed health reforms. The bill is simply about federal-state financial relations. It is specifically about the federal-state Labor deal to take $50 billion of GST revenue away from the states and territories and hand it to the Gillard government from 1 July 2011.

If this was a great government that had a track record of spending dollars very efficiently and producing great value for money we would feel less alarmed, but we all know what this government does with funds. We have the BER as an example of getting extraordinarily poor value for money. We have the pink batts debacle where not only dollars were wasted but also lives were lost. In my electorate and right across Australia there are still thousands of householders who live in fear and dread of what dangers lurk in their ceilings as a result of such a badly mismanaged government policy. In fact, I defy anyone to find anything more badly mismanaged in our history since Federation.

The problem is that after more than $40 billion in new or increased taxes in the past three budgets and $94 billion in new net debt, the Gillard government now wants to get another $50 billion of GST revenue at the expense of states and territories. Not surprisingly, some states, particularly New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia, are saying that they are not going to support health reform.

This bill does very little for the problems which face rural and regional populations in particular. Let me quote a few statistics. According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, people in rural and remote communities experience poorer health, have higher rates of most chronic diseases and have higher mortality rates than those who reside in metropolitan areas. People in rural and remote communities experience higher death rates than their counterparts in metropolitan areas, with death rates increasing for more remote communities. Compared with major cities, the life expectancy in regional areas is one to two years lower and in remote areas it is up to seven years lower, reflecting a higher proportion of Indigenous population in those remote areas. Death rates in inner and outer regional areas are about 10 per cent higher than in major cities, and the death rates in remote and very remote areas are 20 to 70 times higher than in major cities.

This bill does nothing to address the fact that if you are born in the bush and you live in rural and regional areas your health is on average substantially poorer than if you live in a metropolitan area, and the allied health and other key health services that are provided to you—such as oncology and so on—are substantially poorer, even though the Medicare take for tax purposes is the same whether you live in Burke, Echuca or Burwood. That is not fair in a country that claims to do a fair deal for all Australians.
The AIHW reported that people living in regional and remote areas were more likely to report chronic diseases such as asthma, arthritis and bronchitis, but less likely to report osteoporosis, than those living in major cities; however, rates of diabetes, cerebrovascular disease and coronary heart disease were generally similar across all areas. So there is good news and bad news there, but, unfortunately, in 2001-03 the incidence of cancer for people in regional areas was about four per cent higher than in major cities—particularly for preventable cancers, such as those associated with sun exposure. The statistics go on and they are not a happy read, let me assure you.

So what has this government done about all this, other than state that it is going to try to get more GST funding out of the states? The federal government will try but we know it is going to have a real battle there. Why is the government not focusing on real issues such as access to health services? For example, a Senate report found that the provision of hospitals and hospital beds is concentrated in major cities. Some 22 per cent of public hospitals but only 4.8 per cent of available beds are located in rural and very remote areas that comprise about six per cent of the population.

Most small rural hospitals are not equipped to provide the full range of specialised services, and people must be transferred to larger regional or metropolitan centres. The report found that the supply of health workers declines with remoteness. The number of medical practitioners per 100,000 people was 326 in major cities compared to only 179 in inner regional areas, 155 in outer regional areas, 154 in remote areas and just 130 in very remote areas. So there is an enormous difference in access to health services, including dental services.

What has this government done? It has just very recently decided to change the classification system for how it offers incentives to get medical doctors to live and work beyond metropolitan Melbourne, Adelaide, Sydney and the other major cities of Australia. The Department of Health and Ageing has recently completed an internal review of its funding models for medical services. As part of this process, DoHA has decided to replace its current measure of geographic dispersion, the Rural, Remote and Metropolitan Areas—or RRMA—Classification, with the Australian Standard Geographical Classification—Remoteness Areas system. This is the ASGC-RA system. This change was due to be implemented on July 2010. The coalition was very concerned about this when we were in government, but the idea is to make sure there is a whole range of incentives put into various parts of Australia that reflect the need to attract and retain medical practitioners in those areas.

But what have we got with this new system that has been introduced by this government? We have a system which has places like Deniliquin competing with outer suburban areas like Sunshine because they will be offering the same incentives to attract and retain medical practitioners. That is an absurdity. Of course a very different range of incentives is required to work in outer suburban Melbourne compared to relocating your family to Deniliquin or Echuca. Subsequently, small and relatively isolated inland towns will be left to compete with much larger outer metropolitan and regional centres for GP recruits. These are the places that are now to be zoned inner regional RA2. With the significant differences and relocation and retention incentives proposed between these different levels, it is going to make it almost impossible to recruit general practitioners to small rural towns that do not have a more
remote classification—in other words, outer regional RA3+.

Given the shift to the ASGC-RA system is intended ultimately as a whole-of-government initiative—and we know it has already been used in the criteria for access to youth allowance—there will also be implications for the rurality loadings in practice and service incentive payments as well as the bulk-billing incentives. This is a very serious problem. With capitation and pay for performance likely to become a far more significant component of practice income, pending the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission recommendations on blended payments, the viability of practices in these towns must now be seriously questioned.

This new system of reclassification has seriously compromised the capacity of those, for example, in the new so-called inner region to survive with medical health services. I am referring to a report prepared by the Murrumbidgee General Practice Network, the Murray-Plains Division of General Practice and the Albury-Wodonga Division of General Practice. They have done an enormous amount of work in this area. They are very concerned and I join with them in their concern. We have to change the system. It is nonsense putting Sunbury and Sunshine in the same category as Echuca and Deniliquin. The rural health recruitment and retention incentives include the general practice component, the Rural Relocation Incentive Grant, overseas trained doctors and foreign graduates of an accredited medical school program, the bonded medical places and the Medical Rural Bonded Scholarship Scheme, and of course the HECS reimbursement scheme. All of those different incentives hang off this new system of classification which has outer suburbia competing with the same level of incentives as places like Echuca, Kyabram, Deniliquin, Moama, Nathalia, Numurkah and the list goes on. All of those places struggle to have doctor replacements, but they are not going to be able to offer any better incentives than places that are on a tram track or a short suburban train ride from downtown CBD Melbourne. That is a nonsense.

This bill before the House is only about state-federal relationships; it is about stripping away more funds from the states and putting them in the pocket of the federal government—a federal government that has a horrendous track record of poor value for money and very serious misadventure when it comes to spending taxpayers’ dollars on essential services. I commend the amendment moved by the shadow Treasurer, Mr Hockey, the member for North Sydney, which states:

That all the words after “that” be omitted with a view to substituting the following words:

“the House declines to give the bill a second reading until:

(a) there has been laid on the table of the House a copy of an agreement reached between the Commonwealth and each of the states and territories about GST handback in relation to the measures in this bill;

(b) each of the states and territories has signed that agreement; and

(c) given that the state opposition parties in New South Wales and Victoria have signalled that they do not support the current agreement, the people of those states have voted in their upcoming state elections”.

The bill’s premise is basically hypothetical. We are not talking about a bill which is going to advance the cause of delivering better health services and more health service professionals to rural and regional Australia. I find that extraordinarily disappointing in a government that claims to know about social inclusion and giving everybody a fair go.
The best thing that ever happened in my part of the world was the coalition’s introduction of departments of rural health and clinical schools and the funding provided to universities so that students in their final years of medical training could live and work in rural communities, and experience the life and the culture with the hopeful view that they might fall in love with life beyond the cities and stay there. The department of rural health and clinical school in Shepparton together with the University of Melbourne has been extraordinarily successful. Medical students at the Shepparton campus who are about to graduate experience higher outcomes in their academic results than those who remain in Parkville, and the students who go to the Wangaratta, Ballarat and Bendigo campuses are not far behind them. Therefore, we hope this government will look at those sorts of initiatives rather than the nonsense of simply playing games with the states over their GST funding. The issues are too important. I have already provided the data to the chamber about the differences in the mortality and morbidity rates between metropolitan and rural Australia. Those are real statistics. If you are born beyond the tram tracks and beyond where the government focuses its attention, it is not fair to expect a shorter life and a life with higher rates of chronic disease and disability.

My electorate has two large hospitals—Echuca and Shepparton. The one in Shepparton is called Goulburn Valley Health and Echuca is called Echuca Regional Health. Both of those hospitals urgently need an injection of capital. We have had no commitment from the Brumby government to put any additional funding into either of those hospitals. However, we have had a commitment from the state coalition in regard to the Echuca hospital. This government should be looking into issues like that. The Echuca hospital, for example, has not had any major upgrades since 1962. People going into the wards at that hospital in winter have to take their own heaters. It is an absurd almost Third World situation to ask patients to take heaters to hospital so they can be warm in their ward. Women in labour have to compete for bathrooms with those attending the accident and emergency department. Goulburn Valley Health’s accident and emergency department has the second longest waiting period in Victoria. It has the highest number of people who turn away in despair because they cannot get access to a doctor when they have presented with an emergency. This bill is not a bill which any government should be proud of and the coalition will certainly attempt to amend it.

Debate (on motion by Dr Mike Kelly) adjourned.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS
Montara Commission of Inquiry
Mr MARTIN FERGUSON (Batman—Minister for Resources and Energy and Minister for Tourism) (12.30 pm)—by leave—I present the report of the Montara Commission of Inquiry and the Australian government’s draft response.

Introduction
On 21 August last year an uncontrolled release of oil and gas into the Timor Sea commenced from the Montara wellhead platform. The response to the incident was swift. Within 15 minutes of being notified of the incident the Australian Maritime Safety Authority mobilised its resources and immediately commenced aerial surveillance. Soon afterwards, aircraft began applying dispersant to accelerate the natural evaporation and weathering of the oil. This was the first step in a coordinated response that was effective in containing and minimising the impact of the spill.
As efforts to respond to and halt the spill continued, I moved amendments in this parliament, with the support of the coalition, to the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2006 to give me the power to establish an inquiry with royal commission powers into incidents such as Montara. The purpose of this inquiry was to investigate the likely causes of the incident and make recommendations to the government on how to prevent future incidents. The importance of this work was further highlighted by the tragic April 2010 Deepwater Horizon incident at BP’s Macondo field in the Gulf of Mexico. At the time of both these incidents, there were calls from some parts of the community for a moratorium on acreage release and industry activities.

Our approach must be to ensure that our oil and gas exploration and production operations are the best and safest in the world. Shutting down the industry and putting the nation’s energy security, jobs and the economy at risk does nothing towards achieving any of these goals. Offshore petroleum activities have been occurring in Australia for over 40 years, with approximately 3,000 wells safely drilled during that time. The Montara incident was the first well blow-out in Australia in over 25 years. The Australian government is committed to applying the lessons from the Montara and Gulf of Mexico incidents so as to improve the protection of human health and safety and the protection of marine environments. This is essential if Australia is to continue to have a viable offshore oil and gas industry that is able to contribute to Australia’s and our major trading partners’ energy security needs.

On 18 June 2010, following a comprehensive inquiry process which consisted of over 180 submissions and four weeks of public hearings, the Commissioner for the Montara Commission of Inquiry, Mr David Borthwick AO, PSM, presented me with his report. I thank the commissioner for his report. Upon receiving the report, I indicated that I was committed to its public release following proper government consideration of the report’s findings and recommendations. I also indicated that I was bound to give consideration to advice from the Australian Government Solicitor to ensure that in handling this report I did nothing to prejudice the conduct of further investigations for possible offences, including criminal offences, prejudice other civil actions or undermine any natural justice considerations.

The inquiry was not about attributing blame; it was, and continues to be, about understanding and applying the lessons from Montara.

Montara Commission of Inquiry Report

Having completed this consideration, I am pleased today to present to the parliament the report of the Montara Commission of Inquiry and the government’s draft response to the report. The report contains 100 findings and 105 recommendations, which have implications for government, regulators and the offshore petroleum industry.

The inquiry determined that the blow-out was the result of the primary well control barrier failing. The inquiry noted that initial cementing problems were compounded by only one of the two planned secondary well control barriers—pressure-containing anticorrosion caps—being installed. The report concluded that PTTEP Australasia (Ashmore Cartier) Pty Ltd (PTTEP AA) did not observe sensible oilfield practice at the Montara field.

Other findings include:

- That the ‘widespread and systemic’ shortcomings in PTTEP AA’s procedures were a direct cause of the loss of well control.
• That well control practices approved by the regulator would have been sufficient to prevent the loss of well control; however, PTTEP AA did not adhere to these practices or its own well construction standards.

• That the Northern Territory Department of Resources was not a diligent regulator and its minimalist approach to its regulatory responsibilities gave it little chance of discovering these poor practices.

• That at a minimum the proposal to establish a single national offshore petroleum regulator should be pursued.

• That the existing legislative regime be adjusted to further reduce the risks of similar incidents occurring.

I now inform the House of the government’s progress in responding to these key aspects of the report.

PTTEP Australasia

During the inquiry concerns regarding the state of the five remaining suspended wells in the Montara field were raised. On my instruction, on 9 April 2010, my department requested the Northern Territory Department of Resources to seek further advice from PTTEP AA on the status and integrity of the other suspended wells and information on what remedial action would be taken if required.

PTTEP AA implemented a work program to ensure the integrity of the remaining wells on the Montara wellhead platform. AGR, an international company with the requisite expertise, witnessed the satisfactory barrier testing of the wells at the Montara wellhead platform. AGR’s verification report has been further assessed by Geoscience Australia and the Northern Territory Department of Resources. Geoscience Australia advises that all possible work to ensure the integrity of the suspended wells at the Montara platform has been undertaken and completed and that the AGR verification report provides appropriate assurance that the barriers are competent.

The commissioner has recommended that I undertake a review of PTTEP AA’s licence to operate at the Montara oil field. He has further recommended that, as the mechanism for instigating this review, I issue a ‘show cause’ notice to PTTEP AA, pursuant to the cancellation of titles sections of the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2006.

I have accepted the commissioner’s recommendation to review PTTEP AA’s licence to operate. However, PTTEP through its Australian subsidiaries (of which PTTEP AA is one) is the operator of seven exploration permits, five production licences and seven retention leases and has interests in a further five exploration permits where it is not the operator. A ‘show cause’ notice can only be issued where a breach of the act has been identified, and then only in relation to the title relevant to that breach. I believe a review of PTTEP AA’s licence to operate which was restricted to its operations in the Montara field would, in these circumstances, be insufficient.

After careful consideration, I directed my department to instigate an independent review of the action plan that PTTEP, the parent company of PTTEP AA, submitted to the commission of inquiry. This action plan was developed to comprehensively address the technical and governance issues identified by the commissioner and has application across their entire Australian operations. The independent review commenced on 6 September 2010.

The independent review process will provide me with advice on whether the action plan, once implemented, will ensure that PTTEP’s (and its Australian subsidiaries’) operational and procedural measures meet
industry best practice standards. The outcome of this process will assist me in forming a view as to whether the deficiencies in PTTEP AA’s procedures, as identified by the commissioner, relate only to the Montara oil field or to its, or PTTEP’s, general performance as an operator.

My department advises me that the final report of the independent review of PTTEP’s action plan is due by the end of the year. Upon completion of the independent review my department will provide me with advice on PTTEP’s capacity to implement the action plan. I will make the report public within seven days of receiving this advice. The outcome of this independent review of PTTEP’s action plan will be a central part of my consideration as to whether to issue a ‘show cause’ notice which might lead to cancellation of PTTEP’s petroleum titles.

Separate to the commission of inquiry process, the National Offshore Petroleum Safety Authority (NOPSA) provided the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions a brief of evidence in June 2010 in relation to whether occupational health and safety laws were contravened. A Montara investigation team has also been established within my department to consider possible breaches of other provisions of the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2006 and its associated regulations.

**Northern Territory designated authority**

In relation to the regulator, the commissioner found that the Northern Territory Department of Resources was not a sufficiently diligent regulator, adopting a minimalist approach to its regulatory responsibilities. The way in which the regulator conducted its responsibilities gave it little chance of discovering PTTEP AA’s poor practices. The commissioner recommended that I undertake a review of the Commonwealth delegation to the Northern Territory Department of Resources of its functions and powers as the designated authority for the offshore area of the external territory of the Ashmore and Cartier Islands (the location of the Montara oil field).

Under the current framework for regulating offshore petroleum activities the Commonwealth jointly, with the relevant state or territory, regulates activities beyond three nautical miles of the low-water mark or historical boundaries. Under this arrangement the relevant state or territory agency (that is, the designated authority), is responsible for the day-to-day regulation of petroleum activities while the relevant state or territory minister and the Commonwealth minister acting jointly (that is, the joint authority) is concerned with significant decisions such as the awarding of titles.

Under these arrangements, my powers as the designated authority for the 42 petroleum titles, including the Montara development, located in the external territory of the Ashmore and Cartier Islands, were delegated to officers of the Northern Territory Department of Resources. This delegation made the Northern Territory Department of Resources responsible for overseeing the regulation of well integrity matters at the Montara wellhead platform.

While the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2006 does provide me with the ability to revoke the Northern Territory Department of Resources’ existing delegation for this external territory, I consider that doing so would not address the full range of systemic issues identified by the inquiry. Given the Northern Territory’s ongoing responsibility as the designated authority for the Northern Territory’s own principal offshore area, which includes a further 23 titles, these systemic failings must be addressed. I cannot revoke the Northern Territory’s responsibility for the Northern Terri-
tory’s principal offshore area without an amendment to the act to rescind their powers.

To address the seriousness of these findings and recommendations I met the Northern Territory Chief Minister, Paul Henderson MLA, and my ministerial counterpart, the Hon. Kon Vatskalis MLA, the Minister for Primary Industry, Fisheries and Resources and asked them to demonstrate how the Northern Territory would fulfil its obligations as the designated authority.

I also instructed my department and Geoscience Australia to provide ongoing assistance to the Northern Territory in fulfilling its regulatory responsibilities more generally. This assistance will continue until a single national offshore petroleum regulator is in place.

I advise that the Northern Territory has cooperated fully. Key actions that will lead to a fully effective approvals process have been agreed and significant work has already been undertaken in this regard, including:

- more robust approval assessment processes to ensure integrity and consistency of decisions relating to well activity with co-assessment by the WA Department of Mines and Petroleum;
- a review of the delegation process and procedures has been completed; and
- a recruitment process has been completed to find people appropriately skilled in offshore petroleum exploration and development to address the immediate need for additional technical expertise.

On my instruction, my department also requested all other designated authorities to:

- review the integrity of wells, in particular the status of all wells completed and suspended since 2005; and
- ensure that their assessment, approvals and monitoring of offshore petroleum activities were in accordance with the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act.

**Single national offshore petroleum regulator**

A further key finding of the report is that the existing ‘objective based’ regulatory regime is largely sufficient to allow effective monitoring and enforcement by regulators of offshore petroleum related operations. The inadequacies identified by the inquiry relate primarily to the implementation of this regime.

However, the commissioner recommended that the proposal of the Productivity Commission’s review of regulatory burden on the upstream petroleum (oil and gas) sector to establish a single national offshore petroleum regulator should be pursued. Such an independent regulatory body should have responsibility for well integrity, safety and environmental regulation. The government is acting on this recommendation. It is determined to restore the Australian community’s confidence in the regulation of the offshore petroleum industry by ensuring that our operating standards are the best and safest in the world.

The government will extend the functions of the National Offshore Petroleum Safety Authority to include regulation of structural integrity, environment plans and day-to-day operations associated with petroleum activities in Commonwealth waters. There is a fundamental connection between the integrity of structures, the safety of people and the protection of the environment. The expanded authority, to be named the National Offshore Petroleum Safety and Environmental Management Authority (NOPSEMA), will regulate safety, integrity and environment plans.
for minerals extraction and greenhouse gas storage activities in Commonwealth waters.

The government will maintain the joint authority concept in relation to titles matters, so ensuring that the states and territories have, appropriately, proper input into resources development issues in Commonwealth offshore areas, and will establish a National Offshore Petroleum Titles Administrator (NOPTA) which will primarily deal with title administration and resource management issues. Separating titles and resources management from the regulation of safety and the environment will avoid conflict of regulatory objectives.

The government is confident that the scheme I have outlined will more effectively and efficiently harness the highly skilled resources required to properly regulate Australia’s rapidly expanding offshore petroleum industry than is possible under the current fragmented administrative arrangements.

I commit to work with my state and territory ministerial counterparts to implement these arrangements by 1 January 2012.

**Environmental response to the incident**

Turning to the environmental response to Montara, the offshore petroleum industry is required to comply with the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act) where matters of national environmental significance may be impacted, in addition to obligations under the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act.

Since the Montara incident, the Commonwealth Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, as the environmental regulator under the EPBC Act, has adopted a more rigorous process for the assessment of offshore petroleum activities and for the conditions on approvals of offshore petroleum developments to incorporate the learnings from the incident.

The commissioner recommended amending the EPBC and Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Acts to enshrine in law the ‘polluter pays’ principle. Under these proposed arrangements companies involved in an incident would be obligated to meet the full costs of monitoring and remediation and penalties should be payable for pollution on a no fault basis. The commissioner further recommends that this should apply to both prospective and existing operations in Commonwealth waters. The government intends to accept and implement both recommendations and undertake a review of Commonwealth legislation as it applies to the offshore petroleum sector and the marine environment.

I am advised by PTTEP AA that the costs of the clean-up, on-going environmental management, drilling of the relief well and repairs and replacement to the Montara wellhead platform is in the order of US$319 million.

The government will establish a task force of relevant portfolios to develop the legislative amendments required to address the specific findings and recommendations of the report.

**National response arrangements**

With regard to the response more generally, the commissioner found that roles and responsibilities under the National Plan to Combat Pollution of the Sea by Oil and other Noxious and Hazardous Substances need further clarification and recommended improvements to the national plan. Critical to the success of responding to incidents is the effective implementation of the response strategy.

In parallel to the inquiry process an Incident Analysis Team (IAT) was established by AMSA to undertake an independent review.
of the response to the Montara wellhead platform incident. The Incident Analysis Team report provided eight recommendations aimed at strengthening the national plan. The recommendations from the Incident Analysis Team report have been taken into consideration as part of the draft government response to the Montara report.

**Indonesia**

From an international perspective, I note that evidence was presented to the inquiry that some weathered oil had crossed into Indonesia’s Economic Exclusion Zone. This was consistent with AMSA’s observations and was reflected in the government’s formal advice to the Indonesian government nine days after the spill commenced. Throughout the response AMSA was in direct contact with Indonesia’s Directorate-General of Sea Transport and provided updates in relation to the type, amount and nature of the oil present in Indonesia’s Economic Exclusion Zone and Australia’s clean-up response effort. The government has continued to keep the Indonesian government informed of further developments. I am aware that the Indonesian government is seeking compensation from the operator of the Montara oil field, PTTEP AA. This is a matter between the Indonesian government and PTTEP AA.

**International engagement**

The Australian government has also focused on the international events taking place that impact upon the offshore petroleum industry. Following events in the Gulf of Mexico, we have been sharing information and learnings regarding our respective incidents with our United States counterparts. We will continue to do so. The Deepwater Horizon incident posed new challenges in response coordination, international engagement, deepwater technology and the application of science which were not contemplated at the time of the Montara inquiry.

The US President established a national commission on 21 May 2010 to fully inquire into the Deepwater Horizon. The commission’s findings are due to be provided on 12 January 2011. The outcomes from this report will also be considered for any implications for Australia’s offshore petroleum regulatory regime.

International collaboration including through the G20 to identify best practice arrangements will also strengthen existing offshore petroleum regulatory frameworks around the world. The Australian government will host an international conference in Australia of legislators, regulators and industry to review our collective learnings from both the Montara and Gulf of Mexico incidents. Preparations for this conference, to be held during 2011, are underway.

**Draft response to the report of the Montara commission of inquiry**

Of the 105 recommendations in the report of the Montara commission of inquiry the government in its draft response proposes accepting 92 recommendations, noting 10, and not accepting three. The three recommendations that are proposed not to be accepted are technically inappropriate. The recommendations proposed to be noted generally relate to aspects already addressed within the regulatory regime or issues which are primarily operational matters for the offshore petroleum industry to address.

The government will undertake a three-month comprehensive stakeholder and community consultation period in relation to the draft government response, including a call for public submissions. This process will fully inform the government’s final response to the Montara inquiry.

**Conclusion**

The government is committed to doing everything possible to avoid incidents like Montara in the future and is working to en-
sure we achieve the best and safest offshore petroleum industry in the world. Industry, government and regulators must be absolutely committed to a culture of high safety standards and environmental protection within a framework of continuous improvement. We must work and learn together. Applying the lessons from these incidents is vital for the effective regulation of the offshore petroleum industry and its ongoing licence to operate. The jobs and prosperity that flow from Australia’s offshore petroleum industry are vital for our economy and energy security, but this cannot come at the expense of the protection of human health and safety or the marine environment.

Action to implement recommendations on urgent issues identified in the commissioner’s report has already commenced by government with industry also undertaking their own actions to increase safety. The remaining actions to address accepted recommendations will commence following the finalisation of the government response. Implementation will take significant and sustained efforts by government, industry and regulators over several years.

I table the report of the Montara commission of inquiry and the government’s draft response. I seek leave of the House to move a motion to enable the honourable member for Groom to speak for 26 minutes.

Leave granted.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—I move:

That so much of the standing and sessional orders be suspended as would prevent Mr Macfarlane speaking for a period not exceeding 26 minutes.

Mr IAN MACFARLANE (Groom) (12.57 pm)—In responding to the ministerial statement on the Montara Commission of Inquiry report, I shall not be taking the full 26 minutes as in this issue the Minister for Resources and Energy has kept both me and my office fully abreast of the developments from the day that this very unfortunate incident occurred. From the start, the opposition chose not to politicise this issue, and I hope that is the case for all political parties who are part of this parliament. Simply nothing would be gained from trying to score cheap political points from an issue of this magnitude.

As the minister said, the offshore oil and gas industry in Australia has a long and very proud record in the areas of both safety and environmental protection, but in this case the processes that have been put in place have obviously broken down. Rather than try to make this issue a political one and shake public confidence in the process that this nation has undertaken to ensure the safety of the workers, the people of Australia and, most importantly, the environment, we should be using this opportunity to reinforce it. We should do everything we can and leave no stone unturned to establish the cause of this incident.

I only received the report this morning but I have had a briefing on it. Thank you to the Minister for Resources and Energy for that. Having had that briefing, certainly at first cut we are impressed by the depth of the report and by most of its recommendations. It needs to be understood that the reasons have been clearly outlined and there has been a breakdown in process, but knee-jerk solutions will not solve the issue. The most important thing that will come out of this report is a building of the internationalisation of knowledge and an ability to react to these incidents.

Of course, we saw another incident of far greater magnitude and potentially far greater devastation than the case of Montara with the BP escape in the Gulf of Mexico. From both those incidents we will learn a lot. We need to learn a lot for two reasons. Firstly, this exploration cannot stop. The world demand
for oil needs to be met because of the impact that it has on both convenience and standard of living for all inhabitants of the world. This industry must continue. But, secondly, it must operate at a higher level of safety than it has in recent times. This report and the outcome of BP’s experiences in the Gulf of Mexico will mean that will happen if everyone is sensible and practical about dealing with this.

I hope this does not come back to haunt me, but I congratulate the minister on the way he has handled this issue, on the report that he has presented to this House and, more particularly, on his response to the report. There is now, as he says, an opportunity for public comment through until 24 February. There were some 105 recommendations, of which the government has accepted 92, noted 10 and not accepted three. As I say, at first blush we concur with that response by the government.

It is important in the process as we go forward that if new issues are raised then the department and the government respond to them. I think the minister has an unfair advantage in this situation because he has backing him up one of the best departments, if not the best department, in Australia and is supported by the division within that department of Geoscience Australia, whose work is internationally recognised in a whole range of fields. Again, they have excelled in this instance.

How the government deals with the issue of PTTEP AA’s licence to operate is also important. Companies that have come to Australia to explore for oil and gas have been in the main, with the exception of Woodside and Santos—and now Beach perhaps—the mainstay of Australia’s development of the oil and gas industry. We should treat each of them individually and where they have erred or, as in this case, had a major incident we should examine them extremely closely. But, again, if you look at the global operation of PTTEP, they have a very good record. So the process that the minister has put in place in regard to having an independent review run by Noetic Solutions is the right step to take. I have confidence that this organisation has the experience and competence to undertake the role. In fact, I understand one of its principals was a person I appointed to the original NOPSA board when I set it up.

As we go forward from here, there are some issues though that we will need to deal with in our own back yard in terms of government and of the operation of authorities and bodies set up by the government. I certainly listened very carefully to and took on board the minister’s comments in relation to NOPSA, NOPSEMA and NOPTA and will be having further discussions both with him and with the state ministers involved, including the minister from Western Australia, Norman Moore, who I will hopefully meet with next week.

I do support in principle the objective of what we are trying to do with the national authority. I hasten to point out to my state ministerial colleagues that this is a national body. It is not a federal body; it is a national body. A federal body run and owned by the Commonwealth is not the solution. But a national body where each state has the ability to be involved, to supply personnel and to provide input into its operations through its state departments is the right way to go. That fact has been backed up by the failings of some state departments. The minister has been through those failings in detail. They are the single biggest reason, apart from efficiency and effectiveness, that we should be pursuing national bodies. That is not a process that is a fait accompli. I restate that I will have consultations with the states on their views on that. But it is important that these
recommendations, particularly in relation to these national bodies, not be ignored. So the coalition will continue to have discussions with states as well as discussions with the minister.

I say to this House and the people of Australia that the coalition in opposition view this matter extremely seriously. We want to make sure that this does not happen again. We want to make sure that all of Australia’s petroleum industries and all of the global petroleum industries learn from this incident, that some good comes out of something that has been quite terrible and that we make sure that going forward the industry is safer than it has ever been.

FEDERAL FINANCIAL RELATIONS AMENDMENT (NATIONAL HEALTH AND HOSPITALS NETWORK) BILL 2010

Debate resumed.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Murphy)—The original question was that this bill be now read a second time. To this the honourable member for North Sydney has moved as an amendment that all words after ‘That’ be omitted with a view to substituting other words. The question now is that the words proposed to be omitted stand part of the question.

Ms HALL (Shortland) (1.06 pm)—I rise to support the Federal Financial Relations Amendment (National Health and Hospitals Network) Bill 2010, which implements the federal government’s financial relations aspect of the National Health and Hospitals Network Agreement, as agreed to by the Council of Australian Governments, other than Western Australia, on 10 April 2010—a day I well remember, as I welcomed the outcome of that COAG meeting because it delivers great benefits to the Australian people. At the same time I felt very sorry for the people of Western Australia, who stand to miss out on the benefits that will be coming to Australians throughout the rest of the country.

Under this legislation the Commonwealth is retaining and dedicating a portion of the GST to fund health and hospitals and is establishing a National Health and Hospitals Network Fund. It introduces a new process, which the minister must complete before seeking to reduce specific purpose payments for health care, including to Western Australia. The Commonwealth commits to providing no less than $15.6 billion in additional top-up funding over the period 2014-15 to 2019-20. The bill provides flexibility in the provision of this amount of money.

Reform of the health system became apparent to all members of this House not in the last parliament but in the parliament before that when the then Minister for Health and Ageing, the current Leader of the Opposition, referred terms of reference to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health and Ageing to conduct an inquiry into health funding. He referred this matter to the committee because he was concerned that the health system was not operating effectively, that it could be more efficient. He recognised the need for change given that Australia had to have a health system that would be appropriate for the 21st century and beyond. The health and ageing committee brought down a wonderful report called The blame game – report on the inquiry into health funding.

The first recommendation of that report was that the Australian government, in conjunction with the states and territories, develop and adopt a national health agenda. It goes on to say that it should look at the roles and responsibilities of the different levels of government and at long-term sustainability of the health system, that it should support
the best and most appropriate clinical care and that it should support affordable access to best practice, that it should look at structural reforms and inefficiencies, that it should give greater articulation to standards of service, that it should be responsive to the needs of the community and that it should redress inequities. That is just the first recommendation.

This report was tabled in the House in November 2006. By the time of the election, when the parliament rose in 2007, the then government had not responded. The then health minister had not shared with the parliament what his thoughts were on the report that he asked the member for Fairfax, the chair of the committee, to conduct. It was a very long, involved inquiry. If I might say so, the report was very detailed; it looked at all aspects of the health system. It identified that the current funding arrangements were not working. At the time that the terms of reference were given to the health and ageing committee, the then minister for health, the Leader of the Opposition, was keen to say that the states were shifting to the Commonwealth. The committee found that there was cost shifting both ways—the states to the Commonwealth and the Commonwealth to the states. In the long run it was the consumers, the Australian people, that were missing out. The report identified that very, very clearly. It also identified very, very clearly that there were issues of workforce shortage that needed to be addressed, and I am really sad to report to the House today that the then minister for health, the Leader of the Opposition, did nothing.

But I must say the Rudd government and the Gillard government have embraced the need for health reform. That health reform recognises the fine work done by the then health and ageing committee and recognises the changes that need to be made to ensure that all Australians can have quality health care and access to health services going into the 21st century and beyond.

The aspect of the National Health and Hospitals Network that we are looking at is how the GST is going to be used to fund health services and put money into public hospitals going forward into the 21st century. Seven separate health systems will be replaced by a single national hospitals network, remembering that one state is not part of this reform. It combines all public hospitals and all GP and related services. The Commonwealth is picking up 60 per cent of the funding of public hospitals. When the Leader of the Opposition was health minister he ripped a billion dollars out of our public hospital system. The Gillard government is agreeing to undertake 60 per cent of the funding for public hospitals—something that can only benefit all Australians.

This has needed to happen for a very long time, as was identified in the report The blame game – report on the inquiry into health funding. Health reform should have been undertaken many years before now. It really disappoints me, to say the least, that the opposition is continuing to be obstructionist in its response to the health and hospital reforms. It is refusing to support the legislation that we have before us today, legislation that addresses the issue of cost-shifting—which the then health minister was interested in at that time—and is putting in place a system that will benefit all Australians, with the Commonwealth taking full responsibility for all primary care and taking on the responsibility of 60 per cent funding for public hospitals.

It is setting up local hospital networks. In the area that I represent, there will be two local hospital networks. There is the Hunter New England local hospital network, which remains the same as it is at the moment, but it also sets up a Central Coast local hospital.
network. That is something that the people on the Central Coast have been calling for for a very long time. They wanted to have their own hospital network. They wanted to have a Central Coast focus on the delivery of health services. These reforms deliver that to the people of the Central Coast, and the feedback that I have had from my constituents is very, very positive.

Mr Laming—You’re listening to the wrong people!

Ms HALL—The member for Bowman says I am listening to the wrong people. The people I listen to are the constituents in Shortland electorate, the people who have been unable for a very long time to access the health services they want to access, the people who have been unable to visit their local GPs because of the shortage of GPs in the area. And that is a shortage that developed because of the action of the Howard government when they capped the number of training places for GPs, when they reduced the number of doctors that were being trained and when they constantly ignored the pleas of people like me in this parliament who were saying, ‘It’s not good enough that 8,000 constituents whom I represent in this House do not have one doctor.’ Time and time again I raised the issue of the doctor shortage within my electorate, and time and time again it was ignored. It was not one health minister who ignored it but three coalition health ministers who ignored it.

But the Rudd and Gillard governments have recognised the fact that all Australians, not only those living in inner Brisbane, inner Adelaide, inner Sydney or inner Melbourne, deserve to have quality health services. Those were not the only ones who deserved to go and see a doctor; it was all Australians. The reforms that have taken place under the Rudd and Gillard governments have meant that there has been a $64 billion agreement for health and hospital funds and $600 million for an elective surgery waiting list reduction plan. This has already kicked in in my electorate, with Belmont Hospital being earmarked to benefit from that and Belmont Hospital also receiving money for an upgrade of their accident and emergency department so that they can meet the guidelines that have been put in place. That is something that the previous government, the Howard government, chose to ignore. There has been an $872 million investment in preventative health. If you invest in preventative health, you are addressing the issues of health before people develop chronic disease, something that the previous coalition government chose to ignore. There has been investment in the rural and remote workforce as well as investment in the workforce in areas like the area I represent. With more doctors being trained, more nurses being trained and more allied health professionals being trained it really is a win for the Australian people.

We do have an ageing population. Shortland electorate has one of the oldest populations in the country. I stand in this place to argue for equity for the people of Shortland electorate. I have done that over a very long time. The people of Shortland electorate deserve to have quality health and hospital services. The legislation we have before us today and the reform of healthcare funding arrangements are required to deliver this to the people of Shortland and the people of Australia. This will put in place a framework that will ensure that health is adequately funded. That can only be done by putting in place the framework we have before us today to put legs on the National Health and Hospitals Network. This is vitally important legislation, and it will allow the Commonwealth to retain the proportion of GST to bring to fruition the 60 per cent commitment that has been made to the states. (Time expired)
Mr LAMING (Bowman) (1.22 pm)—The problem is that we all think we have got time, as Jack Kornfield said, but in health care, that is not the case. We have been waiting too long for solutions to the flawed and vexed challenges in the Australian health system. We know well that there are schisms running between federal and state provision, between private and public, and between after hours and working-hours care. The Federal Financial Relations Amendment (National Health and Hospitals Network) Bill 2010 takes us no closer to solutions to those challenges. I guess that today is an appeal to the government on behalf of Australians in every corner of this country who ask: ‘What is actually happening?’ and ‘What is changing?’ It possibly reflects an overwhelming and pervading fixation by those opposite on the shell-and-pea game of fiddling with financial systems but not on actually getting down to working out what is going to deliver a better health system.

It seems good to have a national framework and it seems great to have local networks and an omniscient Commonwealth government that is able to make decisions from Canberra about the provision of community and public health in every corner of this great land. In reality we know that the tension that has existed for 100 years between the federalism of devolving responsibilities down to local communities and the other argument that we centralise to try and make sure that those decisions are as perfect as possible, has never really got us any closer to improving our health system. What has changed are revolutionary ideas about how we engage with community health from a hospital. We need to understand that our clinical staff and our researchers are the people who think about community, public and preventive health every moment of their waking lives and we need to involve them in that process. When this Labor government had a moment to think about how it would fix the challenge of the health system and had the audacity to set a date, I think everyone was struck by the possibility that they could actually get somewhere. In fact, we have seen that nothing happened by that date. We now have a new Prime Minister who is rolling out the same old bureaucratic changes that are almost a reflection of their own impotence that they cannot get down and sort out public and community health.

It is one thing to believe that if we take money from one pot, put it into a bigger pot and reassign it to where it was in the first place, things somehow will be better. I do not mean to demean or diminish the very hard work that has been done in drafting these changes, but I beg of every person listening to this debate to ask yourself, ‘How will public health provision in your community be different? How will it be improved?’ Here we are, in 2010, waving goodbye to another year of a Labor administration, but this side of the chamber has to ask the very important question, ‘What has changed?’ You cannot keep putting off what should have been done the day before yesterday until the day after tomorrow, because ultimately the things that were easy become hard, and the things that are hard become impossible. We need to join together as a nation and say that taking over 100 per cent of community funding and assigning it to the Commonwealth sounds seductive. But in reality this is a job that is done by communities; a job that is tailored to Indigenous communities, mining communities and rural communities. The case that has to be made by those opposite is that Canberra can do...
that; that case has not yet been made. They have not yet made the case that the states are failing in their role for any other reason than vertical fiscal inequity—they are not adequately funded to do the job. Sure, we all collect the GST and then it is reassigned after it has run through a Commonwealth Grants Commission process, but there are no longer adequate partnerships between Commonwealth and state, and these national partnership arrangements that are a billion dollars here and there simply have not done the job.

Before government members get too excited about the increased amounts in health care, let us add them all up. In 2009-10 that amount was $12,074 billion and next year it will rise to $14,74 billion. Unadjusted, that is an increase of just under 20 per cent. That is what used to happen under the old hospital arrangements, the old four-year funding agreements, where there were unadjusted increases of between 17 and 26 per cent. I commend the government for increasing health funding but that is what every government has always done, all of the time. Some governments will increase it more in some years than in others, but it is no more legitimate to say that we ripped funding out of the health system than it is to say that the Labor government rips funding out of the school halls program because it spent it all last year and not this year. It is silly economics. There are times when more money goes into health and other times when less goes in. Obviously, the previous coalition government had to pay off a massive Labor debt so we focused on doing that for very good reasons. When it comes to funding hospitals both sides of this chamber can lay claim to good and bad, but while this government is in power we need to ask, ‘What has it done this year and what did it do last year?’

The great frustration to many is that we keep having these administrative bills brought before the House. We dream that by setting up an independent funding authority, then a performance authority, then a Health and Hospitals Fund and then local networks, in some cases things will somehow be better. That case has not been made by the government. I know that they are seduced by the notion of large nationwide corporate structures that are controlled out of Canberra. But let us be honest: we have had a situation where we ran down the power of school principals and of hospital superintendents and it was centralised to either district offices or state governments. We have a system where we have slowly eeked out of state bureaucracies the power to deliver services and centralised it here in Canberra. Then we have had the power of Canberra bureaucracies stripped away from them and centralised in ministers’ offices and finally we have had Labor ministers who complained they could not get in through the Prime Minister’s door—because all decision making resides there. Eventually it becomes intellectual constipation, waiting for an omnipotent prime minister to make decisions like some sort of communist decree that comes out of China or Soviet Russia.

We need to trust local clinicians. All we asked of the government was that we involve ordinary everyday folk in hospital boards, particularly in New South Wales and Queensland. We know that these hospitals and their decision making have basically drawn away like an outgoing tide from the local population. People turn up but cannot get into emergency and they wait on waiting lists that never materialise into an operation. They just want to know why. They know a lot of money is spent on health, but they do not understand how. I am not going to stand here and say that we need to slash the health bureaucracy. I am not going to say that we have frontline staff who are not performing clinical services and who therefore need to be done away with. No, that is overly simplistic.
What we need to know is that leading figures in each community can be part of a hospital board.

Of course we need to resolve the issue of whether these hospital boards actually run the hospitals or simply monitor them. The role of a hospital board fundamentally is to be a conduit for passing information between a hospital, which makes the decisions, and the community, which is affected by them; and that is utterly legitimate. The criticism from Queensland Labor was that we have the butcher, baker and candlestick maker on the hospital board and they cannot possibly run a hospital. But they are ordinary, everyday people who have a grasp of what it takes to serve and what it takes to deliver health care. We need to incorporate these skills of people who are not necessarily health professionals into how health decisions are made. That was the simple request from this side of the chamber.

How the Labor government responded was fascinating. They simply said, ‘We will allow local decisions to be made as well.’ But the decisions will be made by $570 million of extra bureaucracy in a fourth layer of government that controls the health system. So we have the curious situation where the Commonwealth is involved in immunisation services, the state governments are involved in delivering immunisation services, local jurisdictions and city councils deliver immunisation, and now, thanks to Mr Rudd and Ms Gillard, a fourth level of administration will be running our hospital system. Worst of all it is a fourth level we cannot vote out, a fourth level that has no accountability to ordinary Australians, a fourth level that we have to blame in this post-Rudd environment where everyone is responsible for everything and the last thing we need is a situation where we do not know who is not performing.

The great attraction of clearing up this complex miasma of health decision making in Australia is to determine who delivers services most effectively and let them get on with competing to be a provider. But we remain, after all of these reforms, with a health system that has this curious bipartite purchaser arrangement and a single public provider that does not work with the private system. We still have a public system where the faster they work, the quicker they go broke and a private system where the faster they work, the richer they get. That challenge has to be resolved, but it is a nexus that we have not even begun to scratch the surface of.

The solutions are right in front of us but the government is not looking. You only need to see the complex cancer services or the eye operations that are being delivered through private providers, through streamlined systems, at a fraction of the price and with 100 per cent outcomes. I ask the other side of the chamber: why don’t we learn how those cancer services are delivered?

Let me throw a complex notion over to that side of the House; which is, that potentially the private system may do parts of our health work better than a public system will ever do. Let us also face the fact that some public services may well remain more efficient and more effective than private services ever can be. Why don’t we engage in a partnership to work out how those things are best done? Why don’t public hospitals accept that there are some things they simply cannot do as well as private hospitals? Why don’t we reach out across the fiscal divide and involve private services as a competing entity in provision? It is a simple challenge. Let us face it, they are the reasons people in my community of Redlands cannot get to see a doctor, wait for hours in casualty, sit on waiting lists for operations that will never happen and of course end up in medical wards taking up valuable acute bed space.
I put a simple challenge to the government: what are they doing for aged care provision, for the wages of our aged-care nurses and for the infrastructure costs of building aged-care facilities? There has been almost no movement on that in four years. An integral part of a functioning health system is to return people who are discharged to the community. I set the challenge to the government: what is happening with transitional care? What is happening to engage the private sector? What is happening to connect hospitals with community health care? It is one thing to say the federal government should be running community and public health, but where does that leave the states? Completely unengaged in the process. The last thing you want is for the jurisdiction paying 40 per cent of the hospital bills to have no interest in community health.

It would have been much simpler to have a dollar-for-dollar national partnership arrangement on this question and keep all eight jurisdictions in the room on community health. But, no, this government has lost seven of them and will go it alone in providing community health. The greatest mistake of the legislation we debate today is that seven jurisdictions walk away from community, preventative and public health and are no longer engaged. That is a great loss.

We all know the current funding arrangements and how we use partnership payments and health care special payments to fund the health system, which is primarily the responsibility of the states in the public area but the states are not adequately funded to do it. A courageous government would have stepped in and fixed that problem. They would have looked at that vertical fiscal inequity and said that a component of taxation should automatically be given to state governments. I challenge the other side of the chamber again to tell me why, if you are operating in a state government, you are simply incapable of providing these health services.

All of our states are big enough, smart enough, hairy enough and ugly enough to run community health and hospitals. You do not leave this chamber to join a state legislature and suddenly have no compassion or care or ability to run a health system. The states are just like us—they can do it if you give them the means. But they do not have the means because they do not have the funding. The healthcare costs index—which is a product of a technology index, a population's hospital utilisation factor and health inflation—is going up by 10 per cent per year and the GST takings of six per cent cannot keep up. Why don't we just fix that by covering the four per cent out of federal revenue? It would be far simpler.

To the other side of the chamber I say this: it is seductive and attractive to build massive, nationwide networks of bureaucrats, but in the end the question you have not answered is, 'Why can't it be done locally, reporting to a national partnership with priorities?' Those priorities are clear. How we can fix it is clear. We need an auditor-general in health that actually examines the role and performance of health providers, and it should not have state government membership. Whatever is providing the health should not also be writing the monitoring and evaluation plans and then filtering the reports. We need to have a system where we engage the private sector. We need to remove the massive fiscal schisms that run through the health system. But that was all too hard. So today instead we debate a pea and shell game of moving money from one jurisdiction to another and then handing it right back and calling it a breakthrough in health. *(Time expired)*

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)—Before calling the honourable
member for Dobell, I would commend to the member for Bowman the provisions of standing order 64.

Mr CRAIG THOMSON (Dobell) (1.37 pm)—I rise to support the Federal Financial Relations Amendment (National Health and Hospitals Network) Bill 2010. I had the pleasure of sitting through the contribution by the member for Bowman. Obviously the 13th year of government for the coalition would have been a big one. The member for Bowman was very able to identify a range of problems in the health system—some of which, I totally agree, are challenges and problems we need to address—but he failed to recognise that, for the 12 years the coalition were in government, their record on health was atrocious. It is all very well to say that this is the plan and this is what we should do, but the actions of the coalition during their 12 years in government were simply to let the problems—many of which were identified by the member for Bowman—continue, to become worse. Only this government has taken this issue seriously and decided that proper, substantive and major health reform is something we need to effect in this country. Quite simply, we cannot let the health system carry on the way it did when the member for Bowman’s party was in government. We cannot continue with that pattern of reducing the contributions to health funding relative to GDP that happened under the former government. We need to make long-lasting and substantial reforms to the health system and this bill is part of that.

The member for Bowman had the hide to talk about wages for aged care workers. Look at the record of the previous government in relation to aged care and aged care workers. It was the previous government which uncovered the dedicated funding that went to wages for aged care workers. They changed the way it happens so that there was not this dedicated stream to make sure that aged care workers were paid properly and were able to move ahead. Instead, we saw in the aged care sector in particular that wages were stagnating. There is little wonder we have problems today in relation to attraction, retention and ensuring there are enough skills in the aged care sector. Again, it falls to this government to fix that up. More generally in relation to wages in the work force we had Work Choices and the difficulties that individual contracts put on people working in sensitive and vulnerable areas—in the health industry, in aged care, in the community sector. It is staggering for the member for Bowman to come into this chamber today and say that this is a problem which needs to be addressed. When the coalition were in government, they directly contributed to that particular problem and made sure that that was an issue not just in the health and aged care area but more generally right across the Australian work force.

Once again, when it comes to real reforms in the economy or in health, in education or in any area of administration, we find a stark contrast. Those on the other side are happy to do nothing, to let things ride along to the detriment of the Australian community. On this side of the chamber, we are not happy to do that. We are about making sure that, where we can fix things up, where we can make reforms, we get in and do it. There is no more important area of reform than the health industry. This bill is a major step but it is not a step taken in isolation. There are a series of health reforms which have gone through this parliament already and will be rolled out over the next few years. One of the major reforms in hospital and health funding is the introduction of the local hospital networks. No area in Australia has welcomed this government initiative more than the Central Coast of New South Wales.

The Central Coast of New South Wales had an area health service which took in
northern Sydney as well as the Central Coast. For years, I have been campaigning to make sure that the Central Coast has its own area health service, its own local network, so that issues about funding and resources in health care for the betterment of the people on the Central Coast can be looked after and administered by the people of the Central Coast. It is little wonder that the reform put in place by this government has been so universally supported. Even the Liberal Party have been supportive of it. Chris Hartcher, the member for Terrigal and a well-known state Liberal MP, has welcomed with open arms the announcement of the local health reform network and the regional focus that is going to happen on the Central Coast. Mr Hartcher has said it should have happened some time ago. The reason it did not happen is that we were not in government some time ago. Those opposite were in government and we know that those opposite have no interest whatsoever in making sure that there are proper reforms to our health system. Instead, they are about leaving the health system alone because they have a very different attitude to health. They believe those who can afford to can take out health insurance and those who cannot afford it can be looked after by a second tier of health care.

On this side of the House, we have always been about making sure that we have a fair and equitable health system which all Australians can access. Today we are talking about a broad sweep of reforms which are going to change absolutely the way health care is delivered in this country.

Debate interrupted.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

National School Chaplaincy Program

Mr FRYDENBERG (Kooyong) (1.45 pm)—On 8 November I attended Access ministries’ annual chaplaincy dinner in Melbourne. With terrific addresses from leading psychologist Michael Carr-Gregg and Access ministries CEO Canon Dr Evonne Paddison, the 1,300 guests were provided with a wonderful evening. With 219 chaplains working in 287 schools, Access ministries is the principal provider of primary and secondary school chaplains throughout Victoria and its head office is located in my electorate of Kooyong.

The Judeo-Christian tradition places strong emphasis on the pastoral and educational needs of our community. This is particularly important during the school years of our young people. It is here that the National School Chaplaincy Program established by the Howard government in 2006 and now operating in nearly 2,000 schools across Australia plays an important and constructive role in dealing with the social, developmental and emotional issues facing our children. Just knowing there is a person with whom to open up and talk to on a regular basis can be a great comfort and support. Critical to the chaplaincy program’s success is the effective partnerships that are built with school communities, in particular the principals, teachers, students and their families and friends. The work and mission of Access ministries makes a positive difference in supporting our children. I commend the work of Access ministries in Victoria and the work of the school chaplaincy program across Australia. (Time expired)

Crime Stoppers Youth Challenge Awards

Mr LYONS (Bass) (1.47 pm)—I would like to congratulate this year’s entrants in the 2010 Crime Stoppers Youth Challenge. The challenge is an award-winning education program examining crime in the community. The program is an inquiry-based competition for students in years 5 to 10 in all Tasmanian schools. The youth challenge aims to educate youth as to the consequences of crime. The topic of the youth challenge this year was
electronic-safety, with the focus on safe internet use, protecting your privacy online, and cyber bullying. I recently had the pleasure of attending the Crime Stoppers Youth Challenge Awards and it was my honour to present the winners with their prizes. With the use of internet and mobile phones becoming more prevalent in schools and the wider community, it was fantastic to see the efforts students put into their work in drawing attention to issues associated with e-safety.

To quote my state Labor colleague Mr Brian Wightman MP, who in his address drew on his experiences as a school principal:

Schools cannot escape technology; they must learn to embrace it.

In particular, I would like to draw attention to the division winners: East Launceston Primary School, Dominic College, and the Fahan School; and to the winners of the Commissioner’s Award, Lewis Arnold and Dana Devine. They produced powerful presentations. Congratulations again to all entrants and winners in the 2010 Crime Stoppers Youth Challenge. (Time expired)

Wynnum Central State School

Mr VASTA (Bonner) (1.48 pm)—I rise today to encourage the Queensland government to work with the Brisbane City Council to ensure that plans to create a community hub on the old Wynnum Central State School will proceed. There is a real potential to preserve the precious green space and the heritage of the school site, which the state government is selling, by creating a civic centre and community park. I know from my conversations with Lord Mayor Campbell Newman that council had been working hard to get the proposal off the ground ever since Deputy Premier Paul Lucas approached them earlier this year about buying the site. The proposal had since stalled because the state government has, according to independent valuers, overvalued the land and will not budge on this inflated price. I urge the state government to remember that it is not about making a quick buck but about ensuring that the land stays in public hands, not those of private developers who may not be focused on retaining green space or providing community services on the site. I know that this proposal also comes with the support of the local councillor, local businesses and the Wynnum Chamber of Commerce. I welcome a happy outcome to this proposal.

Throsby Electorate: Hammond Care

Mr STEPHEN JONES (Throsby) (1.49 pm)—I wish to draw to the attention of parliament the achievements of Hammond Care, which recently won a prestigious international award for their work in the area of dementia. Hammond Care operate an aged-care and dementia-care facility in Horsley, which is in my electorate of Throsby, and I am pleased to note this recognition of their hard work to improve the quality of life of people with dementia. The ‘Pleasure of Eating’ award given to Hammond Care as part of the International Dementia Excellence Awards was for their work to enhance the experience of meal times for dementia residents. Their approach includes involving dementia residents in the preparation of meals, setting the table and other familiar domestic rituals. Together with other simple steps like having more flexible meal times, this approach has meant that residents have shown a marked increase in appetite and engagement in life.

For anyone with a relative suffering from dementia, we know that these quality of life measures do much to alleviate the anxiety of their families. I am therefore very pleased to congratulate the staff of Hammond Care in Horsley on this award and for their important work in this area. Hammond Care’s efforts
towards designing innovative environments for older people with dementia are to be commended by this parliament.

Bruce Highway

Mr O’DOWD (Flynn) (1.51 pm)—I draw the attention of the House to the shocking state of the Bruce Highway between Gin Gin and Rockhampton. This road is part of our national highway system and is the workplace of thousands of transport operators who risk their lives daily as they go about their business of delivering the freight that keeps the nation functioning. Successive state and federal governments have failed to invest in this vital transport hub for the past 25 years. Yesterday I received complaints from constituents that B-double trucks carrying nitroprill were having to move into the oncoming lane to avoid hitting potholes, some of which are up to one metre in diameter. The highway between Mount Larcom and Rockhampton is a national disgrace. In fact, the highway is in such bad shape that the only answer the Queensland government has is to lower the speed limit in parts to 80 kilometres per hour. This just serves to frustrate motorists and cause fatigue and driver error. The highway between Gympie and Townsville must be listed as a project of national importance and design work must commence immediately. Think of the employment it will create; think of the lives it will save; think of the benefit to the nation.

Health

Mr MITCHELL (McEwen) (1.52 pm)—I rise to remind all Victorians to be very cautious of the Liberal Party’s Trojan Horse of unfunded, uncosted promises that tend to arrive just before an election. Victorians will never forget the man who, as federal health minister, ripped $372 million from the Victorian health budget, the same man who went on 5AA and said:

We’re not getting rid of any super clinics … we’re just not proceeding with new so-called super clinics, and let’s be under no illusion about what’s happening here …

Who was that, you ask. Those were, of course, the words of the Leader of the Opposition. The member for Dickson also criticised the creation of GP superclinics across the country when he said:

One thing that we won’t be doing is adopting Labor’s model with their GP superclinics.

Lo and behold, in the last couple of weeks before the federal election, the member for Dickson comes to my electorate and says, ‘We will build a Wallan superclinic.’ The rotten apples do not fall far from the tree.

I see the Victorian Liberals are following the footsteps of their federal buddies with more false promises for my community. The Victorian shadow health minister has come out with a desperate, 11th-hour, half-baked, uncosted promise, saying the coalition would support $10 million for improving the Kilmore hospital on the condition that the federal government contributes $10 million as well. I welcome the new-found interest in the Kilmore hospital, but I am equally amazed that, in his 10 years in parliament, the shadow minister has not once ever supported the hospital or ever sought funding for it. I remind people that funding for the Kilmore District Hospital has increased 166 per cent since Labor came to office and this year’s funding of $8.9 million is $5.5 million more than the hospital received in 1999, when the last coalition government cut funding, cut services and called my community the toenail of the state. When it comes to health, the Liberal Party’s actions speak volumes more than their words. (Time expired)

Ryan Electorate: Christmas Card Competition

Mrs PRENTICE (Ryan) (1.54 pm)—As the new federal member for Ryan, I was
pleased to recently launch the annual Ryan Christmas card competition. Students from prep to year 3 from schools throughout the electorate participated in the competition, this year with the theme ‘What Christmas means to me’. I am very grateful to the principals, staff, parents and students of our many local primary schools for their support of this initiative and their assistance. I was delighted and impressed with the level of participation and high standard of talent. Together with the community, I look forward to showcasing the artwork of our primary students throughout the electorate on my Christmas cards. I also look forward to making this competition an annual event. My special appreciation and thanks to the judges—Barry Searle of the Local Bulletin, Philippa Wightman of the Western Echo and James Chalmers of Quest newspapers—who had the difficult job of determining the winners from so many entries.

I again congratulate the winners of the competition and also take this opportunity to wish all the staff, parents and students of our local schools a very happy and safe Christmas and New Year with family and friends. There were three overall winners from the Ryan electorate, with one from each year group. The year 1 winner was Ella Mulcahy from St Andrew’s School, Ferny Grove. Second went to Cara Fraser from Hilder Road State School and third place went to Sophie Moeser from Bardon State School. The year 2 winner was Sabine Chin-Lowe from Indooroopilly State School. Second place went to Isabella Gockel from Hilder Road State School and third place went to Maisie Lilenstein from Holy Family School. The year 3 winner was Emma Rose from St Andrew’s School, Ferny Grove. Second place went to Katie Limerick from Bardon State School and third place went to May Weyer from Holy Family School. Congratulations and thank you to everyone involved.

Bowel Cancer

Ms PARKE (Fremantle) (1.55 pm)—Last week, the Cancer Council of Australia held a breakfast here at Parliament House to raise awareness of Australia’s anonymous killer, a disease that does not have the profile it deserves within the Australian community. Cancer causes more deaths than any other cancer except lung cancer. Around 4,000 Australians will die from it this year and more than 1,200 of those deaths will occur among people aged in their 50s and 60s. Economic analysis shows that annual bowel cancer treatment costs will reach $1 billion next year, making it the most expensive cancer for Australia’s health system.

We know, of course, that prevention is better than cure. This is why the Cancer Council recommends a healthy lifestyle and a diet featuring more fruit and vegetables and less red meat. The next best thing is early detection. The National Health and Medical Research Council guidelines recommend screening for bowel cancer at least every two years from the age of 50. This is because bowel cancer often develops without symptoms and it is very difficult to treat once the cancer has gone through the thickness of the wall or out into the tissues or lymph nodes beside the bowel. Currently, screening is available through the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program for Australians who turned 50, 55 or 65 between January 2008 and December 2010. The Cancer Council is asking that this important program be extended to all at risk age groups and I welcome the response of the Minister for Health and Ageing to a question from the member for New England on Monday that the government will consider an extension of the screening program in the context of the forthcoming budget discussions.
Mr ALEXANDER (Bennelong) (1.57 pm)—As a new member of this House, it can be somewhat confronting when you first encounter the tirades of disaffection thrown from one side of this chamber to the other. Each of us entered this parliament as a competitor in a tough battle who came out victorious against political opponents. In my former career, you could be drawn to compete against your best friend or most enduring enemy. You would fight and leave nothing on the court. At the end, you would shake hands and have a beer, maybe two if you had lost.

It is with this background that I entered parliament several months ago. I have a great respect for the need for robust debate in order to construct the strongest agenda for our country and our constituents. We are all colleagues of this marvellous institution. We may have widely differing views on the specifics of policy; however, we are united in our broader values to divine a better future for our country. It is with our tradition of mateship in mind that I say to every member of this parliament, regardless of your party or independence, that I wish you, your families, and all your constituents a wonderful Christmas break and a safe and festive holiday season. I look forward to working together with all of you and arguing, perhaps, with some of you in 2011.

Canberra Electorate: Tuggeranong Community Festival

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (1.58 pm)—I draw the House’s attention to the upcoming Tuggeranong Community Festival, of which I am patron. The festival is one of the many community festivals held in my electorate. The Tuggeranong festival began in 1988 as a small gathering and is the longest running event of its kind in the ACT. The festival is a free event for the community, organised by an army of dedicated volunteers, particularly Michael Lindfield and Jill Faulkner. The festival aims to bring the diverse Tuggeranong community together, recognise local citizens who have made a valuable contribution to the community, develop long-lasting partnerships between the local members of the community and between local groups and businesses and raise awareness of the vast array of sporting, artistic, civic and cultural opportunities open to those who live in the Tuggeranong Valley.

The festival will be held over three days, beginning this Friday night with the Streetlight Soiree, a street party with multicultural foods, street stalls and rides and amusements. Tuggeranong’s buildings will also be lit up with moving images as part of the Street of Lights display. The festival will also include the Leonid Film Awards, which recognise Tuggeranong’s young short-film makers and gives them the opportunity to have their films seen on the screen for the very first time. These are only some of the many highlights of what I am sure will be a great weekend. I would like to detail all the events but the sheer number of them prevents me. It is a testament to the vibrancy of the Tuggeranong community. I pay tribute to those who have volunteered to organise this festival, and I am proud to be patron.

The SPEAKER—Order! In accordance with standing order 43, the time for members’ statements has concluded.
for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs will answer questions on behalf of the Minister for Human Services and Minister for Social Inclusion.

**QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE**

**Climate Change**

Mr ABBOTT (2.00 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, to mark the third anniversary of the election of his government. I refer to his leaked caucus speech of 24 June and I ask: does the former Prime Minister believe that a carbon tax as proposed by the current Prime Minister is more likely to meet the climate challenge than the emissions trading scheme that he proposed and that she advised him to dump?

Mr RUDD—What differentiates this government from those opposite is that we believe in putting a price on carbon; those opposite do not. We accept our national and international obligations; those opposite do not. We will continue our efforts in this respect while those opposite pull up the white flag.

**Korean Peninsula**

Mr MELHAM (2.01 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister advise the House of the government’s response to yesterday’s attack by North Korea on the Republic of Korea?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for Banks for his question. I have had the opportunity to make some remarks publicly about this matter but believe it is appropriate to also make some remarks in this parliament. The government is deeply concerned by yesterday’s artillery attack on the Republic of Korea, a country we consider to be a very close partner and friend in our region. As members will be aware, yesterday two South Korean soldiers were killed as a result of the shelling by North Korea of South Korean territory, and a number of military personnel and civilians were injured. The government condemns this act of provocation, an act which breaches all international norms and obligations and is in violation of the 1953 agreement. The government also offers its condolences on behalf of the Australian people to the people and the nation of the Republic of Korea for the loss of life and injuries that they have sustained.

Yesterday’s events follow the March attack by a North Korean submarine on a South Korean navy vessel. We should remind ourselves that 46 South Koreans lost their lives in that attack. This also follows recent reports that North Korea is developing a sophisticated uranium enrichment program, in complete defiance of UN Security Council resolutions. This series of events is deeply troubling. It threatens stability on the Korean peninsula and in North Asia, and in the face of these provocations it should be noted by this parliament that the Republic of Korea has acted responsibly and in a restrained way. We commend President Lee for his calm and capable leadership. But this is a tense situation. Both sides are heavily armed. Of course, there is a real risk that a miscalculation could arise and lead to further actions or that there could be an escalation, and the consequences of either a miscalculation or such escalation could be enormous. As a nation deeply engaged economically, politically and strategically in North Asia, Australia has much at stake in these events. The government calls on North Korea to abide by international norms of behaviour and to cease its hostile acts. We call on North Korea to abide by its 1953 agreement.

The government is, of course, monitoring these events closely. Members of the National Security Committee of cabinet met this morning and considered latest developments, including our engagement with international partners. We are in close consultation with our South Korean friends, Japanese
friends and of course with the United States of America. We also believe it is important that China use its influence, bring its influence to bear, on North Korea in the wake of these events. The United Nations Secretary-General has described yesterday’s events as ‘one of the gravest incidents on the Korean peninsula since the end of the Korean War’, and so all nations must stand in condemnation of North Korea’s aggression and urge it to cease hostile acts.

Climate Change

Ms JULIE BISHOP (2.05 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to the former Prime Minister’s statement from the leaked minutes of the Labor caucus that the failure to secure action on climate change was one of the three great failures of this government. Does the current Prime Minister agree with the former Prime Minister that this was not his failure alone but hers too? Why did the current Prime Minister advise the former Prime Minister to dump the emissions trading scheme?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the Deputy Leader of the Opposition for her question and believe she must be suffering some form of short-term amnesia, because of course the thing that wrecked the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme was the action of the Leader of the Opposition. The thing that prevented the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme going through this parliament was the Leader of the Opposition, as a weathervane without any convictions on the question, going outside, putting his finger up in the political wind and saying, ‘Which way is it blowing today?’ and then deciding, having done that, that the time was right for him to unseat the then Leader of the Opposition on the basis that he would run a scare campaign about climate change. Now to the extent that you can diagnose any underlying beliefs of the Leader of the Opposition in this coming and going, this set of inconsistent statements, this weathervane conduct of the Leader of the Opposition—and weathervane is not my term; it is the term of one of his most senior frontbench colleagues, the member for Wentworth—they appear to be that climate change is not real.

Ms Julie Bishop—Mr Speaker, on a point of order: the caucus minutes say that it was strong advice from Julia to dump the emissions trading scheme policy.

The SPEAKER—Order! What is the point of order?

Ms Julie Bishop—I am asking why.

The SPEAKER—What is the point of order?

Ms Julie Bishop—Why did she give that advice?

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

Ms Julie Bishop—I was coming to the point of order.

The SPEAKER—You have made your point of order now: relevance.

Ms Julie Bishop—Thank you.

The SPEAKER—it is actually direct relevance we are looking for now. The Prime Minister is responding.

Ms GILLARD—Thank you very much, Mr Speaker, and I could not have been asked a more broadly based question than the one I was asked and, as a result of the assertions in the question, the answer I am giving is entirely relevant. Of course the truth is that this nation would have a carbon pollution reduction scheme if the Liberal Party had hon-
ored its agreements. But it is a political party without honour and that was proved in the last parliamentary term. It enters agreements and then it walks away from those agreements.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The Prime Minister will resume her seat. The member for Dunkley will come to the dispatch box and withdraw his remark.

Mr Billson—I withdraw.

The SPEAKER—Fairly insensitive on a day like today I think, Leader of the Opposition, and I simply say to the member for Cowan and the Manager of Opposition Business that they are both warned. I would hope that some people in the place would actually have a complete understanding of what they are doing and when they make contributions of up to 100 words in an answer by way of interjection they should be fully aware of what they are doing.

Ms GILLARD—So because of this dishonourable conduct by the Liberal Party withdrawing its agreement after it was made, the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme in agreed form did not pass the parliament. That is the history. If the Deputy Leader of the Opposition is searching for who is responsible for that, she could try looking in the mirror, she could try talking to the Leader of the Opposition, she could try turning to her colleagues and talking to those who determined that they wanted to wreck the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme and engage in fearmongering. That is, they wanted to serve their political interest instead of the national interest.

Opposition members interjecting—

Ms GILLARD—Against that history—and the member for Indi is making a contribution of the quality she is known for in this parliament; that is, none—in this new parliament we are seizing the opportunities of this new parliament to build a consensus within the parliament to price carbon. For those who are concerned about the national interest, which lies in ensuring that our economy is a low-pollution economy that can be a prosperous economy in a carbon constrained future—so for those who are concerned about that question—there is an opportunity for them to express their views and to help this nation maximise its future economic prosperity by getting on board with the discussions happening in the Multi-Party Climate Change Committee. But we know, of course, the Leader of the Opposition will not elect to do that, because, to the increasing dismay of his own backbench, his own political strategy is wreck, destroy, spread fear and his own backbenchers—like the member for Higgins—are calling him out on it.

Ms Julie Bishop—Mr Speaker, I seek leave to table the document where it says Julia made him do it.

Leave not granted.

Telstra

Broadband

Ms ROWLAND (2.12 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister inform the House of the importance of the structural separation of Telstra? Why is universal broadband vital reform for Australia?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for her question. I know that she is one of the feistiest advocates we have in this parliament for the National Broadband Network and one of the most informed, and I thank her for her contribution. Major microeconomic reform is not easy. It is not easy but it is necessary for the country’s future. Today’s prosperity has been built on earlier waves of microeconomic reform like having the courage to float the dollar, like having the courage to reduce...
the tariff barriers which were making our economy inefficient and not competitive—microeconomic reforms that have worked to make us a more productive and a more prosperous nation, reforms that include superannuation and building up our pool of national savings, reforms that include competition policy to bear down on regulatory settings and to make sure that we had a leaner regulatory scope so that the economy could thrive and prosper.

These have been the tough reforms of the past, and now we need to engage in another major microeconomic reform. The reality is there are only so many times in a nation’s history when it gets the opportunity to structure its telecommunications system for the future. Our nation has basically had two opportunities in the modern age to get our telecommunications right, and each time the nation has not got the job done. Those two opportunities began when we saw the merger of Telecom and OTC and, of course, the most recent of those two opportunities was the privatisation of Telstra. The merger of Telecom and OTC in 1992 created a market giant which severely compromised competition and then, after the privatisation of Telstra, we saw that market giant out there without structural reform.

This is the day, this is the parliament and this is the time to deliver that structural reform to get the reform job done that has been left undone for 30 years, and we can get it done today, Mr Speaker. We can get it done today by seeing the passage in the Senate of the telecommunications legislation that would structurally separate Telstra.

We have been prepared to work with the crossbenchers in this House and with the Independent senators in the other place in order to secure passage of this legislation. We would, of course, have been prepared to work with the opposition but they made it painfully clear that what they wanted to do was demolish the NBN. They are not interested in reform, not interested in microeconomic reform, not interested in the future prosperity of the country or in the service delivery innovations we can see in health and education. None of that interests them. They are on, once again, a completely negative wrecking path.

Once they made it clear that their only objective was to wreck then it fell to us to work with the crossbenchers and the Independent senators to secure this major microeconomic reform. In pursuit of that we have released more information today: a summary of the National Broadband Network business case. I commend it to those members of the House that are seriously interested in understanding matters about the National Broadband Network, not those who simply seek to wreck. Of course, there is no point in them wasting their time reading it because they will not care what it says.

**DISTINGUISHED VISITORS**

The SPEAKER (2.16 pm)—Before calling the Leader of the Nationals, I inform the House that we have in the gallery today Brett Raguse, a former member for Forde. On behalf of the House, I extend to him a warm welcome.

Honourable members—Hear, hear!

**QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE**

**Mining**

Mr TRUSS (2.16 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to the statement of the former Prime Minister in leaked minutes of the Labor caucus that the mining tax was one of the three great failures of this government. Does the current Prime Minister accept the statement of the former Prime Minister that it was not his failure alone but hers too?
Ms GILLARD—I did not realise when I came to the parliament today that the opposition had been replaced by a history club. Some of us are interested in the nation’s future and we will get on with debating that future and designing that future and delivering a vision for Australia whilst the opposition takes itself back in time—back in time to the days of former glory, back in time to the days of Work Choices when they could click their champagne glasses as another worker lost their penalty rates. This is the kind of nostalgia we are seeing from the opposition.

In its current mode of wreck, destroy, worry about the past, pay no regard to the nation’s future, what I can say to the member who asked the question—

The SPEAKER—Order! The Prime Minister will resume her seat. The member for Mackellar on a point of order.

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop—Mr Speaker, I refer to the Practice and it is a requirement under the old standing orders before we changed to the new paradigm that ministers could answer in any way they wished. Under the new paradigm, Mr Speaker, we are supposed to get direct answers. The question was about, specifically, a statement made by the foreign minister and the Prime Minister. It was not about Work Choices, history or any other theme. Would you ask her to return to the subject matter and answer directly—

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Mackellar will resume her seat. The member for Mackellar on a point of order.

Ms GILLARD—Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. Of course, I am asked by a political party of the past about the history of the minerals resource rent tax. Let me just remind the political party of the past about that history. Of course, that history is that this government was motivated to step up to the plate to manage our current economic circumstances where we are seeing extraordinary growth in the resources sector and, of course, the generation of wealth of assets that can only be exploited once. By definition you can only bring minerals out of the ground and sell them once. In that economic circumstance we determined that it was appropriate for the nation to get a better share of that mineral wealth which we all collectively own.

In pursuit of that the government initially announced the resource super profits tax. Obviously we had some work to do with the mining industry and as Prime Minister I did that work with the mining industry, working with the Treasurer, and we delivered the agreement that is the foundation stone of the minerals resource rent tax. We will pursue in this parliament the legislation of the minerals resource rent tax. It is necessary to help us balance economic growth so that, across the country, we can provide a company tax reduction, most particularly a tax reduction for small businesses to help us balance economic growth across our nation. It will be there to support a growth in the pool of national savings, good for our macro economy, and good for the individuals who will benefit from an increased stream of retirement incomes.

We will use those proceeds to deliver infrastructure projects, particularly to communities that are feeling the pressures of growth arising from the resources sector. For people who are familiar with the pressures that come on cities like Perth, pressures that come on regional areas, they are manifest and more infrastructure is required.

When the legislation comes to this parliament the opposition will have to make a big
call—a big call about whether they want businesses in this country to pay more tax, a big call about whether they want workers in this country to have less superannuation and a big call about whether they want communities in this country to have less infrastructure.

Mr Hockey interjecting—

Ms GILLARD—I am told by the shadow Treasurer they have made the call, and I thank him for his confirmation that the Liberal Party in the modern age stands for more tax, less super and less infrastructure. Thank you very much!

The SPEAKER—The member for Katter has the call but is the Leader of the Nationals—

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! I am sorry. We have got well ahead of ourselves, I know. The member for Kennedy will resume his seat.

Mr Truss—I seek leave to table the minutes of the special meeting of the Labor Party.

The SPEAKER—Leave is not granted.

Mr Truss—Just five months ago today—

The SPEAKER—The Leader of the Nationals will resume his seat.

Mr Katter—Mr Speaker, can I just make an observation: Kennedy died with a dozen spears in his back, and I can understand you making that mistake.

The SPEAKER—Whilst the member for Kennedy did not have the call, on this occasion, hopefully, Hansard did pick up that comment although I do not encourage interjections. The member for Kennedy now has his 45 seconds.

Sugar Industry

Mr KATTER (2.23 pm)—My question is to the Treasurer. Is the Treasurer aware that Innisfail’s South Johnstone mill, in perfect order, was sold by a liquidator for around $15 million to a company that had, at the time, built a mill with half South Johnstone’s capacity for reportedly $85 million? Much worse, this sale took place when the liquidator was aware of a second offer coming forward, involving existing farm owners and four of Queensland’s most reputable companies. Without even knowing what this offer entailed, the liquidator sold to the first offeror, a major customer of the mortgagee. Since mortgagors are sold up like this regularly, inflicting similar hardship, could the minister assure the House that his officers, already doing a very good job, will set a good example and pursue this case to the conclusion which the interests of justice and equity demand?

Mr SWAN—I thank the member for Kennedy for that very important question. As a Queenslander and someone who has been associated with the sugar industry for much of my life I had a very good visit to North Queensland about a month ago. I went to Townsville, first of all, to talk to resource companies about the copper string project, about a transmission line between Mount Isa and Townsville of vital importance to energy supply in the north-west and also of very great potential in terms of renewable energy. We then proceeded further north to the Victoria mill, one of the largest mills in Australia. The thing I can say is that I am an optimist about the future of the sugar industry in this country. I do believe it has a bright future and that it is a very good example of what we can do if we get all the policy settings right. I believe there is more that we can do for our great sugar industry to make sure that it continues to prosper. It is such a vital source of employment, particularly in Far North Queensland but also along the Queensland coast further south and, of course, into northern New South Wales. The member
asked me about the particular case of the South Johnstone mill. I can assure him that I will follow up with the responsible regulator to ensure that everything is done that can be done to ensure that the law has been properly observed.

**Broadband**

Mr RIPOLL (2.26 pm)—My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, why is the National Broadband Network so important for a more productive Australian economy?

Mr SWAN—I thank the member for Oxley for that very important question. The NBN is a fundamental microeconomic reform, probably one of the most important microeconomic reforms in Australia in the past 30 years. It has tremendous potential to lift the productivity performance of the Australian economy across the board. It has tremendous potential to drive new competition and innovation, and nowhere is this more important than in regional Australia. If you go to Townsville or Mackay or Western Australia—if you go to any regional area in this country—you find that small businesses are crying out for superfast broadband because they understand how important it is to the future, particularly, of small business in those communities.

They understand this particularly in the electorate of Dawson. There, small business organisations are very public in calling for the NBN. It is urgent that we deliver this fundamental microeconomic reform because it has been in the too-hard basket for far too long. One of the difficulties was that, when those opposite privatised Telstra, they put in place a vertical structure in the industry that made the sort of competition that the NBN will drive almost impossible. So it has fallen yet again to a Labor government to put in place a fundamental reform by putting in place a wholesale network in which you can then have vigorous retail competition, one which will go to the great regional areas of this country which have been starved of this sort of investment for far too long and which, in particular, were starved of this investment by the National Party who sit opposite and who are now trying to crush this vital microeconomic reform because they do not understand what must be done in this country to drive prosperity. But it is not just prosperity in city areas; it is prosperity in regional areas. That is why this is so important. The chairman of the ACCC had this to say about the NBN:

Structural separation will mean the NBN operator has a clear incentive to treat access seekers on an equivalent basis. Therefore, the government’s announcement provides an opportunity to deal head-on with the difficulties arising from the vertical integration of the current incumbent.

It has fallen to this government to deal with those issues. Of course, those are the issues that go to the very heart of the bill that is in the Senate, because its passage can produce in this country a new era of microeconomic reform. It is not just about superfast internet; it is about increasing GDP growth. It is about increasing the innovative capacities of our small businesses. It is about making markets more competitive. It is about doing all of those things but, above all, it is about joining up regional Australia to the national economy and to the international economy. That is understood by all of those in this House who have the interests of regional Australia very much in their hearts.

But what we find is that the opposition, for base political reasons, want to demolish the NBN. This negative approach of the opposition simply sells our country short. They would rather see the NBN fail than the country succeed and regional Australia grow. That is the problem. They have become so bitter and they have become so myopic that they cannot stand for the national interest. On this side of the House we will vigorously pursue
the national interest. It is not only right for the economy but right for all Australians.

Building the Education Revolution Program

Mr PYNE (2.30 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Does the current Prime Minister agree with the former Prime Minister’s statement from these leaked minutes of the Labor caucus that the waste and mismanagement of her own school hall program was one of the three great failures of this government? After three wasted years and billions of wasted dollars, isn’t this a government that is just going from bad to worse?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the Manager of Opposition Business for his somewhat predictable question. Can I say to the Manager of Opposition Business that I know he is still trying to recover from the embarrassment of failing to call a division on the legislative proposition about a judicial inquiry into Building the Education Revolution that he had been spruiking everywhere, so I understand that there is some embarrassment catch-up in the asking of this. But let me give to the Manager of Opposition Business effectively the answer I gave in the parliament yesterday, which is that the hypocrisy of the opposition on this question is rank, it is manifest, it is everywhere. Just as they come into this parliament during parliamentary days and rail against Building the Education Revolution, the moment they get back to their electorates they cannot wait to stand next to a Building the Education Revolution project and get their photos taken. They cannot wait to get their newsletters out and pretend that somehow it was their strident advocacy for their electorate that brought these projects to their electorate. I am proud, and every member of the government is proud—

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order. The Prime Minister was asked whether she agreed with the former Prime Minister’s assessment that it was one of the great failures of the government and I ask you to bring her back to the question.

The SPEAKER—The member for Sturt would acknowledge that the question goes on further and the matters that the question added after the part that he has just quoted in the point of order opened the scope for a lot of matter to be directly relevant in response.

Ms GILLARD—Let me say again that I am proud, and every member of the government is proud, that through Building the Education Revolution we supported Australian jobs. There is nothing more important to the welfare of Australian families than having parents in work—nothing more important. If we look around our world and look at the circumstances of other economies as they have been hit by the global financial crisis, we see where we could have been. We see where we could have been with an unemployment rate with an 8 in front of the figure or maybe a 9 in front of the figure, with that meaning hundreds of thousands of people unemployed, hundreds of thousands of people at risk of not being able to pay their mortgages or pay their rent, families having their homes repossessed, their mortgages no longer being able to be paid, with everything that means about the future for those families. We were not going to stand by and see that. We understand that the opposition was prepared to stand by and see that but we were not. That is why we provided economic stimulus, why it was targeted and timely, why it was provided to areas of national need like schools to give them the facilities that they will need for the future. Of course these major projects require oversight and as the relevant minister, apart from the oversight built into the program, I also commissioned Brad Orgill to bring his commercial skills to dealing with oversight of the program.
Let us contrast that positive program of action in the nation’s interest and in the interests of Australian families against the alternative advocated by those opposite: don’t provide economic stimulus, let people become unemployed, leave schools without vitally needed infrastructure. All those opposite have ever had their eyes on is the political strategy: call for an Auditor-General report and then when it does not find what they want dismiss it; call for further action and then when the Brad Orgill report does not find what they want dismiss it; try and advocate for a judicial inquiry and then not even bother to come in and call a division and have a vote. We will leave them with their failed political strategy while we get on with the national interest. It is about supporting jobs, it is about supporting families—it is a pity the member for Sturt does not understand that.

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, I seek leave to table the minutes where it says that the third failure—

The SPEAKER—Leave is not granted.

Mr Pyne—of the government was waste and mismanagement, and the—

The SPEAKER—Leave is not granted. Retreat.

Mr Albanese—You idiot.

The SPEAKER—The Leader of the House will withdraw.

Mr Albanese—It is one of the nicest things I have said! I withdraw, Mr Speaker.

The SPEAKER—I am sure there will be a distillation of whether it was a nice thing or not, but in this circumstance it is something to be withdrawn.

Broadband

Mr PERRETT (2.36 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport representing the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy. How is the Gillard Labor government delivering the National Broadband Network so that every Australian business and household can get the benefits of super-fast broadband?

Mr ALBANESE—The National Broadband Network is, of course, the most significant single piece of nation-building infrastructure that we could possibly embark upon in order to prepare us for the needs of the 21st century. It will boost economic growth. Fact: the UN estimates that, for every 10 per cent increase in broadband penetration, we can expect a 1.3 per cent additional growth in gross domestic product. For businesses it will mean lower telephone bills and enhanced business services like high-definition video conferencing, particularly in regional Australia. Consumers will also benefit with increased competition. The OECD found that high-speed broadband provides consumers with benefits by giving them more information about pricing and more access to competition, enabling greater choice as well as putting downward pressure on prices.

It will also drive employment—25,000 jobs on average created each year because of the NBN. It will ensure that innovation stays on our shore rather than be exported overseas. It will increase workforce participation by enabling more employees to telework. More employees participating in telework puts downward pressure on urban congestion and reduces carbon emissions because people can work from home.

So right across the board this has massive benefits. The structural separation of Telstra—the way that we have designed it—will have particular benefit. Paul Budde has said of Telstra’s decision to separate:

The fact that Telstra has made this major step forward is vindication that this industry structure is not only advantageous to the social and eco-
economic benefits of our country, but that it also represents sound economics.

Those opposite took a very different approach. They took a public monopoly, turned it into a private monopoly and called it reform. They know that structural separation is absolutely vital, and that is why we are creating the NBN, a wholesale network with retail competition on top of that so that we can deliver the nation-building infrastructure that we need. Those opposite determine to wreck this nation-building reform at the same time as they say, ‘We are not really opposed to it.’ But every time they have an opportunity to vote they vote against the National Broadband Network, like they vote against all the other important infrastructure reforms of this government. I am pleased that this reform is able to proceed. The National Broadband Network is absolutely vital to Australia’s economic and social future.

Broadband

Mr TURNBULL (2.39 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer her to Senator Xenophon’s statement an hour ago where he says:

The government has backed down and agreed to release a summary of the NBN business case and to have the Productivity Commission advise a joint committee on as yet unspecified aspects of the NBN rollout.

In the light of that backdown, why won’t she agree to ask the Productivity Commission to advise on the fundamental question which is whether the $43 billion NBN is the most cost-effective way of delivering affordable broadband to all Australians?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for Wentworth for his question. I understand that the member for Wentworth is disappointed that Independent senators—including Senator Xenophon, whom he refers to—were taking a constructive approach of thinking through information, receiving information, studying the question and endeavouring to make a decision in the national interest. They are taking a thorough and proper approach to assessing a piece of legislation before them. I understand that he is disappointed by that because it is a stark contrast to what he was advocating to them, which was wreck at all costs—in order to fit in with the opposition’s strategy, wreck at all costs.

We know that in this parliament, when it has come to considering the profound micro-economic reform of structural separation of Telstra, there have been three approaches. The government came determined to deliver this major micro-economic reform to conclude 30 years of reform work; the crossbenchers came into this parliament anxious to absorb information, think deeply about the issue and exercise votes in the national interest; and the opposition came in determined to wreck. The information has always been irrelevant to them.

The reason we never agreed with the member for Wentworth’s call for a referral to the Productivity Commission is that, just as the words came out of his mouth, he indicated that whatever the findings—whatever the Productivity Commission said—the opposition was determined to wreck. He made it absolutely apparent that, even if the Productivity Commission gave this project gold stars all over the page, the opposition would not absorb that information, that it was determined to wreck. I understand that the determination to wreck is increasingly controversial within the opposition. I understand that when the member for Wentworth sits there with a melancholy face that is because this question of just having negative approaches to everything is increasingly controversial within the opposition. I refer members of the House to an article in the Sydney Morning Herald—’Abbott assures colleagues new policies will emerge next year’—. We would like to see that.
Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, on a point of order: the member for Wentworth asked a very considered question about the Productivity Commission referral of the NBN. None of this last minute or two could be seen to be directly relevant, particularly where the Prime Minister is now straying.

The SPEAKER—It may be not the last minute, but the last 10 or 15 seconds were drifting off in a direction. The Prime Minister will respond directly and relevantly to the question.

Ms GILLARD—Thank you, Mr Speaker; I am responding to a question that asked why I did not agree with the opposition about a particular proposition and my answer is that there would have been no point. They have made it clear that they will adhere to their position, despite internal difficulties with some members, like the member for Moncrieff, advocating positive policies and plans from within the progressive faction of the Liberal Party.

Mr Albanese—There is only one.

Ms GILLARD—My colleague is unkindly saying there is only one. I think there maybe three. I think that member may be joined by the member for Higgins and the member for Bradfield, who are actually saying, ‘Let us get something positive done.’

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, on a point of order: under standing order 91 how can provoking members of the opposition, in the way the Prime Minister is doing, not be disorderly?

The SPEAKER—I am pleased to see that the legacy of the former member for O’Connor lives on because this was a point that he put to me often. Within reason, I think that the robustness of this place does not necessarily mean that the comments that were being made were disorderly. If we had the same standing order for answers as we do for questions and we had no debate, that would help. The Prime Minister has the call.

Ms GILLARD—Only in the Liberal Party would saying someone has got an idea be considered an insult. But there we have it—look how far they have fallen. The member for Wentworth is able to see further details about the capital expenditure of the NBN and the rate of return in the information that has been publicly released. If he was really interested in the facts then I would refer him to a study of that document, but we know he is not.

Broadband

Mr ZAPPIA (2.46 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government and Minister for the Arts. Will the minister update the House on the benefits to regional Australia of the National Broadband Network?

Mr CREAN—I thank the member for Makin for his question. I know the strong commitment he has to the important rollout of the National Broadband Network and that he has been engaging with his community to ensure that they get the full benefits. But that cannot happen until we get the legislation through the parliament. It is pleasing today to see a major breakthrough whereby parliament will no longer be standing in the way of the passage of this legislation. Nor should it, because this is a major structural reform. This is the sort of reform that will benefit the nation and the sort of reform that recognises the diversity and distance that this country encompasses. Through this reform we will enhance that economic diversity and we will shrink the distance, and we will deliver better services, particularly to people in regional and remote communities. This is productivity with a purpose—to improve people’s lives and their economic opportunities.
Today’s breakthrough is important and we congratulate those senators who have been prepared to engage constructively with us to try to find the way through—unlike those who sit on the other side and simply carp, whinge and complain while blocking at every point they can. That is an opposition with no agenda and no understanding of what the benefits are for regional Australia. I suggest some of them actually get out there and visit parts of regional Australia. If they did, they would understand why regional Australia is clamouring for the rollout of the National Broadband Network.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The minister will resume his seat until the House comes to order.

Mr Robert—Show me the hay between your teeth, Simon. Where is your bloody big hat, Simon?

The SPEAKER—The member for Fadden should be very careful.

Mr Robert interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Fadden is warned. I guess the minister will not be getting an invitation to Fadden. Now that the House has come to order, the minister has the call. He should be heard in silence.

Mr CREAN—Thank you, Mr Speaker. As I said, they only carp, whinge and complain and never get on with the serious issues. Whether I get an invitation from the member for Fadden or not, I can assure the House that I will be getting an invitation from their regional development body. Like the other 55 bodies around the county, that body is saying, ‘We want access to the National Broadband Network because we understand what it can do to enhance our opportunities for economic diversity, our opportunities to get better services and our opportunities to value-add to the health and education infrastructure all around the country.’

This is a historic reform and it is only through a Labor government that it has been delivered. It is fortunate that those who sit on the crossbenches understand the importance of this and have been prepared to join with us to deliver the outcomes. I ought to say to those members who sit here and oppose so negatively, go and meet with your regional development bodies around the country and see what they have to say about connecting the nation. Do something to advance opportunity rather come into this place to simply oppose by being negative and stopping at every point. Get on the bus and come along with us.

Mr Windsor interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The House will come to order. The Chair of the House Standing Committee on Regional Australia will be careful in the way in which he displays support for answers.

Economy

Mr HOCKEY (2.51 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to the comments of Mr Paul Bloxham, until recently a senior Reserve Bank economist and now HSBC chief economist, who says:

By choosing not to tighten fiscal policy sooner, the government has implicitly chosen higher interest rates than might otherwise have been the case.

Given the Gillard government is borrowing $100 million a day to fund its spending and given that mortgage interest rates have been higher on average under three years of Labor than under 12 years of the coalition in government, is this government just going from bad to worse?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the shadow Treasurer for his question. I am not sure that
the shadow Treasurer is in a position to be lecturing people about fiscal consolidation given the $11 billion black hole the Liberal Party was responsible for in its election costings. What was most remarkable about that $11 billion black hole is that the shadow Treasurer thought it was okay for him, as shadow Treasurer, to say, ‘I never really had a look at the costings.’ That was his excuse—as revealed in the newspaper. It should have been a story on page 1 that a journalist should have won a Walkley award for. It is the revelation of this year that the man who wanted to be Treasurer of this country did not even study his party’s costings during the election campaign and allowed an $11 billion black hole to be produced under his very nose. So we will not be lectured on fiscal consolidation from an $11 billion black hole man.

Secondly, amnesia has broken out in a truly worrying way in the opposition today. It reminds me of a section of the book One hundred years of solitude and the curse of collective amnesia. Those opposite are forgetting everything. The shadow Treasurer has apparently forgotten that under the Howard government of which he was a member we saw interest rate rise after interest rate rise. What was most worrying about that of course was that it was the complete reverse of what the Liberal Party had taken to the election and promised Australians. They stood next to slogans that said, ‘Keeping interest rates at record lows,’ and then they got into government and Australians felt the pressure of interest rate rise after interest rate rise. What is amazing about the shadow Treasurer’s approach to economic management is that at each critical decision-making point over the last three years he has misread the situation. He misread the global financial crisis. He misread the need for economic stimulus. Now he is misreading what the government is doing on fiscal consolidation.

As we go about the task of fiscal consolidation, which is not easy—and building on the fact that we have delivered $80 billion in savings over the budgets that the government have produced—we are thwarted every step of the way by the opposition, who consistently stop savings measures without any regard to the costings in the budget. That is the history of the shadow Treasurer’s performance.

Mr Hockey—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. After over three minutes, the Prime Minister has not talked about her agenda; she has talked about what she claims to be ours. I ask her to be relevant to the question.

Mr Swan—What is your fiscal policy?

Mr Hockey—$50 billion of cuts, you dope.

Mr Swan interjecting—

Mr Hockey—What do you think they are?

Mr Swan interjecting—

Mr Hockey—You are too gutless; insipidly weak.

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for North Sydney and the Deputy Prime Minister are warned! The member for North Sydney will withdraw. It was not a term of affection, but he will withdraw it.

Mr Hockey—What did I say? Insipidly weak?

The SPEAKER—No, the member knows what he said.

Mr Hockey—I don’t. Okay, I withdraw.

The SPEAKER—There is no need to repeat it.

Mr Hockey—Sorry, I thought it was ‘insipidly weak’, but it was obviously ‘dope’.

The SPEAKER—Regrettably, these displays often lack some discipline. People seem to forget what they have been saying in
these exchanges which then brings the whole House into disrepute.

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! I think it does, member for Mackellar. The Prime Minister will be directly relevant to the question. ‘Direct relevance’ is not talking about the person who asks the question and the remarks must be related to the question. Again, I say to the whole House that if the standing orders had been changed whereby the same rules applied to answers that applied to questions, especially about debate, I think the point about ‘direct relevance’ might have been solved. It has not been solved, but that would be a much easier way of bringing it to a true question and answer session as a build-up for other events that should be more important in the daily workings of the House.

Ms GILLARD—Thank you, Mr Speaker. I was asked about the government’s budget strategy. Our budget strategy is abiding by our rules, undertaking the biggest fiscal consolidation since the 1960s and bringing the budget to surplus in 2012-13. We are obviously confronted by obstacles. One of those obstacles is the opposition’s inability to embrace a savings measure in this parliament because of their cheap populism and lack of strategy. Despite that obstacle, we will deliver the fiscal consolidation we have promised and we will bring the budget to surplus in 2012-13 as promised. And, of course, we will not take any advice from the creators of $11 billion black holes as we go about that work.

Health

Mr HUSIC (2.59 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Health and Ageing. How is the Gillard government delivering better quality, more accessible health services to the community through more doctors, more nurses and a better health system? How have these reforms been received and what is the government’s response?

Ms ROXON—I thank the member for his question, particularly because I know he is interested in how services in his region can be improved. You do not have to look too far back—three years ago—to see that when we were elected we inherited, courtesy of the work of the Leader of the Opposition, a health system that was under extreme pressure. A billion dollars had been ripped out of our public health system, GP training places had been capped and nursing shortages were not being properly addressed. But we took action immediately to start to turn these things around.

We have made it easier to see a GP when you need one. We have removed the cap on GP training places. Already 175 extra GPs are being trained in our communities across the country, but that number is growing by 5,500 in the next decade. We have expanded the rural incentive programs for GPs. We have increased nurse university places by 1,000 a year and we have given nurse practitioners and midwives the right to Medicare. Nearly one million services have been provided under the teen dental program. Three years into our five-year GP superclinic program, 15 clinics have provided over a quarter of a million services. All of these things have been done in face of an opposition who have opposed each and every step along the way.

But we are only part way through the delivery of these important services. There are 37 emergency department projects underway across the country. There are new elective surgery theatres being built in, and new equipment going into, more than 125 hospitals across the country. Very shortly I will be making the first announcement for the small primary care infrastructure grants that have been requested by hundreds of GP practices across the country. And of course we have
committed now, in the budget, to the establishment of after-hours GP services—all of this as we get on with the job the Leader of the Opposition has opposed.

I think the Leader of the Opposition might have been particularly interested to see the Menzies-Nous health survey report released today, which shows that 76 per cent of Australians support our health reforms and only nine per cent oppose them. Of course, that nine per cent includes the Leader of the Opposition and those sitting on the opposition benches—a new low, I think, for the Leader of the Opposition to be with just nine per cent of the community.

We are proud of what we are delivering in the health system. We are only able to deliver it because of the good work that has been done by the government to make sure we have a strong economy. We have saved thousands of jobs and we are supporting many more of them within the health system. We are delivering in health and we are delivering in education. We want to use the Broadband Network to deliver even better health services into the future.

It is not that often that I agree with the member for Moncrieff but I think he is right to say that it is not worthy of a leader of a major party with the history of the Liberal Party simply to want to oppose, to want to wreck, to want to end, to want to stop, every initiative that this government takes. Only nine per cent of the population are opposed to our health reforms, and the Leader of the Opposition stands condemned for being amongst them.

Asylum Seekers

Dr SOUTHCOTT (3.03 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to the government’s plan not to vote tomorrow on a motion to require consultation with the local community about a new immigration detention facility at Woodside. Is this not just another example of a government determined to avoid scrutiny for its failed border protection policies? Does the Prime Minister agree with the statement of Senator Faulkner that the government is all cunning and no courage?

Ms GILLARD—I have to say to the member who asked the question that I think he is referring to decisions of the Selection Committee of this House, and the Selection Committee is, of course, participated in by members across the parliament. The Selection Committee works on and makes decisions about what will be the subject of votes in this place and the scheduling of those votes. So can I say to the member that if he is in some way aggrieved about a Selection Committee decision he should take it up with the appropriate person.

Education

Ms LIVERMORE (3.04 pm)—My question is to the Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth. How is the Gillard Labor government delivering to ensure that regardless of a child’s background they get a great education?

Mr GARRETT—I thank the member for Capricornia for her question. The fact is that this government is delivering in education to make sure that every school in Australia is a great school and that every child, no matter where they live, gets a great education. That is why we have almost doubled spending on education—some $63 billion—compared with the opposition’s record in their last four years: to make sure that we can deliver good education to students right around Australia.

In particular, we have the national partnerships, a $1.5 billion investment in low socioeconomic schools, benefiting some 1,600 schools with additional resources to make sure that there are opportunities for those students to get the quality teaching they need. Additionally, the partnership on nu-
meracy and literacy, another national partnership initiated by this government, is ensuring that we have a half-billion-dollar investment in schools that are specifically focused on issues of numeracy and literacy. That is really important, because if we do not provide that investment in schools for numeracy and literacy then students will not be able to develop the skills and capacities through their school career to make use of into the future.

Again, there will be an investment of some $2.5 billion over 10 years in trades training centres. We have approved over $1 billion of this investment, which will see some 288 projects benefitting over 927 schools around Australia in trades training centres. That is a significant commitment by this government and it makes sure that those students who might consider a trade vocation have the opportunity to do it whilst they are still at school. Again, there is a commitment of more than $2 billion over seven years to get computers into schools for years 9 to 12 by the end of next year. Already 345,000 computers have been delivered, with funding approved for more than three-quarters of a million computers.

Then there is the Building the Education Revolution, a $16 billion investment. We have 23,738 projects right around Australia, in all of the states, and in particular around half are to be delivered to regional and remote Australia with some 99 per cent started and 70 per cent completed.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr GARRETT—I can hear some of the opposition starting to call out about the Building the Education Revolution. The member for Sturt has 123 projects in his own electorate. The fact is that, when the opposition went to the election in 2007, they were pledging to cut money from the education budget. They wanted to cut some $3.2 billion and that included some $425 million from the smarter schools Improving Teacher Quality program. So I was interested to read the first speech by the member for Aston. On 26 October, he said:

I am proud to have helped establish the Teach for Australia initiative that aims to lift the standing of teaching through tapping into a different pool of graduates. I am pleased there is bipartisan support for it.

I welcome the member for Aston’s contribution and his participation in Teach for Australia, but I regret to tell him that his shadow education minister and the opposition leader were pledging to cut the very program which he thinks there is bipartisan support for. We understand the need for investing in education on this side of the House. We will continue to deliver the resources to make sure that every student in Australia, regardless of where they live, regardless of their background, gets a great education for their future.

Home Insulation Program

Mr McCORMACK (3.09 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to the tragic triple fatality in a house fire in Wagga Wagga on 10 November this year. Is it correct that the house was fitted with the insulation under the government’s failed home insulation scheme three weeks prior to the closure of the program? Will the government release the results of all inspections under the home insulation scheme and inspect all homes fitted under the program?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for his question. I draw his attention to a media statement released on this question by the Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency in which the minister confirms that insulation was installed at the property in question. He also confirms that he has been advised that the cause of the fire is still
undetermined and investigations remain ongoing. As the member would probably be aware, the police are investigating the matter. I extend my deepest condolences to the family and friends. This is obviously a tragedy in which three people have died and police are taking appropriate steps.

On the question of inspections for home insulation, the member would be aware of the government’s program about home insulation inspections. I reiterate: if people have concerns, they should ring the safety hotline and the number is 131792.

Transport Infrastructure

Mr SYMON (3.11 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport. How is the Gillard Labor government delivering record investment in essential nation-building infrastructure and progressing reform in this important area?

Mr ALBANESE—I thank the member for his question and for his ongoing interest, including in the Springvale project in his electorate, which has now been completed. We are delivering $37 billion over six years in transport infrastructure—that is, double what the previous government spent in this area. Over $21 billion of this investment is going into regional Australia. We have made a tenfold increase in annual spending on rail. We have delivered a national standard gauge rail network under one track manager from Perth to Brisbane. It took 110 years but we got there directly as a result of the input through the economic stimulus plan. We are delivering 10 new urban passenger rail projects worth some $7.3 billion—that is, 10 more projects than those opposite delivered in their time in office because they did not spend one cent on urban passenger rail.

Mr Ewen Jones interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Herbert is warned!

Mr ALBANESE—we have more than doubled the federal roads budget to $27.7 billion over six years. We have also been engaged in reform, not just in investment. We established Infrastructure Australia to overhaul the way we plan, finance, build and use major infrastructure. We have commissioned the first national freight and national port strategies. We have delivered national laws, slashing regulators from the 24 which exist across the transport sector at the moment down to just three—single national regulators in maritime, in rail and in heavy vehicles. We have implemented new, fairer, heavy vehicle road user charges in consultation with industry and we have delivered them. The Infrastructure Working Group last week signed off on our program of completion of microeconomic reform. We have delivered strong, national PPP guidelines. We have delivered streamlined approval processes for major projects. We have delivered best practice on project delivery. On 1 January 2011 we will deliver for the first time a national prequalification system which is about increasing competition in the sector so that drives down prices to governments and at the end of the day to consumers.

We have delivered alliance contracting reforms. The draft is currently out there. Consultation with industry will be delivered in 2011. And we have ended the exile from urban policy that occurred under the previous government. We will have strategic plans for all capital cities in place by 1 January 2012 as a condition of Commonwealth funding. So we have delivered record investment, we are delivering micro-economic reform to make sure that the productivity benefits flow through to the nation and, on top of that, we are delivering the single largest infrastructure investment, and the most important, in the National Broadband Network.
Election Promises

Mr SCHULTZ (3.15 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I ask whether the Prime Minister stands by her comments in this place on 20 October this year when she stated:

I do commit to keeping the promises at a local level that Labor and Labor candidates made at the last election.

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Herbert is out for one hour under standing order 94(a). The offence was the display of a headline or something. Regrettably, I had just warned him after trying not to warn him for about an hour.

The member for Herbert then left the chamber.

The SPEAKER—Member for Mackellar, regrettably I can hear every sotto voce thing you say. He did not have the call and you know that that is outside the guidelines that we thrashed out last parliament.

Mr Albanese—Mr Speaker, on a point of order: the member for Denison asked precisely this question as his first question in the parliament.

The SPEAKER—I think that even the preamble might give me the hook that it is a different question. The Prime Minister will take the call and respond to the question.

Ms GILLARD—My answer to the member’s question is that we made promises, we costed them, and because we costed them we can stand by them and bring the budget to surplus in 2012-13. The opposition made promises it never costed, never accounted for, and had it been elected as the government it would have been headed for an $11 billion black hole, or it would have wholesale marched away from those local commitments, indicating that it would have breached its word to local communities. I say to the member opposite that I stand by the answer I gave the member for Denison and if he cares about local commitments then he will be very happy that the government has properly costed promises that it made.

Mr ABBOTT (3.20 pm)—Mr Speaker, I ask a supplementary question to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to Sena-
tor Lundy’s letter to the member for Hume dated 18 November and I ask her: why has the government broken a commitment made to the people of Hume by her candidate in the election to provide $100 million to Goulburn Base Hospital?

Ms GILLARD—As usual, we will have the matter looked at and the facts checked because the Leader of the Opposition never comes to this place with the facts.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The Prime Minister is responding to the question and she will be heard in silence.

Ms GILLARD—The research I was referring to was not looking at Parliamentary Secretary Lundy’s letter but looking at the assertion that the Leader of the Opposition and the member made about promises by this government. As I am advised by the Minister for Health and Ageing, no such commitment was made. I am very happy to stand by local promises we made. It would be very intriguing indeed to see if the shadow Treasurer and the shadow finance minister could ever spend enough time together to give us a costed list of the local promises they made, because as we know they allowed local candidates to make, and they themselves made, promises that they never bothered to cost. They were heading for an $11 billion black hole and a fundamental breach of trust with local communities.

So I presume that the member for Hume is fairly embarrassed by that performance by his political party. He might therefore want to advocate to the Leader of the Opposition that, in preparation for the 2013 election, the Leader of the Opposition should try to find a way to live by the Charter of Budget Honesty. He promised to do so in the run-up to the 2007 election but did not do it because he was covering up an $11 billion black hole and the littering, right around the country, of promises made to be broken.

Mr Abbott—Mr Speaker, I seek leave to table the article from the Goulburn Post making the commitment and the letter from Senator Lundy breaking the commitment.

Leave not granted.

Paid Parental Leave

Mrs D’ATH (3.23 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs—

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The Leader of the Nationals is close to going out for an hour. Effectively, the leaders knew what they were doing to get the object photographed. That then makes the application of the agreed policy about documents being displayed very hard. I find that type of attitude a little disturbing. The member for Petrie will start her question again.

Mrs D’ATH—My question is to the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. How is the Gillard Labor government delivering support for new mothers?

Ms MACKLIN—I thank the member for Petrie for her question and for her very real commitment to paid parental leave. As the member for Petrie knows, and as all members of the House should by now know, on 1 January 2011 Australia will finally get its first national paid parental leave scheme. This will be a historic day for the mothers and fathers of Australia, who have waited decades for paid parental leave. In just over one month, Australia will finally catch up with the rest of the developed world. This will be extremely important, not just for mothers and fathers but for all the newborn babies who are going to get a better start in life because of our paid parental leave scheme. It will give parents—mothers and...
fathers—the financial security to spend more time at home with their newborn baby, time which will allow mothers to recover from the birth, to bond with their newborn baby and, where possible, to establish breastfeeding.

Today we saw the release of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare report Australia’s mothers and babies, which shows that the number of women giving birth remains high in this country. So it is not surprising that we see so many mums enthusiastically ringing the Family Assistance Office and registering for the new Paid Parental Leave scheme. More than 2,700 applications for paid parental leave have already been registered. We have also seen a very significant number of employers signing up—around 550 employers have already signed up for the Paid Parental Leave scheme. Employers understand just how important paid parental leave is, both for their businesses and for their employees. They also understand that they will not be slugged with a new tax, one which was going to be delivered to them courtesy of this Leader of the Opposition. Employers understand that paid parental leave will mean that there will be better workforce connection with the mothers in their employment. They also know that it is likely to increase workforce participation.

Everyone in this House will know that for 12 years this Leader of the Opposition refused to deliver paid parental leave. He so famously said that paid parental leave would only be delivered over his dead body. Paid parental leave is being delivered because of this government and we can only speculate what that might mean for the Leader of the Opposition. We know that the member for Moncrieff thinks that they are just a complete bunch of wreckers on that side of the House. By contrast, this government is delivering— we are delivering a strong economy; we are delivering jobs; we are delivering in health and education. This government is delivering high-speed broadband and, on 1 January, we will deliver Australia’s first paid parental leave scheme.

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

DOCUMENTS

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (3.29 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:

Committee reports—Government responses to parliamentary committee reports—Response to the schedule tabled by the Speaker on 24 June 2010.

Department of Defence—Reports for 2009-10—Volume 1—Department of Defence.


Safe Work Australia—Report for the period 1 November 2009 to 30 June 2010.

Debate (on motion by Mr Hartsuyker) adjourned.

AUSTRALIAN CRICKET TEAM

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (3.29 pm)—On indulgence: may I take this chance to wish Ricky Ponting and our cricketers all the best for the Ashes test about to start at the Gabba. Obviously our cricketers should know that the whole nation is behind them and we are confident that they will beat the poms.

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (3.30 pm)—On indulgence: on behalf of the government, as Leader of the House, I associate the government with the best wishes for the Australian cricket team in the Ashes tests.
PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

Mrs MIRABELLA (Indi) (3.30 pm)—Mr Speaker, I seek to make a personal explanation.

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

Mrs MIRABELLA—Yes, I do.

The SPEAKER—Please proceed.

Mrs MIRABELLA—In today’s edition of the Border Mail there was an article with the headline ‘Sophie survey says no: gay marriage has no support from Indi voters’. This is incorrect. There was no actual survey conducted and I actually told the Border Mail that the majority view of my electorate was, as I had assessed it, to support marriage in its current form, defined as a union between a man and a woman.

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Gillard Government

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 deliver an agenda for Australia’s future

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) (3.31 pm)—On the third anniversary of the election of the Rudd government, I regret to say that this has been possibly the most disappointing government in Australia’s history. It has put off decisions, it has botched programs, it has broken promises, it has completely failed to develop any vision or agenda for our country and it has embodied the dictum of Senator Faulkner that the modern Labor Party is ‘all cunning and no courage’. Above all else, it has disappointed its own members. The stream of leaks that we are now seeing from inside the government, most recently today with the full caucus minutes of 24 June, is a sign of just how betrayed by this government even good Labor people feel. I say this not in any spirit of gloating over the misfortunes of this government but, frankly, as a lament over the decline of a once great political party, which might have just held on to government after the recent election but which has obviously comprehensively sold and lost its soul. This government has not been overwhelmed by an external crisis; it has proved itself completely incapable of building on the strengths of this nation. It has demonstrated that after 25 years of good government we have now had three years of bad government, three years of drift and three years of squandering the built-up inheritance of a quarter of a century.

Three years ago we knew what good government in this country was like. Then we had a $20 billion surplus and no debt; now we have a $50 billion deficit and we are borrowing $100 million a day. Then we had three boats a year; now we have three boats a week. Then we had a government that was frugal and prudent and responsible with taxpayers’ money; now we have a government which proposes to spend $43 billion without a proper cost-benefit analysis. This government has been an exemplar of how not to run a country. In the first three years of the Howard government, we saw semiautomatic weapons banned. We saw a 50 per cent improvement in waterfront performance. We saw the independence of the Reserve Bank of Australia. We saw the $10 billion black hole bequeathed to us by the former government fixed. It was the greatest fiscal repair job in Australia’s history. And we saw the
holy grail of policy that had defeated successive generations of governments—tax reform—finally begun. That was what a real reforming government looked like and that is not this government.

But lest members opposite think that I am incapable of extending credit where it is due, let me concede that the first three years of the Hawke government were three years of genuine reform. In the first three years of the Hawke government we saw the deregulation of our financial sector, we saw the allowing into this country of foreign banks, we saw the floating of the Australian dollar and we saw the substantial elimination of tariffs. These were serious reforms from a serious government. These were real nation-building initiatives by a government that did not lack courage. By contrast, what have we seen from the current government over the last three years? Well, I have a list of failures that I will shortly go through, but I want to look at the successes. Lest I be accused of not giving credit where it is due, let’s look at the successes. There is a website and there has been a modest extension of welfare quarantining in one territory of this country—two modest successes, both of which build on the reforms of the former government.

But, essentially, what this government has done in the last three years is spend money—and haven’t they spent! They have turned a $20 billion surplus into a $50 billion deficit. They have turned $60 billion worth of net assets into $100 billion of net debt and they are borrowing $100 million every single day. Millions and millions just in the course of a parliamentary session are going out the door because of the profligacy of this government. But if you listen to ministers you hear them say it was all worthwhile because the one thing you cannot take away from them is that they kept Australia out of recession. If the economic policies that kept Australia out of a recession, as in the words of members opposite, were so smart, why did they sack the Prime Minister who presided over them? If this government was so good at keeping Australia out of recession—if that is the ultimate boast of this government—why did they sack the member for Griffith, the most unfairly treated man in Australian political history? If the economic policies were so good and this government is such a good economic manager, why did the one truly economically literate and numerate person in this government, the former minister for finance, Lindsay Tanner, quit in disgust when the prime ministership changed in this country?

Let me make it absolutely crystal clear: the reforms of the previous governments, not the spending spree of the current one, have kept Australia in the relatively good economic health that we currently enjoy. What we have seen from this government is a comprehensive and complete failure to deliver on its program. We know about the modern Labor Party: they are good at politics but they are hopeless at government. Let us go through the list. There is the Home Insulation Program, an absolute disaster. In fact, it is more than a disaster; it is a tragedy. We know about the 207 house fires and we know about the four deaths but, tragically, it seems there might even be more. There is a quarter of a million Australian families living in such houses now—nearly all unchecked—that have dodgy or dangerous roof insulation because of the waste and incompetence of this government.

The Building the Education Revolution program should have been called the botching the education revolution program, a monumental waste of public money to be eclipsed only by the coming National Broadband Network disaster or school halls on steroids. There is the border security disaster. Since members opposite changed the laws that were working, we have had 9,188 illegal arrivals on 190 boats. There is the mining
tax, the dagger aimed at the heart of the most productive sector of our economy. There is the emissions trading scheme. First of all, it was delayed because of the deep loyalty of the former Deputy Prime Minister who is the current Prime Minister—such loyalty and solidarity amongst that group—and now it seems to have been dumped by the uberloyal former Deputy Prime Minister, who is also ubernhonest. The Prime Minister was telling us before the election that there will be no carbon tax under any government that she leads and is now telling us that there will be. There is the East Timor processing centre that is never going to happen. There are the domestic processing centres that are bursting at the seams. There is the takeover of public hospitals that was supposed to happen in 2009 but which is now bogged down in the kind of bureaucratic mess that we have come to expect from this government. It is typical of the work of this government that, after spending billions in its first year, I think there are 11 extra hospital beds in New South Wales as a result of all that extra federal spending. There are the GP superclinics: 36 were promised; four are fully operational. There is the Indigenous housing program whereby $45 million was spent without any actual work on the ground being done. There was the computers in schools program: a million were promised; 340,000 have so far been delivered. There are the trade training centres: 2,650 were promised; only 22 have been delivered. There is the Fuelwatch that never happened. There is the GroceryWatch that never happened. There were the 260 childcare centres that were scrapped after just 38 were built. There were the green loans: only 1,000 were ever made although 140,000 assessments took place and thousands of assessors are $3,000 out of pocket. That was a $275 million complete waste of money, and then there was the citizens assembly, which lasted perhaps three weeks before being dumped.

It is a bad government getting worse. If we think they were indecisive with a majority, they are now absolutely incoherent without a majority. Let us pause for a moment to think about the absolutely shambolic nature of this government. We saw a slight window of it in the Financial Review this morning in an article by Laura Tingle, who said not only is there no published business case for the National Broadband Network but there has been no cabinet submission on the National Broadband Network and there has not even been a proper cabinet briefing. What we have instead are these duelling cabinet subcommittees competing with each other to stymie proposals because the senior members of this government do not trust each other. That is the truth: they do not trust each other. And why would they trust each other now that we know how it all works, because we have been told thanks to the leaker of the caucus minutes and thanks to the lament of the former Prime Minister, perhaps the most unjustly treated senior politician in recent Australian history.

But let us consider what has happened since the election. We have had the mining tax, which has been made less favourable to the mining industry. We have had the emissions trading scheme, which has been replaced by the carbon tax. We have had the detention policies, which have been dramatically watered down. We have had the privatised National Broadband Network, which has now been replaced by the permanently nationalised national broadband network, some kind of latter-day Postmaster-General’s department. Imagine that: the Postmaster-General’s department trying to deliver faster speeds! But that is what we have got.

What is the common ingredient in all of this? It is the fact that Labor are in govern-
ment but the Greens are in power. Every policy change since the election demonstrates the Green-lean which the Deputy Prime Minister alluded to today and said that Labor have to reject it. How can they possibly reject the Greens on whose votes their government crucially depends? Then, of course, there is the gay marriage distraction which is going to rip the Labor Party to pieces over the next 12 months precisely because of the influence of the Greens.

It is just not good enough. The Australian people want a political party in government which knows what it stands for. Here on the coalition side of the parliament we stand for lower, simpler, fairer taxes. We stand for moving from a welfare state to a society of opportunity. We want to see genuine people-power in our schools and hospitals and we want to see a new standing green army to give our land the care that it really deserves.

We are Liberals who believe in smaller government, lower taxes, greater freedom. We are Australian patriots who want to see strong families and respect for values that have stood the test of time. Unfortunately, what we have is a government which has comprehensively let the Australian people down over the last three years. There are two questions the Australian people should contemplate over the summer. Is your life better? Is our country stronger? Thanks to this government the answer is a resounding no.

(Time expired)

Dr Emerson (Rankin—Minister for Trade) (3.46 pm)—Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker Slipper. I do not know if you noticed but, while that speech was being delivered, there was plenty of chatter going on behind the Leader of the Opposition. This is the second last day of parliament under the new parliamentary arrangements in which the opposition leader said that he would be delivering alternative policies for Australia. He could have brought in some supporters but, instead, what he had was just chatter and a very, very flat effort indeed.

This is a debate, ostensibly at least, about government and opposition agendas—policy agendas. That is what the parliament should be debating, so I want to address that directly in terms of the government’s agenda. I will go through our budget policy which is to return the budget to surplus in 2012-13, which would be the fastest fiscal consolidation since 1960 and we would be the only major advanced country to achieve this.

The Leader of the Opposition has said repeatedly that we should not have gone into deficit, that there should not have been deficits in this country. When more than $100 billion, and at one point an estimated $200 billion, is slashed off the nation’s taxation revenue the prescription of the Leader of the Opposition would have been then to cut a corresponding amount out of government spending—that is, to double the negative impact of the deepest global recession since the Great Depression by keeping the budget in balance at a time of severe trauma for the nation’s revenues. In that decision he would have destroyed the lives of hundreds of thousands of Australians who wanted the dignity of work but who would have been thrown out of work through the cold-hearted policies of the Leader of the Opposition. Fortunately he did not get a chance to implement that particular policy prescription.

As a result of Labor’s efforts through economic stimulus and the efforts of small and larger businesses in this country, instead of losing jobs, hundreds of thousands of jobs have been created in Australia at a time when millions of people lost their jobs in Europe and North America. The government have set about implementing an agenda to deal with some other major economic difficulties bequeathed to this nation by the previous
coalition government. I refer to easing capacity constraints and lifting productivity growth. We need to ease the capacity constraints, namely the skill shortages and the infrastructure drought, inflicted upon this country by 12 years of coalition sloth and neglect.

The former Treasurer of this country, Peter Costello, said that infrastructure investment is not a responsibility of the Commonwealth of Australia. They are saying that they did not believe in investing in infrastructure, including in regional Australia, and they failed to invest in the necessary skills formation to enable this country to deal with those bottlenecks. As a result there were inflationary pressures and, right now with the two-speed economy that we have, these capacity constraints are increasingly severe. It is because of the foresight of Labor governments in understanding these problems and dealing with them that we are making the necessary investments, and I call that a very positive agenda for the nation’s future.

The government are setting about dealing with another great legacy from the previous coalition government, and that is a massive slump in productivity growth in this country. Why is this important? Because today’s productivity growth is tomorrow’s prosperity. Yesterday’s productivity growth was negative. Multifactor productivity growth in this country between 2004 and 2008 was negative. Australia was less productive at the end of the period of the previous coalition government than four years before that. We are revitalising productivity growth through our efforts in creating a seamless national economy and, of course, in rolling out the National Broadband Network, about which I will have more to say in a moment.

We are embracing important elements of tax reform by giving small businesses much needed tax relief. So much for the coalition parties being the parties of small business! What are they doing in terms of our efforts to provide tax relief for small business? They are opposing it. What about our efforts in providing infrastructure investment in the regions? They are opposing it. What about our efforts in increasing the superannuation guarantee payments from nine per cent to 12 per cent to give people a secure income in retirement? They are opposing it. Why? Because they are opposing the minerals resource rent tax that would fund these important productivity-raising initiatives.

Mr McCormack interjecting—

Dr EMERSON—In hospital and health we will have as a result of our reforms more doctors, more nurses and a higher quality health system, which this country deserves. I remind members of this parliament what the Leader of the Opposition said when he was the health minister. He said: No one should fret over an “unreformed” Australian health system. He has never believed in reform.

In the last few moments I have begun to explain the government’s policy agenda, and that is what this debate is about. But of course we all remember when it was not exactly determined who would be forming a government in this country.

Mr McCormack interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)—Order! The member for Riverina will remain silent.

Dr EMERSON—Members might recall that the opposition leader convened a shadow cabinet meeting to which he invited the media, and he described the shadow cabinet—that is, the coalition shadow cabinet—as ‘a government in waiting’. If you are a government in waiting, then there is an obligation on you as an alternative government to develop alternative policies. But
what have we heard from the Leader of the Opposition in respect of alternative policies? Nothing but three-word slogans. Remember he took to the elections, and has been saying ever since: ‘Stop the boats. Stop the waste. Stop the taxes.’ Never mind that his policy of stopping the boats involves Admiral Abbott sitting at Kirribilli overlooking Sydney Harbour, taking phone calls from north-western Australia and deciding which boats are going to be towed back out to sea. That is a policy: stop the boats! That is their policy.

He says, ‘We’re going to stop the waste.’ That is very interesting, isn’t it! They are going to stop the waste, but they go to the election with an $11 billion gaping black hole. How is that stopping the waste? Then the costings were released. I remember the fantastic media performance from the shadow finance minister and the shadow Treasurer, who could barely be in the same room at the same time so much do they despise each other. The shadow Treasurer revealed later that he had seen the costings—how long before? Two weeks? Two days? Five minutes! Five minutes before the press conference was actually held—out of his own mouth. He then said, hand on heart, ‘These costings all add up.’ It required the intervention of the Independents to insist that those costings be subjected to Treasury and Finance costings, truly independent costings, and it was Treasury and Finance who identified an $11 billion black hole. So much for the slogans.

Mr Lyons interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—The member for Bass will remain silent, particularly because he is not in his seat.

Dr EMERSON—Then he said, ‘Stop the taxes.’ ‘Stop the taxes’ was the third slogan. What is their position on tax? Their position is to apply a great big new tax on everything you buy to fund the Paid Parental Leave scheme, which they now oppose and which, obviously, the Leader of the Opposition said back in 2002 would happen over his dead body. But then he had a metamorphosis and said, ‘I’ve got a good idea. Why don’t we increase taxes to pay for my Paid Parental Leave scheme?’ And now he says, ‘We’re going to stop the taxes!’ In fact, they would increase the taxes.

These three-word slogans are really catching on, Mr Deputy Speaker. What is his climate change policy? No carbon price. What is his telecommunications policy? Demolish the NBN. What is his health policy? Local hospital boards. What is his budget policy? An $11 billion black hole. What is his education policy? Cut school funding. They are very catchy, aren’t they, these three-word slogans? That is the depth of the work that the Leader of the Opposition has done this year and in the lead-up to the election. He has no policies. All he has is slogans.

And you do not need to rely on me, Mr Deputy Speaker, to accept that analysis. Just ask the member for Moncrieff, because the member for Moncrieff has expressed today in the media the frustrations that so many members of the coalition are expressing about this totally negative, totally opportunistic Leader of the Opposition. Why wouldn’t the member for Moncrieff become frustrated? He was actually in shadow cabinet at one point, then he was demoted from shadow cabinet to the outer ministry and now to the back bench. Why? Because he has got some ideas; he has got some alternative policies. I do not agree with his alternative policies on bringing back unfair dismissal laws for small business, but at least he has had the courage to say, ‘I’ve got some policies and I think as a coalition we should debate these policies and we should substitute reasonable policy’—‘reasonable’ from the coalition’s point of view, not from our point of view. But at least he has policies in
place of these three-word slogans. I do not know that this intervention by the member for Moncrieff is going to help his career, but maybe he will be joined by others with similar courage who will say they have had a gutful of the Leader of the Opposition believing, as he says, that the coalition is ‘a government in waiting’ and that he can skate through with focus tested three-word slogans.

I heard during question time the Prime Minister talking about the National Broadband Network and the ongoing demands for the coalition that there be cost-benefit analysis and so on. The Prime Minister made the perfectly valid point that it would not matter what happened; the coalition would never support the National Broadband Network. And the Leader of the Opposition said, ‘Wrong.’ Well, the Prime Minister is right because even now in his contribution to the matter of public importance he described the National Broadband Network as a disaster.

Does this sound like a policy that at some point the Leader of the Opposition might embrace and that at some point, if there was a cost-benefit analysis, he would support? What did he say earlier, in May this year, about this? He said, ‘I think it’s a bad idea.’ What did he say on the Alan Jones program? He said, ‘Well, we won’t go ahead with it, Alan. We just won’t go ahead with it.’ That sounds like a pretty conclusive ‘no’ to me, and that is what the coalition’s policy is: no to the National Broadband Network, no to lifting productivity growth in this country, no to supporting the regions.

I have listened to the interjections from a new member of the National Party in this parliament, the member for Riverina, and he should be supporting the National Broadband Network. He should be supporting regional development in this country. He should be supporting the regions. But, no, again the National Party falls in behind.

Mr Truss interjecting—

Dr Emerson—Here we have the ostensible Leader of the National Party, Mr Who. In surveys he actually rates below ‘Who?’ and ‘I don’t know’ and such answers when people are asked who is the Leader of the National Party. ‘I don’t know’ actually rates above the current Leader of the National Party.

Mr McCormack—Mr Deputy Speaker, I raise a point of order. The minister really should refer to the National Party leader by his correct name, not Mr Who.

Mr Deputy Speaker—I call the minister, whose time is rapidly running out.

Dr Emerson—I thank the member for that wonderful point of order, that I should not call the leader Mr Who. I will call him Doctor Who.

Mr Deputy Speaker—I draw the minister to the provisions of standing order 64. He ought not to refer to other members by terms other than their position or the name of their electorate.

Dr Emerson—Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. When the Leader of the Opposition was contributing to a debate here, I think it was his first contribution in the new parliament, this is what he said:

The Australian public expects the government to keep to its commitments. If this government could not keep to its commitments, the Prime Minister should not have accepted the Governor-General’s commission.

Okay, a commitment that we made at the last election was the National Broadband Network. Hold us to account, insist that we implement the National Broadband Network, but don’t get in the way and don’t try to stymie it. After all, the opposition leader said this government should keep its commitments, which include a commitment to the National Broadband Network, a commitment to GP superclinics—an entire election pro-
gram. But this Leader of the Opposition, who has spat the dummy, has just been spoiling and sulking and thwarting every piece of legislation he possibly can in this parliament because he has no policies. He is still grumpy, he is still mean and upset because, under the born-to-rule mentality of the coalition and of the Liberal Party, he did not get the nod. So he said, ‘I’m going to wreck and ruin and rant,’ and that is what he has been doing ever since.

This government will get on with its agenda of implementing good economic policies for a stronger economy, for a prosperous economy, for a fair society and for a sustainable environment in this country.

Mr TRUSS (Wide Bay—Leader of the Nationals) (4.01 pm)—When judging incompetence in government, most people regard the Whitlam government as the benchmark. ‘Worse than Whitlam’ has become a sort of mantra that we are hearing quite a bit around this place lately. The Whitlam government is the illustration of shoddiness in government. It is interesting to note that the Whitlam government lasted three weeks short of three years. They were considered to be an abject failure when it came to fundamental areas like economic policy and competent management. Today on the third anniversary of the Rudd-Gillard Labor government, perhaps we should compare their performances. This government has had three years—three weeks more than the Whitlam team did. For all its chaos and its scandal and the rampant debt and unemployment and economic misery and raging political incompetence, at least the Whitlam government did something. At least Gough Whitlam tried. At least the Labor Party of the 1970s had a core and a heart and some mojo. Just compare it with this soulless and short-sighted and inept mob, paralysed by focus groups and liaison with the Greens, with a stunning lack of imagination and poise and focus—a government by zombies, as one of their own numbers has suggested.

In the first 14 days of the Whitlam government there was just a two-man band running the country, a gang of two. Yet this gang of two made 40 far-reaching decisions, largely in the areas of social reform. Some of them were good and most of them were bad, but at least they made some decisions according to the Whitlam government’s own plan for Australia’s future. If we compare what the gang of two did in their first two weeks, now we have got over three years of a gang of four, although we have now learned that no decisions were made when one of the gang was present. They had to wait for the former Minister for Finance to leave before they could actually tell the truth about what they wanted to do. So we have got double the number of people but none of the calibre and none of the firepower—twice as many suits in the room but they are all empty. When decisions were made they were all about overblown rhetoric and promises about the greatest reform of all time, the biggest projects imaginable. Insulation, school halls, green loans, CPRS—all of them were going to save the world or save the economy, save the nation. All empty rhetoric, although in some cases they have had appalling consequences. They were going to turn around the boats, they were going to deliver all sorts of change that simply has not happened.

Most of the programs that they have put their effort into have proved to be such an appalling disaster. There was the insulation program—a program that goes on killing. How much longer can this government stand aside and refuse to level with the Australian people about the horrors of this program and what is actually going to be done to fix it? What about the billions lost in school halls, the green loans program which has left hundreds of thousands of Australians short, the assessors who paid for training and now are
getting nothing in return? This is the example of this government. In the words of Dougie Cameron, the zombies who underwent a political lobotomy are not consulted at all. The remainder of the cabinet ministers are left in the dark. I am not saying they would have read the report or the cabinet documents even if they had got them. It seems no minister has bothered to read the plan for a $43 billion program. If they are not going to read about what it is proposed to spend $43 billion on, how can we rely on them to deal with programs which have significance but do not involve such high-profile activity?

Now we are told there is going to be a change. Now we are going to have caucus have a brainstorming program. After three years, nothing to do, bereft of ideas, finally the zombies are going to be allowed to have a say. They can at least put in their ideas. I guess they will be ignored and disregarded from then on, but at last, after three years, caucus is going to be allowed to have some brainstorming.

Let us be aware that Kevin Rudd as Prime Minister tried to undertake some significant initiatives. He regards his greatest achievement as saying sorry for the injustices to Aboriginal people, but there has been no plan to address the chronic Indigenous disadvantage. The report has shown no progress. If this was the most important issue for his government to address, you would think he would have achieved something. There was $45 million spent before the first house was built, and even now only a handful of houses have been completed. We have been bombarded by all sorts of words and reviews and promises, reports by the dozen, but nothing actually happens.

Now we have a new Prime Minister—five months in office today—but nothing has changed. The front page headline of today’s Australian Financial Review describes the forlorn way in which this government approaches decision making. The headline is ‘Gillard’s way: a more inclusive form of indecision’. There will still be indecision but it will be more inclusive than it was previously, so all the zombies can be a part of the indecision. They can all play a role in the future. And—oh dear!—isn’t that headline so apt? We are told that cabinet is going to meet early tomorrow morning because it needs to make a decision about anti-siphoning. This issue has been around for a year. The people of Australia, and particularly those in regional Australia, want to know whether they are going to be able to watch the football in the months ahead. The decision has become desperately urgent because the current rules expire in a few days. Finally, the cabinet has to make a decision. What a terrifying prospect—the whole cabinet in the room having to make a decision on who can watch the football and who is going to miss out. To do this, they have to start at seven o’clock in the morning, it seems. They have to get up really early to make this decision that they needed to make 12 months ago.

Is it any better with the National Broadband Network—a really big decision? We are told it is the most important piece of social infrastructure our country has ever seen, but it is $43 billion with a secret business plan that no-one is able to see. Those who are able to see it have not even read it, yet they are asking the Australian parliament to vote on accepting a scheme where they do not even think the review and the business case is worth reading.

Kevin Rudd, from the caucus minutes of five months ago, said there were three great failures in the government. He named them as the mining tax, the BER and the emissions trading scheme. But what he made absolutely clear was that these were not his decisions alone; the decisions were actually made by
people like his deputy and the Treasurer. They were urging him to make the decisions that have proved so disastrous for the Labor Party and for the Australian people. So they were a part of the decisions but now they have been rewarded. The people who made the bad decisions in company with the former Prime Minister are now filling those high offices.

Of course, Treasurer Swan has been a real part of the failure of this government—Australia’s weakest Treasurer. He talked up inflation, he blew the surplus, he plunged the budget into deficit and drove the nation into debt. It is no wonder that not even the banks will listen to him any more. He has become a laughing stock and now he makes promises about balancing budgets—something Labor never does. Something Labor never does is repay debt. In reality, this government will be no better.

As we look at the progress of this government, there is no doubt that Julia Gillard got it right when she said—also five months ago today—that Labor have lost their way. It was her job to try and find the map and to get Labor going again in the right direction. But the party have been absolutely clueless. They know deep down that they have nobody else to blame for this than themselves. Launching a book today, the Treasurer was trying to blame the coalition for all Labor’s failures. It is our fault that all their programs have turned into lemons, that they have been a failure in what they wanted to do.

The reality is that this government have no idea where they should be going. It has been a government that has delivered a crisis in confidence. They lack the quality to be able to make the decisions that matter for Australian people and, even worse, once the decisions are made for good or for bad, they do not have the capability to implement them in an efficient and reliable way to deliver results for ordinary Australians. The Australian people know that government is for grown-ups, for people who will make decisions and get on with the job, not factional machine men who care only about their own jobs. This government cannot govern. They have failed and it is time they handed over to somebody who can do the job. (Time expired)

Mr GEORGANAS (Hindmarsh) (4.11 pm)—I welcome the opportunity to speak on this MPI on the Gillard government. I welcome it because I am very proud, as all of us on this side on the House, of the good work that this Labor government has been doing and has committed itself to do, together with the crossbenchers in this House, and the support it has for the work being done within the community. Members of the crossbenchers and the government alike, the Australian public and our constituents in our electorates will be able to take pride in the substantial very important changes to which we are making a positive contribution and which will affect a variety of important, if not critical, areas of our lives and the lives of all Australians.

If we look back over the period of the Howard conservative government, we saw inaction and we saw neglect for many years. Of course, it is up to a Labor government—here it is again—to deliver to the Australian people. There is no alternative, as the opposition do nothing but obstruct. All we heard today at question time—and all this week and in the lead-up in the last couple of weeks—was how they will obstruct, how they will delay, how they will oppose and how they will be wreckers. The opposition have not come up with a positive strategy. There are no positive policy plans. All we see is obstruction, opposition for the sake of opposition, and the destruction of anything good that will better the lives of Australians. As they have removed themselves from the
political debate by their opposition and their destructiveness, they have made themselves irrelevant. We see that through the inept policies that they have not been bringing to this House.

I take this opportunity to speak to all of us in this place, but especially to the cross-benchers and the Australian public at large, about just a few of the improvements that we are making through working together and the few improvements that we can all anticipate. We can reflect on one of the strongest policy initiatives of this government, that being a new telecommunications network for this new century, which is again being opposed by those on the other side for the sake of opposition. It is a substantial reason for this government’s coming into being.

There is a commitment to replace our reliance on century-old technology with a network that will have the capacity to deliver all that we require. In this period of radical communication change, the National Broadband Network is not a once in a generation initiative but a once in a century initiative. Again, this is being opposed. The acute increase in broadband capacity and speed that this network will give us will see changes in many parts of our lives and will affect Australian lives all over this country.

We have heard about some of those anticipated improvements in question time this week. These include better access to markets, better access to professional services, better access to information and education, and better access to our friends and loved ones around Australia and the world. These are just some of the areas that will improve but which those opposite are opposing just for the sake of opposing, destroying and delaying.

The network will also give us remote access to professional health services, which is just one area where it will better the lives of Australians. This will be just one part of the transformation of our health and hospital system that had $1 billion pulled out from it under the former government. Labor invented universal health care in Australia. The conservative Liberal Party privatised it. Labor re-created universal public health care and the previous Liberal Prime Minister described it as a rort.

Again, it falls to Labor to restructure our old, failing health system, which for far too long was a hot potato passed between federal and state governments. In the lead up to the 2007 election we saw the report *The blame game: report on the inquiry into health funding*. Anything and everything that was discussed in health was the fault of the states, and the blame would be handballed to the states and they would have to deal with it. Well, this is a government that is dealing with the issues.

As I said, at last we have a national government doing what is required to improve the health system through the restructuring of funding responsibility and improving services, and not just passing the buck to the states. By introducing clarity and certainty for the first time, the public will know who is responsible. This government will fund substantial improvements in this area, such as a four-hour emergency department turnaround guarantee to ensure patients are admitted, referred or discharged within four hours of arrival at an emergency department. That is what we stand for; the Liberals are opposing this measure.

Further improvements include targets for maximum waiting times for elective surgery and a guarantee that 95 per cent of surgeries will be delivered on time. Again, this is opposed by the opposition. There will also be extra GP services in aged care homes to improve access for older Australians to primary care services. These are the people who have
paid taxes all their lives and have fought in wars, yet the opposition opposes these important policies. These are just some of the benefits that we can anticipate as a result of this Labor government’s national health agenda. This is the agenda the public supported in the lead up to the last election. This parliament makes the rules and, most importantly, the majority of members in this House support that agenda.

As it will with health care, the NBN will increase the access of Australians to information and education resources. It is clear that part of the strategy behind providing a higher value education to the next generation is this government’s substantial direct investment in the IT capacities of our schools. As a direct result of this government’s education agenda we will have schools with the computers they need to supercharge our children’s education through the resources and materials they will be able to access through—here it is again—the National Broadband Network. Again, the opposition are opposing our children having the tools to access the information and technology needed to make us a better nation.

The opposition are opposing, blocking and delaying for the sake of opposing. In spite of those opposite, constituents absolutely welcome this government’s investment in their schools—public and private alike—and in their children’s future. We heard from earlier speakers about the Building the Education Revolution. The investments made by that program have been a tremendous success. We have seen how those opposite all clamour to have their photographs taken when there is an opening of a BER project in their local electorates even though they are opposed to it.

The BER has been a tremendous success in our electorates. This is evident from those on the ground. All of us on this side speak to the principals, teachers and students in our electorates. They have all welcomed it and said how much it was needed after so much was taken out of the system during the many years those opposite were in government. In ceremony after ceremony that I attend for the opening of BER projects, the people on the ground who I speak to support the government’s agenda and more than welcome its ongoing fulfilment. This is because they know the value of education. We all know that a good education in our society will improve the future chances of those students. They know how important it is to get the skills needed to get and hold a job.

Even with all the turmoil in the world—such as the recent turmoil felt in Ireland—we are continuing to grow our economy and workforce. This is an outstanding achievement that continues to get better. If we had listened to those on the other side who opposed our infrastructure programs and stimulus packages, who knows where we would be today? Additionally, if they had won government with their $1 billion budget black hole I think we would have been in very dire straits. We know that many jobs were created in the economy through the infrastructure packages from this government. For example, well over 600,000 jobs have been created since this Labor government came to office.

The students of today can take great heart from the condition of our national economy and their likelihood of securing, with requisite training, work to fund their lives well into the future. What this Labor government has done will enable our economy to grow by 3¼ per cent in 2010-11 and in 2011-12. So this government’s actions have kept people in work. This is very important to consider when you think about how those on the other side opposed all of the packages designed to keep our economy going. This government’s actions have kept people in work.
work through the worst financial crisis in over half a century. (Time expired)

Ms JULIE BISHOP (Curtin) (4.22 pm)—There is a scholar and a speaker in the United States by the name of Joel Barker, who is known in corporate circles as the paradigm man. He is said to have popularised the concept of a ‘new paradigm’. So there is nothing original under the sun. Mr Barker begins his lectures on leadership and vision with these words:

Vision without action is just a dream. Action without vision is just passing time. Vision with action can change the world.

What do we make then of a leader with no vision and no action—not dreaming, not even passing time, just a hollow vacuum occupying the job of Prime Minister, courtesy of the factions that put her there and holding onto government courtesy of the Independents? That is the legacy three years on of this government.

It is not as if the Prime Minister has not been pressed endlessly to come up with a vision or a plan for Australia. Just before the election on 20 August, News Ltd published an article by the Prime Minister. It was in response to a request for her to lay out her vision for Australia in 2013. It was a free kick for the Prime Minister. Supported by her army of ministers, advisers, bureaucrats and not to mention the highly paid speechwriters and consultants, she had to come up with a plan for the nation. How timely was that? Just days before the election it was an opportunity for the real Julia to show real leadership—to inspire, to move people by her insights, to lay out a path and an agenda that would carry the nation to greater heights for the betterment of all. No, we were not expecting soaring rhetoric. We were not expecting a Chifley ‘light on the hill’ rallying call. We were not expecting a Menzies ‘forgotten people’ masterpiece. But we were expecting more than a depressing and dreary insight into this Prime Minister’s limited depth and breadth of thought. Her article started off, predictably, with her usual declaration of a belief in the power of hard work and education—okay, so far so good. She then went on to say we should:

... show simple courtesy and respect by caring for each other in times of need.

Fine. The Prime Minister said that she will be guided by those values. That, members of the House, was it. The reader should have been really worried by that stage. Surely, this Prime Minister realises that those principles have been advocated by every Prime Minister and virtually every parliamentarian in history. If this is her vision, with whom is she trying to contrast herself by sprouting motherhood statements? Hard work, education, courtesy and respect are all laudable, but, seriously, this was meant to be her vision, her agenda and her plan for 2013. This was meant to inspire people to vote for her in 2010, yet she could only sprout sentiments held by every politician in the past 100 years.

The Prime Minister listed her priority of investing in infrastructure and nominated as key the National Broadband Network, the trade training centres for schools and the GP superclinics. These were the central planks for her vision for Australia. It was strange that the horrendously overpriced school hall program did not appear on her list, given that she had personally presided over that $16 billion disastrous program. One could almost forgive the Prime Minister for being embarrassed about that program with billions wasted due to her incompetent administration. As we know from the leaked Labor caucus meeting minutes of 24 June, the Building the Education Revolution was deemed to be one of the three great failures of the Rudd government. It was strange that the Prime Minister failed to mention her delivery of the trade training centres, and that is
because she did not deliver on Labor’s 2007 promise. It was also strange that she failed to mention that Labor failed to deliver any but a small fraction of its 2007 promise on GP clinics. That was it for her vision. She summed it up this way:

My vision is for a country that works, step by step, towards better jobs, better opportunities and better services for all Australians.

In contrast with whom? All those governments that actively work to ensure, step by step, worse jobs, fewer opportunities and worse services? Perhaps we do have the key to her vision after all: the Prime Minister was comparing her agenda with that of state Labor governments. This Prime Minister’s benchmark for achievement is to aspire to be better than state Labor. That lowest common denominator thinking will be the hallmark of federal Labor forever more.

One of the more depressing aspects of the Prime Minister’s statement of vision for the nation was that of the 650 words in her statement about 200 were dedicated to personally attacking the Leader of the Opposition. So 30 per cent of her vision for Australia involved a personal attack on the Leader of the Opposition—so much for courtesy and respect. This is where the slag and bag began—in that vision statement and the attack on the Leader of the Opposition. What a depressing, disappointing and lazy effort it was by someone campaigning to be the Prime Minister of Australia.

Perhaps I am being too harsh, because it is entirely possible and becoming more plausible by the day that this effort was in fact her most honest revelation, that it is the extent of this Prime Minister’s vision—empty, vacuous and hollow. Since the election there has been a vacuum of leadership by the Prime Minister. A government’s agenda should be designed to give people hope that it is capable of improving their lives, making things better not worse, ensuring the government passes on to the next government a better set of circumstances than it inherited. Governments should build on the policy agendas of their predecessors and further expand economic reforms put in place by successive governments. The Hawke and Keating governments built on the work of the Fraser government by opening up and liberalising our economy, particularly the financial sector. The Howard government implemented economic reforms that built on the Hawke and Keating agendas.

One of the great legacies of the Howard government that was bequeathed to this Labor government was zero government debt. The Howard government paid off the massive debt accumulated under Labor—$96 billion of debt was paid off over 10 years. Then with $60 billion in savings and a budget surplus of more than $20 billion, this Labor government inherited the best set of books of any incoming government in our nation’s history. It was presented with an opportunity unlike that of any incoming government, which put this government in a stronger position to weather the global financial crisis than virtually any comparable economy. Yet when it was in opposition Labor opposed every reform of the Howard government and now deludes itself that it was good luck, not good management, that it inherited such a fantastic set of books.

To the great cost of this nation, it is only now clear that it was not luck but the good management of the coalition government. And, despite her professed belief in hard work, the Prime Minister lacks the grace and dignity to acknowledge the Howard government’s achievements. In a number of manifestly visionary moves, the coalition established the Future Fund so that future generations of taxpayers would not have to foot the bill for the superannuation entitlements of those in public service in this generation. The
coalition established the $6 billion Higher Education Endowment Fund and the Leader of the Opposition, when health minister, established a medical infrastructure fund. Our vision was for these growth funds to exist in perpetuity to provide universities and hospitals with an additional source of funding for their infrastructure needs. The first thing this government did was raid those funds and spend that money, and this Prime Minister is personally responsible. She pillaged the Higher Education Endowment Fund.

Labor has spent these funds while at the same time plunging the budget deeply into deficit. It has managed to plunge the government back into the depths of Labor’s debt last seen in 1996. This government will never repay its debt. It never has; it never will. And despite its rhetoric no-one seriously believes this government will ever deliver a budget surplus. This government will go down in history as providing a far worse set of accounts than it inherited by providing economic ‘reforms’ that take the country backwards not forwards. It will be the first government in living memory that leaves this country far worse off than it was under the preceding government—apart from the 1996 Labor government. What a poor and sorry history and what a poor and sorry example of leadership for this country.

Ms O’NEILL (Robertson) (4.32 pm)—I am surprised and delighted to be able to speak on this matter of public importance. I am surprised because the opposition has actually come up with an MPI that has the word ‘future’ in it. I am surprised because I have been overwhelmed since arriving in this place by the backward-looking whinging of the leaders of the opposition. Their focus on negativity, on wrecking and on fear-mongering is like a disease that they are trying to spread throughout the entire place.

For every word those opposite speak on any policy matter that relates to a positive future for Australia we could just get rid of all the clanging, booming backward-looking words we hear over and over in the disguise of different language and replace them with this: ‘We was robbed. We should’ve won; we could’ve won. We were the best. We still can’t believe that the Australian people didn’t give us the job.’ They are the party looking to the past, longing for the past and realising only now the opportunities that they squandered in those 12 long years when they failed to invest in critical reform and infrastructure.

The reality that they just did not get it at the time of the election and they still do not get it now, as the parliamentary year 2010 draws to a close, shows just how out of touch those opposite are. The Gillard government won because our agenda was clearly offered to the Australian public before they voted us in. It was fully costed, it was fully funded and it was clearly articulated. We are getting on with delivering that future here in this parliament. No matter how much those opposite obstruct, we are bringing a better future to this great nation.

I said that I was surprised and delighted. Now it is my pleasure to turn to the matters that delight me. I daresay that what I am about to delight in is also delighted in by the people of Robertson and any other Australian who has a sense of vision for the future of this great nation. The people of Robertson totally understand that it is only a Gillard Labor government that has an agenda that looks to our future, and I want to talk about three key areas: education, health and infrastructure.

On school reform, the Gillard Labor government’s vision is absolutely crystal clear. It is to make every school a great school, because in the 21st century a great school and a
great education are the keys to unlocking an individual’s potential and our nation’s future. It is only with a world-class school system that we can build a high-productivity, high-participation economy that gives all Australians the opportunity to engage in rewarding and satisfying work. We are going to continue to push forward and deliver these ambitious reforms, achieving more for our schools in less than three years than the coalition delivered in almost 12.

The government is making major investments to reverse the underfunding that has held our schools back for too long. We are looking to the future, doubling the funding for Australian schools, because we know that no other investment will generate the enduring, long-term results and returns like our investment in human capital, our investment in young Australians, our investment in Australians who want to retrain, our investment in Australians who, unlike those opposite, believe that our best days are still ahead of us.

Quality of schooling matters, and we need to invest in making schools great places in which communities can gather. That is why the government have invested in modernising infrastructure with the Building the Education Revolution program and trades training centres, together with our investments in improving teacher quality and the learning outcomes for young people.

What a future we have for the people of Robertson. The Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth today indicated that there are 23,738 projects underway around Australia, and there are pages and pages of those programs just in Robertson.

**Mr Craig Thomson**—Read them out.

**Ms O’Neill**—I do not have time if I am to tell our story for the future of this country. There are so many things that we need to get out there.

I really want to talk about Building the Education Revolution because it is too badly maligned. At St Edward’s Christian Brothers College on the Central Coast we have a trades training centre which has been developed in concert with St Joseph’s just across the paddock. Those visionary projects are the things we need to invest in. I have knocked on 20,000 doors in my electorate but I have not met one parent, one grandparent or one kid who does not want the new things which have come to their school. They understand that halls are places in which we gather to celebrate what we have learned, where we gather to celebrate as a community, and that halls are places in which the school can truly act as the hub of the community. We need to continue delivering our vision for the future in education. But wait; there is more. Let us have a look at the health agenda. Let us have a look at what Nicola Roxon said in her press release today. She said that 76 per cent of Australians ‘support the Gillard Government’s historic health reform agenda’. That is a pretty good number.

**Government member**—Who are the other 24 per cent?

**Ms O’Neill**—Maybe they have not heard yet because all they are hearing on the media of this country is the negative carping of those opposite. We have to tell our positive story—and it is a positive story. It is an investment in our country. It is an investment in our future. We have an agenda and we are delivering. I welcome the fact that 76 per cent of Australians are keen on Australia’s health reforms. I also take the opportunity to mention that, in addition to health reforms, we have plenty more to deliver. But critically for the people of Robertson and critically for regional Australia we need to talk about the infrastructure agenda. The Gillard government, with a vision for the future, are committed to delivering. We have to clean up after more than a decade of neglect. Infra-
structure bottlenecks were the hallmark of the Howard government’s failure to invest, failure to have a vision for this country and failure to get on with the job of building a positive future.

We are making sure that we have key achievements in many areas but nothing more clearly indicates the difference between those opposite and the visionary agenda that we have here on the government benches than the National Broadband Network. It is a vision for the entire country. It is not for some city slickers or for some country people. It is not either/or; it is an and/and. It is for all Australians. It starts from our efforts right here on the government benches pushing forward with a vision for what Australians might be capable of as we give them a pathway to the future. We are replacing core infrastructure. We will build along the pathway an opportunity for many other people to provide a range of services, so that Australians will get a much better deal when they sign up to high-speed quality internet access for their kids. All of a sudden they will have this fantastic optical fibre cabling to their place—it is going to make a big difference.

This country has a future; a future which is possible because we have a healthy economy delivered by a Labor government. When things got tough, we got on with the job. We rolled up our sleeves. We delivered across the entire nation an investment in infrastructure for the kids in our schools and an investment in jobs for every community that benefited from the Building the Education Revolution.

Despite the whingeing of those opposite in this place, they know that their communities back home—real Australians—are in real schools. They are in real school halls and real classrooms doing real learning and gathering together learning as communities. They are learning about their future, they are believing in their future and they are in buildings ready to last into the future, not in the decaying infrastructure that would still be there if those opposite were still in charge of this country.

We have a vision for Australia’s future and that is why the Australian people elected us and not those on the other side. We are getting on with delivering an enabling agenda, a positive and visionary agenda. We will do it for the Australian people, despite the carping negativity, the whingeing, the fear mongering and the wrecking ball mentality of those opposite.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott)—The discussion is now concluded.

FEDERAL FINANCIAL RELATIONS AMENDMENT (NATIONAL HEALTH AND HOSPITALS NETWORK) BILL 2010

Second Reading

Debate resumed.

Mr CRAIG THOMSON (Dobell) (4.42 pm)—As I was saying previously in relation to Federal Financial Relations Amendment (National Health and Hospitals Network) Bill 2010, the contrast between those on this side of the House and those on the other side could not be more stark in their approach to the health industry. We are about making sure we can put in place real reforms to the health system—reforms which will matter to people, ensuring health is delivered in a better, more localised way, so that people can access public hospitals and there is a proper flow of funds.

What has been offered from the other side in relation to health is staggering. The coalition had 12 years in government when they did nothing. All they did was to decrease the proportion of Commonwealth funds to the health system. Meanwhile, our hospitals were struggling with increased
workloads. What did that government then do? Absolutely nothing. In fact, the Minister for Health and Ageing at the time, who is now the Leader of the Opposition, ripped $1 billion out of the health system. That was the solution. When they first came into government they canned the Commonwealth Dental Scheme. The coalition have never been the friends of people who need health care in this country. When real reform is needed, it is only this side of the House that can implement real reform. That is what this bill is about. We are putting forward changes through a series of reforms to the health industry.

It is not just the sorry past record in health that the coalition stands condemned for. We could be generous and say that maybe they learnt that in 12 years of government they cannot sit around and do nothing. But they have not learnt. It just gets worse. What we saw in the last election was that the highly successful GP superclinics are going to spread even further around this country, changing the way in which primary health care is delivered in many communities. What was the opposition’s solution to this? Did they get on board and say that this was a good idea? Did they come up with a new promise saying, ‘We are going to do more of this’? No. Their solution, as is typical of their history in relation to health, was to cut the program. If they were elected they were going to cut GP superclinics.

I was fortunate enough that in the 2007 election a GP superclinic was promised for Dobell. We have had a temporary GP superclinic up and running for about 18 months. It is overwhelmed by the support it has from the local community. In doorknocking and going around my electorate for the 2010 election the very idea that these sorts of facilities might be cut or not proceeded with horrified the good people of the Central Coast. Luckily, we prevailed in this election and I can report that the Central Coast is getting a second GP superclinic and that is only going to add to the level of care that is delivered on the Central Coast. The Central Coast has both the fourth and fifth busiest emergency departments in New South Wales so these types of solutions are absolutely vital to make sure that we take the load off these very busy emergency departments. We will make sure that there is proper access to doctors and other health professionals so that people do not have to wait for weeks to see a doctor.

On the Central Coast many of the existing GP clinics—not the superclinics—are full. They are not taking any more patients and you cannot get in to see a doctor. I had someone come to my electoral office the other day while on holidays on the Central Coast—a good choice of holiday; one I would recommend to anyone—and they were quite ill. They had been told they could not get in to see a GP and they ended up in the Wyong Hospital emergency department because that was the only option available. We have said we know there is a problem here. We are not going to sit on our hands for 12 years and do nothing. We are going to address these problems. We are about fundamental health reform to make sure that the citizens, not just of the Central Coast but right around Australia, get a much fairer deal in health care. It is not surprising that when asked whether people supported Labor’s reforms of the health system we find that 76 per cent of Australians are right behind the sorts of health reforms that we are doing. That should not come as a surprise to anyone.

When you look at the six major areas that we are reforming in health you can see the breadth and the depth of the changes we need to look at. The six areas are: hospital projects, which is about expanding hospital capacity; investing in our workforce—
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training more GPs, making more nurses and allied health scholarships available so that we do not have the sort of workforce shortages that I was talking about regarding GPs but also other allied health professionals; making sure that there is primary care infrastructure, as I mentioned through GP super-clinics; and e-health—another area that the policies of the opposition were to cut. They do not get this area at all. They do not get that these are the sorts of investments that are needed to save lives and improve the care that is needed for citizens around this country. Another area that we are reforming is prevention, which is in record numbers.

Those are five of the areas, and then there is the area that this bill is concerned with—the establishment of local hospital boards. There is no area that is happier with the proposed local hospital network than the Central Coast. We have been locked in to the Northern Sydney Area Health Service for the last number of years and everyone on the Central Coast has applauded this decision, even the Liberal Party. The state member for Terrigal, Mr Chris Hartcher, welcomed the decision to set up the local hospital network on the boundaries that we have been campaigning for. Even he has seen some good sense in it. The only ones who cannot see any good sense in it are those who are opposite, and they stand condemned for their opposition, for their getting in the way, for their carping about the essential reforms that are needed for the health system. We on this side of the House, on the other hand, are getting on with the job, making sure that we are putting the interests of Australians and their health care first. We are not carping, we are not blocking, we are not trying to wreck. We are getting on and reforming this health system.

Mr RAMSEY (Grey) (4.50 pm)—I rise to address the Federal Financial Relations Amendment (National Health and Hospitals Network) Bill 2010. We are asked to believe that this bill will fix all the problems in our hospital systems. It does not matter how I line it up, I am afraid I just see it as a pea and thimble trick. What are we doing? We are shifting a funding split basically from 40-60 to 60-40 and taking the money from the states to fund it. That means the federal government will take roughly one-third—and I say ‘roughly’ one-third because now we find the states do not know what part of their GST receipts they will be giving up. I must say it is quite curious to me that the Labor-controlled state governments have been in such a rush to sign on to something they cannot possibly fully understand at this stage. It does in fact have a parallel with what the parliament is being asked to do with the NBN at the moment, which is to sign a blank bill. We have heard of blank cheques but this is in fact a blank bill. The states are unsure what they will be paying for the privilege of having 20 per cent of their hospital funding obligations taken off them.

When the then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd proclaimed this new deal it was about the federal government taking over the whole system and, as the major funder, the Commonwealth would of course assume responsibility. But, no, that is not exactly what has been negotiated. The states are to be left in charge but answering to a new bureaucracy, the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care—and we have debated the formation of that body in this place before.

In my state of South Australia, not only is the state bureaucracy to be left in charge; the government has also managed to convince their federal counterparts the management systems we are using at the moment are just fine, thank you very much. Very little is likely to change. As far as the administration of hospitals in South Australia is concerned, we are being told that we are to have very little change, yet this is to fix a health system
that is in need of major reform. I really do not see what is going to happen here that is very different from what is happening at the moment. It concerns me because the track record of the Labor regime in South Australia towards regional health services is deplorable.

In 2008, the Rann government launched an attack on regional hospitals with its ill-conceived country health plan. The intent was to reduce services in country areas. It elicited outrage from not only the affected communities but from right through the South Australian public, and the government was forced into retreat. In a similar time frame, the government sacked our local hospital boards, which had largely established these services and which were the community advocates for our hospitals, our health services and, in many of the smaller towns I represent, our aged-care services. To me, this was the really big change because, after it, local communities had no say in the operation of their local hospitals. That is why I was pleased that, last election, the coalition committed to reinstating the boards. The state Liberal team still has that intention if it is elected to government, which will hopefully occur sooner rather than later.

We well remember the great debates that came with the introduction of the GST, which the Labor Party implacably opposed. Government members should remember what their voting record on economic reform was when they were in opposition, because we are hearing much nowadays about the way oppositions should behave. It was a very important reform for the nation and particularly for the states, because they had a totally new growth tax. I am just amazed that the Labor state governments are prepared to give up access to this tax and take on what is basically, as I said, a blank bill.

I want to keep this relatively short today, but I do want to focus on something that has been happening very recently in South Australia as a result of the state budget, which was delayed and delivered in September. It is an example of what can happen with country health systems if you have hostile and uncaring governments. There are 32 state government hospitals in my electorate and there are two not-for-profit community hospitals. These not-for-profit community hospitals, Moonta and Ardrossan, have been receiving a small part of state funds to supplement their income. In total, the Ardrossan Community Hospital has been receiving $140,000 a year, which covers about 50 per cent of the cost of their accident and emergency. Moonta Hospital has been receiving $288,000 a year, which pays for up to eight public beds, should they be occupied, at about $110 a day—a pretty good deal for the Commonwealth, I might point out.

The state government has decided to pull that money out of those hospitals. In the case of Ardrossan, which is a 22-bed hospital, 50 per cent of their admissions come through their A&E department. It is highly likely that their admissions will take a big dive. These are private, paying patients and, without them, the hospital would be likely to close. The extra ‘hang on’ in this case is the 25-bed aged-care facility attached. If there is no hospital, there will be no aged-care facility. So it is a tragedy for the community and we will keep working to try to put pressure on the state government to reverse the decision. Up the road at Moonta, if the $288,000 is taken out of the budget it is highly likely that the acute services there will cease and the hospital will have to be turned into an aged-care facility.

I would like to speak much more about both of those issues and about the GST changes that are proposed with this bill, but I will keep it short and just reiterate my open-
ing comments. I believe this is a pea and thimble trick and that very little will change on the ground. We are being sold a pup.

Mr ZAPPIA (Makin) (4.57 pm)—I rise to speak in support of the Federal Financial Relations Amendment (National Health and Hospitals Network) Bill 2010. Listening to the member for Grey, I thought he put up some very good reasons why he might have supported this bill, but it is obviously his prerogative to take positions as he sees fit. When the Labor government came to office in 2007, the health system across Australia was in a mess. In fact, it is my view that it was one of the key reasons the Howard government lost office.

We know that there was a shortage of doctors in our hospitals and in general practice, there was a shortage of nurses and a shortage of hospital beds, there were lengthy waiting times in hospital emergency departments, there were a whole range of different medical demands not being funded and elective surgery waiting lists were way too long. The system was in so much of a crisis that former Prime Minister Howard, in the late stages of the 2007 election, made a rush to Tasmania to try and save the Mersey Community Hospital. This was, I guess, an attempt to show some leadership by trying to restore the health system of this nation. It did not work because, quite rightly, the electorate knew that he had had 12 years to show that leadership and that he had not done so. More importantly, it did not work because the electorate also understood very well that the reason the health system was in such a crisis was a lack of funding from the federal government over those 12 years. We certainly know the record of the Leader of the Opposition, then Minister for Health and Ageing, in cutting a billion dollars out of health funding across this country.

In addition to that, we saw that there was not only insufficient funding but poor planning of medical services across this country and, in particular, poor coordination of services between the state and federal governments. That overlap of responsibility between the state and federal governments often led to a whole range of inefficiencies and even wastage. The national health system is of priority to families across Australia and it should be to the national government. It is certainly of priority to this government. Since we came to government in 2007, not only have we taken our responsibilities in respect of providing a good health service across this country seriously but the government has made significant investments across a range of measures relating to the provision of health services throughout Australia. We have invested more in training doctors. We have invested more in recruiting nurses. We have invested money in the establishment of GP superclinics and medical research. We have also put substantial amounts of money into reducing elective surgery waiting times and waiting times at emergency departments of hospitals.

But we know that health costs in this nation will continue to rise. Based on the best predictions, in around 30 years time, if we continue with the current system that we have, many of the state governments will have almost their entire state budgets consumed by their health costs alone. That is one of the critical concerns that we need to address today. It is no good waiting for 20 or 30 years and then having someone quite rightly stand up and say: ‘You knew this was going to happen. Why didn’t you reform the system earlier on?’ So the duplication and inefficiency of the health system that has been created over the last 100 years—it evolved from the different practices of all the different states—has to change. It has to change if we are going to ensure that it is
financially sustainable and if we are going to be able to continue to provide the health services that the community of Australia is entitled to and quite rightly expects. The reforms that are being proposed as part of this measure will ensure that we have a much more efficient health system and a more sustainable health system.

The member for Grey also alluded to the GST payments. There is no question that, if we are going to reform the system, we will have to reform the funding arrangements between the Commonwealth and the states, and that is exactly what this bill seeks to do. GST payments will be withheld from those states that have agreed with the Commonwealth that we need to change the system, and those payments will go directly into the provision of health services around the country, in addition to new money that the federal government will make available in the years ahead. The implementation of a national health system will also ensure that we have better services, because there will be less wastage. If you do not have the duplication and overlap of services that we are currently seeing, there is no question in my mind that we will have the ability to save money along the way which can in turn be put into the provision of services. Additionally, we will ensure that all Australians have consistency and uniformity in the services that they get, wherever they live in Australia.

I said a moment ago that this system has evolved over the last 100 years or so, and so we all expect that change will not be easy and there will be criticism along the way. There will be arrangements that are currently in place in local communities and there will be local practitioners who oppose any change that we propose. But the reality is that we cannot continue to operate the national health system under the current arrangements. It is disappointing to see that every time there is a bill in this place that endeavours to reform the health system the opposition opposes it. We saw the criticism of the government’s GP superclinics proposal, and yet we see opposition members who would dearly love to have a GP superclinic in their own electorate if they could. We know that it was in fact the opposition who first mooted the idea of an e-health proposal, and yet when we include it in our budget and in our proposals the opposition opposes it. What is even more disappointing is that many of these initiatives did not come just from the government. They were in fact initiatives that came through discussions with the health sector generally and have been supported by the medical sector across Australia. I have to say I am absolutely bewildered as to why the opposition would think that they know better than the medical sector generally.

Under this bill, the Commonwealth government and the seven states and territories have agreed to a fundamental shift in the delivery of vital services for our country. The establishment of the National Health and Hospitals Network will in fact be the most significant reform to our health system since the introduction of Medicare. Under the proposals, our hospital system will be funded nationally and run locally. Yes, the Commonwealth will take on 60 per cent of the efficient cost, with hospitals being managed by local hospital networks. That in itself is an important shift, because it means that the local hospital network is in a good position to determine the priorities and needs of the network which they oversee. The Commonwealth will take 100 per cent of the funding and policy responsibility for GPs, primary care and aged-care services. Medicare locals will be established to coordinate services in local areas.

Under the National Health and Hospitals Network, the Commonwealth will become the major funder of the Australian public
hospital system. The Commonwealth will fund 60 per cent of the national efficient price of every public hospital service provided to public patients; 60 per cent of recurrent expenditure on research and training functions undertaken in public hospitals, which are currently funded by states and territories; 60 per cent of block funding paid against COAG agreed funding models, including for agreed functions and services and community service obligations required to support small regional and rural public hospitals; 60 per cent of capital expenditure on a user cost of capital basis where possible; and, over time, up to 100 per cent of the national efficient price of primary healthcare equivalent outpatient services provided to public patients. The Commonwealth will also take on full policy and funding responsibility of primary health care and aged care, including the Home and Community Care Program.

Since the agreement was mooted in April 2010, the implementation timetable has already begun with a number of key activities having commenced in 2009-10. New funding to states and territories to improve emergency department waiting times and increase the numbers of elective surgery procedures began to flow in June 2010. Legislation to establish the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care as a permanent body responsible for new national clinical standards and strengthened clinical governance was introduced in parliament on 23 June 2010. Legislation to implement changes to federal financial arrangements to give effect to reforms to the financing of health and hospital services, including the dedication of a portion of goods and services tax, or GST, revenue to health care, was also introduced in parliament on 23 June 2010. In e-health, the Healthcare Identifiers Bill 2010 and the Healthcare Identifiers (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2010 were passed on 24 June 2010 to establish the Healthcare Identifiers Service. The service will assign unique identifiers to individuals, healthcare providers and healthcare organisations to improve safety and quality of patient care. On 25 June 2010, applications opened for Primary Care Infrastructure Grants of up to $500,000 each to upgrade facilities in general practices, primary care and community health services, and Aboriginal Medical Services. In respect of the Primary Care Infrastructure Grants, I am pleased to say that a number of GP clinics in my electorate have put in applications to access funds under that program.

I am particularly interested in how these reforms will affect South Australia. It is my view that the South Australian health system will directly benefit as $20.2 million has been allocated to expand the capacity of public hospital emergency departments by undertaking infrastructure projects which will enable faster treatment; $36.3 million in facilitation and reward funding has been allocated to meet four-hour national access targets for emergency departments; $13 million has been allocated to boost elective surgery capacity in public hospitals; $47.3 million has been allocated to facilitate and reward the staged achievement of national access guarantees and national access targets for public elective surgery patients; $119.8 million in capital and recurrent funding has been committed to deliver 97 subacute beds; and $16.6 million has also been allocated in flexible capital funding for emergency departments, elective surgery and subacute areas, so there will be the flexibility to direct that to the highest priority needs within a particular jurisdiction. Additionally, about $266 million is being invested in health workforce measures to support doctors, nurses and allied health professionals and in aged care to provide better, more appropriate care for older Australians and reduce the pressure on hospitals. This funding will also
be invested in the provision of better coordinated and integrated care for people with diabetes, which will provide better care in the community and reduce avoidable hospitalisations. Overall this means that South Australia will receive from the Commonwealth both direct and general benefits totalling about $519 million as a result of these reforms.

In closing, I will comment briefly on the amendment moved by the opposition. Essentially, they are seeking to defer any decision on this matter until after the elections in Victoria and New South Wales, using the argument that the opposition parties in both those states oppose the reforms that are contained in this bill. Firstly, both governments of New South Wales and Victoria signed this agreement when they were not in caretaker mode; they were the legitimate governments of those states, and the New South Wales government is still. Secondly and more importantly, it seems to me that this is simply another delaying tactic as is the case by those opposite with every bill that is brought into this place by this government. Every time we seek to reform any area of government and we bring a bill into this place, the opposition opposes it by, in most cases, introducing and implementing delaying tactics. That is all that this amendment seeks to do: delay the decision making even further. It is my view that these reforms are well and truly overdue and that this bill should be supported. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate (on motion by Mr Albanese) adjourned.

BUSINESS

Rearrangement

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (5.12 pm)—by leave—I move:

That business intervening before notice No. 9, government business, be postponed until a later hour this day.

Question agreed to.

PROGRAM OF SITTINGS FOR 2011

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (5.12 pm)—I move:

That the program of sittings for 2011 that was presented to the House on Monday, 22 November 2010, be agreed to.

As members would be aware, the sitting schedule has already been tabled in the parliament. I will leave further remarks to the closing of the debate.

Mr PYNE (Sturt) (5.13 pm)—I rise to speak on the Leader of the House’s motion that the sitting pattern be adopted by the House. In doing so, I wish to make a few comments about the sitting pattern and about its paucity of sitting days for 2011. This is the first time since the 1996 election of the Howard government, so it is the first time in about 15 years, that the parliament will sit for 17 sitting weeks. This number for 2011 is the lowest number of sitting weeks in around 15 years. It is an extraordinary admission on the part of the government that it has no agenda, no plan and no program for the future of Australia. It is also an admission that the government does not want to sit, because it does not want the public to know that while the Labor Party is in government the Greens are in power. The Leader of the Opposition outlined today during the MPI debate the myriad changes that the government has introduced which are basically straight out of the Greens playbook. The Greens are running the government of Australia. They are in power. Bob Brown is the most powerful politician in Australia and the government is singing to the tune that the Greens are playing. It is a disgrace. The sitting pattern that we are debating now in the House is a manifest example of a government that could not cobble together a pro-
gram to last for more than 17 weeks in 2011. In 1997 we sat for 20 weeks, in 1999 we sat for 19, in 2000 we sat for 19, in 2002 we sat for 18, in 2003 we sat for 20, in 2005 we sat for 18 and in 2006 we sat for 18. The other years of the Howard government were election years and, of course, elections truncate the sitting pattern of the parliament. For example, since this government have been elected, in 2008 they sat for 18 weeks, in 2009 they sat for 18 weeks and in 2010 they will only sit for 15 weeks because, of course, again, the election has truncated the parliamentary schedule.

In 2011 they will sit for a record 17 weeks, the lowest number of sitting weeks in 15 years, which is a clear admission from the government that they do not have an agenda and they do not have a program. As it happens, for this last sitting week of 2010 after a recent election of a new government, we would normally be expected to sit late on Thursday, or into Friday or even into Saturday as we have in previous years because of the bunching up of the program at the end of the year with government business. There would be bills that needed to be passed, motions that needed to be dealt with and disallowance instruments that needed to be dealt with. But not in this government. In this government we will be getting up at five o’clock on Thursday. Many people will say, ‘What a relief,’ and people will be pleased to get home after what has been in some cases, especially for the Labor Party, a torrid year. Many members of the Labor Party are hoping that the sooner we rise the less likely there is that damaging leaks will be given to the newspapers or to the opposition. The government will be going into the foetal position over Christmas after the disastrous election result of August this year.

Usually, Mr Deputy Speaker Scott, as you would well know with your experience in this place, we would be expecting to sit late on the evening of the last day or even the next day, but there is no need to because the government does not have a program. The government does not have bills that need to be dealt with. It does not have motions that need to be dealt with. It is so bereft of ideas other than the idea of how to win elections that, in fact, we are getting up at five o’clock and as the Leader of the House admits, that is not a bad thing. Of course, he is from New South Wales Labor and New South Wales Labor’s primary goal is about clinging to power and not about introducing policy.

The New South Wales Labor Party does not care about policy; it only cares about clinging to power. We have seen the impact that that has had in New South Wales. As Paul Keating said, ‘Where New South Wales goes so does the federal Labor Party.’ That is why we saw them butchering their Prime Minister on 24 June and saw, laid bare in the minutes of the caucus leaked to the Australian newspaper, the full speech of the former Prime Minister published as a transcript. I wonder who requested the full speech be published as a transcript in the minutes. It did seem unusual to members of the coalition that, in fact, the entire speech of the former Prime Minister was published in the minutes of the Labor caucus. Somebody must have requested that. I wonder if it was with an eye to leaking it at some stage in the future.

I digress. I return to the motion under debate which is the sitting schedule for 2011. It is a paltry 17 weeks with an enormous break in April and May. The public must be wondering what on earth the federal parliament is doing when we are sitting for only 17 weeks of the year. I think my time is almost up. I see I have another nine minutes to go but I have no intention of continuing for another nine minutes because I know the House has other matters to deal with. These are important points that need to be made about the
government’s failure to develop a program, an agenda and a plan.

The public must be wondering why the federal parliament can sit for such a short period of time. We have over a trillion dollar national economy. The budget of the Commonwealth runs to hundreds of billions of dollars, yet the government cannot find more than 17 sitting weeks to occupy the time of this parliament. The public must be wondering if they are becoming more and more like state Labor governments that hardly ever sit rather than being a national government running a serious country. We are the 14th largest economy in the world, we are an important middle power, yet this government cannot find enough business to occupy the House for more than 17 weeks of the year.

There is another reason why this sitting pattern is an embarrassment to the Leader of the House. I know it took so long for him to develop the sitting pattern because he was trying very hard to come up with more sitting weeks so that they would have a decent program, a real agenda, a real plan to demonstrate to the Australian people. Yet he has had to come in here and embarrassedly put this notice of motion on the Hansard record of a 17-week sitting. He will go down as the Leader of the House that had oversight over the record-breaking shortest period of sitting in 15 years.

The opposition is more than happy to come back to the House throughout next year and allocate whatever time is necessary for a proper scrutiny of government policy and for the opportunity to vote on private members’ business, which was of course the agreement the Leader of the House made with me and with the crossbenchers to ensure that private members’ business was given pride of place. I remember those negotiations; I remember the discussions that we had. He was so reasonable in those negotiations. He managed to convince the crossbenchers that he genuinely wanted to improve private members’ business, that he was absolutely committed to voting on private members’ business. Yet we are here presiding over one of the shortest periods of sitting in 15 years and he uses the lack of time on the agenda to say that we cannot have votes on private members’ business. That I think is the most powerful argument for why this sitting schedule should be exposed for what it is.

This sitting schedule is designed to have the parliament sit less because the government do not control the parliament. It is designed to have the parliament sit less because when the parliament sits the government are embarrassed in question time by the performance of their ministers, particularly the performance of their Prime Minister. They are embarrassed about the fact that they cannot determine every outcome on every vote. They are embarrassed by the possibility of being defeated on the floor of the House, as they have been on numerous occasions since this parliament began. So they have decided the less they sit the better the government will look.
My view is that if the parliament does not sit the Australian public will reach two conclusions. No. 1, they will decide that the government does not have an agenda and, No. 2, they will decide the government is not doing the work that members of parliament are elected to do. We should all be here, especially the new members of parliament, debating, scrutinising, holding the government to account. The government should be required to be here explaining what its agenda is for the Australian people, and the reason it is not is that it does not have an agenda for the Australian people.

The opposition will not, obviously, vote against the sitting pattern. It is a matter for the government if it wishes to be embarrassed by a short sitting pattern; we will not vote against it. I do wish to make these points on the record so that when the Leader of the House tries to pretend that the government has got an agenda and a plan we will be able to point out that we said to him right at the beginning: ‘You presented this sitting schedule because of the paucity of ideas on the government side.’

I would simply say that the government is cynical in not wanting to be here to be subject to the scrutiny of the parliament because when they are here they are of course subject to the Independents and others wanting to have access, as they were promised in the new paradigm—to have briefings from Treasury, to have access to the Prime Minister—and perhaps they have worked out that if they are not here they may be relieved of some of that tedium.

But the reality is that the agreement that was struck for the running of this chamber—and I was taking a look at it just this afternoon—said that the government would use all of its endeavours to make this place work in a better fashion. Well, it has completely reneged on that undertaking. In fact, this whole idea of a new paradigm where people have to answer questions directly or give direct answers to the question is becoming rather meaningless. We are right back to the old tedium. Ministers can say what they like when they like. We are back in this place to having a slap-down of members of the opposition, who are either named or warned and who have been thrown out.

Mr Pyne—Slag and bag!

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—‘Slag and bag’ is quite right. The language is undignified. There is no improvement from the government in this place at all, and this calendar of events for next year reinforces just how
shallow the Labor Party is. I suppose it is not surprising. After all, the leader of government business is married to the Deputy Premier of New South Wales, and they never sit. So I suppose we should not expect that we would want to sit here much either.

Mr Albanese—You don’t talk about other people’s families in here, Bronwyn.

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—I am just talking about someone who is a public official, and the fact of the matter is that we should do better than that. But, hopefully, when we come to the election in March we will have a different outcome. This is just a typical example of how bad the Labor Party is in whichever chamber they sit, federal or state.

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (5.28 pm)—I rise to close the debate. I notice that the opposition will actually be voting in favour of this because it is a good schedule that has been worked out with the interests of the parliament in mind. The fact is that we have an extra Senate-only week in this schedule, and the Senate budget estimates will sit on 17 October through to 20 October without the House sitting. Of course that is the lead-up to CHOGM, which is being held in Perth next year. Indeed, in order to ensure that the Prime Minister has been in the parliament she has in fact, as all Australians would be aware, travelled to represent the nation for three of the last four weekends, including last weekend travelling to Lisbon to represent Australia at the meeting concerning Afghanistan.

We needed to work into the schedule the UN General Assembly, APEC, the G20 meeting, the G20 finance ministers’ meeting and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change—the important international conferences at which Australia, thanks to the advocacy of this government, is represented. Being represented at senior forums like the G20 forum is surely something that would be supported by everyone here in the House.

The Manager of Opposition Business sought to make a distinction and essentially argued that 17 weeks plus a reserve week—an 18th week, which is in there—is bad, but 18 weeks is good. There is this big distinction over what is effectively one day. That is, of course, a nonsense. He would be aware that originally it was the intention of the government to resume the parliament on 1 February. I received, as Leader of the House, a number of representations, because school goes back in that first week of February. Parents on this side of the House—and, I am sure, on the other side of the House—will be very pleased, particularly those who have a child attending their first day of school, by the fact that they will be able to be there for that first day of school, engage as a parent with the new teacher and engage with the settling of the child into their new class. I make no apologies for that. Therefore, we are coming back on 8 February rather than 1 February. That is a good thing.

I also, towards the end of the year, have tried to envisage, after representations from both sides of the chamber, parliament not sitting into the period in which there are school functions—that first week of December. This is just a sensible position moving forward. It is not party political and it is not ideological; it is a sensible reform. Indeed, in order to accommodate that we are even sitting in the first week of July—again, sensible—so that new senators who are sworn in can actually sit in their places. The position adopted after some elections was that people became senators on 1 July but were not actually sworn in until many weeks later.

In the last parliament, the House sat for 36 hours per week. Prior to the last parliament it sat even less. The new parliament will sit for
a total of 56 hours per week, with 40 hours in
the main chamber here. Previously, the
House sat for 36 hours and the Main Com-
mittee for 10, for a total of 46 hours. Now, it
will be 40 plus 16, for a total of 56 hours,
which is an increase of 10 hours, or 21 per
cent—not a bad productivity improvement.
That includes an additional 6½ hours dedi-
cated to private members’ business, bringing
the total allocated time to nine hours per
week.

I cannot let the extraordinary contribution
of the member for Mackellar go without a
response. The member for Mackellar raised a
fuss here the other night over the tabling of
this document. She pretends she is an expert
and moves points of order every question
time. She came into this chamber and created
chaos to the point where Kevin Andrews, the
member for Menzies, was named, but the
Speaker chose to withdraw that naming. To-
day, having had this schedule in front of her
for days, she looks at it and tells the parlia-
ment that we are sitting up to 24 December
and that there are reserve weeks including a
sitting on New Year’s Eve. I say to the mem-
ber for Mackellar: it is time to retire when
you look at a sitting schedule that you have
had for days and you think we are sitting up
to 24 December. That was one of the most
extraordinary performances from someone
whom time has just forgotten. It is time for
the member for Mackellar to simply move
on.

In between all that, she thought she was so
clever by crossing the rule that we do not
have a go at members of parliament through
members of their family. She breached that
understanding that all of us have and that all
of us honour in this chamber. The member
for Mackellar embarrassed herself with that
contribution. She is an embarrassment to the
Liberal Party, and she is an embarrassment to
this parliament.

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

Mr Pyne—Mr Deputy Speaker Georga-
nas, I have a question to you about mislead-
ing the House. I understand that when such a
question becomes apparent it should be
raised at the first opportunity. With all great
respect to the Prime Minister, in question
time today the Prime Minister indicated that
it is the Selection Committee that determines
the scheduling of votes on private members’
business. It was probably an inadvertent er-
ror on her part, but of course the government
schedules the voting on private members’
business in government members’ time. I ask
you to request that she return to the House
and correct the record.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr S Geor-
ganas)—I will not be requesting what you
are asking, but I will discuss it with the
Speaker.

FEDERAL FINANCIAL RELATIONS
AMENDMENT (NATIONAL HEALTH
AND HOSPITALS NETWORK)
BILL 2010
Second Reading
Debate resumed.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr S Geor-
ganas)—The original question was that this
bill be now read a second time. To this the
honourable member for North Sydney has
moved as an amendment that all words after
‘That’ be omitted with a view to substituting
other words. The question now is that the
words proposed to be omitted stand part of
the question.

Mr FLETCHER (Bradfield) (5.37 pm)—
If we cast our minds back to the period of
approximately January to April this year, no
hospital patient anywhere in Australia was
safe. They would find themselves waking up
groggy from the anaesthetic, somewhat con-
fused, not sure where they were, to realise that there was an unexpected visitor plonking himself down in a casual fashion on their bed. Then they would notice to their horror that this unexpected visitor was surrounded by four or five camera crews and a collection of bustling journalists. I refer, of course, to the period in which the former Prime Minister, Mr Rudd, seemed incapable of passing a day without visiting several hospitals and just dropping in to chat with patients. Why was he doing this? He was doing it because he had dumped the issue of climate change and he was searching desperately for another issue to pursue. He was also, I suggest, increasingly conscious, in a somewhat guilty way, of the promise that he had made at the 2007 election that he would take over public hospitals from the states by mid-2009 if the position had not improved. Manifestly he had failed to deliver on that commitment.

The piece of legislation which the House is debating today, the Federal Financial Relations Amendment (National Health and Hospitals Network) Bill 2010, emerges from that frenzied period of political activity. I want to argue today that this piece of legislation badly underdelivers on the heady rhetoric which accompanied the policy announcements which were made in April this year. It is a piece of legislation which fundamentally undermines the clarity of the financial arrangements between the states and the Commonwealth embodied in the GST. I want to make three basic arguments. Firstly, this piece of legislation fails to deliver on the objectives which it claims to achieve. Secondly, it is complicated and uncertain and, as well as not doing good, there are good arguments that it does harm. Thirdly, one specific problem with this bill is that it undermines the federal-state financial relations embodied in the arrangements for the goods and services tax, which have worked very effectively since 1999.

Let me turn first to the failure of this legislation to deliver on its claimed objectives. The promises came thick and fast. This bill was supposed to get rid of waste, of duplication, of unclear accountability. It was in fact a historic reform, we were told. The then Prime Minister said, on 20 April:

... today we have reached an historic agreement to deliver better health and better hospitals for the working families of Australia.

For anybody who did not get the point, he went on to say:

This, ladies and gentlemen, is a very, very big reform of the health and hospital system of Australia.

He then went on to make reference to that large community of rather surprised patients upon whom he had been relentlessly and unexpectedly dropping in for a period of several months. He said:

I have spoken, literally to hundreds and hundreds and hundreds from the smallest hospitals in rural communities to the largest hospitals in our biggest cities and so much of what they have said has been the same …

It was not, ‘Please get off my hospital bed.’ It was apparently:

… please, please, please, fix our system for the future; please, please, please, get rid of the duplication, the waste in our system …

So does this bill, and the arrangements embodied within it, deliver on that promise to get rid of the waste and the duplication? The answer to that is no. It establishes arrangements of remarkable complexity. The governance arrangements and the interaction between many of the various entities which are established are left very unclear and we can have very little confidence indeed that there is going to be any systematic addressing of the current levels of duplication and unclear accountability.

We were also told when the announcement was made that there was a clear fund-
ing basis under which the Commonwealth would retain one-third of the goods and services tax receipts and that these would be dedicated to funding the Commonwealth’s contribution to the cost of hospitals. The press release which was issued on 20 April headed ‘Historic Health Reform’ contained the following statement:

The Commonwealth and seven states and territories have agreed to the Commonwealth retaining one third of the GST and becoming the dominant funder of the nation’s hospital system.

But the devil, as is so often the case, is in the detail. The precise figures are not in fact known. The figure of one-third is merely an estimate.

This reform was supposed to involve the Commonwealth taking over the hospitals. That, after all, was what Mr Rudd promised in the 2007 election. In fact, it is very clear from this package that the states will continue to operate the public hospital system, through the new local hospital networks. The COAG communique issued on 20 April makes it very clear that the Commonwealth is expressly excluded from any role in the operation of the local hospital networks.

We are also told that it is a virtue of these reforms that the Commonwealth will become the dominant funder of the nation’s hospital system. Those of us who were here in this place earlier this year can well remember the particular thrill, the tremor, which entered the voice of the then Prime Minister when he talked about the Commonwealth becoming the dominant funder. He seemed to find that a particularly satisfying expression. But the real question which is left unanswered is: why is this necessarily a good idea? How can we have any confidence at all that, if the Commonwealth becomes the dominant funder, it will in some way improve the operational performance of our health and hospital system? We know from recent experience, in areas as widely distributed as pink batts and Building the Education Revolution, that the Commonwealth government is not very good at operational performance. The officials who have most experience of running operational organisations are generally found at state level, not at federal level.

There are many other ways in which this piece of legislation does not live up to the grand promises which have been made about it. Mr Rudd described it as fundamental reform, and it is no surprise that he liked this package, because it allowed him to spend more money. But, despite the cherished beliefs of this government, spending money is not the same thing as reform. You have to demonstrate that you are going to be spending more money after you have intervened than before to make the case that you are delivering fundamental reform. So what we have here is a package which has been hugely oversold.

The second area that I want to address is that this package establishes a regime and set of arrangements which are complicated and uncertain. It creates new layers of bureaucracy, including the new national health and hospitals fund and new joint intergovernmental funding authorities. Then there are the various specialist bodies hanging off the sides of this arrangement, such as the Independent Hospital Pricing Authority and the National Performance Authority—lots of lovely new organisations filling out the organisational chart and gladdening the heart of any bureaucrat. But, as submissions to a number of inquiries have highlighted, there is a considerable lack of clarity about how all these organisations will work and interact. And there is a troubling degree of faith in the policy architecture and the capacity of complex bureaucratic structures to address every problem.
Let us just ask one simple question: if the objective of this package of reforms is to have the same people responsible for collecting the money and spending the money and, further, for those people to be sufficiently close to patients and to service delivery such that they make sensible decisions based upon what is happening on the ground, how is this rich, new ecosystem of authorities, networks and funds going to achieve that? The answer is that there is very little to satisfy us that it will. On the contrary, there is considerable cause here to suspect that we will see more confusion, less clarity as to accountability and rich, new possibilities for cost shifting and finger pointing.

Let us look at some of the submissions that have been made by respected authorities or stakeholders such as Catholic Healthcare. It has asked a very good question: ‘How is the private and not-for-profit hospital system involved in this set of reforms?’ What has been put forward is deeply unclear on that very important question. The Australian Medical Association asked in its submission: ‘What are the relationships between the multiple bodies which are created out of this package of reforms? What are the relationships between the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care, the Independent Hospital Pricing Authority and the National Performance Authority?’ There is a distinct lack of clarity in what is being proposed.

The third area that I want to address in the brief time remaining is the impact of this package upon arrangements for Commonwealth-state relations, arrangements which were clarified and put on a much more sustainable basis with the introduction of the goods and services tax by the Howard government in 1999. This was a major and serious reform. It was not just an exercise in spending more money described as reform. The consequence of the introduction of the GST was to give the states a growth tax for the first time. Proceeds from the GST rose from $24.4 billion in 2000-01 to $44.5 billion in 2009-10. The policy intention was to allow the states to better manage key functions with greater certainty over their revenue base.

Unfortunately, this set of rushed through changes which the House is now considering will have the effect of comprehensively white-anting the GST policy architecture which was so carefully and painstakingly introduced by the Howard government. It is troubling indeed that these changes appear to have been made in a fashion which is inconsistent with clause 44 of the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Reform of Commonwealth-State Financial Relations 1999, which says:

All questions arising in the Ministerial Council will be determined by unanimous agreement unless otherwise specified in this agreement.

Instead of that unanimous agreement, we have the Commonwealth imposing its will and seeking to comprehensively change the GST arrangements in a way which is far from good for the policy of giving the states certainty and clarity as to their source of funding. Indeed, the impact of these changes on the GST revenue stream to be received by the states is uncertain and variable. According to the Commonwealth’s own documents, the share of the GST revenue that the Commonwealth will retain for the purposes of funding the new hospital arrangements will vary widely by state in 2011-12 between 50 per cent in the ACT, 40 per cent in Queensland, 30 per cent in New South Wales and 25 per cent in Victoria.

This is a package of purported reforms which is deeply flawed because it does not deliver on the bold objectives and claims that are made about it. On the contrary, it introduces complication and uncertainty and it
offers manifest possibilities for continued cost shifting and playing of the blame game. Lastly, it has the not incidental but in fact quite serious consequence of materially damaging the arrangements under which the goods and services tax has, until now, provided the states with a degree of certainty as to their funding base, which in turn has allowed them to go about their jobs of delivering services to citizens in a more productive and efficient way. For these reasons, I would argue that the legislation before the House ought not be supported.

Ms RISHWORTH (Kingston) (5.51 pm)—I start my contribution on the Federal Financial Relations Amendment (National Health and Hospitals Network) Bill 2010 by saying that it is no wonder the member for Bradfield proposed nothing positive in his contribution and it is no wonder the Liberal Party just wants to wreck any good reforms in the national interest, because the Liberal Party took no health policy whatsoever to the election. The member for Bradfield has asked why the former Prime Minister, why the Minister for Health and Ageing and why people from the government visited hospitals. I will let the member for Bradfield know that it is because we are actually interested in health. We actually want to make our hospital system better. We want to ensure that the residents in electorates such as mine can actually access health services when they need them. I am very pleased to rise in support of the bill. I am very proud to speak on this bill which will ensure that residents in my electorate of Kingston, as around the country, will be able to access a sustainable, affordable healthcare system into the future.

Our health and hospital system is already struggling to keep pace with the growing demand for health care as our population ages. This will only intensify into the future. The National Health and Hospitals Network reform is an essential evolution of the federal-state relations regarding the delivery of health care. This bill will ensure that all Australians get better value for money and receive better quality health care. Reform of the healthcare sector is imperative so that future generations can enjoy world-class, accessible and affordable health care.

The inadequacies of the current health and hospital system is something that is raised from time to time in my electorate of Kingston. Earlier this year, I was informed by a mother of a child with a late diagnosed double pneumonia that she had been told that she would have to be prepared to wait many hours upon arrival at the emergency department of her local hospital. Other residents have been dismayed when they have been informed about the waiting times for elective surgery. Our current health system is struggling to keep pace and this problem will be exacerbated by population growth that is projected to substantially increase by 2050. This growth will create more pressures on Australia’s health services. At the same time, Australia will be faced with an ageing population, which will substantially increase healthcare needs and expenditure. It is for this reason that the government is taking direct action now to plan for the future of our nation’s healthcare system.

Since being elected, federal Labor has taken the area of health and hospitals very seriously. We have started by investing in our health and hospitals to meet the current and growing demand in the health system. But we have a lot of work to do because of the disastrous situation we were left with by the previous government. It was the now Leader of the Opposition, as the former Minister for Health and Ageing, who ripped $1 billion out of our health system and chose to cap GP training places, leading to the severe GP shortage we are suffering from today. In contrast, the $64 billion COAG 2008 National Healthcare Agreement saw a 50 per cent in-
crease in funding flowing to the states, including $750 million to take pressure off 37 of our country’s busiest emergency departments and to upgrade our hospital equipment across the country. We are now taking action to address the dire workforce shortage—a legacy of the former Liberal government. We are doubling the number of GP training places to 1,200 by the year 2014 and will fund training for over 1,000 new nurses each year to help our ailing health system.

In my electorate of Kingston alone, residents have benefited from investment in an operating theatre and surgical equipment upgrades at the Flinders Medical Centre to improve emergency and elective surgery waiting times. Furthermore, this government has invested $10 million to redevelop training facilities at the Flinders Medical Centre, Noarlunga Medical Centre and the Repatriation General Hospital. This is so they can attract, train and retrain quality health professionals in the area. We have committed to establishing after hours GP services in communities such as Seaford, Morphett Vale, Huntfield Heights, Sheidow Park and Aldinga. The Noarlunga GP superclinic is expected to be completed in 2011. This will also play a very important role in building the infrastructure necessary to improve frontline health services in my electorate and to bring more GPs and allied health workers under the same roof.

The bill before us today is about building on the significant investments in our health system and implementing comprehensive reform of our health system so that all Australians have access to quality health care well into the future. The bill proposes to amend the Federal Financial Relations Act 2009, which will enable the implementation of a number of major reforms to the governance of the Australian healthcare system. These changes have gone through extensive consultation and the bill implements the changes to federal financial relations as agreed to by the Council of Australian Governments earlier this year.

These major reforms build on the strengths of the current system and ensure the long-term sustainability of our healthcare system. Under the National Health and Hospitals Network, the Commonwealth will become the major funder of Australian public hospital services. The government’s reforms are not just about increasing access to and lifting the quality of health services; they are about preparing for our ageing population and ensuring that investment in our health and hospital system is sustainable for the long term.

The government proposes to make three key amendments which will affect all states except Western Australia. First, the government will retain a portion of the GST to be directed by the Commonwealth government towards spending on health and hospitals. Second, funding sourced from the national health care specific purpose payment will now be directed to health and hospital services throughout the National Health and Hospitals Network fund. Third, the government will be able to make an additional top-up payment to states if hospital costs outpace the growth in GST revenue. Additionally, while the Western Australian government has not yet signed the National Health and Hospitals Network agreement, this bill protects Western Australian current health funding ensuring that the Premier of Western Australia would need to agree to any change to the current funding arrangements, and that would have to be tabled in the parliament. These changes will ensure greater federal investment in the health and hospital area. This is something that the previous Liberal government substantially neglected. This will reduce the pressure that rapidly increasing healthcare costs will place on the insuffi-
ciently funded state and territory budgets into the future.

I wish to stress that the reform of health and hospitals is not about providing a blank cheque to the states; rather, it is about introducing more efficient pricing based on what health services actually cost. Retaining a portion of the GST will ensure that the federal government is able to invest directly in health and hospital services in all states and territories. This government will invest no less than $15.6 billion in additional top-up funding over 2014-15. Retaining and dedicating the GST in 2014-15 provides the base for the Commonwealth then taking on the majority of any growth in costs beyond the growth of GST revenue. As a result, all states and territories will benefit from this reform in the long term. More importantly, Australians will benefit from more efficient, better quality healthcare services.

Unlike those opposite, the Labor Party has always believed that the health of Australians should be a top priority of government. It was a Labor government in 1948 who introduced the PBS, it was a Labor government who introduced Medibank and it was a Labor government who introduced Medicare. The current government will continue this tradition by delivering a National Health and Hospitals Network. This bill is a necessary step in the implementation of essential reform and it would be a shame if those opposite were successful in their reckless opposition to a sustainable healthcare system.

As I have previously mentioned, I am sure that many in this House would remember all too clearly that, when the Liberals were in government, they ripped $1 billion from our hospital system, capped GP training places and ignored the shortage of nurses in our community. We are now, in my electorate of Kingston and in the rest of the country, experiencing the repercussions of these short-sighted policy decisions, and it is this Labor government who is picking up the pieces and moving forward in the direction of a world-class, accessible and sustainable healthcare system.

Unsurprisingly, those opposite have trumpeted the same old misleading arguments against the national health and hospital reforms. The Liberals have threatened to wreck this reform and this will be to the detriment of all Australians. Their continued mindless opposition to change and necessary reform shows just how uninterested they really are in securing a sustainable and affordable healthcare system for our country’s future.

As usual, the opposition has presented a number of misleading excuses as to why they will not pass the bill, and these seem to change daily. The COAG agreement shows the willingness of the state governments to reverse the anti-health trend of the previous government. Seven out of eight states and territories signed the National Health and Hospitals Network Agreement. While Western Australia was not a signatory, the revised intergovernmental agreement will allow Western Australia to join the health reforms or to remain separate. Just because one state has not signed the current agreement, this should not be a barrier to national reform. Western Australia will not stand in the way of these health reforms and neither should the Liberal Party.

The opposition are simply not interested in the long-term viability of our health system. All in all, those opposite will attempt to wreck this bill purely to oppose this government. It is opposition for opposition’s sake. Their reckless political strategy is a direct threat to the sustainability of the Australian healthcare system. I urge the members on the other side of the House to see past the rhetoric and join with the government in supporting this necessary reform.
In conclusion, the National Health and Hospitals Network reform is the most significant health reform since the introduction of Medicare by the former Hawke-Keating government. It will mean the efficient provision of better quality, more accessible health care to future generations of Australians. We cannot afford not to act to secure the long-term sustainability of our health and hospital system. My constituents, along with the rest of Australia, deserve a properly funded health and hospital system. For this reason, I commend the bill to the House.

Mr ANTHONY SMITH (Casey) (6.03 pm)—I rise to contribute to the debate on the Federal Financial Relations Amendment (National Health and Hospitals Network) Bill 2010, which sums up so much about those opposite on so many levels. This legislation is defective in many respects, and previous speakers have focused on various aspects of it. In the time available, I want to particularly focus on the fundamental breach within this legislation of the 1999 GST agreement. That says so much about this government’s approach and about what the government believes in.

When the GST passed through this parliament in 1999 for introduction in 2000, the fundamental agreement at that time was that there would not be any change to the GST arrangements in any way, shape or form without the unanimous agreement of the states, and I will come back to that. Back in 1999 when that agreement was reached, shortly after the passage of the legislation, those opposite—including the Minister for Trade, who is at the table, but particularly the member for Griffith—were very opposed to the goods and services tax; they did everything they could to stop it. When they talk about reform over the last 25 years, they airbrush out the years 1999 and 2000. They do not even mention the goods and services tax or the reduction in personal income tax rates that accompanied that important reform.

When the member for Griffith was in this House—at this dispatch box, I suspect—a little over 11 years ago, he was not just opposing the GST but competing with all his colleagues to be the person who opposed it most vigorously. In fact, he almost impersonated Franklin D Roosevelt. You will recall the ‘day of infamy’ with the bombing of Pearl Harbour. This was followed by the ‘day of fundamental injustice’ declared by the member for Griffith, Kevin Rudd, here in this parliament in 1999. Because it was such a historic moment I will say that Wednesday, 30 June 1999 at 11.35 was the time that ‘Fundamental Injustice Day’ was declared. He said:

When the history of this parliament, this nation and this century is written, 30 June 1999 will be recorded as a day of fundamental injustice—an injustice which is real, an injustice which is not simply conjured up by the fleeting rhetoric of politicians. It will be recorded as the day when the social compact that has governed this nation for the last 100 years was torn up. It will be recorded as the day when the nation’s taxation system moved from progressivity to regressivity. It will be recorded as the day when the parliament of the country said to the poor of the country that they could … go and take a running jump.

That was Fundamental Injustice Day, declared by the member for Griffith in 1999. The member for Griffith as Prime Minister never talked about Fundamental Injustice Day with respect to the goods and services tax. In fact, he went from hating the goods and services tax to loving it so much that he wanted to keep it and take some of it back from the states, and that is what this bill, which is a result of his announcement of his so-called reform, seeks to do.

As I said at the outset, the agreement in 1999 was quite clear. It stipulated very clearly that the GST was designed to be a
state tax, a tax collected and administered by the federal government but where all of the revenue went to the states to give the states a growth tax, a secure and growing revenue base. That is why clause 44 of the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Reform of Commonwealth-State Financial Relations back in 1999 said the following:

All questions arising in the Ministerial Council will be determined by unanimous agreement unless otherwise specified in this Agreement.

As the shadow Treasurer pointed out a little earlier, in 2008 as Prime Minister the member for Griffith signed another agreement with the states and territories that the GST arrangements would not be changed without unanimous agreement. There is no agreement from Western Australia. Equally to the point, the oppositions in both New South Wales and Victoria, facing elections in March and this Saturday respectively, have indicated that they do not support the arrangements, yet this government is seeking to breach the fundamental agreement which the GST was based upon.

Mr ANTHONY SMITH—Well, no matter what he said, I think he probably had his fingers crossed behind his back. But the member for Griffith declaring Fundamental Injustice Day way back then and then going from hating the GST to loving it so much that he wanted to take it back from the states sums up so much about the approach of this government.

Mr HUSIC (Chifley) (6.11 pm)—Can I at the outset, on indulgence, just place on the record my condolences to the families of the Pike River miners. I think that people all across the chamber, along with others across the country, are deeply saddened by the news we have learned this afternoon. I just want to place on the record my heartfelt condolences for those families who will be going through an enormous amount of pain as we speak.

Turning to the matter that brings us here now, it gives me great pleasure to speak about the Federal Financial Relations Amendment (National Health and Hospitals Network) Bill 2010 because certainly in our neck of the woods, out in Western Sydney, health care is a major issue. It is certainly of great concern to me as a new member representing the electorate of Chifley, covering such suburbs as Blacktown, Doonside, Rooty Hill and Mount Druitt, to name but a few.

The changes, as the Deputy Prime Minister noted in late October in his second read-
ing speech when he introduced the bill, re-
cast healthcare funding ahead of what are
phenomenal pressures, particularly the
demographic wave that looms before us and
the costs of technology for health care,
which are well documented. I must say that,
reflecting on the contribution of the Deputy
Prime Minister, I was taken by the statistic
that, on the basis of current trends, health
and hospital spending would consume tax
revenues collected directly by state govern-
ments by 2045-46. Clearly there is a demand
on us as a government, particularly in com-
munities with people getting older, with their
demands increasing and with costs increasing
as a consequence of improvements in
technology, that we do something about this
now rather than cobbling together a response
at a time when we are not necessarily blessed
with options. That is why this will become a
landmark piece of legislation that will be
celebrated not necessarily in the way we
would traditionally expect but by families
who will be relieved that the health care they
need will be there at the time that they most
need it.

The way that this legislation reflects gov-
ernment intention to dedicate one-third of
GST revenue to health and hospital services
will guarantee in effect growth funding to the
states of over $15 billion over the period
2014-15 to 2019-20. In particular I note the
three arms of the reforms: firstly, the funding
responsibility and the sustainability com-
bined with a focus on performance transpar-
ency and accountability, which is exception-
ally important given the commitment of gov-
ernment funding in this area; secondly, the
better access to high-quality integrated care
that will guide attention towards patient
need, especially around patient care need and
an eye on prevention, early intervention and
community care, which are aspects I would
like to reflect on later in my contribution;
and, finally, a massive shot in the arm for
healthcare investment—$7.3 billion in im-
mmediate health and hospital improvements.

On those last two points I would like to
focus on how this benefits the Chifley elec-
rorate. I have had the pleasure to get to know
and work with some outstanding local pro-
fessionals such as Peter Zelas, Graham
Reece and Dominic Dawson, amongst oth-
ers, learning about the great advancements in
health care within the Blacktown and Mount
Druitt areas. In particular, across Blacktown
through to Mount Druitt and the two hospi-
tals that operate there we are injecting nearly
$45 million in new investment, with extra
beds and in emergency rooms additional
beds and extra equipment. For example,
through the course of the election we were
proud to announce the provision of new CT
equipment and paediatric equipment for
Mount Druitt Hospital. Other exciting devel-
opments include the construction of a clinici-
ian school at Blacktown Hospital and the
GP superclinic which will help reduce the
pressure on the emergency departments in
both Mount Druitt and Blacktown, in an
area, I might add, that is experiencing and is
set to continue to experience phenomenal
growth in residential numbers with the de-
velopment that is occurring across Western
Sydney.

The other thing I wanted to focus on, as I
mentioned earlier, is preventive health care.
Some of the things that have been raised
with me as a new member and through the
course of the campaign and the comments by
GPs and by other professionals who work in
the community in Chifley have helped me
focus on those issues of prevention, issues
such as early childhood speech pathology,
diet and wellbeing, and the need for encour-
aging youth in particular to embrace exercise
to improve their health now and well into the
future. In addition to that I have GPs giving
me information in forums that I have, includ-
ing discussions with GPs such as Dr Hani
Bittar, who has informed me that he and his colleagues have great concerns about the number of patients who present with health-care problems as a result of obesity. Some other healthcare outfits in the area such as the Kildare Road medical centre in Blacktown recently undertook healthcare booths at a local shopping centre where they had people presenting who, even though they are taking blood pressure medication, still have inappropriately or in some cases dangerously high levels of blood pressure and are unaware of those conditions. Others dealing with diabetes are not aware that they have diabetes themselves. It is phenomenal when you talk to healthcare professionals about this, and we do need to find a way to detect but, importantly, prevent the impact of those conditions on people.

On the issue of speech pathology which I flagged in my inaugural speech, I have teachers indicating to me, particularly in some of the suburbs north of Mount Druitt, that there are children who are unable to quickly access assistance through the public system and the only way they could rely on that type of assistance is to approach people for private support which is well beyond financial means. If we were able to provide support at an early age for speech pathology, we would be able to benefit children in their early days in school, ensure that they are able to engage better, ensure that they are able to fulfil their promise through the education system, ensure that they are not frustrated by education because of an inability for us to provide speech pathology early on. If we are able to address these issues early on, we will in effect enable young children to become great students within the system and then they will be able to secure jobs and assist their own families in later life. If we are able to dedicate these resources earlier instead of trying to mop up later, imagine the huge transformative effect that can have on people’s potential.

It is something of great pride that we are talking more about prevention these days. It is something that was in effect neglected many years ago. That is not a political point, because I think, with respect, that on all sides it was not necessarily something that was factored in to thinking on health care, it was more about dealing with problems as they presented in emergency departments. But we simply cannot afford the social and economic cost that arises by us being unable to dedicate ourselves to prevention through better living, better diet and providing resources early on such as what I have indicated with respect to speech pathology to ensure that our citizens, our members of the community, do not have their potential limited by an inability to have healthcare resources when they need them. Certainly that is one area that I am keen to explore in terms of how we are able to better mobilise.

The government is doing this through its initiatives in primary health care and its willingness to embrace and consider other opportunities developed at the grassroots level to improve health outcomes. We cannot do these things without the ability to fund the system appropriately, which brings me back to this bill. This bill tries to think ahead in terms of funding and gearing the system to immediate needs and then ensuring a quality healthcare system when resources are needed at the tail end as the demographic wave hits ahead of the impact of the rising costs of technology.

We often debate in this place. We debate processes rather than objectives. It is important for us to focus across both sides of the chamber on the objectives that we are working towards. These are to improve the health care of the people of this nation, particularly with what is circling underneath it all in a
demographic sense—that is, an ageing population. Certainly in my electorate there is a high proportion of young people and we need to meet their needs as well.

I am tremendously supportive of this bill. I express concern, as a lot of my colleagues have, that there is a proposal to set aside any action on this front. I believe that we cannot afford inaction in not only the injection of funds into the system now but also getting the system set for future growth and the future impact of the demographic changes I have mentioned. I would hope we are able to ensure this bill gets through so the people of the communities we represent will get the health care that they rightly deserve, free of the way in which federalism once failed to deliver for their needs and their wants. I hope that we can, as indicated in the bill, recast the way we finance health care in this country for the good of the people of Australia.

Mr ADAMS (Lyons) (6.24 pm)—This Federal Financial Relations Amendment (National Health and Hospitals Network) Bill 2010 implements changes to the federal financial arrangements. It gives effect to reforms to the financing of health and hospital services, set out in the National Health and Hospitals Network Agreement, endorsed by the states with the exception of Western Australia on 20 April 2010. The National Health and Hospitals Network agreement includes significant reform to the financing of health and the hospital system and requires modification to the current framework for the financial relationship between the federal government and the states. The current situation is set out in the Intergovernmental Agreement on Federal Financial Relations. The agreement changes the treatment of the GST general revenue assistance payments to the National Healthcare SPP. It also creates new arrangements that allow the Commonwealth to meet its financial commitments under the National Health and Hospitals Network Agreement by making additional top-up payments.

Under the agreement, the Commonwealth becomes the majority funder of the Australian public hospital system by funding: 60 per cent of the national efficient price of every public hospital service provided to public patients; 60 per cent of recurrent expenditure on research and training functions funded by states and undertaken in public hospitals; 60 per cent of block funding paid against a COAG agreed funding model, including the agreed functions and services and community service obligations required to support small regional and rural public hospitals; 60 per cent of capital expenditure on ‘user cost of capital’ basis where possible; and, over time, up to 100 per cent of the efficient price of primary health care equivalent outpatient services provided to public patients. This will be a major opportunity to give major reform to the health services of Australia.

This really does give Australia an opportunity to improve health care in our country. It is greatly in need of it. We can knock off some of the duplications and we can work towards a more practical and efficient delivery of health care. It will also mean that we can get some more sense of funding priorities into regions to focus where we need to put more resources. It will mean great improvements to Commonwealth-state relations. The reforms will lead to getting better value for all Australians from the money invested in health.

Tasmania suffers because it has to deliver primary health care to a small, scattered and decentralised population across the whole island. We also have to deal with current perceptions of what an efficient health care system is. We have many old, small country hospitals that have seen better days and need to be ‘rebadged’ for their actual role. The
word ‘hospital’ is something that people can hang onto, even though their ‘hospital’ would not have been thought of as such many years ago. Today, if you are really sick you need to be in a major hospital that can give the needed services. We need to deliver primary health care in our regions in a new and better way, which is what this government is endeavouring to achieve.

We have been discussing this for some time and the change to health funding gives us an opportunity to look at the whole question of health—from primary health care delivery and prevention through to the hospital system. I believe there should be a regional approach and Tasmania has always worked best when three regions have been used as a base for any planning of delivery. This is because local people on the ground have the most experience in delivering services within their boundaries. If they know their areas they can be innovative and make sure that services are delivered in those areas. They can work more closely together and it makes sense to allow the service deliverers and their clients/patients to be able to easily access each other. Technology is going to play a bigger role in service delivery too. People seeking help will be able to use the internet to access diagnostic-type information.

We cannot talk about health without talking about aged care. The biggest problem with our health system in Tasmania, particularly as it relates to hospitals, is that our beds are overflowing with aged care patients because there is nowhere else for them to go. I believe older Australians should be able to choose the location and kind of place they live in, and they should have access to affordable care when needed. But community and residential care is underfunded and therefore the problem is thrust onto the health care system, which leads to a build up of care needs in the public hospital system.

This has to change. I believe that many of the moves this government has made in developing the health infrastructure have begun to make inroads into the waiting lists. Some of these moves include GP superclinics, developing programs that assist regional doctor services to add ancillary activities to their practices, and allowing nurse practitioners to have access to Medicare schedules. These measures will mean that fewer patients will need to go to a hospital because their care can be sorted out at a local level. We do not have to clog up areas around hospitals.

There will still be a need to do something at the other end with aged care and there have been some recent models that have come up with some plain common sense ideas. Any health plan should include an aged care package to allow many older Australians to enjoy growing old and not be parked somewhere where they cannot contribute to their community.

E-health is becoming a reality, even in outlying areas and rural pockets that have hitherto been unserviced and not represented in the health care delivery system. An article in Tasmanian Country on 19 November clarifies this very well:

Local networks are used to check on clients and nurses make phone contact when they can’t make outreach visits.

For instance, they make sure that firewood and food is available by one means or another. They can serve more people because it can take 1½ hours for a nurse to reach a client in the Central Highlands in my electorate, be with them for an hour and then spend 1½ hours on the journey back. The article went on to say:

The use of technology allows nurses to give clients health care that is the first of its kind in Tasmania.

Cars are fitted with mobiles loaded with Wi-Fi software.
Nurses consult with specialists via the phones, which send and receive data.

The Central Highlands is the only place in Tasmania where in home monitors are used to take vital observations such as blood pressure, pulse, weight and blood-sugar levels.

The information is then read and analysed by the treating doctor. No-one has to travel, more people are given fast and efficient health care and these people are allowed to live longer at home. It is a win all round, I would say and I think most people would agree. These are opportunities for the future. With the National Broadband Network this sort of technology will expand and assist us in delivery in ways beyond what we can presently imagine.

The other change that I think would improve the current system would be to use electronic technology to move each individual’s personal records. Each practice seems to have a computer in front of the doctor and records of the visits of patients, treatments, referrals, drug therapies, et cetera, are entered into that computer. Yet if you ask for an electronic copy to take with you to the specialist there is great reluctance to relinquish the information, and the paper trail starts again. I have noticed that even in hospitals one can still see orderlies wheeling around trolleys full of paper folders. These are prone to being lost or containing mistaken entries, yet they are the major information system in many hospitals.

We are well behind where we should be. Technology can help us make gains in efficiency and effectiveness, and make health delivery safer. It will help people make decisions and allow information to be passed on in an electronic format. There are real opportunities within the primary health delivery system and in the hospital system. What can be connected to a bedside situation is unlimited into the future.

The government want to provide national leadership on health and hospitals. The ministers need to be congratulated on the great work that they are doing. But while the government are doing that, we have to allow greater control at the local level. We are determined to work with state and territory governments to deliver the National Health and Hospitals Network. The reforms will include the governance of our health and hospital system and ensure funding sustainability in the future.

We need to deliver better access to high-quality integrated care that is patient-centric. We propose to deliver health care that is designed around the needs of patients, not the needs of the health system. It must be focused on the patient and it should be about outcomes. It is also vital that we focus on prevention and early intervention. It is the new way of delivering health care throughout this nation.

Hospitals should only be used if there are clinical reasons and not for the provision of aged care. There are many things throughout hospitals that can be delivered around clinics and general GPs. The roles and responsibilities between the Commonwealth and the states need to be clarified. It will help reduce duplication of activities and improve coordination. These reforms will put Australia’s financial relations on a more sustainable footing for the future and allow us to better manage health expenditure growth. I support the bill and wish the Treasurer and the health minister every success in its carriage through the parliament.

Mr SWAN (Lilley—Treasurer) (6.39 pm)—I thank all members who contributed to this very important debate on the Federal Financial Relations Amendment (National Health and Hospitals Network) Bill 2010. It is an important bill. This is a debate about Australia’s future. Australia’s population is
ageing and our health costs are going up. The
Intergenerational report did shine a light on just how serious the challenges are that we face as a nation. In coming decades, we will have a significantly older population and relatively fewer taxpayers to support that ageing population. If we do not rise to that challenge then the truth is we are just leaving it to our children to solve. Do we expect them to just go without some life-saving treatment when the money is not there? Do we expect them to cut other vital services so they can afford the health system that we all take for granted? I don’t and nor do the government. We do not accept that a do-nothing approach is the way to go. That is why the government are acting on the challenges through this bill. It is a historic bill. It reflects the priority that the government places on health care now and well into the future.

In April this year, COAG, with the exception of Western Australia, reached a historic agreement on health and hospitals reform—the establishment of a National Health and Hospitals Network. This is one of the most significant reforms to Australia’s health and hospital system since the introduction of Medicare. It is one of the largest reforms to service delivery since Federation. The government’s health reforms are all about delivering better value for every health dollar spent. They are necessary so that future generations can enjoy world-class, universally accessible and affordable health care. The one thing the seven states and territories agreed as part of health reform was that a proportion of GST would be dedicated to health in each state. This bill provides the legislative underpinning of that agreement.

Under the National Health and Hospitals Network, the Commonwealth government will become the majority funder of Australia’s public hospitals. The Commonwealth will fund 60 per cent of the efficient price for all public hospital services and 60 per cent of capital, research and training in our public hospitals. We will also take funding and policy responsibility for GP and primary healthcare services and for aged-care services. As well, we are committed to reducing cost shifting and to strengthening the integration between care provided in hospital and in community settings. So we will, over time, move to fund 100 per cent of the efficient price of primary healthcare equivalent outpatient services.

In line with the Gillard government’s strict budgetary approach, this will still see the budget back into surplus in three years. Fiscal responsibility is a key component of these reforms. The investment is fully funded over the forward estimates, wholly consistent with our fiscal strategy, and does not add to the budget deficit. An independent pricing authority will determine how much the Commonwealth will pay for hospital services. The Commonwealth’s share will be based on how much the independent authority says that a particular service should cost—no more and no less. This will ensure that taxpayers receive the best value for their investment in health care and it will also drive efficiency in the delivery of health services.

I would like to make some comments about some of the criticisms that have been made in this House about the bill and in particular some of the criticisms from those opposite. The opposition have been wringing their hands about the GST dedication that has been agreed with seven out of eight states and territories as part of the COAG agreement. What was the coalition’s health policy at the last election? I think I might take the opportunity to remind those opposite of their policy, which states:

…the Coalition would be prepared to consider moving to a higher percentage of hospital funding, including 100 percent of the efficient price, but only if a State Government would voluntarily
agree to surrender an appropriate percentage of its
GST revenue.

So the coalition’s own election policy states
that they would ask the states to surrender a
proportion of GST revenue. This reveals that
the coalition’s public posturing about GST is
what it is—simply another excuse to oppose
reform; nothing more than another excuse to
wreck reform.

Opposition speakers have also suggested
that we should junk our health reform be-
cause only seven out of eight states and terri-
tories are signed on, but at the COAG in
April every state and territory except West-
ern Australia signed up to the government’s
health reform package. This included agree-
ing to the dedication of a portion of GST
funds to health, which this legislation allows.
The detailed implementation of the COAG
agreement will require revisions to the Inter-
governmental Agreement on Federal Finan-
cial Relations, and these revisions will need
to be agreed by all states and territories. The
revisions to the IGA can be designed to al-
low Western Australia to join the health re-
forms or to remain separate from the health
reforms. The bill preserves the existing fed-
eral financial relations arrangements for
Western Australia until it becomes a signa-
tory to the National Health and Hospitals
Network Agreement, and Premier Barnett
has indicated that Western Australia will not
stand in the way of other states participating
in health reform.

I think it is of concern that the Liberal op-
position would want to stop Australians
benefiting from these reforms when seven
out of eight states can see the merit in the
new arrangements. Even Premier Barnett has
indicated that he will not stand in the way of
other states, so the criticism from the opposi-
tion is yet another example of their determi-
nation to wreck another important reform
which is required to deal with the ageing of
our population.

We have also heard opposition speakers
express surprise that different amounts of
GST will be dedicated in different states. I
think this does speak volumes about their
lack of interest in and knowledge of this re-
form process. This element of the reform was
made clear in the National Health and Hospi-
tals Network Agreement, was made clear in
the 2010-11 budget and was made clear in
the 2010-11 MYEFO, which I released ear-
lier this month—it is plainly there for all to
see. This is part of what seven out of the
eight states and territories signed up to in
health reform at COAG in April. This in-
cluded signing up to a dedication of GST,
which is what this legislation facilitates. The
portion of GST to be dedicated will be a re-
fection of how much of the GST the state
itself spends on health. The proportion is
different in different states because different
states spend different amounts on health. But
in each state the allocations from dedicated
GST combined with contributions from the
healthcare SPP will provide 60 per cent of
hospital funding and fund 100 per cent of GP
and primary healthcare services, which are
currently provided by the states.

Opposition speakers have noted that min-
isterial determinations that are made under
this bill are not disallowable instruments.
However, the bill limits the discretion in
making these determinations. New section
21A requires that the minister consider the
National Health and Hospitals Network
Agreement and the intergovernmental
agreement when making determinations, and
new section 21B prevents the minister from
making determinations inconsistent with the
National Health and Hospitals Network
Agreement that would result in substantial
financial detriment to one or more states
unless a proper process was followed. As
part of this process, the determination must
be tabled and approved by each house of
parliament.
We have also heard opposition speakers make the claim that these reforms will somehow make state and territory finances worse off. That is completely absurd. I am not sure whether the opposition has been following the detail, but this is simply untrue. The amounts of GST that are dedicated will all be spent on health. In addition, as part of the reforms, the Commonwealth expects to provide an additional $15.6 billion for health and hospitals out to 2019-20 directly from the Commonwealth budget. This is in addition to the dedicated GST amounts and it is in addition to the previous estimates of Commonwealth health spending. In other words, states will not be worse off in the short term and over the longer term they will be significantly better off under these reforms.

In summing up, this bill underpins historic reforms to Australia’s health system—reforms which will put Australia’s federal financial relations on a more sustainable footing for the future and allow us to better manage expenditure on health for growth. These changes are designed to deliver value for money from our spending on important health services so that future generations can enjoy the affordable and sustainable health-care system they all deserve.

Can I also pay tribute to the very hard work that has been put in on this bill and all of the arrangements that go with it by the Minister for Health and Ageing. This is indeed a historic reform for Australia which meets the challenges of the future and does it in a financially responsible way.

Question put:

That the words proposed to be omitted (Mr Hockey’s amendment) stand part of the question.

The House divided. [6.54 pm]

(The Speaker—Mr Harry Jenkins)

Ayes............  75
Noes............  70
Majority.........  5

AYES

Adams, D.G.H.  Albanese, A.N.
Bandt, A.  Bird, S.
Bradbury, D.J.  Brodtmann, 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.
Crook, T.  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.  Vamvakinou, M.
Wilkie, A.  Windsor, A.H.C.
Zappia, A.

NOES

Abbott, A.J.  Alexander, J.
Andrews, K.  Andrews, K.J.
Baldwin, R.C.  Billson, B.F.
Bishop, B.K.  Bishop, J.I.
Broadbent, R.  Buchholz, S.
Chester, D. Christensen, G.
Ciobo, S.M. Cobb, J.K.
Coulton, M. * Dutton, P.C.
Entsch, W. Fletcher, P.
Forrest, J.A. Frydenberg, J.
Gambaro, T. Gash, J.
Griggs, N. Haase, B.W.
Hartsuyker, L. Hawke, A.
Hockey, J.B. Hunt, G.A.
Irons, S.J. Keenan, M.
Jones, E. Laming, A.
Kelly, C. Ley, S.P.
Ley, S.P. Macfarlane, I.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 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.

PAIRS
Plibersek, T. Ruddock, P.M.
Bowen, C. Briggs, J.E.

* denotes teller

Question agreed to.

Original question put:

That the bill be now read a second time.

The House divided. [6.59 pm]

(The Speaker—Mr Harry Jenkins)

Ayes............ 74
Noes............ 71

Majority........ 3

AYES
Adams, D.G.H. Albanese, A.N.
Bandt, A. Bird, S.
Bradbury, D.J. Brodman, 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. Dunby, 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. Gibbs, 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’Neill, D.
O’Neill, D. Oakshott, 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.
Vamvakinou, M. Wilkie, A.
Windsor, A.H.C. Zappia, A.

NOES
Abbott, A.J. Alexander, J.
Andrews, K. Andrews, K.J.
Baldwin, R.C. Billson, B.F.
Bishop, B.K. Bishop, I.J.
Broadbent, R. Buchholz, G.
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. Gambaro, T.
Gash, J. Griggs, N.
Haase, B.W. Hartsuyker, L.
Hawke, A. Hickey, J.B.
Hunt, G.A. Irons, S.J.
Jensen, D. Jones, E.
Keenan, M. Kelly, C.
Laming, A.
Macfarlane, I.E.
Markus, L.E.
McCormack, M.
Morrison, S.J.
Neville, P.C.
O'Dwyer, K.
Pyne, C.
Randall, D.J.
Robert, S.R.
Schultz, A.
Secker, P.D.*
Slipper, P.N.
Sonley, A.M.
Stone, S.N.
Truss, W.E.
Turnbull, M.
Vasta, R.
Wyatt, K.

Ley, S.P.
Marino, N.B.
Matheson, R.
Mirabella, S.
Moylan, J.E.
O'Dowd, K.
Prentice, J.
Ramsey, R.
Robb, A.
Roy, Wyatt
Scott, B.C.
Simpkins, L.
Smith, A.D.H.
Southcott, A.J.
Tudge, A.
Van Manen, B.
Washer, M.J.

PAIRS
Plibersek, T.
Bowen, C.
Ruddock, P.M.
Briggs, J.E.

* denotes teller
Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Message from the Governor-General recommending appropriation announced.

Third Reading

Mr SWAN (Lilley—Treasurer) (7.02 pm)—by leave—I move:
That this bill be now read a third time.
Question agreed to.
Bill read a third time.

ADJOURNMENT

The SPEAKER—Order! It being approximately 7.00 pm, I propose the question:
That the House do now adjourn.

Korean Peninsula

Mr ALEXANDER (Bennelong) (7.02 pm)—I rise to express outrage at North Korea's deadly artillery attack yesterday on the South Korean island of Yon-pi-ong. As the representative of an electorate with a substantial and vibrant Korean community I urge all governments to condemn this unprovoked attack, which has reportedly killed two South Korean soldiers and wounded civilians, taking South Korea to its highest possible non-wartime alert.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has described this as 'one of the gravest incidents since the end of the Korean War' while South Korean President Lee has shown incredible patience and calm in the face of this military aggression. North Korea's reckless behaviour will further destabilise one of the world's most volatile regions, and comes after 46 South Korean sailors were killed in March. Recently US scientist Siegfried Hecker was 'stunned' by the sophistication of a North Korean uranium enrichment plant operating 2,000 centrifuges.

North Korea is estimated to be the world's most militarised nation with more than one in three people serving. It has become increasingly clear that the North Korean dictatorship, which is currently going through a baton change, is most likely to heed advice from our friend and trading partner, the People's Republic of China. Bennelong embraces a very large and active community of Chinese Australians and I was privileged to recently welcome the new Chinese Ambassador, Chen Yoo-Ming. It is imperative for our government to use all communication channels to request China to require restraint from North Korea.

In 2006 a North Korean missile test led China to impose limited sanctions, utilising the heavy dependence that the North Korean regime has on aid from China. The recent events seem to have taken the longstanding brinkmanship on the Korean Peninsula to a new level. We should encourage our good friends in China to engage in constructive dialogue with the North Korean regime, to repeat their opposition to North Korea's nuclear program, and to lobby for the immedi-
ate recommencement of the six-party nuclear talks. This issue is one of the most important diplomatic priorities in our region. We are a great friend to the Republic of Korea and this year we celebrate our relationship through the 60th anniversary of the end of the Korean War. We must all work towards a goal of restraint on the Korean Peninsula so that the good people of the Republic of Korea can live in peace.

Australian Defence Force

Mr DANBY (Melbourne Ports) (7.06 pm)—I rise to express my concern at some outrageous comments made by an online journalist called Antony Loewenstein in an article about Australian soldiers in the online publication Crikey. The article was entitled ‘Elite Oz soldiers in covert operations for top-secret base’. Neil James of the Australian Defence Association has written a brilliant response to this article and I want to read some of it into the record. What Crikey alleges about Australian soldiers is so irresponsible that the editors of Crikey and its owner Mr Beecher should hang their heads in shame. Mr James says that the article is:

… merely a mixture of undergraduate-level urban rumours, historical myth … and … conspiracy theory, flavoured by numerous factual mistakes, misrepresentations and misunderstandings about our defence force, its compliance with international law and, indeed, the way Australia actually works as a democracy ruled by law. Even the two Australian sources cited … a six-year-old, long-discredited article by Brian Toohey in the “Australian Financial Review”—

and another article in the Australian—

… Our soldiers are deployed in Afghanistan … fighting a UN-endorsed conflict at the lawful direction of our elected Australian government.

As we heard during the debate, this effort has bipartisan support. Those soldiers are fighting on Australia’s behalf. Mr James continues:

It is unfair at best for any Australian to make their job harder or more dangerous by writing or publishing biased nonsense that could be so easily misused in Al Qa’eda propaganda. There is no excuse to betray the men and women of our defence force by such stupid, thoughtless and irresponsible claims. If you disagree with the war in Afghanistan, argue with our government (using facts), not endanger our troops (by wild claims).

These claims are that, somehow, Australian soldiers would allow themselves to be deployed by private American companies to murder selected people in Afghanistan. Mr James’s response to the Crikey article continues:

Let us be clear what “Crikey” boldly stated. “Crikey understands Australia has been engaged in such behaviour [alleged assassinations contrary to the Laws of Armed Conflict] in the past decade, leaving Canberra and its officials open to potential charges of war crimes and prosecution in an [sic] criminal court”.

I do not know how Crikey could have published such an irresponsible and, frankly, thick article. Neil James goes on to say:

Previous Ministers for Defence and the current Chief of the Defence Force have pointed on several previous occasions—when journalists have made incorrect claims about “assassinations”—that the ADF, including its Special Forces, have not and do not ever assassinate anybody. They do not deliberately kill anyone, except in battle, and where authorised by Australian rules-of-engagement grounded in the Laws of Armed Conflict and the ethics of a professional force made up of fellow Australians. Similar denials have been made by Ministers responsible for ASIS. No journalist, or polemicist, has ever been able to back up such a claim with a single substantiated fact. Furthermore, as in this case, every journalist’s sole defence when challenged to prove it has been merely to cite older unsubstantiated claims by other unprofessional … ideologues.

… The numerous denials by the Ministers and CDF are not even mentioned. No military or intelligence historian was cited either. The only two academic experts consulted, a defence finance expert and a lawyer who does not specialise in
LOAC … commented on a hypothetical basis only …

Mr James and the Australian Defence Association suspect they were not quoted accurately anyway. Mr James concludes:

Both made the unsurprising qualified observation that, if true, such acts would be illegal. Neither, however, offered any confirmation of the wild claims or that they considered such claims might or could be true. Moreover, neither the ADA as the relevant public-interest watchdog, or the Australian Institute of Professional IntelligenceOfficers as the relevant professional body, were asked for any opinion.

Mr Loewenstein consulted the ADA but did not, as usual, check these sources out. This article is a disgrace to *Crikey* and I call on Mr Beecher to apologise. (Time expired)

**Brisbane Electorate**

**Ms GAMBARO** (Brisbane) (7.11 pm)—Tonight I rise to reflect on several great activities that are taking place in the electorate of Brisbane. Recently, I had the privilege of attending the opening of the new Comscentre head office at Milton. The opening of this office—and I note that Deputy Speaker Slipper also attended this opening with me—coincided with the official opening of the office in the Philippines by the Australian Senior Trade and Investment Commissioner, Mr Ross Bray. These new offices are in addition to the existing offices in Sydney, Melbourne and Perth.

Comscentre had humble beginnings. Ben Shipley started the business in his local garage. Eight years on, Comscentre is run and managed by Ben Shipley and has an incredible record. It regularly gets praises from *BRW* and other industry professionals. Among its achievements, Comscentre was recently awarded the Brisbane City Lord Mayor’s Business Award for business growth and can proudly say that it has again been named by *BRW* as being among the top 10 fastest growing companies. I am proud to say that Comscentre calls the electorate of Brisbane home. This great teleconference and communication company is doing fantastic work in that leading communication technology area and it has a very high reputation for customer satisfaction. I have no doubt that it will do greater and bigger things in the years to come and I want to congratulate the people of Comscentre on their outstanding achievements to this point.

Secondly, I want to support a great initiative of my friend and colleague in this place, the member for Fadden. I refer to Treasures for the Troops. Australia has 2,350 uniformed defence personnel in the Middle East, including 1,550 in Afghanistan as part of Operation Slipper. There are 400 troops in East Timor, 80 in the Solomon Islands and small numbers in the Sudan, in Egypt and in Sinai. These committed men and women are serving our nation and will miss out on spending Christmas at home with family and friends. The aim of Treasures for the Troops is to provide an Aussie Christmas for our deployed forces through the provision of care packages that contain donated items, including magazines, lollies, toiletries and all sorts of things. More broadly, this program will help demonstrate the coalition’s appreciation of Australia’s troops serving overseas and raise community awareness about the free care package service that Australia Post offers.

I know how important Christmas is to families in our local suburbs. Not only is it a time of togetherness with our loved ones; it is a time when we think about those who cannot be present with us. Our loved ones might not be in the same room, but at Christmas time we can all make sure that they are not forgotten. Many of these troops come from my electorate of Brisbane and that is why I really want to champion this great cause. Whether it is as near as East Timor or the Solomon Islands, or as far away
as the Middle East, these brave men and women deserve our thoughts, our prayers and our thanks. That is why I am letting them know we care by organising gift packages to be sent from my electorate office this week. Australia Post will send these packages free of charge and I am looking to the community to come together with gift donations for these soldiers.

On 12 November I also went to a function at Officeworks in Windsor in my electorate. I was very pleased to be part of the Buyequip Recyclathon, for the recycling of unwanted office and computer equipment. The launch represented a really important initiative regarding our community’s disposal of the ever-growing amount of e-waste. E-waste, also known as electronic waste or e-scrap, is discarded and obsolete electronic devices and related broken material. There is a growing amount of such material and waste. As rapid changes in technology occur, low-cost mass production results in more and more electronic waste in our society. Many thousands of tonnes of this e-waste are being produced in Australia each year, with a high number of discarded computers and phones making a real environmental problem. The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that only 15 per cent of e-waste is recycled, with the remainder going into landfills and incinerators, with devastating consequences for the environment. I want to commend the great work that Officeworks are doing and to commend this particular initiative. As we have seen in recent times, there have been collection days with old televisions put outside on the footpath. Officeworks are taking a problem and providing a real solution, and I commend them for that. *(Time expired)*

**Volunteers**

Ms RISHWORTH (Kingston) *(7.16 pm)*—I am very pleased to speak tonight about the volunteers award ceremony that I hosted in my electorate on 8 November to recognise the great work that many of our dedicated volunteers do in my electorate of Kingston. Over 19,000 people volunteer their services to benefit residents in the southern suburbs of Adelaide every year. Volunteers save governments and organisations a significant amount of money every year and form the backbone of our local communities. I received an overwhelming response when I invited a range of different organisations to nominate a local volunteer who they believed had offered voluntary service which was above and beyond what is generally expected. Over 40 volunteers received nominations from a variety of community groups including sports clubs, environmental groups, schools and community service providers in the southern suburbs of Adelaide. Some were nominated for the length of time they had shown dedication. In some cases they had offered their time and effort for upwards of 30 years. For others, it was for the enthusiasm and energy that they had brought to a relatively new role.

Over the afternoon we heard stories about all these local volunteers, and it was quite incredible that so many people in our local community spend their weekends helping out with general maintenance at local schools or chatting to elderly people in aged-care facilities. One thing that came out was the fact that a lot of people were recognised for looking after the books of their local organisation or club, and certainly accountants and people with bookkeeping services are sorely needed in our local community groups. It is certainly welcomed when people give up their time and energy for that. Hearing these different stories was really wonderful, and I think it was lovely to have both those who were nominated and those that nominated them sharing in the day.

It was a fantastic day. The day was started by a group of students from Hackham East
Primary School led by Mr Jarrod Lamshed. They opened the ceremony singing the national anthem. We also had well-known Australian children’s author Mem Fox, who gave a delightful and very entertaining keynote speech about the rich experience she has had in being a volunteer. Mem Fox spoke about the question that you often hear from volunteers, and that is: who benefits most—the volunteer or the people receiving the service? She said she is yet to find answer, but one thing I think we can all say in this place is that government and organisations are the real beneficiaries of volunteers. We also had the pleasure of having the Hon. Julie Collins from this place, the Parliamentary Secretary for Community Services, come and recognise the importance of these volunteers to our local communities and to the Australian community. Ms Evelyn O’Loughlin, CEO of Volunteering SA, attended as well to offer congratulations to each of the successful nominees.

The ceremony was followed by an afternoon tea, which allowed the volunteers from the different organisations to network. One thing that came through as we were mingling was that a lot of these volunteers who were recognised for their work in a specific organisation indeed volunteered in a number of others. That was not often acknowledged because they were a little shy about talking about themselves, which is often what we find with volunteers, but in fact many of these people had not only done exemplary work in one particular organisation but volunteered in many.

One award recipient, Ms Cora James from Anglicare SA, works in the local community offering support to people who are most in need so that they can get back on their feet. Cora commented that, while it can be quite difficult, you never forget the people you speak to and you find it very rewarding to be able to give something back to the community through this work.

Those who nominated a volunteer within their organisation said they were very grateful for the opportunity to nominate these volunteers because of the effort that the volunteers put in, whether it is in our local schools, our local sporting clubs or our environmental groups. They just could not do their jobs without these volunteers. I would like to congratulate everyone who was nominated as part of the southern suburbs volunteers ceremony for the great work they do in our community.

Forde Electorate: Beenleigh

Mr VAN MANEN (Forde) (7.21 pm)—The electorate of Forde is home to one of Queensland’s oldest towns, Beenleigh. Beginning as a town in the 1860s, Beenleigh was built on sugar and is home to Australia’s oldest rum distillery. With the population explosion in South-East Queensland over the past several decades, Beenleigh has been engulfed by Brisbane and the Gold Coast.

Over the years, Beenleigh has been neglected by all levels of government. Numerous consultations and studies have failed to amount to anything, yet have provided vital information for the recently released master plan. Despite a lack of investment, Beenleigh still retains much of its character, along with a very strong regional identity and community spirit. The district is home to the Beenleigh Historical Village, named Old Beenleigh Town, which transports visitors into the history of the area with period artefacts and buildings. It is now time for this historic landmark to catch up to the growth of surrounding suburbs and it is for this reason that Logan City Council is pushing for Beenleigh to fulfil the potential it has to become an important centre for its district.

The draft of the new master plan to guide Beenleigh’s growth and development over
the next 20 years was released to the public this month for a period of community feedback and comment. The aim of this master plan is to overcome the previous disparate interest from all tiers of government, as well stakeholders and the private sector, in delivering town-building infrastructure in this area. The draft plan proposes to physically transform the town’s centre and includes clear proposals for land use, buildings, public space, pedestrian and traffic movement. And it is supported by a time line and a delivery strategy, something lacking in previous plans. A final version of the master plan is expected to be adopted by the council in early 2011, after consideration of all feedback during the community consultation period. This will then provide the basis for the new Beenleigh local plan to become part of the new Logan Planning Scheme and also an implementation plan, with a high level of participation by government, community and business in the next phases of detailed planning, design and delivery. Logan Mayor Pam Parker said:

The draft plan identifies key challenges and opportunities, and gives potential investors the confidence that our plan has a clear and deliverable redevelopment strategy. It identifies catalyst projects that will put the draft plan’s strategies into action in the short, medium and longer term, and would go a long way towards encouraging new investment in Beenleigh. This draft plan provides a clear vision for the town’s centre; one that takes advantage of the town’s great assets including the railway, showground and existing retail and business centre. The draft plan identifies key sites that can be successfully developed, strategies for managing traffic, population density and our future infrastructure needs.

The project is seen as one of the town’s most comprehensive planning initiatives in recent memory. With professional and public feedback, a consultation report will be published by the council before the master plan is finalised. A process has been outlined to create a compelling business case for investment in priority town-building infrastructure. Priority projects have been identified, and now the task has commenced to quantify the social and economic benefits that this community infrastructure will produce. Targeted, government-led investment in key town-building infrastructure projects will be the catalyst to stimulate further private sector investment and will enable Beenleigh to finally realise its potential as an important centre of employment, business and community services for the region.

Funding for the majority of the identified priority infrastructure will need to be sourced from a range of grants and funds. In order to secure the required level of funding, a compelling case is being developed. Of course, many of the identified priority projects will require substantial funding from a variety of sources. A key component for the success of this project will be federal government funding and investment. I look forward to working with the community, council and state and federal governments to see this important project come to fruition. (Time expired)

Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme

Mr MURPHY (Reid) (7.26 pm)—Last Monday morning when I presented petitions in this House, one I presented, on behalf of the member for Deakin, was signed by 1,718 petitioners and concerned the urgent need to publicly fund the drug, Soliris, for sufferers of paroxysmal nocturnal hemoglobinuria, or PNH. Tonight I will present a further petition on behalf of 4,813 signatories in respect of the same matter and particularly on behalf of my constituent and principal petitioner, Ms Whitney Lane. These petitions have also been approved by the Standing Committee on Petitions.

Whitney is a very sweet, softly spoken, intelligent and articulate young lady. I had the great pleasure of meeting Whitney and her
parents in a meeting earlier this year in my electorate office, and again here in Canberra last week, to discuss the very rare blood disease, PNH. Approximately 100 Australians suffer from this disease and Whitney is one of the youngest known sufferers. Whitney has just finished her final HSC exams and I wish her all the very best with her results. However, it is with great sadness that I report to the House that Whitney was unable to sit every exam because she was physically unable to do so.

In simple terms, PNH is the destruction of red blood cells and some white cells. Normal red blood cells contain a protective protein that prevents this occurring but in sufferers like Whitney this protective protein is absent. Extreme fatigue, chronic body pains and constant headaches are common symptoms. As the condition worsens, sufferers may experience clotting and major organ failure such as that of the liver, kidneys and lungs.

Unfortunately, science has been unable to tell us exactly why the disease starts or how we can cure it. The horrifying reality is that one in three people living with PNH will die within five years of being diagnosed if they do not receive the right treatment, and life expectancy without the drug is approximately 10 years. Soliris is the only known treatment for PNH and approximately 23 people are already receiving it under the manufacturer’s ‘compassionate program’, with around 30 other people awaiting treatment. The cost of the treatment is $480,000 a year and, obviously, this is simply beyond the reach of the average person. Further, once a patient begins treatment with Soliris, they must continue to receive it, every 12 to 16 days, for the rest of their life.

This is a treatment that requires serious consideration, not least because of the cost, but because of its ongoing requirements. Previously when the independent expert advisory committee, the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee, or PBAC, considered a submission for the funding of Soliris through the Life Saving Drugs Program, or LSDP, the PBAC did recommend that the government consider it for inclusion under the LSDP. However, the PBAC also noted a number of uncertainties in the evidence about the drug, particularly the extent that Soliris extends life compared with the best supportive care, as well as the size of the benefit in reducing the incidence of blood clots, a major component of the disease.

In light of the doubts surrounding the effectiveness of Soliris I am pleased to note that the minister for health made an urgent request for further advice from the PBAC on the merits of Soliris for funding. This review enabled the PBAC to provide further advice to the government under the recently revised funding conditions and criteria for the LSDP. On 29 September 2010 the PBAC again recommended to the Australian government that it consider funding Soliris for PNH sufferers through the LSDP. In light of the recent PBAC recommendation I know that the minister is giving this very serious matter her utmost compassionate and expeditious attention.

Following the recommendation by the PBAC, the minister announced that there were several steps that must be completed before the government could consider the drug including negotiations with the sponsor as well as treatment, eligibility and guidelines. These are positive signs; however, no announcement has yet been made about the future of Soliris for PNH sufferers in Australia.

Whitney’s parents are keeping the faith but expressed to me the urgency of getting an answer from the government about the future funding of Soliris. They said that as each day passes, more harm is being done to Whit-
ney’s health. I can only imagine how they must feel and I strongly urge the government to make a decision about the future of Soliris as soon as possible. Whitney is a very strong person, as is her family, and I know that she and other sufferers have much more to contribute to our community and our country, and I ask that the government provide the necessary support to ensure Whitney and others living with PNH have the opportunity to do so for many, many years to come. I therefore present the petition.

The petition read as follows—

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

This petition of Australian Citizens, who are friends, family or supporters of Australian sufferers of Paroxysmal Nocturnal Haemoglobinuria (PNH) disease, a rare and potentially fatal disease of the blood draws to the attention of the House the need to publicly fund out of the Federal Government, the only currently available treatment for PNH sufferers, namely Soliris® (Eculizumab) as a matter of urgency.

We therefore ask the House to introduce and pass any legislation or to take any administrative action available to the House that will enable sufferers of PNH disease to urgently receive breakthrough life saving treatment for this very rare and debilitating disease.

from 4,813 citizens

Petition received.

Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme

Mrs GASH (Gilmore) (7.31 pm)—I would like to concur with my colleague from the other side, who has just spoken, because I am going to speak about the very same subject. Jenny is a 29-year-old, is married, lives in Heathmont, Victoria, and some day wants to have children. Jenny also has a death sentence hanging over her head but with a single stroke of the pen, Jenny can be reprieved and go on to enjoy a long and full life.

Up until January this year, Jenny was employed as a weather forecaster with the Bureau of Meteorology. In January she collapsed and after extensive testing was diagnosed with an extremely rare condition, PNH, or paroxysmal nocturnal hemoglobinuria. It is a disease in which the body destroys its own red blood cells, eventually leading to organ failure due to the lack of oxygen being circulated.

Jenny’s life has been turned upside down. She is chronically breathless and has had to give up many things most of us take for granted. She has reduced her working hours, she cannot travel, and she has given up playing basketball. Even as we were speaking to her last week, we could hear she was running out of breath.

Her husband Luke is terrified. Just the other morning Jenny woke suddenly at about one o’clock with a violent episode of vomiting. Her husband had to get up, clean his wife up, change the sheets, clean up the mess and generally nurse her. Both are losing an enormous amount of sleep. Fortunately, her mother lives close by and comes to the house regularly to help clean. Jenny also has a supportive network of friends who rally to help her. Right now the only treatment available to her is to have blood transfusions every three to four weeks. Along with her health, her quality of life is slowly but surely diminishing. The point is that it does not have to be like this.

Last week I met with Jenny and her colleagues from the PNH Support Association in my office here in parliament. Linda Charlton is the President of the PNH advocacy group and is also on the compassionate program with the drug Soliris. The group came to beg the government to sign off on the life-saving drug, Soliris, which will allow Jenny and about 50 others under the sentence of death from PNH to have a chance to live a
long and full life. On that day, the group met with the Prime Minister and minister for health, who acknowledged the drug Soliris has been recommended for adoption by the PBAC for the Life Saving Drugs Program. On that day also, my colleague the member for Ryan, asked in question time:

Given that the government has wasted billions of dollars on the home insulation and school building schemes … why, 20 months after the PBAC first recommended listing of the drug, does it remain unlisted on the PBS?

The Prime Minister’s answer was disappointing. It was not incorrect but was lacking in real empathy because the core of her reply went to the fact that a price had not been set. And the Prime Minister said as justification for the rationale: ‘It happened every time under the Howard Government as well.’ What a pathetic and heartless statement that was. The Prime Minister seems oblivious to the fact of the highly shortened lifespan of PNH sufferers. The five- to 10-year survival span is not measured from the day of the question.

Indeed, two people have died since the Prime Minister first came to office three months previously. How many have died since the PBAC delivered their recommendation? And how many will die while they wait for this government to make up its mind? Surely the power is available to give interim approval and wear the cost differential. After all it is a matter of life and death and sometimes in the interests of compassion and humanity we have to put aside some of our dogmatic rules. I do not know what the cost of the drug is but I do know what the cost of doing nothing could be. Twenty months is just far too long to wait in this case and I appeal to the Prime Minister to put aside the rule book. Yes, there is a process but that should not be the be-all and end-all.

Linda Charlton, who led the deputation to the Prime Minister and minister for health, was gracious in her comments, describing the Prime Minister as ‘lovely’, and ‘she was fantastic’. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if the Prime Minister could show just how fantastic she was by approving the subsidy of Soliris. Measured against a life, it is a small price to pay. Flattery and soothing words just may not be enough.

In closing, I make mention of my constituent in Gilmore, John Beauchamp, who also has the disease. We are indebted to all who contacted me to try and assist him. I especially want to thank Glen Ellard of the South Coast Register for printing John’s story. As a result of the combined effort of everyone concerned, Alexion Pharmaceuticals has added John to their compassion program. I urge the government to sign the documents now so that Soliris can be made available to those whose lives are at risk. The process has been completed; it just needs the Prime Minister to sign off.

May I wish all in the House, the attendants, the Comcar drivers, the cleaners and the security staff all a wonderful Christmas and a safe and happy New Year. You are simply the best and we all appreciate you.

Building the Education Revolution Program

Mr O’DOWD (Flynn) (7.36 pm)—The failings of the BER have been well documented. Hundreds of millions of dollars have been wasted because the government saw fit to remove the rights of local communities to have input into what was best for their local situation. Some schools ended up with school canteens that cannot fit into a pie warmer. Some schools had to stand by while their tennis courts were demolished to make way for a basketball stadium that was too small to fit the court.

The government also insisted that it handle the process of appointing the building contractors who would carry out this work.
Local builders, who employ local labour and purchase their materials from local suppliers, were overlooked in favour of the big companies, who used drive-in-drive-out workers and materials that were purchased out of town.

I draw your attention, Mr Speaker, to the proposed library at the Wowan State School in my electorate. In May this year the Queensland government’s Department of Education and Training advised the school that the indicative cost of building the library was $850,000. Within weeks the school was advised that the project would be subject to a cost over-run of $110,000, taking the total cost to $960,000. The alternative was that the school could accept a smaller building that would not be suitable for the job—or they could have demountables. On 14 September the President of the Wowan State Primary School P&C Association advised the department that they would not accept the price as quoted nor would they accept a substandard building or a reduced size from that which was originally planned. Since then, the P&C has obtained a quote from Cavalier Homes in Biloela for $589,000 to build the building as per the original proposal. The school and the P&C will get a building that they need, taxpayers will save $371,000, a local builder will get to employ local workers and local suppliers will get to provide the materials.

It is a win-win for everyone, Mr Speaker. But wait—this is where it gets scary. The department will not give a contract to a company that is not accredited by them, so they refuse to entertain the local quote. The chairman of the Wowan State School building committee has been frustrated in his dealings with the department because of their arrogant ‘we know best’ attitude and their insistence on giving the contract to a large multinational company.

Baralaba State School, also in my electorate, was yesterday advised of a cost over-run on their project, too, and building has not even commenced. What on earth is going on, Mr Speaker? Cavalier Homes in Biloela is prepared to complete the accreditation. In fact, they commenced the paperwork yesterday and are well on the way to obtaining accreditation to enable them to do the work. Why should the government allow this ridiculous situation to continue? It is not too late to give the BER scheme some credibility. I call upon the minister to intervene to allow the Wowan and Baralaba State Primary School P&Cs the opportunity to build something at their school that they really need. Allow them to appoint the local builder to do the job.

Broadband

Ms SAFFIN (Page) (7.40 pm)—I rise to talk about the benefits of the NBN nationally and locally, particularly in my area. That is one of the great things about the NBN: it is for all of us and it will benefit all Australians—households, businesses, health and a whole range of other areas.

In June this year a local survey was done in my area, the Northern Rivers, which showed that 98 per cent of Northern Rivers’ companies believed that high-speed broadband internet access is important for their business. The survey was done by the NSW Business Chamber. Of the 50 businesses surveyed, 88 per cent said broadband was of great importance, while 10 per cent said it was of some importance and two per cent said it was of no importance. That is reflected in all the surveys that have been done, particularly in the business sector.

One of the things that I was able to do was champion early NBN rollout on the North Coast and, working with the local university, Southern Cross University, and particularly with the then Professor of Information Tech-
ology and Information Systems, Professor Peter Croll, put forward a submission from our area. It went beyond my seat of Page; it covered the whole North Coast and out to the tablelands area. We said we were NBN ready, and we were. One of the sites that was early tested on mainland Australia was in New England, in the Armadale area. When the second-release sites were announced in mainland Australia, it was very pleasing to see—if my memory serves me correctly, and I would not get this one wrong—that a lot of them were in regional areas. NBN is something that is of great benefit to the regions.

I am very carefully watching the NBN roll out. I know it is going to take a few years because it is a huge national infrastructure program, but it is something that we can all look forward to with some degree of excitement and anticipation. It is the largest nation-building project in Australia’s history. It will lift us in Australia to the top of the world rankings in broadband access. It will drive major productivity and growth opportunities and it will also ensure our children get the best education available in the world.

The NBN will deliver high-speed broadband to all premises in Australia, no matter where they are. Every home, every business, every school and every hospital will be included and no-one will miss out. Under the NBN, 93 per cent of premises will be connected with fibre-to-the-premises technology which will provide speeds of one gigabit per second, and the 10 per cent of Australians who live outside the footprint will receive faster and cheaper broadband from the next generation of satellite and wireless technology.

In my area it is something that people are quite excited about. Members who were talking earlier on were saying: ‘It was a quick fix for an election.’ That is absolute rubbish. It is a solution for the long-term benefit of the country, including our rural and regional areas. This is something that we in the Australian Labor Party are good at—national public infrastructure and doing things that are of benefit for all Australians wherever they reside, whatever their background and whatever their means. There are also some benefits in parity of pricing with the regions and with the city, and that is a good thing because it does not always happen.

There is another part to this which involves some of the benefits. We know telehealth can enable remote consultations, remote home-based monitoring of chronic disease patients and the aged and remote training of medical professionals. Without getting into a definition of remote, there are some places in my area that are remote in terms of access and this will help dramatically to overcome it. Studies in Australia have found that the steady state benefits to Australia from widespread implementation of telehealth may be in the vicinity of between $1.9 billion and $4 billion per annum.

Mr Adnan Alghazal

Dr STONE (Murray) (7.45 pm)—I want the Australian nation to take note of the life, and now the tragic death, of a very special man who, despite his own great suffering under the regime of Saddam Hussein, was able to bring great comfort and emotional support to so many fellow refugees who also had to flee from Iraq to Australia. Mr Adnan Alghazal, a Shepparton man and a proud Australian citizen, began his life in Basra, Iraq. Sadly, he died in Mecca after a peaceful evening and after his prayers on 8 November this year. Adnan had suffered terribly as a Shi’ite during the Saddam Hussein regime. As he explained to a journalist on the Age in 2003, ‘I was not armed or involved in the uprising. I was just demonstrating when a hand grenade was thrown.’ When Adnan regained consciousness he found he was in jail,
where he remained for six months without medical treatment for the very serious shrapnel wounds he had. These injuries continued to cause him great suffering for the rest of his life.

Adnan fled from Iraq in 1997. He arrived in Shepparton after a two-year journey through Jordan, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, China and Hong Kong. He spent another three years bringing his wife Ikhlas and daughter Lubna to his new and peaceful home in Shepparton. Ikhlas and her daughter travelled through Jordan and Syria on their journey to Australia, which included six months in jail in Jordan. It is hard to imagine how stressful that waiting time was.

You can imagine someone growing bitter and not wanting to engage any more with others in a community that he was finding so different to his one in Iraq. But Adnan welcomed with joy his new son, Ahmed, born in 2004, and already at that time he was working in the community of Shepparton to be, as he said, the voice of harmony. He understood very much that a lot of the new Iraqi refugees were finding it a strange land and he acted as their interpreter. He was in fact a professional interpreter. He was president of the Iraqi Association of Shepparton District and a teacher’s aide at Wilmot Road Primary School, which has a big refugee community including Middle Eastern people from Iraq and Jordan. He was a multicultural worker for Uniting Care Cutting Edge and a volunteer worker in the community.

‘Adnan was not a normal person,’ said family friend Fatima Al-Qarakchy as she spoke about the sad death of Adnan. ‘He was our oldest brother,’ she said. That very much sums up the way the community felt about Adnan Alghazal. He was very often in my office, always extraordinarily polite and gentle, quietly spoken and often obviously suffering very poor health. But he was always there with a concern about a fellow citizen of Shepparton, usually someone newly arrived or just made a citizen, almost always from the Middle East. He was constantly in search of better ways to explain how best we could ensure there was integration, community harmony and interfaith support.

The community is now mourning and there have been the traditional three days of grieving in one of Shepparton’s mosques soon after his death. Adnan was buried in Iraq and his family flew there to be with him. It was a very sad day, not just for the Iraqi community, because Adnan had also been instrumental in the Kialla United football club, which includes Afghan, Congolese and Sudanese people as well as Iraqis and Australians, the old-fashioned fourth and fifth generation Australians. Even when Adnan was in hospital, as he often was, he would make sure that the football club knew he was available to be consulted, to interpret, to be a hands-on member of the club. I have to say that the club is one of the major ways that we have interracial, interethnic and intercultural harmony promoted in our part of the world.

I will miss Adnan dreadfully. He was a dear, dear friend and I think it is important that we note the loss of such a great man in this place.

Electric Cars

Dr LEIGH (Fraser) (7.49 pm)—I rise today to update the House on the imminent launch of Australia’s first electric car network in Canberra in 2012 and to explain how the electric car will benefit Australia’s economy, health, foreign relations and environment. Last week, Australians paid an average of $1.24 per litre for unleaded petrol. Soon, they won’t have to. Aside from the heavy burden that the price of petrol places on families, sourcing oil from regions with a history of being politically unstable will in-
evitably result in volatile petrol prices for Australians.

The introduction of hybrid and electric cars presents an opportunity that benefits our health, our environment and our economy. Petrol-consuming passenger vehicles account for nearly half the total of Australia’s liquid fuel consumption, but we will soon have the opportunity to shift these vehicles’ power source from petrol to electricity.

Producing electricity for travel in hybrid and electric cars through current national electricity generation methods would release less greenhouse gas emissions than combustion in petrol cars. Indeed, an electric car powered by electricity from a coal fired power station emits less greenhouse gas than a petrol car.

But we can do even better if the electricity comes from renewables. Currently, Australia generates 15,000 gigawatt hours of renewable energy, sufficient to supply a fleet of five million electric cars without any ‘well to wheel’ greenhouse gas emissions. The Gillard government is committed to generating 20 per cent of Australia’s electricity from renewable sources by 2020, which will equate to 45,000 gigawatt hours of renewable energy annually—enough to supply an entire national electric car fleet without any greenhouse gas emissions.

The health benefits of electric cars are also significant. Unlike petrol vehicles, electric cars have no tailpipe emissions only pre-combustion emissions which, unlike those from petrol vehicles, include virtually no carbon monoxide, hydrocarbons or particulate matter emissions and only a quarter of the nitrogen oxides that are released by petrol vehicles. The total reduction of air pollutants in electric vehicles’ emissions compared to petrol vehicles’ emissions ranges between 10 and 20 grams per kilometre.

The emissions produced throughout the electric car’s life cycle, in the manufacturing and disposal processes, are difficult to predict, due to the ever-evolving and highly complex automotive manufacturing industry and its supply industries. At this stage, research from MIT indicates that electric cars require 20 per cent less lifecycle energy and associated greenhouse gas emissions than petrol vehicles. Electric vehicles will also require less maintenance, as they have 70 per cent fewer moving and consumable parts, which is estimated to halve maintenance costs over ten years.

Australia’s power generation and distribution infrastructure will most likely not need to be expanded to produce extra electricity for electric cars. The power produced by renewable solar and wind sources varies over the day. Therefore, electric cars will charge during the time required by the driver at charging rates that vary according to the current electricity available and demand for distribution. This minimises the impact of the cars on the energy infrastructure, and allows cars to collect and store up to seven kilowatts of energy generated in times of low electricity demand that would otherwise be wasted. A car can then later return any surplus energy to the grid in periods of high demand to power the community or other cars that require immediate charging—greatly reducing the demand for additional energy generation to charge electric cars.

By capturing, saving and then returning excess energy to the grid, excess energy that Australia generated but would not otherwise have used or stored, each electric car could enable, for example, the retention of 43 megawatt hours of renewable wind energy annually—while each electric vehicle would require only 2.7 megawatt hours of electricity to recharge over a year. By each car effectively saving 40 megawatt hours of energy that would otherwise be lost, a fleet of one
million electric vehicles would therefore allow the realisation of the 45,000 gigawatt hours of renewable energy required by the federal Renewable Energy Target.

The introduction of the electric car to Canberra in 2012 presents Australia with an unprecedented opportunity to increase our international independence and economic stability, to decrease car maintenance costs and increase the health of Australians, and the possibility of greatly reducing Australia’s greenhouse gas emissions. This is an opportunity we must grasp with both hands—an opportunity that our nation cannot afford to miss.

Mine Emergency Response Competition

Mr CROOK (O’Connor) (7.54 pm)—I rise tonight to advise the House of a recent Chamber of Minerals and Energy of WA Eastern Regional Council Underground Mine Emergency Response Competition. The competition was held from 5 June to 7 June this year at the famous Kalgoorlie-Boulder Mt Charlotte Gold Mine, managed by Kalgoorlie Consolidated Gold Mine who also operate the famous super pit. Some 13 mine rescue teams competed. They were: Agnew Gold Mine, Barrick Kanowna, Cosmos Operations, KCGM, La Mancha Resources, Leinster Operation, MMG Golden Grove, Newmont Jundee, St Ives, Sunrise Dam Gold Mine, two teams from Yilgarn One and Yilgarn Two representing Barrick, and Kambalda Mutual Aid, which is a team made up of three companies—Silver Lake Resources, Lightning Nickel and Mincor North.

The skills that the teams were tested on included search and rescue, firefighting, first aid, rope rescue, the use of breathing apparatus, theory and team skills and team safety. I can assure the House that there was plenty of team spirit at the awards dinner held at the Australian Prospectors and Miners Hall of Fame at the conclusion of the event. Having well-trained and well-drilled mines rescue and safety teams and procedures is critical in today’s mining industry. I applaud all the people who partake in these activities and all the mining companies that commit so strongly to this initiative.

The importance of having well-trained and resourced emergency response teams has been highlighted by recent events in Chile and, as we speak, the Pike River Mine in New Zealand. My prayers and hopes are with those missing and their families and friends who eagerly await the outcome for their loved ones. Of course, we cannot forget the Beaconsfield mine accident in April in 2006 where mine rescue came to the fore.

Coming from a mining town in a mining state, the way in which industry and government deal with mine safety and emergency response is an imperative for the safety of workers and the future of the sector. I wish to acknowledge the overall team winner in this competition: Sunrise Dam from Ashanti Gold Australia. I would also like to congratulate all of the teams and people involved in the mine rescue competition for competing and looking to further their skills for the safety of their fellow workers. These events cannot be carried out without funding and I congratulate all who sponsored this very worthy event.

In closing, I would like to acknowledge the efforts of Matthew Payne, who was the Goldfields Regional Liaison Officer at the Chamber of Minerals and Energy. Mathew has now unfortunately left the goldfields and moved to Perth to further his career. Mathew has been a great champion of the mining industry and an outstanding member of the goldfields community and will be missed. I would also like to acknowledge the efforts of Russell Cole, the General Manager at KCGM, for his commitment to the mine rescue program.
Question agreed to.

**House adjourned at 7.57 pm**

**NOTICES**

The following notices were given:

**Mr Albanese** to present a Bill for an Act to amend legislation relating to telecommunications, and for other purposes.

**Mr Albanese** to present a Bill for an Act relating to certain companies associated with the national broadband network, and for other purposes.

**Ms Collins** to present a Bill for an Act to amend the Medicare Australia Act 1973, the Commonwealth Services Delivery Agency Act 1997 and the Child Support (Registration and Collection) Act 1988, and for other purposes.

**Mr Crean** to move:

That, in accordance with section 5 of the *Parliament Act 1974*, the House approves the following proposal for works in the Parliamentary Zone which was presented to the House on 22 November 2010, namely: External expansion to the Abacus Childcare Centre at the Treasury Building.

**Mr Champion** to move:

That this House:

(1) notes that:

(a) Australian Building and Construction Commission (ABCC) created under the Howard Government’s industrial relations legislation unfairly targets workers in the construction industry; and

(b) Government believes the current ABCC should be abolished and replaced with a new inspectorate that is part of the Fair Work Australia system; and

(2) calls on all Members to support the abolition of the ABCC to restore fairness in the construction industry for workers and employers.

**Mr Bandt** to move:

That this House:

(1) notes that:

(a) Christmas Day falls on a Saturday in 2010;

(b) in some parts of Australia, notably Victoria, SA, the NT and the ACT, workers who are working on Christmas Day will not receive public holiday penalty rates;

(c) the Tasmanian Parliament recently moved to ensure workers in Tasmania received fair compensation this Christmas; and

(d) it is unjust for workers having to work on Christmas Day not to receive appropriate remuneration for having to sacrifice time with family and friends at Christmas; and

(2) calls on the Government to ensure a common standard across the country that public holiday penalty rates are paid to all workers who have to work on Christmas Day regardless of the day of the week Christmas falls on.
The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper) took the chair at 9.30 am.

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

Dulwich High School of Visual Arts and Design: Social Justice Committee

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) (9.30 am)—I rise to recognise the outstanding work and achievements of the student Social Justice Committee of the Dulwich High School of Visual Arts and Design. Every year I have met with the Social Justice Committee from the school here in Canberra to hear their concerns and their ideas on actions the developed world can take to help alleviate poverty and improve the quality of life in the developing world.

Recently I had the pleasure of attending a school assembly organised by the students to raise awareness and remind the governments of the developed world of their commitments made in 2000 to halve global poverty by 2015 under the Millennium Development Goals. Students themed the assembly as a fifth birthday party as part of the Micah Challenge, focusing on millennium development goals 4 and 5, dealing with child and maternal mortality.

The Australian government is doing its bit to help deliver on the Millennium Development Goals. Since 2000 more than 900,000 children have been immunised in Papua New Guinea against measles and other childhood illnesses. In East Timor, investment by the Australian government in health programs and initiatives has seen the maternal death rate fall by a third since 2000. In Indonesia, investment by the Australian government to renovate more than 2,000 junior and secondary schools has provided access to education for an additional 330,000 children. In Zimbabwe, Kenya and Malawi, investment into safe water points in communities has helped 51,000 people have access to clean water and sanitation.

Despite progress being made by the developed world towards the Millennium Development Goals, there is still much more that the developed world needs to do. In 2008, 8.8 million children around the world died before the age of five. Every year 500,000 women and girls die as a result of complications during pregnancy or childbirth, with 99 per cent of deaths occurring in developing countries. However, it does give me great hope to see young people, such as those at Dulwich High School, who are socially aware and are willing to do something to make a difference. I commend the work and the students of the Social Justice Committee of the Dulwich High School of Visual Arts and Design for their fantastic achievements and ongoing work.

Wide Bay Electorate: Ginger Industry

Mr TRUSS (Wide Bay—Leader of the Nationals) (9.33 am)—I rise to support Australian ginger growers, many of whom are in my electorate, who are concerned about the long delays in implementing a statutory levy for research and development in the ginger industry. I have been informed by Mr Gant Davison, President of the Australian Ginger Growers Association, that the latest advice from the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry is that it may not be able to implement the levy even by the delayed commencement date of 1 April 2011. There is overwhelming support for this levy among ginger growers, heightened by the urgent need for research into combating the disease Pythium myriotylum. This disease is responsible
for severe rhizome rot and was first identified by ginger growers in the 2007-08 growing season, with some producers reporting total losses in some blocks.

Ginger growing is a small but very important industry in Queensland, with approximately 50 per cent of processed ginger being exported. Ginger growers have been going through the process of instituting a statutory levy for research and development for their industry and are appalled by the delay being experienced with government departments. The levy was voted on by ginger growers according to all the guidelines outlined in this parliament and received 88.2 per cent support. This levy is needed to fund research and development for the industry and attracts a government matching contribution.

I will briefly summarise the history. Late in 2009 the framework was set to have the statutory levy voted upon by all ginger growers. In January 2010 it was put to a vote and overwhelmingly supported. On 23 February this year the levy proposal was lodged with the department. The department raised a number of questions, which were promptly answered. Industry was advised that all the issues had been addressed and that the matter would be progressed. Everyone expected an implementation date of 1 October this year. That date has passed. The industry has now been advised that the next nominated date, 1 January 2011, will be impossible, and now an April date is also being placed in question. No assurances are available as to when this will start.

This is simply not good enough. We know that the government does not have a high regard for the importance of rural research. The Department of Finance and Deregulation has been trying to cut expenditure on rural research for a long time, but it is time for the government to act. This research is vital for the industry. The delays are simply unacceptable. The parliamentary secretary needs to take urgent action to make sure that these administrative arrangements are dealt with promptly.

Calwell Electorate: Ethnic Communities

Ms VAMVAKINOU (Calwell) (9.36 am)—I rise today to speak about an issue that has deeply distressed members of the Assyrian, Syriac and Chaldean communities in my electorate of Calwell. I refer to the recent senseless and violent attack, on 31 October, on Our Lady of Salvation Syriac Catholic Church in Baghdad’s Karada district, which, members might remember, resulted in the killing of 58 innocent people and the injuring of 60 others.

Members of my community still have family in Iraq, and they themselves have come here under the Refugee and Humanitarian Program. They are grateful for the opportunity that has been given to them to live in a stable and peaceful country such as Australia, and they are indeed making a great contribution in their new homeland. But it is also their great wish that the people they have left behind, many of whom are family members, be able to look to a more stable and less violent future.

The Assyrian, Syriac and Chaldean communities in Calwell continue to advocate for the protection of the Christian minority in particular, and look to the Australian government to do its utmost to assist in securing that protection. This latest incident is one of many. It is an attack not only on those who lost their lives in this senseless murder or on those left maimed and wounded but on Iraq as a whole—on the people of Iraq. Crimes such as this cannot be attributed to one community or one religion. They are an overall attack on Iraq’s people and on their way of life and future prospects. So I join with the Assyrian, Syriac and Chaldean
communities, who on Friday, 12 November staged a public protest on the steps of the Victorian parliament. I join with them in their strong condemnation of these senseless murders, and I encourage other members of this House to participate in that condemnation.

On another matter, I want to congratulate the Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia. Next Tuesday, 30 November, they are holding a press conference in Sydney at which they will launch their statement on multiculturalism, which is part of a submission that they are putting to government. I congratulate them on this initiative and look forward to working with them in progressing the aim of the statement, titled Reclaiming multiculturalism.

Finally, I seek leave to table 2,947 signatures to a petition which has already been presented and cleared by the Petitions Committee. It is a petition regarding the inclusion of the Modern Greek language in the national curriculum. This latest instalment of petitions takes the number of signatures already collected and submitted to this parliament to the sum total of 25,052.

Leave granted.

The petition read as follows—

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

This petition of Certain citizens of Australia including representatives of community, educational, political organisations, institutions and establishments across the country draws to the attention of the House: The matter of the importance of including the Modern Greek language in the National Schools Curriculum as a language of cultural, community, historical and economic importance to Australia and the Australian people.

We therefore ask the House to: Ensure that the Modern Greek language is included in the National Schools Curriculum currently being developed by the Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority.

from 2,947 citizens

Petition received.

Forde Electorate: Save Bahrs Scrub Alliance

Mr VAN MANEN (Forde) (9.39 am)—The Save Bahrs Scrub Alliance, with the support of a Logan City EnviroGrant, has recently produced a flora book which describes some of the precious and rare plants found in the Bahrs Scrub precinct, presently threatened by development. Previous approvals by the Gold Coast City Council for residential development in Bannockburn, Bahrs Scrub and Clarkes Hill have removed fauna corridors and koala habitat. This is the reason a group called the Save Bahrs Scrub Alliance has been formed—to save this unique piece of rainforest and a significant landmark within the Forde electorate.

Bahrs Scrub is a significant area of bushland in the electorate, situated near Windaroo. Parts of Bahrs Scrub are classified as lowland, subtropical rainforest, which are unfortunately the last remnants of what was once much more extensive. Bahrs Scrub has been called unique by botanists, as there are at least 456 native plant species in the area, which is classed as extraordinarily high for such a small area. Adding to its uniqueness is the fact that at least 12 species of plants at Bahrs Scrub are classified as rare or threatened.

Recently, Logan City Council released the Bahrs Scrub Local Development Area Plan. This land is identified in the South East Queensland Regional Plan 2009-2031 as an area that can
accommodate urban residential development in the short term, and provide recreation and open space opportunities for residents. Logan City Council has a vision for the Bahrs Scrub local development area to develop as an urban residential community catering for a population of some 11,000 residents during the next 15 to 20 years.

Bahrs Scrub has been classified previously as worth protecting, with the Gold Coast City Council’s NatureMapping review of 2005 identifying the forests of Bahrs Scrub as being of state significance for conservation. In May 2009, the Border Ranges Rainforest Diversity Management Plan, for New South Wales and Queensland, also identified the rainforests of Bahrs Scrub as a hot spot of significant biodiversity and a priority for management. Previously, in a DPI vegetation mapping series of the late 1970s, Bahrs Scrub rainforests were identified as areas to be permanently protected as a scientific resource.

The electorate of Forde is very fortunate to have an area such as Bahrs Scrub, as well as community groups that are looking to protect it. It would be a shame to lose such a valuable and unique piece of land. My office will continue to work with relevant stakeholders in the hope of achieving the broader aim of protecting this valuable area for future generations. (Time expired)

Tangney Electorate: Paid Parental Leave

Dr JENSEN (Tangney) (9.42 am)—I rise to speak on an issue brought to me by some constituents in my electorate—namely, the cost to small business associated with 18 weeks of paid parental leave. It is not only the cost of salary and wages to replace staff that go on maternity leave that affects small business but also the costs that occur due to the loss of knowledge and skills during the leave period and the cost of training and skilling replacement staff. I bring to the attention of the House the experience of Kim Savill, Financial Controller of Dragnet Technology and Consulting:

We are a small family owned IT business, running since 1998.

It is difficult enough to run the business when someone goes on holiday or is sick let alone if we are faced with losing a vital member of the team for 18 weeks.

We would have to employ someone on a contract basis which is expensive and difficult as it takes 2 months on average to get someone up to speed with our customers and procedures.

If we had to hold a position open for 18 weeks we would not be able to grant anyone else leave and pray that no one became ill.

We are finding it hard enough in this current economic climate.

The prospect of this new Parental Leave entitlement is a major issue for us.

We feel the current government has no concept of what it is like to run a small business, the dedication, work, sacrifice and stress.

The actions of a few sully the majority and it makes my blood boil when I see government advertisements showing employers as uncaring, greedy thugs.

We need Canberra to understand the consequences of decisions made in the nation’s capital.

I would like Dr Jensen to ask the Labour government how we are to cope with this situation.

So I put that question to the House and to the Gillard government, which introduced the scheme: how are small businesses expected to absorb all the costs associated with paid parental leave and continue to be profitable organisations? Have the government actually modelled the wider impacts of this policy on small business, and do they understand the financial bur-
den on small business of their paid parental leave policy? Our economy is still fragile in many small business sectors, and the imposition of increased costs by the government in this way serves to demolish the very backbone of our economy for the benefit of a small few.

**Member for Kennedy: Policy Wish List**

Mr KATTER (Kennedy) (9.44 am)—Today I rise to speak about 20 key points that were put together by some of the nation’s better intellects and I would like to think I made a small contribution to those myself. I have been pushing a number of these points over most of my lifetime. I move very quickly to them. No. 1 is the creation of a national energy grid, facilitating resource development; the decentralisation of population; and continuous access to renewable, clean energy resources, specifically solar, biofuels, wind and geothermal. The fuel for each of these is free forever. Government commitment to clean energy projects along the North Australia clean energy corridor section of the grid is essential to achieving a range of policy objectives common to both the ALP and the Liberal Party. Whilst the two giant projects, the Kennedy wind farm at Hughenden and the Pentland solar and biofuel project near Charters Towers, require little financial assistance they do, however, require a strong government commitment.

No. 2 is the removal of tax on Australian produced biofuels and the introduction of a statutory 10 per cent ethanol content in all petrol, rising to 22 per cent, as in Brazil. Such measure is to be overseen by a production and marketing implementation board, controlling prices from the farm gate to bowser, and allocating production centres for sugar and grain. Such board is to exclude representatives of the oil corporations, Woolworths and Coles. This will restore self-sufficiency in oil to our country, removing the aromatics and small particle emissions—both of which are carcinogenic—and will reduce the price of fuel to Brazil and United States’s prices—73c and 84c respectively. These were Sao Paulo and Minnesota prices in 2008. The Australian price of fuel at the same time was $1.38 per litre. This process will also reduce the carbon footprint, restoring viability to the grains, cattle and sugar industries by creating some 30,000 jobs in rural Australia.

No. 3 relates to addressing the two-chain oligopoly market concentration in the Australian food-retailing sector, with the option of divestment. Also, a maximum market share for any chain of only 22.5 per cent and/or adopting the European approach of a maximum mark-up of 100 per cent between the farm gate/factory price and the retail price, with a board to determine ‘unders’ and ‘overs’ and exceptions to the rule or some other similar proposal to restore a fairer and/or more competitive marketplace. This relates to the so-called Woolworths/Coles problems where these two entities hold over 85 per cent of the food market in Australia.

No. 4 concerns the preservation of the Trade Practices Act as it is, including sanctions on predatory pricing, and to amend section 46 to remove the requirement to prove motive with respect to anticompetitive behaviour. *(Time expired)*

**Cowan Electorate**

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (9.48 am)—I take this opportunity to raise an issue concerning a planning matter that greatly affects several hundred of my constituents in the electorate of Cowan. Landsdale is a suburb in Cowan. It is a very good area where families are doing well. Parents are working hard and providing a great future for their children. It is an authentic and aspirational part of Australia which, particularly over the last 10 years, has become a highly
sought after suburb. It is a suburb based around Broadview Park and Warradale Park, each with its own small lake. As with all subdivisions, those who were looking to buy lots and build their own great Australian dream had choices to make as to where they would buy their lot. They had choices of lots with various views or of lots that were perhaps close to the schools in the area or near to the shops. They could also pay a little less for the higher volume streets or pay a little more for the quieter, dead-end streets. Such streets that appeared on the maps of the developers included Hamel Close, Kevo Place, Grayswood Court, Rosebud Court and Mossfiel Retreat. I make the point that the descriptors of these streets all directly implied dead-end streets. ‘Close,’ ‘place,’ ‘court’ and ‘retreat’ are all clearly terminating streets and not-through streets. So it was the case when many of my constituents were buying their lots or later buying existing houses in those particular streets that they were drawn to a quieter lifestyle and were prepared to meet the premium cost attached. They have told me that the developers told them that these streets, Hamel Close, Kevo Place, Grayswood Court, Rosebud Court and Mossfiel Retreat, would remain closed and that belief was reinforced by the descriptors.

Naturally these same people were upset when, in 2008, the City of Wanneroo advertised on large signs in the area a local structure plan that detailed that their streets would be open to the new development of East Landsdale. On 6 August 2008, within a day or so of the signs being put up, I had a conversation with a local resident, and on 7 August I distributed a flyer alerting locals to the proposal to open their streets up to through traffic and informing them of the submission I would be making to the City of Wanneroo about it. On 22 August 2008 I sent my submission to the City of Wanneroo supporting the local residents, and on 26 August my petition, with 115 names, went to the City of Wanneroo opposing the local structure plan. It was only on 11 November and again on 18 November 2008 that the City of Wanneroo discussed this serious situation in council. I am a little surprised that it was only after my flyer that the city realised that what they had advertised was a major issue for local people. Nevertheless, the city eventually fully opposed the opening of these streets, and I am very happy about that.

Unfortunately, what has now transpired is that the WA Planning Commission have rejected the City of Wanneroo’s modifications to the structure plan that would have seen these streets closed for good. The commission have not sought to engage with locals, they have not sought to explain their decisions to locals, and their actions amount to nothing short of arbitrary judgment. Clearly there needs to be a willingness for the commission to be prepared to stand by their decisions and appear before the local people at a public meeting. I therefore call upon the Planning Commission to arrange a date for a public meeting and explain why they have made a decision that ignores the views of residents whose property values and lifestyles will suffer as a result of this decision.

Defence: Army Reserve

Mr MARLES (Corio—Parliamentary Secretary for Pacific Island Affairs) (9.51 am)—It is my great privilege as the Parliamentary Secretary for Pacific Island Affairs to visit our neighbours in the Pacific islands. Ours is a deep and enduring friendship, and part of my role is to reinforce the importance of this friendship to Australia. On my recent trip to the Solomon Islands, I discovered that that friendship extends much closer to home than I expected. During a tour of the headquarters of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands, otherwise known as RAMSI, I had the pleasure of meeting a young woman from my home town of Gee-
long. Private Tegan Bubb is a 20-year-old Army reservist currently deployed with rotation 22, Operation Anode, part of the Australian Army’s Combined Task Force 635. The former Belmont High School student joined the Army in 2009 under the ADF Gap Year program and was posted to Townsville as a clerk administrative. She was then transferred to the Army Reserve and posted back in Geelong to the 8th/7th Battalion, Royal Victoria Regiment, at the start of 2010. Private Bubb deferred her studies at the Victorian Fitness Academy to take up her deployment with RAMSI and is one of only 10 women in the Australian Defence Force contribution to the Solomons.

I was also surprised to discover that Private Bubb is one of 17 Army reservists from Geelong currently serving with RAMSI in the Solomon Islands. Among the 16 others are the company commander, a clerk and 14 riflemen. They are of all ages, from 20 to 59, and from all occupations. Each has taken six months leave from their studies or their job as a public servant, as a municipal worker or within private industry. They are serving their community proudly, and I am pleased to say they will be welcomed home by family and friends when their deployment is complete before Christmas. Just under 80 per cent of the current rotation from the Australian Defence Force are Victorians. Most of these are reservists. Some have already served in the Solomons previously or in East Timor. Many were also involved in the search and recovery operation that was carried out in the tragic aftermath of Victoria’s Black Saturday bushfires.

We rarely give a thought to the work of our reservists, but my visit to the Solomon Islands gave me an opportunity to meet with them and to see firsthand the work that they do. We should be grateful for their contribution and for their preparedness to put study and careers on hold to serve their country. As the member for Corio, I am doubly proud to see that the people of Geelong are so willingly there to do their bit.

Deakin Electorate: Cheong Park

Mr SYMON (Deakin) (9.54 am)—Cheong Park reserve is home to the South Croydon football and cricket clubs. The seniors football club is in Division 1 of the EFL, which is a testament to the hard work and skills of the players, coaches and administration of the club. Cheong Park is a well-used local sporting ground that is desperately in need of new infrastructure. I have been along there to see the state of the oval and the pavilion both on game days and at quieter times during the week.

I was taken around the facilities by Stephen Quon, the president of the South Croydon Football Club. He showed me some of the things that they have to put up with on a weekly basis when the club has its players along for a game or during the week when they are just training. Of course, it is not only the players but also the umpires, the volunteers and the supporters who keep local clubs like South Croydon growing. I went along to the ground on 7 August this year to see for myself what it was like. I can tell you that there was hardly a blade of grass on the ground. The entire ground was a mud hole, except for a little bit of grass in one of the forward pockets. The players were just covered in mud. They were all dark brown. You really could not tell who was on which side. Even worse than that, it is a special type of mud. It is the sort of mud that really stinks, so not only were they dirty but they smelled pretty bad too.

I also had a look at the pavilion and the facilities within it. Being built in the early 1970s, like so many pieces of infrastructure in my electorate of Deakin, it is seriously out of date. It
does not have modern change facilities. It does not have female facilities. It does not have
disability access. Of course, the club is successful, so its pavilion is now way too small. So
during the federal election campaign it was with great pleasure that I was able to convey La-
bor’s commitment of $250,000 to upgrade Cheong Park, an announcement that was greatly
welcomed.

Just last week the ALP’s candidate for the state electorate of Kilsyth, Vicki Setches, an-
nounced that a re-elected Brumby Labor government would provide an additional $500,000
for upgrading the pavilion and to provide female change rooms along with lights for night
training. I have known Vicki for many years. Vicki is a fantastic, hardworking local. She ad-
 vocates very well for her community and she would be a great advocate for Kilsyth as the
new member for Kilsyth. I wish Vicki every success at this Saturday’s Victorian state election
and note that, whichever way the result goes, Vicki will still be there working to improve our
local community and sporting facilities.

**Solomon Electorate: Community Service**

*Mrs GRIGGS* (Solomon) (9.56 am)—I rise today to share some exceptional achievements
of people in my electorate. I wish to acknowledge the outstanding effort of Yazmin Brown, a
17-year-old who has been named the Australian school based apprentice of the year. Yazmin
has been studying a certificate III in automotive technology at Casuarina Senior College and
also works at Kerry’s Automotive Group in Stuart Park. Yazmin recently appeared in a *Nor-
thern Territory News* article and provided this valuable piece of advice to other young people
starting out in their careers:

As long as you have passion for what you’re doing, you’ll stay in it.

I think we in this place would all agree that these are wise words for someone so young.

I also wish to acknowledge Sitzler, who won the national workplace health and safety
commercial award at the Master Builders national awards here in Canberra last Friday night.
This award was for the fin fan walkways stair and ladder installation. I extend to the director
of Sitzler, Steve Margetic, and his staff who worked on this project my sincere congratulations.
Workplace safety is for everyone.

I also want to share the fantastic initiative by Mark Noonan, the AFLNT umpire and game
development manager, who runs a program where prisoners from Berrimah prison are re-
 cruited and trained as boundary umpires in the AFLNT competition. I understand that there
are about a dozen prisoners who have been recruited and around six now officiate as boundary
umpires each weekend. The results are very encouraging. The aim of this program is to assist
with the rehabilitation of prisoners and also to increase umpiring resources. In a recent ABC
*Stateline* interview, the prisoners talked about the respect they had gained from others and for
themselves by participating in this program. Each one has talked about the improved disci-
pline they have felt as a result. I wish to congratulate the AFLNT and Corrective Services for
embracing this initiative and in particular Mr Mark Noonan, who instructs and coaches these
men.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity, given that it will probably be the last time I
rise in this place before Christmas, to wish my parliamentary colleagues and their staff a safe
and merry Christmas. As a new member, I extend my personal thanks to those more experi-
enced than I who have given me a helping hand. But I wish to remind honourable members
that there will be those who will find it difficult this Christmas for a variety of reasons. Some
will be experiencing a sense of loss, missing those loved ones overseas with the Australian
Defence Force, and some will be struggling financially under the pressures associated with
the cost of living. I encourage all Australians to support those families in need. In my elector-
ate of Solomon, it can be as simple as putting a gift under the Kmart wishing tree or donating
food at a Salvation Army or St Vinnie’s collection point. I wish everyone in the electorate of
Solomon a merry Christmas and a happy new year.

People Trafficking

Mr HAYES (Fowler) (9.59 am)—I have just come from a meeting with a number of nuns
from Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans who are working to do
something about the unlawful trading of women—effectively slavery—in this country. When
we go about our electorates, we would not ordinarily think that that occurs here. One thing
they wanted to stress is that this is not just about sex workers but also about people being
brought into the country and exploited by restaurants, the clothing trade and other areas where
people are restricted because of their illegal entry. They are quarantined away, so they live
separately and cannot go to the authorities or the police. A disturbing point the sisters pointed
out to me is that, when they are found and repatriated to their own countries, the stigma at-
tached to those women as a consequence of being traded has the effect that they are probably
going to be subjected to human trafficking once again. Mr Deputy Speaker, thank you for the
opportunity to raise this matter.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)—Order! In accordance with standing or-
der 193 the time for constituency statements has concluded.

GOVERNOR-GENERAL’S SPEECH

Address-in-Reply

Debate resumed from 22 November, 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.

Mr HAASE (Durack) (10.01 am)—This is a parliament of firsts. On the occasion of the
Governor-General’s speech at the opening of the 43rd Parliament, we had a remarkable situa-
tion. For the first time in 30 years the chamber was no longer blessed with the presence of the
Hon. Wilson Tuckey. This parliament is worse off for his absence. It is true: you do not know
what you have till it is gone. It is also the first time we have had a woman elected as Prime
Minister of this country and, at the same time, a woman representing Her Majesty Queen
Elizabeth II, Queen of Australia. I note also that we have a hung parliament.

It is with mixed emotions I stand here today, I am not new to this House; in fact, this is the
fifth time I have been elected to represent people of Western Australia. What is new is that
today I stand here proudly as the first member for the new electorate of Durack. For 12 years I
represented the people of the Kalgoorlie electorate, or 91 per cent of Western Australia, and
now, due to the electoral boundary changes, the Federation seat of Kalgoorlie is gone—it no longer exists. They say change is like a holiday. Let me tell you, this change has been akin to holidaying in the salt mines of Siberia. With the boundary changes I have moved office from the city of Kalgoorlie-Boulder to the city of Geraldton-Greenough, from the rich red earth to the bright blue Indian Ocean. Moving office was not as easy as I had envisaged.

One thing that has not changed is the ongoing support I have had from constituents, volunteers and staff—staff that worked relentlessly in an election campaign knowing that in the end they were out of a job. They are valuable staff—staff that have endured me, I might add, for many years. I acknowledge and thank the ever-suffering Linda Crook, Pam Foulkes-Taylor, Nikki Fleming, Samantha Jones and Jacki Green, staff I was very sorry to leave behind in Kalgoorlie. It is not easy to maintain a team when you move the office 1,000 kilometres. I thank the hundreds of volunteers who manned the 108 polling booths across Durack and I thank the constituents who put their faith in me and cast a vote in my favour. The election outcome in Durack was decisive: a clear indication of the rejection of minor parties and a rejection of homespun parties that would not support a conservative coalition in Canberra. I thank all Liberal supporters for contributing to that result. I thank my son, Shane, and his girlfriend, Kate. I am greatly indebted to my brother, Murray, my sister, Dianne, her husband, Ken, and Sue Ellen and Clive for their years of unwavering support and hands-on help given whenever needed.

The new electorate of Durack, just 63 per cent of Western Australia, covers an area of over 1½ million square kilometres, or about a quarter of Australia. Durack is 61,068 times greater in size than the electorate of Wentworth and is made up of 43 local government areas, including the Shire of East Pilbara, the largest shire in the world, comprising an area of over 371,696 square kilometres—larger than the state of Victoria—from Kalumburu in the north to Merredin in the south, with Geraldton-Greenough being the major population centre.

Western Australia continues to lead the way as Australia’s premier resource investment destination. There is currently more than $150 billion worth of projects either committed or under consideration for the state during the next few years, the majority in Durack. The Chamber of Minerals and Energy of WA estimates that an additional 38,000 employees will be required by the minerals and energy sector in the next three to five years. Total direct employment in the minerals and energy sector currently stands at about 85,700 people.

In the waters off the Durack coast from Exmouth to the Northern Territory border we are blessed with natural gas resources which are the envy of the world. The 2009 total known resource is 151.7 trillion cubic feet. The Gorgon project alone will generate $40 billion of taxes over the next 30 years of operational life. The resource contains about 40 trillion cubic feet of LNG. That is enough to power a city of one million people for 800 years. LNG processing at Barrow Island Onslow, Devils Creek, Burrup Peninsula and James Price Point will employ thousands of Australians and contribute billions of dollars to our balance of trade.

Whilst mining and petroleum are an integral and highly valuable part of the electorate, they are only one aspect of Durack. The greatest part of the western rock lobster industry, the most valuable fishery in Australia, is between Cervantes and Kalbarri. In a good season WA produces about 80 per cent of Australia’s export grain and 70 per cent of that comes from Durack. Including all other agricultural pursuits our annual production is worth $1.9 billion.
In this newly-defined electorate of Durack, the range of resources and activities is breathtaking: iconic places, high-cost infrastructure, natural treasures and amazing people. The Argyle Diamond Mine, located in the East Kimberley region south of Kununurra, is by volume the largest producer in the world. It is a significant source of pink diamonds, producing over 90 per cent of the world’s supply. Lake Argyle, with the largest freshwater storage in mainland Australia and more than nine times the water volume of Sydney Harbour, produces water for the Ord River Irrigation Area; 14,000 hectares producing a range of horticultural products, tropical fruits, chia and sandalwood. And now, thanks to a commitment by the Howard government in 2007, stage 2 is underway.

South of Halls Creek is Wolf Creek Crater, the second largest in the world at 850 metres in diameter. Also in the Kimberley are the World Heritage listed Bungle Bungle Ranges in the Purnululu National Park. In Kununurra, Lee Scott-Virtue, founder of the Kimberley Toad Busters, and her band of over 5,000 volunteers have contributed over 1.5 million hours of volunteer time. They have removed from the environment over 500,000 cane toads in their effort to slow down the advance of this toxic pest. The Kimberley Toad Busters’ Caring for the Kimberley Environmental Forum and the ‘what’s in your backyard?’ program were recognized in the 2010 International Year of Biodiversity schedule of events calendar. These are the only Australian events to be awarded this status by the United Nations.

Well-known tourist destination Broome, home of the now famous South Sea pearls is a perfect stepping off point to explore the Kimberley wilderness. In 2009-10 Port Hedland, Australia’s largest tonnage port, had a record throughput of 178.6 million tonnes. The Dampier archipelago off Karratha, home of the Woodside LNG processing facility, is also home to an extraordinary collection of ancient Indigenous rock art. It is highly regarded as the largest concentration of petroglyphs in the world. The port of Dampier, constantly vying for record holder status with Port Hedland due to Rio Tinto’s iron ore exports, also hosts Dampier Salt, the world’s largest exporter of solar salt with 9.5 million tonnes of salt each year.

Recently there has been much local excitement created in the town of Exmouth—originally constructed in 1964 as a support town for the United States naval communications station, Harold E Holt—by speculation that a US space communications system will be housed there. Ningaloo Reef is the great attraction that brings thousands of tourists to Exmouth and Coral Bay each year. Challenging the Great Barrier Reef in its diversity, it deserves to be overwhelmingly more popular due to its ease of accessibility: drive to Coral Bay, step off the beach and it is right there.

Away from the coast, in the Murchison, we have the nation’s second-biggest uranium deposit, Yeelirrie, and, on Boolardy Station, the perfect site for the next generation radio telescope—the Square Kilometre Array. Further analysis and research continues in our bid to win this billion dollar international project. Carnarvon, at the mouth of the Gascoyne River, boasts not only a horticultural district with world’s best practice drip irrigation systems but an extremely lucrative seafood industry. The extensive iron ore deposits, both haematite and magnetite, of the Murchison and mid-west are the commercial justification for the construction of the Oakajee Port and Rail project. This deepwater port, 25 kilometres north of Geraldton, will create diversity of employment which is vital in an agricultural area suffering the vagaries of climate change.
Situated 25 kilometres south-east of Merredin in Western Australia, the Collgar wind farm project is the largest single-stage wind farm development currently under construction in the Southern Hemisphere. The wind farm will generate approximately 792,000 megawatt hours of renewable electricity per year from 111 wind turbines, enough to power 125,000 homes. Unfortunately, the central wheat belt region has this season suffered a severe shortage of rain, and we are all very thankful there is already some degree of alternative commercial diversity. For many years Merredin has been the site for airline pilot training and it supplies China Southern Airlines with flight training for hundreds of pilots a year. In addition to such diversity, we now have Globe Drill, a highly experienced exploration drilling company, testing their new GT3000 drill on the western outskirts of Merredin. They are putting down a three-kilometre test hole through granite bedrock. This will be the deepest hole attempted onshore in Western Australia and, when proved successful, the rig’s revolutionary design will slash the costs of geothermal exploration for a green-energy-hungry world.

In addition to reflecting upon the vastness in my electorate, I need to address the Governor-General’s speech. The office of the Prime Minister prepares the Governor-General’s address, outlining the government’s plans for the next three years. The people of Australia would expect to hold dear the words of the Governor-General. However, if we reflect upon the speech delivered by the Governor-General on 12 February 2008 for the opening of the 42nd Parliament, a speech we now know was littered with propaganda and false promises, we get an understanding of how much faith to place in the stated plans of the 43rd Parliament. The government was committed to a plan to build a modern Australia equipped to face the challenges of the 21st century. History tells us that the modern Australia the Labor government built was fraught with waste, incompetency and additional tax proposals.

Let us compare the outcomes versus the commitment of the 42nd Parliament, led by Prime Minister Rudd. The government committed to implementing major changes to Australia’s education system, with the aim of achieving higher standards and better results at every level of education from childhood to mature age. They committed to build 260 new childcare centres on school, TAFE, university and community sites. Only 38 were built—not one in regional Western Australia. They steadfastly said they would increase focus on high-quality child care, yet now they are seeking to reduce the maximum per child amount of childcare rebate to $7,500 per annum and suspend indexation until July 2014.

The government said they would invest $1 billion to provide computers for all years 9 to 12 students and faster broadband connections to schools. Only 345,668 new computers are on students’ desks, and none of them have been connected to fast internet. At this stage the promise of one million computers for one million students by the end of 2011 will not be fulfilled until 2016. The government committed to funding of $2.5 billion, to be provided for secondary schools to build or upgrade trade training facilities over the next 10 years. Before the 2007 election they promised one trade training centre for every one of the 2,650 secondary schools across Australia. Lo and behold, at the beginning of the current school year only one was fully operational.

The Labor government’s commitment to implementing major changes to Australia’s education system in order to achieve higher standards and better results, including mature age education, did not mention that you needed to live in the cities to be part of this achievement. They put a large group of students through emotional hell whilst they fought politically to
disadvantage rural students qualifying for independent youth allowance. The $42 billion Building the Education Revolution stimulus package as part of their education commitment contained a centrepiece building program worth $14.1 billion that sought to add a new iconic building to every primary school in the country. True to Labor tradition, of course there was a cost blow-out this time to the tune of $1.7 billion. Perhaps it would have been more fiscally conservative to add the words ‘value for money’ at the time of writing the guidelines, not seven months down the track.

The government committed to a plan to reform health and hospital systems. This has not happened. In fact they are still arguing about it. It is apparent now that the government will have to reform the GST also. The government said they would also work with the private sector to build a high-speed national broadband network, the critical infrastructure platform of the 21st century, with the capacity to fundamentally transform business to overcome much of the tyranny of distance and to boost productivity growth. That has not happened. Even if it does, only 93 per cent of the Australian population will benefit and guess who the seven per cent are who miss out—it is the very people who need it most, remote Australians. There is $43 billion of further debt without any meaningful cost analysis. No astute business would do it and that, we are told, we should not worry about.

The government committed to assisting small businesses wanting to develop family-friendly practices. In fact, they imposed 9,997 new or amended regulations in less than three years—hardly family friendly. In 2008 the Governor-General told us that the government considers climate change represents one of the greatest long-term economic and environmental challenges. This turned out to be perhaps the greatest international embarrassment Australia has ever suffered. An absolute lack of global support for the government’s climate change ideology amounted to a total failure on this commitment. Now, with the failures and broken promises of 2008 in mind, let us take a look at the 2010 Governor-General’s address to the 43rd Australian Parliament.

The government say they will facilitate the creation of a parliamentary budget office and a new role of parliamentary integrity commissioner. That is quite a blatant admission of the failure of the last three years of the Labor government—a government who governed in their own political interest, not in the national interest, and treated Australians with contempt. The address speaks of:

… the need to build a high-productivity, high-participation, high-skilled economy that delivers sustainable growth for all Australians

That is a lofty aspiration. Now to balance the books they want to hit the mining industry—the saviour of the Australian economy—and rob royalty payments from the states.

We were told that in this term of parliament the government will continue the rollout of Australia’s greatest ever infrastructure enterprise, the National Broadband Network, at a cost to us of $43 billion. They talked about this last time and what has happened? There is still no transparent cost analysis and questions are emerging from consumers regarding affordability.

The government have committed to pursuing measures to increase workplace participation by disadvantaged or disengaged groups including Indigenous Australians. There is still nothing tangible being proposed to improve school attendance to ensure an education as a foundation on which to build job training. The Governor-General’s speech said:
Indigenous communities will benefit from the government’s continued investment in housing, health, early childhood, economic participation and remote service delivery …

The original promise was to build 750 new homes, rebuild 230 homes and deliver 2,500 refurbished homes. The Labor government took nearly two years to build the first house and spent more than $45 million before the first house was even finished. The address states:

… the government seeks to remove the incentive for an asylum seekers to undertake dangerous sea voyages to Australia …

What we do have is record arrivals, universal rejection of an offshore regional processing facility and still no mention of temporary protection visas.

So there we have it, my parliamentary friends—two Governor-General’s speeches, two Labor governments all interwoven with the same thread of hypocrisy. In addition, the barbecue-stopping programs, home insulation, solar panels—

Mr Hayes—Mr Deputy Speaker, on a point of order: I draw your attention to standing order 88:

A Member must not refer disrespectfully to the Queen, the Governor-General, or a State Governor, in debate or for the purpose of influencing the House in its deliberations.

Mr Haase—I withdraw. So there we have it my parliamentary friends, in addition to all of that we have the barbecue-stopping programs of home insulation, solar panels, ‘cash-for-clunkers’, GroceryWatch, FuelWatch, the Green Loan Scheme, exploding debt and borrowings to the tune of $100 million a day. How long will Australians tolerate this bungling and continue to be hoodwinked? The new paradigm of transparency is a complex recipe for inertia achieving much glory for individuals in the short-term and nothing but disaster for Australians in the long-term. With Labor in government but the Greens in power we will continue to ventilate many issues but get nowhere in reducing the cost-of-living blow-out caused by Labor’s financial mismanagement. Merry Christmas.

The Deputy Speaker (Hon. Peter Slipper)—I thank the honourable member for Durack. Before calling the member for Shortland, the Government Whip, the Clerk just mentioned to me in passing that her daughter Hannah Skrzypek visited Broome last week. The question is that the address be noted. I call the Government Whip, the honourable member for Shortland.

Ms Hall (Shortland) (10.21 am)—I commence my contribution to this debate by thanking the people of Shortland for the confidence they have placed in me. I thank them very much for supporting me in the last federal election. I make a commitment to them that I will serve them and respect the great privilege and honour they have placed upon me.

I also thank many other people for helping me in my re-election. I thank all the members of the ALP who worked tirelessly. They made an enormous commitment because they believe in what the Labor Party stands for. They ask nothing more than to have a Labor government and a Labor member of parliament representing them in Canberra. I do appreciate the effort of each and every one of them in working towards having myself and the Gillard government re-elected.

I cannot ignore the contribution of my family. They made an enormous contribution to my campaign and made enormous sacrifices, particularly when there was some illness in the family at the time of the campaign. They still put in big-time and helped have me re-elected.
sometimes wonder why they do that. The families of each and every member of parliament make enormous sacrifices in having us here. We are quite often absent from many family functions and we are often not there to provide the support that is the usual expectation within a family. Overall, I want to put on the record my appreciation for my family and particularly my husband Lindsay.

We had a fantastic campaign team. I would like to acknowledge their contributions as well. Chad Griffith, who stepped into the breach when illness hit; he really was the spearhead of our campaign. He worked very hard and put his life on hold just to be my campaign manager. I thank Chad very much for his contribution. Don and Maggie Bowman—if anyone in this parliament wants to know how to conduct a postal vote campaign then Don and Maggie are the ones to go to. We had a fantastic formula and I thank Don and Maggie for their tireless work and the contributions they made to my campaign.

I also want to mention three other people. Paul Daley, who, I think, I totally exhausted with letterboxing. One day he just could not come out in the afternoon. He has worked tirelessly for me over a number of years in campaigns, along with John Goverd and Kevin McFadden and many other workers. I would just like to particularly single out those people.

I thank very much the people who worked on my booths. I thank the people who worked on pre-poll for the time that they put aside to do that. I thank the people who had my signs in their yards, and I particularly thank those who constantly had them removed and had to have them replaced. I thank Graeme Hamilton and Beryl Bridgefoot for the help that they gave me on street stalls for a number of months and I also thank members of the ALP from North Lakes who helped out as well. I thank my wonderful, wonderful staff for the enormous contribution that they made to my campaign. Kay Fraser would get up early in the morning before she started work and go out and letterbox. It was the same with Mark, Chris, Vicky and Kathy Tudor. I really appreciate the enormous effort that they put in. Thanks also go to Jan, Catherine and Melanie, who worked in the office during the campaign and took many phone calls, and we all know the number of calls that come in during an election campaign.

So I thank my staff and everyone who was involved with the campaign. These are all dedicated people who help me represent them in this parliament because they believe in what the ALP stands for. Some of those values are fairness, equity, inclusiveness and a society free from discrimination. They are the values that drive me as an individual and are the values that drew me to the Labor Party in my early years. I believe we should have a society in which every member is valued, where every child that is born has the same opportunity. Unfortunately, it does not work like that, but I believe that this government has as its goal to try and bring that to fruition. It will not happen in one term, it will not happen in two terms, but it is a goal to work towards. When there are two babies in a hospital, their futures are nearly determined the day they born. I think it is the role of government to help address that inequality and create a system where they have the same opportunities as each other.

Before I move on, I would like to make one other point. One of the things that I find most gratifying as a member, on election day or even after the election, is when you meet with a constituent and they come up to you and say, ‘I voted for you.’ When they say that, they are not saying, ‘I voted for you, so give me this.’ It is as if they have given you one of the greatest gifts that they could give you. I think that goes towards what democracy is about. As a de-
mocratic society people have that right to vote, and when they cast it for us in this place we are very privileged.

Shortland is a very environmentally sensitive coastal electorate, and as such climate change is a very important issue within the electorate. Rising sea levels could see the majority of the electorate go under water. Therefore it is really important for this government to address the issue of climate change. During this next term of parliament we must really work on this issue. I implore members of the opposition to acknowledge the fact that climate change does exist and I encourage them to work with the government to put a price on carbon and put in place other policies and laws that will ensure that electorates like Shortland, including many held by members on the other side, are not decimated as a result of climate change.

The demographics of the Shortland electorate are quite interesting. It is an older electorate; according to the 2006 census, it is the 11th oldest electorate in the country. Because it is an older electorate, health is a very important issue. With an ageing population, you need to make sure that you have proper health infrastructure in place—that there are sufficient numbers of doctors, that there is access to hospitals and that the support services are there on the ground for people as they get older. The Gillard government has put in place health and hospital reforms that will very much benefit the people of Shortland.

We have had a chronic doctor shortage for a very long time in Shortland. When the Howard government were in power, I stood up time and again here in the parliament to raise the need for more GPs and a much larger, stronger health workforce. Unfortunately, those words fell on deaf ears. Under the health and hospital reforms and measures that have been put in place by the Gillard government and the Minister for Health and Ageing, there are more doctors being trained, there are more nurses being trained, there are more allied health professionals being trained and there is more money going into our public hospitals. There has been a mindset to actually address the issues that surround health and ensure that we have a hospital and health system that can cope with our needs in the 21st century.

Education is an issue that is very important to all members on this side of the parliament. In the Shortland electorate, the Building the Education Revolution has provided much-needed resources, upgrades and capital works in schools. I have listened to members on the other side speak disparagingly about the program in the House and I can only say that the schools in my electorate have embraced it. The opposition call it the ‘school halls program’. Yes, there have been some school halls built within the Shortland electorate; but there have also been many classrooms built and a multitude of other capital works projects that have taken place through the Building the Education Revolution program. I will share with the House the fact that, at the beginning of the 42nd Parliament, I visited Gwandalan Public School, and the principal and the president—

Mr Slipper—Madam Deputy Speaker Bird, I seek to intervene.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms S Bird)—Will the member for Shortland accept the intervention?

Ms HALL—No. I visited Gwandalan Public School, and the principal and the president of the P&C showed me the school’s classrooms. There was mould on the floor. There was rotting carpet and mildew. The roofs leaked. But the Building the Education Revolution has now delivered new classrooms to this school, and the school is so proud and happy with what is tak-
ing place. The rooms are not quite completed but when they are they will be classrooms for
the 21st century with smartboards and every other educational aid needed for student success.
This is a far cry from what happened under the previous government.

It is important to recognise that the Building the Education Revolution was also about cre-
ating a stimulus for the economy. I have had a number of construction companies come and
talk to me about what it has meant for them. They have been able to keep their workforce in-
tact as opposed to having to shed the jobs of construction workers. It has been a big boost for
those companies. Instead of only one or two people remaining employed, the three companies
who talked with me have managed to retain the workers employed by them—16, 50 and 80
people respectively.

Under the previous government, there were plans to build an Australian technical college
on the Central Coast. There was a lot of talk but there was no action. Under the Gillard gov-
ernment, Australian technical colleges have been devolved to the local high schools. North-
lakes, Gorokan and Lake Munmorah High Schools in the electorate of Shortland now have
Australian technical colleges. In addition, they each have trade training centres. They have
state-of-the-art training centres for young people prior to their entering the workforce. This is
a great boost for young people in an area where there is a very high level of unemployment.
There is 40 per cent youth unemployment. Furthermore, young people have great difficulties
with travel because the area is made up of a series of little villages. Now those students can
get the education they need in their local school.

The Gillard government delivered a Medicare office for Belmont, one that the Howard
government closed and ripped out. The Howard government refused also to give any money
to the Fernleigh Track, whereas under the Gillard government we have now concluded the
track, taking it to its end. It is nearly 20 kilometres of cycleway and walking track and the
Gillard government has put $2.85 million into it.

The Shortland electorate is an electorate where people live. Young people attend university
in Newcastle, and the government has put a lot of money into Newcastle University. Belmont
Hospital has benefited under the health and hospital reforms, and enormous amounts of
money have also gone into John Hunter Hospital, Wyong Hospital and Gosford Hospital—all
hospitals that people in Shortland electorate use and that will benefit from this extra money.
The Gillard government has also put money into the Hunter Medical Research Institute,
which is delivering to people within the Shortland electorate, and the CSIRO. These are all
investments that benefit the people of Shortland electorate.

The main sectors of employment for people in the Shortland electorate are: retail, construc-
tion, light industrial, service and health. The commitment of the Gillard government to ap-
prenticeships will definitely benefit the young people in Shortland electorate. We can see that
there is a need for young people to be able to train and to develop skills, and that will address
the skills shortage that was allowed to develop under the Howard government.

The Gillard and Rudd governments have delivered a strong economy to the people of Aus-
tralia. Australia has one of the strongest economies in the world, and that is something that we
should all be proud of. We came through the global financial crisis with flying colours. It was
because of investment in programs like Building the Education Revolution that this came
about.
What we on this side of the House want to see develop is a fair and resilient society, where people with disabilities have the kinds of opportunities that other people have and where older Australians can actually get the services they need and not be discriminated against. We make a commitment to look at putting in place policies and programs that will help people with mental illness and people that are disadvantaged. I remind the House of the additional money that the government gave to pensioners and of the paid parental leave scheme.

I believe Australia is a nation with a great future, a future that all Australians can share in. The role of the government is to see that this comes to fruition. I seek to table a list—it is not an inclusive list by any means—of investments that have taken place in Shortland electorate under the Gillard and Rudd governments.

Leave granted.

Mr SLIPPER (Fisher) (10.41 am)—It is a great pleasure to join the address-in-reply debate in the Main Committee of the House of Representatives. It is a great privilege and honour for all of us, all 150 members, to be elected to serve in the people's house, the House of Representatives of the Parliament of Australia. In the period since Federation only a relatively small number of Australians have been granted this privilege, and I must say that I believe that most members, regardless of their political stance, are elected to parliament for the right reasons, not the wrong reasons. We all seek to make our electorates and the nation as a whole a better place. It is a great responsibility to be given the task of drafting and formulating laws, and of course all of us have the opportunity to stand up and oppose those initiatives which we believe are unhelpful and support those which we consider are in the national interest.

I have been privileged to be returned as the member for Fisher on eight occasions—in 1984, 1993, 1996, 1998, 2001, 2004, 2007 and 2010. I want to thank the residents of the electorate of Fisher, in its many manifestations, over that period for showing their confidence in me so that I am able to be their effective representative in the Australian parliament. There was one election I did not win and that was in 1987, when Michael Lavarch narrowly defeated me. The newspapers contacted both of us after the election, and my first response was that I was ‘quietly confident’. When they did a recheck of the votes and extra votes came in, I was reduced to being ‘cautiously optimistic’. When it looked pretty grim, I was, when the media contacted me, ‘hopeful’. Then, shortly after that they had the declaration of the poll, and I was history! I must say that when I came back six years later—I served the first three years as a member of the National Party then came back as a Liberal in 1993—I think my expectations were much more realistic and I believe that I have been a much more effective member for the experience of having received six years in the sin-bin when I was not in the Australian parliament.

For the last couple of years I have served as a member of the Liberal National Party of Queensland. I suppose I have served in three parties in the Australian parliament and, apart from Billy Hughes whose portrait proudly hangs in my office, I do not know whether any other member has had that particular privilege.

Mr Fitzgibbon—You're no rat!

Mr SLIPPER—I am not sure whether that is an interjection I should recognise, but I do feel particularly honoured that my friend the Chief Government Whip, who really should be a minister in this government, has come in to listen to this contribution. Obviously, one does not
get elected to the Australian parliament on so many occasions without the support, not only of the electorate but also of very many people who work hard to achieve the electoral outcome that has seen me in this parliament. I would like to thank my wife, Inge. She has been incredibly supportive in every respect. I want to also thank the many volunteers. We have hundreds of people turning out on polling day, as happens in other electorates, and also during the election campaign. It is really humbling to see that so many people, who do not seek anything in return, were prepared to work extraordinarily long hours at the last election with a view to changing the government.

I would like to thank my Acting Campaign Director during most of the campaign, Greg Robinson. The Campaign Director Michael Bloyce was a great tower of support, but he had a long-planned holiday to the United Kingdom. I do not know whether he had a window into the Prime Minister’s mind as to when the election was going to be held but it was called on a date when he was back. I would also like to thank the Sunshine Coast regional zone Chairman of the Liberal National Party, Greg Newton.

Other members of the campaign team were: Ken Hinds; Belinda Howard; Rob Matchett; Mark McEwan; Helen Sava; Jenny Sinclair; Val Bradford; Peter Pollock; Colin Caudell, who was a former member of the South Australian parliament; John Tusler; Arthur Walton, and so many others. It is always dangerous to highlight the efforts by certain persons because inevitably people who should be included are omitted.

I would like to thank my staff—Tim Knapp, Michelle Ellis, Melissa Ellard, Bill Van Motman, Nicky Fisher and Richard Bruinsma, and of course my son, Nick, and his wife, Ashlea; my daughter, Alex, and her partner, Ben; my parents-in-law, Rob and Bev Hall; and, as I mentioned before, I would like to thank my wife, Inge.

We were very much supported by the staff at the Liberal National Party headquarters. They put in incredibly long hours to make sure that the LNP in Queensland achieved a strong and positive election result. The LNP was led by Campaign Director James McGrath; Cameron Thompson, who honourable members would know is a former member of this place; and James Mackay. I would like to thank the LNP President, Bruce McIver, Vice-President Gary Spence, and state Director Michael O’Dwyer for their leadership over this period and in the years since the merger which has helped to ensure that the Liberal National Party has grown to become a respected and trusted political force in Queensland.

Since the merger of the Liberal Party and the National Party in Queensland, the LNP has proven to all Queenslanders, and in fact to the nation as a whole, that it is a dynamic political force, and I am very pleased to have been associated with the party in a positive way right from the beginning. When one looks at the website of the Australian Electoral Commission and at the party’s success in a numerical sense, one will see, I think, that the Australian Labor Party has 72 members, the Liberal Party of Australia has 44 members, the Liberal National Party of Queensland has 21 members, the Nationals have seven, and then of course there are the Independents and Greens and so on. Had the conservative forces done as well in other states as we did in Queensland, then we might well have had a change of government. It almost happened but did not quite occur.

I would also like to thank the parliament for entrusting me with the role of Deputy Speaker. I want to publicly express my appreciation to members of the Speaker’s panel, including you, Madam Deputy Speaker Bird. We work very well as a team. All of our members are dedicated
with a view to ensuring that the parliament delivers to the Australian people in the way that the Australian people would like.

The challenge in future parliaments will be to preserve as many as possible of the positive changes which have occurred in this parliament, brought about by the necessity to negotiate and cobble together a government with the support of members who were not actually elected as members of the government party. I believe that the reforms that will succeed into the future will be those reforms which are seen to be objectively good. While we all collectively have our training wheels on, there will be a lot of positive outcomes from this parliament, not the least of which is that parliament is seen to be more cooperative. It is not a case of winner takes all. The Chief Government Whip would know that, every time there is a vote, he and the Leader of the House have to work to ensure that, on that particular vote, they have the support of the crossbench members. We will find that there will be many fewer guillotines applied. We will be talking more. Members will have the opportunity to express their views and the views of their electorates on so many areas. I see this as being a good thing.

Obviously both major sides of politics would have liked to have won the election outright, but every cloud has a silver lining. The parliament is now a place for debate and a place where decisions are actually made. We have the capacity to take some power back from the executive, and that is a good thing. It is great that we are voting on some private members’ bills and motions so we are able to display to the people of Australia where we stand on important issues and not just on the issues that the government of the day deems to be important. I am pleased to see the Chief Government Whip nodding in agreement on that. There has had to be a high level of cooperation—perhaps an even higher level of cooperation—among the government whips, the opposition whips and, for that matter, the crossbench members in this parliament. That not only taxes the ability of the people occupying those whipping positions but also means that they are able to achieve positive outcomes consistent with what some people refer to as the new paradigm—I must say, I hate that expression, and I suspect it will probably disappear soon enough, because it has become one of those words that is repeated over and over again.

In the time available to me, I wish to mention that the Sunshine Coast is one of the fastest growing areas in Australia. It is an area to which a lot of people move from the rust belt areas of southern Australia. It has a wonderful climate and a welcoming population. It has easy access to and from the capital city. But we do have major problems as far as our infrastructure is concerned. The state government is seeking to dramatically increase the population of the Sunshine Coast even without the satellite city south of Caloundra, which contains some 50,000 people, and even without the Palmview development, which will have some 16,000 people. We are, as the Sunshine Coast, going to have our population close to double over the next 10 to 15 years. This means that the infrastructure in so many areas will be taxed.

We need to upgrade the Bruce Highway to six lanes all the way from Brisbane. The Howard government upgraded the Bruce Highway to six lanes as far as Caboolture. That removed the worst bottleneck between Brisbane and the Sunshine Coast at the time. But, as population continues to grow and as traffic continues to become heavier, we now need the extra lanes between Caboolture and the Sunshine Coast itself. At the present time it sometimes takes two to three hours to travel to Brisbane, whereas at other times one might get there in an hour and a half. If we are going to achieve our full potential as an area, we do need to upgrade the
Bruce Highway to six lanes. The official population of the Sunshine Coast is up from about 247,000 in 2001 to 322,000 in 2009 and it continues to grow as many people make the sea change move to our coastal communities or the tree change move to our lush hinterland villages and towns. I must say that, on occasion, we do not really seem to get our share of infrastructure spending. I certainly want to give the Leader of the House notice that I will be coming to see him in relation to a number of projects that we really need, and need now, on the Sunshine Coast.

We also need a major international entertainment centre. In the election campaign I was able to promise that an Abbott government would give seed funding of $10 million in relation to this arts and exhibition centre, and that would have been enough to get the project off the ground because the state would have kicked in and the council would have done their bit. Unfortunately, we did not win the election and we have a situation where we do not have that funding allocated, so at the present time the arts and exhibition centre is quite some distance away. We do have a number of smaller entertainment centres in places like Caloundra, Kawana, Nambour and so on, but the region lacks an international facility which has the capacity to host world-class entertainment shows and major conventions. For too long, local residents have had no choice but to travel to Brisbane on our inadequate highway to attend major entertainment events.

Also during the election campaign, I launched four pledges in four weeks. We were aiming to improve infrastructure—and I mentioned before the upgrading of the Bruce Highway. I would like to see the building of the Sunshine Coast University Hospital advanced. The state government promised it prior to the last state election and then delayed its construction by two years. I would also like to see the Sippy Downs Town Centre master plan developed, along with the business and technology precinct adjacent to the University of the Sunshine Coast.

Also, we need to make sure that we are no longer categorised as metropolitan with respect to decisions made by the department of health. We need to attract more general practitioners to the Sunshine Coast, and we need to get the coastal part of Fisher classified as an area of need so that qualified overseas-trained doctors are able to work there. It is always important to recognise that mental health is a really important issue, and we need to expand front-line services. Certainly we need extra facilities in this area on the Sunshine Coast.

I also believe we need to foster employment opportunities on the coast. One of the frustrations for families on the Sunshine Coast is that, when their children finish school, sometimes they can go to the University of the Sunshine Coast but it does not always offer the particular courses that people need, and then young people have to leave the Sunshine Coast to get a foot on the employment ladder. I would like to see more industry on the Sunshine Coast, particularly clean and green industry. If we could achieve more of that, more families would be able to stay intact; their kids would not have to go away. I think that is a matter of vital importance.

The Sunshine Coast, though, is a wonderful place to live. Lots of people are moving there. We need to promote projects which will encourage the ambience of the area, which will make sure that we preserve the atmosphere on the Sunshine Coast, which is the reason that so many people have chosen to move to the Sunshine Coast.
I would like to take this opportunity to wish all honourable members a happy, safe and holy Christmas. This has been a very interesting and historic year for all of us. We all continue to learn. Our life, I suppose, is a collection of experiences, and we are the collection of our life’s experiences. It really is important to take a break at Christmas. I hope that everyone takes that opportunity so that we have a chance to recharge our batteries in readiness for 2011. The sitting program which has been announced is obviously a demanding one. Given the reform agreement, it is important that the parliament sit more, and we are obviously sitting longer, but I think it is vital that we take the opportunity over Christmas to spend time with family and friends. Some people ask me, ‘What are you doing for Christmas?’ I say, ‘I’m staying home, and it’s really quite exciting to be home because it is that time of the year for friends and family.’ I hope that people recognise that.

As Deputy Speaker I would like to officially thank all honourable members for their cooperation since my appointment to that position—a moment ago, I thanked members of the Speaker’s panel. It is a very great privilege to serve in the Australian parliament, one experienced by just over a thousand Australians in the years since the colonies came together to form the Commonwealth of Australia in 1901. The electorate of Fisher was created in 1948 and was named after the Rt Hon. Andrew Fisher, who was a Labor Prime Minister of Australia. I went to a commemoration of Andrew Fisher’s prime ministership a couple of years ago and found that his descendants, as you would understand, are still very much resident in this country. Australia is a great democracy; we are a young country, but an old democracy. We have a singular opportunity in this parliament to make a real change. I thank honourable members for accepting this challenge and this responsibility, and I hope that during this parliament all of us will make a contribution towards making Australia an even better place than it is today. We are the lucky country, but we can do better.

Mr FITZGIBBON (Hunter) (11.01 am)—It is a great pleasure to follow the Deputy Speaker and member for Fisher. He reflected somewhat on his time in this place and the electoral success he has had over many years, albeit with a short time in the sin-bin. I think that reflects the conscientious way in which he approaches his work in the electorate. He is doing a great job as Deputy Speaker helping to settle the parliament down and playing a positive and progressive role, and the government appreciates that. I make these remarks very genuinely, Madam Deputy Speaker, not just to ensure that when I go to the Deputy Speaker’s drinks tonight I get a glass of one of the Hunter’s finest reds.

It is true that this has been a very tumultuous year. I am sure that, when the history of Australian political life is written in future years, there will be much reflection on 2010. There was a fascinating and somewhat strange election campaign in late August followed, of course, by a very long 17-day wait for a determination on who might form a government. And now there have been almost five weeks of parliamentary sittings under—and I will say it only once, for the benefit of the member for Fisher—the new paradigm. It is an environment in which things are much different for all of us, but I welcome the fact that it is an environment in which the parliament is operating very, very effectively. I am obviously in a position to observe that very closely. Just as importantly, if not more importantly, to the Australian people, the government is functioning very well. It is getting on with its progressive and forward-looking agenda, and I know that will be welcomed by many people.
We will never know why the election was so close, in many senses. It is difficult, despite all our capability through opinion polling and other research, to get into the minds of every one of the 10 million or more voters in this country. If there is a lesson to be learned, I think it is more likely that none of us—neither individuals nor the political parties—can assume that they will be returned to government just on what they have done; they will need to demonstrate what they intend to do. It is an interesting thing to analyse, because there is no doubt that the first-term Labor government, the one elected in 2007, was a successful government. It had many, many achievements under its belt, not least the way in which it protected us from a global contagion, the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression, and indeed in those first three years created 650,000 jobs—a very, very significant achievement.

Then there was, just to name a few, the apology to the stolen generation, long overdue and long called for by people on my side of the parliament. There was the signing of Kyoto and what we did in significantly increasing the mandatory renewable energy target, now known as the renewable energy target, to 20 per cent. Of course, there was the Building the Education Revolution, much criticised by some, an ongoing program which is transforming the way in which we deliver education in our country in the 21stcentury. Then there is the new industrial relations system. It is strange how quickly we forget how bad our system was not all that long ago, and there has been a bit of a debate about that this week. It is interesting to note there was no equal pay case under the old regime; that has only been facilitated under this architecture. One achievement very close to me is the defence white paper, the first one in more than a decade—long overdue. There has been pension reform, with pension increases. Under family assistance more generally, paid parental leave has been a historic reform. Health and hospital reforms are still rolling out. Just one aspect of that is 20 new cancer centres throughout the country. Our GP superclinics are making a difference in local communities. There is money for childcare support. The list goes on and on.

It is funny to me—for want of a better word—that, in a sense, we did so much that it was all too much for some people to absorb. Too quickly, the media moved on to the next subject. Of course, our ambitious program continues. There are big challenges now and what people will be looking for us to do is to get on with the National Broadband Network. People want it, we need to deliver it and others should get out of the way. There are also the ongoing reforms in health and hospitals.

We need to tackle climate change, of course, but the community and business are simply crying out for certainty. The overwhelming majority of Australian people recognise that climate change exists, that it is a problem, and they want government to do something about it; and, again, people who want to interfere should simply get out of the way. Tax reform will be important, and I should have included in the list of successful reforms under the last government what we did in terms of a more focused, equal and profitable mining tax—a way of returning the dividends of the mining boom back to the people and back to the infrastructure which supports their local communities.

I want to turn back to the BER for a second, because one of the things that made us even busier than usual during the election campaign was the time we had to allocate to opening new facilities in our electorates. I have now opened a number of facilities in my local primary schools. I am delighted, as are my school communities, that every local primary school in my electorate now has a new facility—a new school hall, a new library, a multifunction centre,
whatever it might be. Despite the criticisms from those opposite and some criticisms from the media, I can guarantee members of the House that my school communities—Catholic, public, Christian, you name it—are absolutely overwhelmed by the difference it has made in their capacity to deliver 21st century school programs.

Indeed, I was talking to the director of Catholic schools for the Hunter region—and the member for Newcastle will be interested in this—who pointed out to me that, not long before we made the announcement about the BER and the schools program, the Catholic Schools Office had sat down to work out how much money they would need to bring the infrastructure in all the Catholic schools in the region up to an acceptable standard, a 21st century standard. I will not share the numbers for fear that they are not for public digestion, but they did the sums and sat back in distress, recognising that they could never hope to secure anywhere near that amount of money and therefore lived in forlorn hope of ever achieving their objectives. Of course, as a result of the BER, they got almost exactly the amount of money they had calculated they needed in that difficult and challenging exercise. So that is a small example of the difference the program has made.

Ms Grierson—and they’ve been wonderful to work with.

Mr FITZGIBBON—They have been wonderful to work with—absolutely. So it is an overwhelming success. People can sit back and criticise, of course, when you are spending so much money so quickly—remembering that, as I heard the member for Shortland say, this was an economic stimulus package first and a schools program second. It was a good choice to spend the money on schools, because that is where it was needed most. If you are rolling out money that quickly, of course there are going to be examples of mistakes, cost overruns et cetera and maybe, in a small number of cases, value for money not being delivered—the Gill report has identified those—but overwhelmingly the program has been fantastic and has worked well.

That leads me to my electorate. Like any electorate, my local area has many challenges, and I will go through some of them. Interestingly, our biggest challenge now, in my view, is the tightness of our labour market. If someone had told me when I was first elected in 1996 that the Hunter region’s unemployment rate would be five per cent in my lifetime, I would have laughed at them. Maybe I need to be more ambitious, but I could never have conceived it. It is ironic that, in my view, one of the biggest challenges facing the region now is to ensure that we do not fall short on the skills front and, in fact, on the labour participation front. I was talking just last week to a local publican. As you do, I said, ‘How’s it going, mate?’ He said, ‘It’s going well, but my biggest problem is that I can’t get staff.’ Despite having an unemployment rate around five per cent, we still have these huge pockets of unemployment, typically among young people who lack the skills and wherewithal to take up these job opportunities, and still among some more mature former blue-collar workers. This is the biggest challenge for government in our local region.

Ms Grierson interjecting—

Mr FITZGIBBON—I hear the member for Newcastle agreeing. We cannot afford to allow people to continue to lie dormant while we have this inflationary effect in the local economy and while we have so many employers unable to get the people they need to fill the jobs they need filled. Of course, that is a brake on our growth, because we cannot grow more economically if we continue to allow people to lie idle.
Dealing with those already sitting in those pockets is one thing, and that is a speech for another day. It is a complex issue, but we cannot allow another generation of young people to come in and fall into that same trap. That is what our trade training schools are all about. That is what our science labs are all about. That is what the $600 million the government is spending on skills is all about. It is what the Apprenticeship Kickstart program is all about. Trades training centres will intervene early and get kids worked up to the skills they need to take up those opportunities. I will continue to pursue that as an issue and to support the many very strong programs the government is rolling out to address those problems. I will just mention that we spent $7 million on Kurri Kurri TAFE as part of the stimulus package, a sum which does not come along every day.

It is amazing how good can come out of adversity. We had a global recession. The government found it necessary to spend money to keep us out of recession, and we are getting all these benefits that one would not have dreamed about. I could run off a list of community projects in my electorate which were not gold-plating; they were infrastructure projects that were required and that would never have been built if it had not been for what was a very well targeted economic stimulus package.

I want to stay on growth but turn to some of the impacts on infrastructure. In my region the biggest impact—in addition to child care, doctor shortages et cetera—is road infrastructure. When I leave this place, rightly or wrongly, probably my greatest achievement will be the $1.7 billion Hunter Expressway, which will do more than anything to clear the traffic nightmare through the Hunter region between Newcastle and the Upper Hunter, along with the third river crossing, in Maitland—I congratulate the state government on that. It will certainly reduce the congestion in Maitland, which was the second fastest growing city in Australia last time I checked. Maybe it is now the fastest, but it was second to Mandurah, in Western Australia, last time I checked.

These infrastructure shortfalls need addressing. I put my own government on notice again that I have a very high expectation that the proceeds from the new mining tax will be redirected into mining communities, into infrastructure projects in those regions—including my own—and into road upgrades in addition to the Hunter Expressway, such as a bypass of the townships of Singleton and Muswellbrook. In addition to millions of tourists, many coalminers drive through the Hunter’s wine country to get to work as they move further into the Upper Hunter region and we have to do something about our vineyard region’s roads.

Ms Grierson interjecting—

Mr FITZGIBBON—The member for Newcastle enjoys coming to my electorate for a bite to eat and a nice glass of the world’s best wines. She acknowledges that you cannot have tourists coming from Sydney and elsewhere having to drive on goat tracks. It is obvious to me that the state government does not have the capacity, even though the roads are its responsibility—if I had time I would say something else about that. The federal government will have to give some assistance. We already do in a modest way, but we are going to have to see some of the mining tax go into projects like the vineyard roads. And we will need to see money going into the Scone level railway crossing overpass, which I almost forgot to include in that list.

The state government spends about $200,000 in the Cessnock LGA on what I still call regional roads—roads that are basically a state government responsibility—including Broke Road through the wine country. That is $200,000 a year. Obviously Cessnock Council does
not have the resources to do the work. Someone is going to have to help, but the state government, of any political persuasion, is going to have to do much, much better.

The other big issue in my electorate is of course land use conflict. Mining is growing and growing. It covers a fairly small area in geographical terms, but many would argue now that we have overdone open-cut coalmining in particular. There is a growing and changing mood about this. People understand and appreciate the wealth and the jobs coalmining has brought—not just to my electorate but to all electorates in the region. There is no shortage of appreciation, but many people are looking at air and water quality issues and, of course, at the impact of mining on sustainable industries—viticulture, agriculture more generally and the thoroughbred breeding industry, which is very important to the region as well as a critical employer. So this community is showing not a change of heart but growing concern about the impact of mining on sustainable industries. Thankfully that concern is now starting to seep through to the state government, and a subcommittee of the state cabinet is looking at these issues. I urge them to focus intensely and to start to restore more balance to the ecology of our local region.

Another factor now is the emerging coal seam methane industry. Again people will listen and will welcome the opportunities for more long-term jobs and more wealth in the region, but we cannot look at short-term benefits without looking at potential long-term harm to sustainable industries. Coalmining has been great; coal seam methane can be great and will be great for some regions. But we cannot grow further an industry that might last 30, 40 or 50 years at the expense of industries that we would like to think are going to sustain the local region for hundreds, if not thousands, of years—if that is not looking out too far. So we must get this balance right.

On state government issues, I simply appeal to the state government to sort out its long-term power contract problems with Hydro Aluminium in my electorate. It is a complex issue I know, but there are jobs and people’s livelihoods at stake here and we cannot sit back and play with them. I am taking Minister Burke to the plant next Wednesday where he will officially open a reprocessing centre, a reuse facility for spent potline waste. I would dearly like that issue to be resolved before I take Minister Burke there to open what is an environmentally friendly project and a great initiative of Hydro Aluminium. It is a great company, a great corporate citizen and a great employer, and we need to get that issue sorted out. If I can play a role—I send this statement to the state government—I would be very happy to do so.

Last but not least, like the member for Fisher and the member for Shortland before him, I would like to thank all those who supported me in my re-election. Not even those of us in the safest seats get more than six out of 10 votes, so none of us are universally popular, but I am very pleased that a sufficient number of people have decided that I have done enough to be returned to this great place. It is a great privilege and specifically I thank all those who directly supported me, my family first of all, but as part of my campaign team there were all those people who worked the polling booths on what was, I think, a fairly difficult Saturday and, of course, they had to enjoy a glass of beer or wine or soft drink late into the night, quite uncertain about the outcome. They are great troopers and we appreciate them very much. We could not get ourselves elected to this place without their help.

I thank all those who have worked cooperatively with me on both sides of the parliament in making the new parliament work. It has been difficult for us all. We have our disagreements
and we are always running interference on one another behind the scenes, but overall people have come to the arrangement in the right spirit and it is good to see the parliament working well. *(Time expired)*

**Mr BRUCE SCOTT** (Maranoa) (11.21 am)—I rise this morning in this address-in-reply to the Governor-General’s speech on 28 September when the 43rd parliament was formed. Her speech talked about the parliamentary reform of the House of Representatives, including the changes to question time to make it more effective. I certainly welcome these changes and we will see with the passage of time how well they will work but, in fact, in the last parliament I submitted a proposal to the Procedures Committee calling for a restructure of question time. I had received so many complaints from my own constituency who quite understandably thought question time was a complete joke and that much of the behaviour of members of parliament—and we all fit into that category, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I do not cast aspersions on you in the chair—was embarrassing and certainly not befitting for the titles that we hold in this place.

Until 1989 the average length of question time was 45 minutes and by mid-2008 the average length of question time had doubled to almost 90 minutes. I also proposed in my submission in the last parliament that a limit be put on the time of an answer to a question. Until very recently there had been no restrictions on the length of response to a question and answers gradually became more combative and political. I think that there were many Australians who wondered what we got paid for when they watched question time. I certainly welcome the fact that this new reform has been put into place and that there are restrictions on the length of questions and responses. I think it has allowed us to re-establish some integrity into our parliamentary process, particularly that of question time which becomes a very public face of all of us in this place.

I want to turn to my electorate now and I want to speak about the CSG—as I heard the member for Hunter spoke a little bit about it—and the LNG projects, coal seam methane gas and liquefied natural gas which is converted from coal seam methane gas. Both these projects, which have recently been approved by the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, have a significant stake in the landmass across the Surat and Bowen basins, particularly the Surat Basin in my own electorate.

The issues are of concern to many of us, the landholders who hold the title deeds for the above land activities. We do have concerns about the coal seam gas process. This has been ongoing for some years. In fact, in 2008 I put together a mining expo, a ‘meeting of mines’, a meeting of those people in the mining sector and the concerned citizens at the time. Since that time, we have seen a number of farmer groups, citizen groups, local governments and agricultural producers come together because they feel that there is a juggernaut of mining operations that are rapidly developing in my electorate. I am certainly not against mining, but I do believe that we must ensure the legacy of these prime agricultural lands, which, if ever mined, would never be able to be fully rehabilitated to the quality that they have now. I will talk a little bit about food security later.

Since the minister’s approval of these CSG projects, the one-offs I referred to—Santos and British Gas—we have seen tabled in the Senate a number of documents from the Water Group, which raises concerns about the long-term effects of CSG developments and their impact on the Great Artesian Basin. I want to refer to these documents. The first one is the Water
Group advice on the EPBC Act referrals, the QGC referral 2008/4399 and the Santos/Petronas referral 2008/4059, and comments on the AP LNG referral 2009/4974. These comments are based on information provided by the proponents up to the close of business on 3 September this year. These are the comments by the Water Group, which were provided to the minister from within his own department prior to making these decisions.

This is the concern I have with the comments that have come from the Water Group—and I know they are in draft form. The comments say:

From all the information provided to date, including that from AP LNG, there is no indication when any of the systems affected by the CSG developments will return to pre-CSG conditions.

What they are referring to is when the underground water aquifers will return to their condition pre-CSG activities. They continue:

QGC—Queensland Gas—
states that the WCM—the Walloon Coal Measures—
(this includes the Springbok Sandstone) will not begin to recover until 70 years after CSG production ceases.

Seventy years after! They will only then begin, according to this report, to recover, not fully recover. It says the data also:
… shows that the Springbok, Hutton and Precipice Sandstones will not have recovered after 200 years.
I have to say that this is very alarming stuff. It goes on:
Whilst the residual drawdown is modelled to be quite small, a simple extrapolation for the Hutton Sandstone—
which is a further sandstone aquifer, deeper down than the other ones I just mentioned—
would indicate that recovery will take in the order of 1,000 years.
Interesting also is that:
… Santos has requested that their modelling in the EIS not be used and its new modelling was not provided in time to be included in this assessment …
I wonder why they did not want their modelling that they put in the EIS to be used. Have they found some new data? Is the science not that good? It raises these concerns. This is an alarming comment:
From the AP LNG modelling—
this is modelling that they have looked at and reviewed—
the Gubberamunda Sandstone (the lateral equivalent of the Hooray Sandstone) will not have returned to pre-CSG levels by 3100.
Therefore it can be concluded from the proponents’ modelling that the legacy effects of the CSG developments are considerable, with at least 1,000 years passing before this part of the GAB—the Great Artesian Basin—
will return to pre-CSG levels.
Those are not my words; they are the words in this report from the Water Group, which was provided to the minister prior to his making those decisions.
Madam Deputy Speaker Bird, as you would be aware, the Great Artesian Basin is the lifeblood of so many towns in western Queensland. When we talk about the Great Artesian Basin we talk about all of the different sandstone formations. It is the lifeblood of the towns, for stock and domestic household use. This report really should be ringing alarm bells in the minister’s office. Whilst he has put on a number of significant restrictions and caps and taken what he would call, I suppose, a cautionary approach to his decisions, I think the minister needs to explain why it is that this has been provided to him in draft form and yet he still has approved these projects with those conditions. I know that my communities out in western Queensland are not convinced. When we read these reports, page after page after page of documents that have recently been tabled in the Senate, more alarm bells will ring.

My communities are not against these projects. In fact, we want to see the new wealth, but we also want to make sure that the wealth is not at the expense of our Great Artesian Basin. Without the Great Artesian Basin, if they do not recover, we will lose some communities out there and, if we lose our underground water, we will lose some towns as well. So we have to make sure it is not mining at the expense of communities and agriculture. That is why I will continue to call for the science, that the ministers both state and federal rely on a peer review by an independent panel of experts. It will not take long. They are out there. But let us have it, Ministers. I do appreciate the significant economic benefit these projects will have on our regional communities across Queensland, but we have to make sure that the Great Artesian Basin is not the victim of new industries coming in and the environmental concerns as well relating to some of the contaminants that have been registered recently in the underground water of western Queensland and up around South Burnett as well. As to the conditions that the minister has proposed, whilst they are welcome, I think he really has to make sure that there is an opportunity for peer review of these documents that we have recently seen tabled in the Senate.

Recently the Queensland government also approved Xstrata’s coalmine at Wandoan, which I am sure you would be well aware of, Madam Deputy Speaker. This mine is predicted to extract some 30 million tonnes of coal per annum over the life of the mine, which is about 30 years. It is estimated that it will be the biggest coalmine in Australia. It is going to bring enormous revenue to both state and federal governments. I understand also, from the briefings I have had, that Xstrata are planning to buy more farmland, both cattle and grain farms, so that they can continue to develop the mine to this capacity over the next 30 years. If they do go ahead and buy this land that will mean Xstrata will be the largest landholder within the Maranoa Regional Council. Xstrata, a mining company based in Switzerland, is the largest landholder in the Maranoa Regional Council. We have to ask ourselves: is this absolutely right? There has to be a better way in relation to dealing with landholders and taking out of production for a significant period of time some of the best cattle country in that part of Queensland.

This is a major concern, I have to say, and I know the public debate will continue to go on, but people are not happy. Unfortunately, the landholders do not have as many rights as the mining companies. If the mining companies go to the land court they will ultimately get access to privately held land—the landholders who pay the rates today. These are families, and we have to make sure there is a better process. I really am concerned about the extent to which these companies want to buy the land. They have the resources, and after 10 years of
drought, with the weakened bank account of a farmer, many of them are feeling very much under threat. If the CSG projects—coal seam, methane, gas and mining—in my electorate do come on stream, the CSG alone will generate some $800 million a year and go to the coffers of the Queensland state government. That is all going to end up in George Street. As we all go home to our electorates and see the development in South-East Queensland, we know where the money is going. What I say and what my communities say is that we should be sharing in this in our part of the world. There should be a third of the wealth coming back to the community where the wealth was created.

I looked at this during an overseas study trip 18 months ago. I went to Wyoming in the United States of America where there are agreements between the federal government, which owns the resources, the state of Wyoming and the county council. A third of the tax revenue or royalty revenue goes directly to the county council. They are building hospitals, better roads and sporting facilities with it. The liveability of their communities is being improved. That is the sort of model that we have got to have. The model that I saw in Wyoming in the United States of America should be overlaid in our situation in Queensland because these communities are feeling the juggernaut of the development out there.

I come now to the Warrego Highway, which is an absolute disgrace. These projects are all approved and the development is going ahead, but there has been no money injected into the Warrego Highway and there is no second range crossing. All the additional traffic, including the people going to and from work and the subcontractors, is putting enormous pressure on the Warrego Highway. Prior to the last federal election, we committed some $150 million for this highway. Unfortunately, the government did not commit anything. That really concerns me. They are prepared to take the wealth of the income tax revenue that comes from this, but they are not prepared to invest in this very important road.

I have one point that I am sure the member for Bonner would appreciate. The Clem Jones Tunnel in Queensland is a $3 billion project for five kilometres of road. To put that in context, $1 billion in road funding would build a road from Brisbane via Alice Springs to Perth. I am not against Brisbane getting this sort of development—we see it going on around the south-east corner—but let us see some of this money being directed out into the regional areas and particularly to the Warrego Highway, where these mining projects are going ahead at break-neck speed. That also is a concern.

I am disappointed, though, that the money that former Prime Minister Rudd committed before the 2007 election, some $55 million, has not proceeded rapidly. We have seen the first $5 million or $6 million rolled out now between Roma and Mitchell, but there is some $10 million for passing lanes in the corridor east of Dalby on that section of the Warrego Highway not spent and there is $5 million for some truck stops still not spent. I ask the question of the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport: when in this AusLink term will you spend this money on this highway? I understand that the minister ticked it off, but when will the state government get on with the job, through the Queensland Department of Transport and Main Roads, of rolling out this project? Passing lanes are needed today, not next year or the year after at the end of this program. We need it now, along with the $5 million for the truck stops. We need that money now. It will bring some relief to the highway and the travelling public. It will not be enough, but at least it will be something given it is a commitment of this government. They have still not spent this money.
I would also like to talk about the Landsborough Highway, which you, Madam Deputy Speaker, would be well aware of. It runs from Morven right through to Cloncurry. There was no commitment from this government in the last federal election. It is the major arterial route from South-East Queensland, from southern Australia, right through to Darwin. There is no money committed to the Landsborough Highway. It is a critical road. It is also one of the great defence links between southern Australia and South-East Queensland and our defence bases in the Northern Territory. During the last election campaign we committed some $57 million to the Landsborough Highway, with $7 million to begin in 2011. Unfortunately, that is now history because we did not win the election. I am so disappointed that the Labor Party did not listen to the Remote Area Planning and Development Board and the submission they put forward to the Labor Party. The Labor Party did not listen to them. The coalition did; we understand the need for this.

I now go to the Birdsville Track. Only this morning I met with the Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government, Mr Crean, on this issue. The Birdsville Track is south of Birdsville in South Australia. It goes into unincorporated land areas where there are no local governments. It is an important strategic highway that could be further developed. From Cairns to Port Augusta via the inland through Birdsville is some 500 kilometres shorter than going further east through Bourke and Broken Hill. That is the sort of development we want to see. We are seeing money going into places like the Clem Jones Tunnel and ring roads around cities, but in this new paradigm of the parliament—and we have heard the Prime Minister talking about this being a parliament for regional Australia—here is an opportunity to put some money into regional Australia. We need this money for the Birdsville Track. I must admit that Minister Crean gave me, along with Rowan Ramsey, the time to discuss this only this morning. I appreciated his time and I think he could see what we were talking about. We will continue to bring forward a proposition to the minister as well as to the state governments of South Australia and Queensland.

I want to touch quickly on interest rates. I travelled my electorate in the last few weeks before this last sitting fortnight and I have never felt such despair among the small businesses in my community. The latest interest rate rise seems to have just stalled local economies. Small businesses are telling me they have had their worst November trading ever. Here we are pre Christmas, and across my electorate it is probably one of the best seasons we have seen in decades, yet some trading houses are closing their doors while others are telling me that, since that interest rate rise, they have seen the worst trading environment since they have been in business. This really is a major concern to me. I am encouraging people, in the lead-up to Christmas, to shop locally. Please, wherever you are, shop in your local community. By shopping locally, you are supporting your local community. If you are serious about your own communities, buy your Christmas presents and all your Christmas cheer locally; do not look outside your communities, please. It creates jobs in your community. Shop locally as we head for Christmas this year.

Finally, I wanted to quickly say that I will continue to push for optic fibre cable in the Diamantina and Barcoo shires. It is a very important part of what I would hope the minister is listening to in relation to his proposition and the NBN project. We do need this optic fibre cable going into these remote communities. It is about building the nation’s infrastructure and the backhaul, and I just hope that the minister, who met recently with the mayors of Barcoo...
and Diamantina and the RAPAD Board, understands the need to push this money into outback Queensland.  *(Time expired)*

**Mr ENTSCH** (Leichhardt) (11.42 am)—What an outstanding contribution from a fine regional and rural member. Madam Deputy Speaker Bird, when I made the decision some three years ago to stand down from this place, I never believed for one moment that I would be standing here again before you today—

**Mr Bruce Scott**—We did!

**Mr ENTSCH**—delivering another speech. Interestingly enough, I cannot now call it my maiden speech! Nevertheless, it has been quite an amazing journey and I am very, very privileged to have been given a second opportunity to represent my electorate in this place. As I have said previously, when I made the decision to quit politics I did so because of a commitment to my son, who at the time was becoming a teenager. As I am sure many members would appreciate, it was not possible for me as a dad to give him the time necessary while continuing to serve in this job. It was a difficult decision but it was the right decision, and I have enjoyed the now four years that my son has lived with me—something that I would never have walked away from. He is 17 years old now and he has finished his secondary education, so that frees me up.

Initially, I was happy on the farm, but I have to say that, as I watched many of the achievements that I had been able to secure for the region over the extended period of time since 1996 that we were in government being eroded, there was a rising level of despair. Eventually, when approached, I made the decision to recontest the seat. Some of the things that upset me were relatively small in the overall scheme of things, but one of the things that pushed me over the line was the state government’s decision to push forward with the wild rivers legislation, because of the impact that was going to have not only on the Indigenous population of Cape York but also on the broader community. That of course has continued to happen, but I am hopeful that we might be able to at least fire a shot across the bows, because what we see there is an unelected group called the Wilderness Society driving the government agenda. We have to get back to the point where governments actually govern for the people and do not allow themselves to be pushed aside for unelected interest groups to, basically, control their decisions.

But there are other things as well. The prohibition on alcohol in Cape York was introduced by the government, but they did so without any support mechanisms. One of the few mechanisms that we had in Far North Queensland was the Aboriginal and Islander Alcohol Relief Service. That was defunded by this government after many, many years of operation. Rose Colless and her team set that up and operated it for many decades. It was a very successful place where Aboriginal and Islander people with alcohol problems or substance abuse problems could voluntarily go, pay for the service and have a chance at rehabilitation. We now have a situation where the closest service is based in Townsville and I have been encouraging Aboriginal people from Cape York to travel as far south as the Gold Coast. It is just a joke. Not only that, 30-odd Indigenous people were put out of work. Some of them had been working for 25 years for this organisation and suddenly they were back on the unemployment queue.

Another issue was the contract for the naval vessels that had been awarded to NQEA. That was a great opportunity for Cairns and for NQEA. That decision was not supported by the
state government and was not supported by the local federal member, and the contract was transferred to Victoria. In spite of the fact that NQEA had had two amazingly successful contracts in the past, one with the Fremantle class patrol boats which they built and the second with hydrographic ships, they missed out. The contract went to Victoria, and we have seen the dog’s breakfast that has been created by the component that was built down there. It is an absolute waste of money, and of course they are having major problems because of the quality of workmanship. That had a profound impact on Cairns. We lost over 300 jobs as a direct consequence of that.

Of course, there was more. The Dr Edward Koch Foundation had carried out outstanding suicide prevention work in Cairns for many, many years. Suddenly they lost their funding. The money had gone to a middleman, if you like, a carpetbagger in the southern part of the state. The services provided by the Dr Edward Koch Foundation have been lost. We are still trying to recover that. We are talking about areas where there is a huge incidence of suicide, particularly in our Indigenous communities, and this support mechanism is absolutely critical. The memorandum of understanding, the working arrangements, that the Dr Edward Koch Foundation had with the police, with Indigenous communities and with many other organisations meant that they were very widely accepted and were very much needed and appreciated by these communities. But, rather than keep that going, the government has put the money into a middleman who cream off their bit and feeds out bits and pieces to regional areas. I think that is something that we need to look at very closely.

Probably one of the most ridiculous and unbelievable decisions that was made caused the loss of our Cairns Youth Mentoring Scheme, where $50,000 or $60,000 a year had a profound impact on young people’s lives. It recognised that there are a lot of single mums out there with boys who do not have a good male influence or who have limited male influence and they need to have some sort of male mentoring arrangement. I established the organisation back in 1998. It was run by the community for a minimal amount of money with wonderful mentors. Both the mentors and the kids got a huge benefit out of it. The government decided that they could not afford to pay that $50,000. It was just unbelievable. So the Cairns community went begging and these kids have no alternative, nowhere else to go.

During the last time I was in the parliament, we established the Marine and Tropical Sciences Research Facility—MTSRF—in Cairns. It was a $40 million investment in our community. Unfortunately, with the change of government, bureaucracy took control. They not only broke it up and tried to send part of it to Townsville; they took the rainforest component and tried to impose it on Darwin, in spite of the fact that the Darwin community said, ‘We do not have any rainforest up here and we would much rather not have to deal with it.’ Work is ongoing to try to recover that but it has had a huge impact. We have lost a lot of jobs.

Then, of course, we had the Coral Sea marine park, as proposed by an organisation called Pew, an American based group. This is another case where an outside organisation is controlling decision making in government. Not only did they decide to turn the whole of the Coral Sea into a marine park; they also decided they wanted it to be totally shut down for all forms of fishing—recreational, sporting and commercial. Sustainable commercial fishing has of course been an important part of the Cairns character.

When you look at these collectively, suddenly you can understand why we ended up with over 14 per cent unemployment in an area that was absolutely vibrant only four years ago.
You can see why we are, economically speaking, on our knees and begging for support. We are looking for some way of making things happen. Many of these government decisions—both state and federal—have caused large areas of diversification in our region to shut down. And then when this happens they come back and criticise the community and say, ‘The problem with the community is that it needs diversification.’

We also had white boats. We used to service these large privately owned white vessels but unfortunately, through lack of government support and as a result of the state of the economy, the last major slipway has gone into receivership, so we have lost that as well. Then there was the stimulus package—and we have all talked about the resulting debacle over the home insulation scheme. Not only did we lose a life in my region through electrocution but sadly many legitimate businesses have gone to the wall because of the unfulfilled government promises. Business geared up and supplied the services as requested at the time and then, when the government made the decision to shut the scheme down because of mismanagement, those businesses were left holding huge amounts of stock that could not even be given away. Many of these businesses have folded, some of them with the promise that there is going to be some sort of compensation—but that has unfortunately not eventuated.

The school hall debacle situation also affected us. A $240,000 school hall was delivered to one of my small community schools on the same day it was announced that it was going to be shut down. That sort of thing does not instil a great deal of confidence in a community that is trying to find opportunities to start moving forward and that is doing all sorts of things in order to return our region to prosperity—and all this is of course on top of the fact that there has been a significant decline in tourism in the Cairns region, a region known for its tourism industry.

They are all the negative things that have been causing a great deal of grief in our community—and this is a community which has been known for its resilience. It is known for never depending on government handouts to survive. If we need something to happen, somebody in private enterprise has always put their hands in their pockets to make it happen. But work is needed in Port Douglas now—and in all the years I have been a member, going back to 1996, it has never been the case that they came to ask us for some support; the business community always went ahead and made it happen. But all these government decisions have impacted on our community. It is time for government to have a look at this and say, ‘There is a special circumstance here and we need to begin to make special concessions to offer support so that we can get the local economy back up and running again.’

There are a number of things that can be done in the regional development area and I am encouraged about that. We lost our area consultative committee; that was another government decision, of course. But a new regional development organisation has been set up by Minister Crean, and I am hoping that we may have an opportunity through that to put up some of our projects and get them up and running. While we have been suffering for a long time, we have not been sitting down and doing nothing. We have been looking at opportunities and I have been working with the community to look at ways we can start diversifying our economy but also taking advantage of the infrastructure and industry that we have, which of course is primarily in tourism. I have been working now with the community to establish a sports and cultural precinct in Cairns. There was a commitment for some $240 million for a performing arts centre. I have argued very strongly that, while we certainly need a performing...
arts centre, the money could be spent on a broader infrastructure project that would include the international sporting facilities up there and would become the tropical campus for the Australian Institute of Sport. There is work being done on that at the moment. We are putting together a group of business leaders and sporting leaders with the intention of putting forward a plan that we could submit to Minister Crean’s department for consideration. We are looking at a waterfront project for Port Douglas; again, the business community is taking leadership on that. Hopefully, we can get that up and running as well. We are also looking at a marine gateway project for Weipa; again, the business community up there is looking at that and seeing what we can do to make it happen.

In the Torres Strait there is a rather interesting situation. There has been a commitment for building infrastructure on islands like Saibai, but these islands are actually being washed away at the moment because of the deterioration of their seawalls. It is aged infrastructure—some of it is over 40 years old. The commitment by the current government is to put a health centre there—but, unfortunately, if you are going to build something in these areas you have to make sure you have a solid foundation. Rather than putting in $400,000 to measure the tides, I would humbly suggest it would be better to invest $20 million in rebuilding the seawalls so that we can then put down the foundations to make sure the buildings survive. If we do not do that then we are going to have to forcefully remove at least half a dozen communities in those Torres Strait areas and relocate them to other areas because we have failed to assist in providing them with the appropriate infrastructure required to maintain the integrity of their communities. So this is another project that I would dearly like the minister to consider as a way of helping to rebuild these communities and provide additional opportunities so we can re-establish ourselves in these areas. There is a lot of potential in the region. We have some wonderful people up there who do an outstanding job in providing these opportunities. I would very much like to think that we can work with the government in making these things happen.

During the election campaign there were many small issues I was working on that had affected our communities. They are still works in progress. We had major issues with, for example, the medical colleges and the medical registration board. Unfortunately, through that process, we have lost one of the most wonderful cardiac specialists who has ever been in our region. That is a work in progress. We are still trying to recover the Marine and Tropical Science Research Facility. As part of the campaign the opposition committed to funding the first stage of the Australian Institute of Tropical Health and Medicine. Our promise was not matched by the government, but I will certainly be encouraging the government to do that through James Cook University.

We want the Cairns Youth Mentoring Scheme back up and running again. As I said earlier, we want the performing arts centre but we would like to see a sporting precinct as well. Another project we had committed to was COUCH, which was for an oncology unit or wellbeing centre; again, the government had not committed to that but we will be encouraging them to do so. There are issues in relation to the southern access road in Cairns that need to be addressed and I will continue to campaign on those as well.

Supported accommodation is desperately needed there, but during the campaign we were fighting to try and stop inappropriate public housing being put into areas, squandering public money, when in fact it would have been better done by putting in supported accommodation.
It is my intention to continue to fight for that and eventually to return the integrity of those communities, sell those inappropriate buildings and do what we can to put that back into supported accommodation.

Turtles and dugongs were also a major issue up there, and I would hope that the government will eventually have the courage to put in a full moratorium, to stop all taking of these creatures until we know the numbers that we have there so we can appropriately manage the area. I recognise Colin Riddell for the outstanding work that he has done in raising this issue, and also James Epong, a traditional owner, who has already put in place a moratorium in the area in which he is actively involved and which his traditional group represents.

In closing, I will say that I would not be here if I had not had some wonderful people in my campaign. I recognise Trent Twomey, my campaign manager, and Dennis Quick. I have Danae Jones here, who was assisting me with my media. But there was a whole raft of other people who did an outstanding job in assisting me during the course of this campaign—far too many to be able to note in the very short period of time I have left. Nevertheless, I thank all of those people who were involved very much for their outstanding contribution.

I look forward to serving my community as I move into my next opportunity in this place. As I said on the night, we have suffered very much over the last three years in our community from a dreadful case of laryngitis, but I can assure you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and my constituents, that Cairns has now, well and truly, like others, found its voice. (Extension of time granted)

I appreciate the extension of time. It is something that I have never experienced in all these years!

I will just turn to one area here that is particularly bothering me. I mentioned it earlier, in relation to wild rivers. I noticed that in the national papers on the weekend they had full-page ads from the state government promoting the value of the wild rivers. That was clearly done to support the Wilderness Society, and a lot of information that they provided was quite frankly quite deceptive and mischievous. I say this because there are 10 elected councillors in the Cape York area representing each of their regions. Each and every one of those—they are Indigenous councillors—has indicated their strong opposition to it. The ads have selectively picked people who have actually got some sort of benefit, either from the Wilderness Society or the state government—in effect, in most cases, buying their support.

What worries me is the fact that they have embarked on this national campaign, and I would hate to think what it costs to have full-page ads in all the national weekend papers. But I guess they have been able to successfully fund this program through the recent sale of Queensland Rail. I find that very, very disappointing.

As I said, we are really trying to make things happen in our region and I think we have a great opportunity to do that with a high level of cooperation. We are desperately trying to re-establish programs. For example, there was a very positive one we announced called the farm gate distribution network. We always talk about remote communities and the disadvantages they have, particularly regarding access to fresh food at an affordable price. It was a very small program that actually I had committed to as part of our campaign. I hope that we can have it re-established. It was a farm gate to distribution network, where there was an arrangement made with the local farmers to produce food specifically for the remote communi-
ties and it was sold directly into a network that went into these communities. The process at the moment is that the produce is sold to agents and goes down to either Sydney or Brisbane and then is relocated back into North Queensland, so that at times it can be a couple of weeks old by the time it gets to the plate in the remote communities. And of course there is an additional cost for freight.

This initiative meant that there was a chance for us to be able to put food on the tables in the remote communities at the same price, or cheaper, than it could be bought in Woolworths or Coles—in most cases that food would be a lot cheaper. It also provided a great opportunity for our farmers in the region insomuch as they had direct contracts with the communities, which meant that they were able to get a lot more—they were not paying middle men and what have you. So it was a great initiative; it was not very expensive and was one that we desperately need.

Another issue that will certainly help us relates to aviation charges. At the moment there is a review of aviation charges for our airports. Cairns has a particular disadvantage in being a regional international airport but, unlike Townsville and Darwin which are very heavily subsidised by the military, it has to rely purely on the costs of aircraft coming into the area. There has been an increase in aircraft accessing the airport in recent years and that has caused a major problem. I am hoping that that will be factored in and that there can be a special case made to make sure that we are able to remain competitive as we start to recover—maybe some sort of sliding rate. I am urging government to consider that because that will be a very important part of our economic recovery. We cannot afford to continue to have the cost of landing in Cairns as a disincentive for people flying into that area. I understand that the review result will be coming out towards the end of this year, and I hope that there will be due consideration given to our special circumstance. I think additional funding should be coming into the area to help us build a new industry in sports tourism and to give us the support to allow our communities to recover to what we had in the past.

Dr WASHER (Moore) (12.08 pm)—I want to speak on three issues which are of critical importance to Australia’s future. One is the stabilising of our population to sustainable levels, increasing our productivity and reducing our emissions of carbon dioxide and its equivalents.

Australia, like other countries around the world, faces immense challenges to create sustainable cities and societies for the future. For these to be sustainable, they must be able to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. They must be vibrant and healthy environmentally, socially and economically.

Eighty-five per cent of Australians live in an urban community within 50 kilometres of the coast. If Australia is to have a population of 35 to 36 million people by 2050, this will increase the size of most of our coastal cities by greater than 60 per cent. We already have over 22.3 million people. The aim should be to stabilise the population to 26 million, and to do this we need to reduce the overseas migration program to 70,000 people per annum. Population growth in Australia last year was 440,000, with net overseas migration of 285,000, up from 213,416 the year before. We need to cut skilled migration to 25,000 per annum. One hundred thousand young Australians aged between 15 and 24 years dropped out of the workforce last year. In 2007-08 skilled migration was 114,777. Of the so-called skilled migrants, only a minority of non-English-speaking migrants use their professional qualifications to work. In
2007-08, 3,485 cooks and 1,082 hairdressers came in on skilled migration. Currently around 3.97 million Australians aged between 15 and 64 are not employed in the labour force.

We need to hold family reunion at 50,000 per annum and increase the refugee intake from 13,750 to 20,000 per annum. We need to restrict the New Zealand or trans-Tasman program to the number of permanent departures from Australia over and above 25,000. Half of these should be skilled and the other half family reunion. Other New Zealanders should apply through normal application. For example, in 2007-08 we had 61,380 permanent residents leave Australia permanently and we had 34,491 permanent arrivals from New Zealand. Last year this increased to over 51,000. It is worth noting that one-third were third-country migrants who attained citizenship in New Zealand and came to Australia.

The current fertility rate in Australia is 1.92 babies per woman. Ideally this would be 1.8 if we are to hold the population at 26 million and plateau beyond 2050. The argument about increasing population is that we need more skilled migrants to increase our productivity and profitability in the future. However, if Australia is going to be successful in the future it will need to be a country of clever people and have innovations and new technologies where that is not necessarily required.

We must increase productivity. Australia’s unemployment rate is 5.1 per cent, one of the lowest of all OECD countries; however, our overall slack in the labour market is actually higher than the OECD average. Underemployment increased significantly during the downturn; however, even before the current downturn we had amongst the highest rate of involuntary part-time employment in the OECD. These are part-time workers who cannot find full-time jobs. More than 60 per cent of involuntary part-time workers have no post-school qualifications and one-third of them are under 25.

Also, those part-time workers who are given the opportunity to move into full-time work have poor financial incentives. Our tax and benefit system creates few incentives because the pay-off from working longer hours is small. For every additional dollar earned, an average worker will lose almost 55c in taxes or lost benefits. The disincentives are even greater for households with children where only one person works. They lose more than 70c in every additional dollar earned when moving to full-time work, mainly through a loss of means-tested family benefits.

Of the Australian government sources of 2006-07 tax revenue, 45 per cent was sourced from individual tax; 23 per cent from company tax; 16 per cent from GST; and the balance from superannuation, excise and other taxes. From a productivity perspective we need to look at thresholds on income tax and at the level of company tax. The levels of company tax need to be reduced and the thresholds for income tax increased. In order for this to occur, the level of consumption tax, the GST, may need to be investigated.

We must make it easier for businesses to employ people. Whilst equity concerns need to be addressed, care must be taken not to undermine labour market flexibility. Firms must have the flexibility to adjust to changes in their operating environment. Businesses cannot be drowning in a sea of red tape and compliance requirements.

The growth in productivity during the 1990s resulted from a number of causal factors which may or may not be replicated in the current financial climate. A number of advances may have been one-offs in the nineties but we still need to be aware of where we can make
further advances. We need to consider always innovative ways in which the best outcomes can be achieved. Some of these strategies may include: trade liberalisation and openness to trade; research and development expenditure resulting in technological advances and development in information and communications technology; good and efficient use of human capital; flexibility of labour, capital and product markets; and increases in mining production.

Geography may be a limiting factor in Australia. Physical geography cannot be changed by governments but we can ensure that nationally and internationally we can compete, with our own well-developed transport and communications systems, and that all of our infrastructure building is based on an understanding of both regional and national needs. We should ensure that any government initiatives do not stifle innovation in the business sector. This may mean more flexible arrangements and cooperation between business, unions and governments at all levels.

As a medical doctor, mental health has always been a critical issue for me, as it has not been adequately addressed in the past. From a productivity perspective, it is also a critical issue. Mental health is a key workforce participation priority. Almost half of all Australians experience a mental health disorder at some time in their life.

Finally, we must address our CO2 and equivalent emissions. To do this we must put a price on carbon. This will encourage other measures that need to be undertaken such as improving energy efficiency, reforestation and investment in renewable energy technologies. Australia has a strong reliance on non-renewable, CO2-emitting forms of energy. Although sustainable energy technologies and resources exist, a strong market driver to guide their use and further development does not. Pricing of different energy sources is not always level, and large-scale grid power in Australia rarely represents the true cost of delivered electricity. Large power stations in Australia are mostly coal fired, and the price of electricity produced does not include the external costs of greenhouse gas emissions and pollution. We must create an honest market, one which tells the ecological truth. Either we have tradeable permits—which very successfully reduced sulfur emissions from power plants by half from 1990 to 2000, at minimal cost, in the US—or we calculate the cost of carbon dioxide and its equivalents and incorporate it as a tax on goods and services. Taxation is the most powerful tool available in the market economy in directing consumer habits. It will enable goods and services which involve lower emissions in their production to become more economically viable.

Our current economic model is not sustainable. A new economy must be developed that is powered by sustainable and renewable energy sources. Last time atmospheric carbon dioxide was this high was probably 20 million years ago. The current rate of increase is approximately 1.1 parts per million per year—100 times greater than the most rapid changes that have occurred over the last 650,000 years. Around 30 per cent of anthropogenic carbon dioxide—that is, carbon dioxide generated by man—is dissolved into the oceans. Carbon dioxide reacts with water to form carbonic acid, making our oceans more acidic. As carbon dioxide has a higher solubility in cold water, the Southern Ocean contains a disproportionate amount of anthropogenic carbon dioxide compared to other, warmer oceans. Therefore the impacts of ocean acidification are being seen first in the Southern Ocean.

Increasing acidity makes it easier for aragonite to dissolve. Aragonite is a form of calcium carbonate which marine organisms such as planktonic species use to build skeletons or shells. It is thought that aragonite could disappear from the Southern Ocean within 50 years if carbon
dioxide emissions continue to increase. The impacts being seen in the Southern Ocean are likely to be followed elsewhere. Acidification of the earth’s oceans within this century will have potentially serious implications for the sustainability and management of many marine and coastal ecosystems and fisheries.

Reafforestation not only locks up carbon but also has the potential to enhance rainfall. Clearing results in changes to surface albedo, which is the proportion of light or radiation reflected by a surface. A land surface area that is light in colour reflects much more solar radiation than a darker surface and this causes serious changes to the microclimate close to the ground. Surface heating causes the thermal convection which triggers the inflow of moisture laden colder air from the ocean.

In WA in the winter time colder moisture laden air is dragged inland by convection and becomes part of the constant west-east system of high and low pressure systems. Across all four southern states we have extensively modified the surface albedo by clearing. In the northern agricultural region of WA we are only probably dragging in one-third of the moisture laden air that we did before land clearing. There is good evidence to suggest that the ecological threshold or tipping point for this convection driven moisture laden air may be in the region of a 40 per cent change in surface albedo. In the 40.6 million hectares of cleared cropping and farmland of the four southern states, around one-third of the land is not suited to intensive production. Replanting this land with native trees would go a long way to restoring some of the microclimate thermal issues and bring back the west-east moisture laden trade winds from the Indian and Great Southern oceans. To re-tree this area, which is not suited for intensive production, 13.52 million hectares would have to be planted. With approximately 300 trees per hectare, we would conservatively average 35 kilograms of sequestered carbon per tree lifespan, or 495 million tonnes of CO2 equivalent annually. That is two-thirds of what is required to offset our agricultural sector emissions.

Australians want cities that are vibrant and healthy, environmentally, socially and economically. As their representatives we must make the decisions to work towards this. We must stabilise our population at a sustainable level, we must increase our productivity to retain our living standards and, finally, we must address our carbon emissions. To do this we must place a price on carbon, because if we do not we will make some crazy decisions.

Mr SNOWDON (Lingiari—Minister for Veterans’ Affairs, Minister for Defence Science and Personnel and Minister for Indigenous Health) (12.22 pm)—I acknowledge the contribution of the member for Moore. It is always gratifying to hear his contributions to debates in this place, particularly because he is not cowed by views which might be expressed elsewhere within his own party. I hope that those people in his party who are cynical about the issue of climate change and the need for a price on carbon read his speech. Whilst we might not all agree with everything he has said, he makes a very good argument as to why this parliament, and indeed Australia, should have a price on carbon. He is a person who comes to this place with a great deal of worldly experience. From my observation, since I have been in this place with him, his contributions to whatever the debate of the day might be have always been thoughtful and insightful. I want to thank him for the contribution he has made to this discussion.

Whilst I would like to engage in a debate about climate change, that is not the purpose for which I am going to speak today. What I would like to do is paint a picture of how my own
electorate of Lingiari benefits from initiatives from this government. I say that because, as you would know, Madam Deputy Speaker, as a minister you do not often get an opportunity to freewheel it in a discussion in the parliament, and not often do you get an opportunity to speak on behalf of your own electorate.

I now come here with two roles, really—my ministerial role and my role as a member of parliament. In my ministerial role there is one particular area that I would like to pay some attention to because it directly impacts upon my own constituents—that is, as the Minister for Indigenous Health. I was the first Minister for Indigenous Health appointed by any government, and it is something I am quite proud of. I am proud to have overseen an 85 per cent increase in funding for this critical sector since we came into government.

I think that how the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health sector works and the importance of community based health services within the structure of our health delivery system in this country are not properly understood. Within the context of the current debate in the main chamber about health reform, I think it is worth contemplating the engagement of Aboriginal community controlled health organisations within the broader question of health reform and, most importantly, their contribution to alleviating the very poor health status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and working with us to close the gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and the rest of the community in life expectancy and in all matters to do with health.

We know that people are very poor in my electorate in the Northern Territory. We know that none of the health delivery systems that have operated in the past has been really successful—in fact it can be argued that, on the face of it at least, they have not been successful at all. But changes are coming. Change not only is coming but has come. It has come in the form of the collaborative relationship which has been developed between the government of the Northern Territory, the Australian government and the Aboriginal community controlled health services which provide fundamental primary health care to very large portions of the Northern Territory population.

They run health services in Darwin, Katherine and Alice Springs. For the Katherine West area they are run through the Katherine West Health Board. They are run through Sunrise Health Service to the east of Katherine, down to the area of Ngukurr and the gulf. There are the Wurli Wurlinjang Aboriginal Health Service in Katherine, the Anyinginyi Congress health service in Tennant Creek, the Utopia homelands health service to the east of Alice Springs, the Pintubi Homelands Health Service to the west of Alice Springs, and the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress in Alice Springs. These are very important initiatives. There is also the Miwatj Health Aboriginal Corporation health service operating on the Gove Peninsula, and the Laynhapuy homelands have their own health services. There are other organisations across the Northern Territory which provide these health services.

These health services are provided by Aboriginal community controlled organisations. They employ their own staff. They have cultural awareness and ownership of the services, which is quite important in making a difference in dealing with health issues that confront people. But I need to emphasise that if you measure them in the broader context of the success rate of delivery of health services—actual numbers of patients et cetera—then you will see that these are very successful organisations because they provide broad based primary health care. They provide doctors, nurses and access to physiotherapy, psychological services and
the like—the sorts of services you would expect from a comprehensive primary healthcare service.

Unfortunately they do not get a great deal of visibility in the broader Australian health context. This is true not only in the Northern Territory but also in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria. In every state of this country there are very good primary healthcare organisations that are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled. They deliver fundamental services—very basic services but very important services—to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across this country. I am forever encouraged by the contributions they are making to their own communities.

In the context of the health reform which we are currently engaged in, I think they have illustrated what it is to be a good primary healthcare service. When talking about delivering superclinics and the like and how to deliver good, comprehensive primary health services, I think we need to see some of these organisations, because of the quality of the work they do, as benchmarks for the provision of best practice.

What I do want to talk about briefly are some of the issues that confront people in regional and remote communities but particularly in remote communities. One of those issues is, of course, very poor infrastructure. Over recent weeks you will have heard, Madam Deputy Speaker, about Wadeye in the Northern Territory—sometimes referred to as Port Keats but its correct name is Wadeye. There have been difficult times there, going back over recent years, with social volatility and a whole range of issues. It is a community of about 3,500 people with its own health clinic. It is a Northern Territory government health clinic but the Commonwealth funds the services it provides, largely. I was in the fortunate position of going to Wadeye only a week or so ago to open a new clinic. This new clinic provides state-of-the-art health services to this community. From memory, it was a $7½ million spend, which means that this piece of infrastructure is second to none not just in terms of its physical attributes but also in providing accessibility to Aboriginal men and women. It understands the cultural appropriateness of dealing with men and women separately, and it does that through the design of the building, and it is staffed by very professional and highly motivated people who are delivering first-class care to their community.

I have used Wadeye as an example; I could have used any number of communities across the Northern Territory and, indeed, Northern Australia. I could refer to the organisations in your own state, Madam Deputy Speaker Livermore—the Queensland Aboriginal and Islander health services do an exceptional job in providing primary health care. But it is not only in primary health care where we need to be looking and listening to what is happening in Aboriginal community controlled health services, and I want to refer to one program in Katherine. The StrongBala Male Health for Life Program is an initiative underway in Katherine. This program helps men who have endured social alienation through substance abuse. It helps them to rebuild their lives. It has grown from the ground, coming from an initiative from Wurli Wurlinjang, the community based health service in Katherine. There were effectively a couple of key drivers, Phil Richards and John Fletcher, who have coordinated the contribution of the Wurli Wurlinjang Aboriginal Health Service committee and other sections of the Katherine community to establish a place for men to rebuild their lives, to provide employment pathways and to express and affirm their culture.
This program is unique, for a number of reasons. Not only is it actually addressing the health status of men but it sees the whole of life, the whole story. It is saying: 'If we want to make you a healthy individual, we can give you access to primary health care, we can give you health checks, but we need to make sure you are looking beyond the health centre and the health environment and looking at your whole life. How can we make sure you don’t become further dependent on alcohol if you have been dependent on alcohol previously? How can we make sure you have a pathway to employment? These are the sorts of things that will make a significant difference to the lives of many Aboriginal people in and around Katherine—not only the men themselves but also their families, because they will impact directly upon the relationships they are involved in. If we can help control some of the poor behaviour that exists in some family relationships then we will improve the life outcomes for young Aboriginal kids who are being born into these families—and that has got to be our objective. So, if we can see this as not only developing the individual but having a significant impact on individual families, their own family and their broader family, in terms of their extended family, and on their communities, then it will have made a significant contribution to the wellbeing of many Australians and be a positive outcome for so many.

These are the sorts of things that are engaging people—that when we talk about health we are thinking about it in a more holistic sense than we may have done previously. We need to understand the interrelationships that exist between drug and alcohol dependency and life outcomes for others. That is why StrongBala is a very, very good program, a great initiative and one which deserves to be understood. It should also be seen as an opportunity by others to learn from it.

I might also say, while on the subject of men, that in Alice Springs the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress has a unit which is run by a very good friend of mine, John Liddle. Mr Liddle runs this male health program and as part of that they now run biannual male health workshops. These workshops have concentrated on the role of men in the family. The last one, which I attended a few months ago, was about violence in the family. As a result of this discussion, which took place with Aboriginal men from around Australia but principally from Central Australia, they took what I think is a very strong view about themselves in relation to their partners and their children, their families and their communities, and they have now started a movement entitled Stop the Violence. It is about trying to get people to understand that there is no place for violence in any family in any community and that if they are on the grog that is not an excuse for being violent, and what we need to do is to get people to understand that it is unacceptable to behave violently in any given set of circumstances.

I want to highlight that this, again, is an initiative from within the community, just as StrongBala in Katherine is an initiative from within the community. It has the support of the whole community and will make a great deal of difference over time to the health outcomes of many people. Most importantly, it will have a direct impact on young Aboriginal men who live in and around these communities. One of the by-products, of course—hopefully—is that it will teach them responsible behaviour. It will teach them how not to behave irresponsibly when they are involved in the consumption of alcohol. We know about the higher levels of violence in some communities that are the direct result of abuse of alcohol and other substances.
There is a very strong discussion going on within the Northern Territory community about alcohol. It is a discussion that needs to have the attention of the broader Australian community, because it is saying that we need to control not just the abuse of alcohol but its consumption, the way it is retailed, who it is retailed to and how people behave when they have been consuming alcohol. These are very important discussions that people need to be aware of.

I will complete my contribution by referring, for a moment, to Building the Education Revolution. I am not sure what planet people in this place are on when they say that there is something wrong with Building the Education Revolution. They have not visited the schools in my communities, where there is absolutely 100 per cent support for the work which is being done through Building the Education Revolution—over 300 projects in my own communities. In Lingiari, it has benefited 130 schools to the value of $180 million—an enormous amount of money. Not only is this a great investment in employment and job opportunities generally and in business opportunities but the impact it is having on the life outcomes of young Territorians is obvious to everyone. It has transformed schools in a way we cannot imagine.

I am sorry for the opposition, who bleat and moan about some of the issues which have emerged in a small number of schools across the country. I say to them: open your eyes, go and have a look at what is happening in some of these communities and understand the immediate educational and social impact of the new infrastructure on these communities. If you were able to open your minds to those things, you would see that you would be opening your minds to the new opportunities that now exist for young people that did not exist previously.

A fortnight or so ago I was at a community at Gapuwiyak, in Arnhem Land. Recall that in 2000-01, prior to the election of the Labor government, there were no secondary education opportunities for kids in the bush—none. Whose responsibility was that? The Country Liberal Party—the conservative party, to which the member for Solomon and a senator for the Northern Territory belong. It was disgraceful.

Do you think you would have seen a science laboratory in Gapuwiyak before the election of a Labor government? Not on your nelly! What we were able to do a fortnight ago was open a new science laboratory on the northern coast of Australia—the Arnhem Land coast. This year seven of its students will be graduating from year 12. That is such a fillip to that community, and the infrastructure which we are providing will add to the opportunities that new and current students in the school will be able to avail themselves of. There is also the Gunbalanya CEC.

The Katherine High School has a really innovative program, a sports science centre to complement the very successful Clontarf Academy program. Unfortunately, I do not have the time now to talk about Clontarf, but at some point I will, because it is a very successful program in attracting kids to school, leveraging off sport and giving them an educational outcome which they would not otherwise have got. It has been a very successful program, and those people involved in it need to be congratulated.

I note the Maningrida CEC, with its language centre; the Milingimbi CEC, with its science centre; OLSH—Our Lady of the Sacred Heart—at Wadeye, with its science centre; Shepherds College at Galiwin’ku, with its science centre; and Tennant Creek High School’s science centre. All of these things are initiatives of this government, yet we hear in this place question
after question of the Prime Minister about the supposed inadequacies of the Building the Education Revolution program.

Let me tell you: in the real world, there is nothing that could be said other than positive things about Building the Education Revolution and its impact not only on the physical infrastructure but on the capital infrastructure of this country—the human capital benefits that will accrue as a direct result of having this infrastructure built and the opportunities that it creates for young Australians to get improved educational outcomes as a result of this infrastructure. I am a former teacher, and I have to say to you that I have not seen better school facilities in this country in the 35 years that I have been involved in public life. I say: congratulations to this government for the work we have done in this regard, and shame—real shame—on the opposition for trying to undermine it when everyone knows it is very successful. I have not visited one of these communities where I have been talking about Building the Education Revolution without hearing the question: ‘What goes on down there in Canberra? What is it about the Australian newspaper? Is it just New South Wales? What is it?’ They speak glowingly of Building the Education Revolution and its impact upon their communities, their children and their families and the opportunities that will inevitably result from that investment.

Mr Andrews (Menzies) (12.42 pm)—I say to the previous speaker that it is a pity that the examples he gives did not extend throughout the rest of the country. The waste and mismanagement that are part of that program could have provided for more schools, more teachers and more facilities not only for Indigenous students in the Northern Territory but for students throughout this country. The pity is that on this day, when we mark three years since the election of the Labor government under Mr Rudd, we see that it has been three years of waste not only of time and reform opportunities but of billions of dollars of taxpayers’ money by a government that has largely been all talk and no action.

I raise in this wide-ranging debate an important issue about both the environment and industrial relations—in particular the industrial mess that the Victorian desalination plant project has become. In particular, I call on the Victorian Premier, John Brumby, to demonstrate leadership by stepping in to fix the industrial mess surrounding the Victorian desalination plant project and to come clean about any involvement of the Victorian Labor government in ensuring that the CFMEU would be the major union involved in the construction of the desalination plant.

Last Saturday, the Australian newspaper revealed that one of the reasons Thiess management had resorted to the unorthodox practice of hiring an undercover investigator to get to the bottom of hiring practices at the desalination plant was that union officials were dictating to Thiess who could be hired on the project. It seems that a number of these employees do not have the appropriate skills required to do their jobs and that this lack of skill is inhibiting productivity and delaying the progress of construction. One manager apparently said that there was no way that the plant would be constructed on time. It was also claimed that the union thug and convicted criminal Craig Johnston has been involved with the project. While it seems that Mr. Johnston, a former state secretary of the AMWU, has an AMWU ticket, the union at the centre of all of this mess is the militant Victorian construction division of the CFMEU. This is a union with such an appalling track record of thuggery, intimidation and unlawful behaviour that it was recently fined $1 million for its disgraceful actions on the West
Gate Freeway project, a project which involves erecting safety barriers on the side of the West Gate Bridge to stop attempts at suicide by people who are obviously in that mental condition.

The Labor government is trying to wash its hands of the problems at the plant, saying either that management practices have nothing to do with them or that Thiess has a fixed price contract and that it will be their problem if the construction is not finished on time. Mr Brumby desperately wants to avoid accountability for the fact that his government was involved up to its armpits in ensuring that the CFMEU rather than the Australian Workers Union got the desalination plant job.

The involvement of Victorian government minister Martin Pakula, a former Victorian secretary of the National Union of Workers, in directing traffic to the Victorian Trades Hall Council secretary and former BLF official Brian Boyd to negotiate industrial agreements for the desalination plant is Victoria’s worst kept secret. The story is that the interests of Victorian taxpayers were ransomed as part of an internal ALP deal to satisfy a bizarre political alliance between the CFMEU, the National Union of Workers and the shop assistants union. Observers do not think it a coincidence that Martin Pakula announced that Thiess was awarded the desalination plant tender within days of the finalisation of preselections within the Labor Party for the elections this Saturday.

It is extraordinary that, while John Brumby talks tough when it comes to law and order, he has never publicly criticised the CFMEU, even when that union was bringing in bikie gangs as picketers at the West Gate Bridge project. Presumably Mr Brumby’s and the Labor government’s silence when it comes to the thuggery of the Victorian branch of the CFMEU is as much a mystery to the Prime Minister as it is to observers of the Victoria’s industrial scene. On this issue, credit must be given to the Prime Minister. She should be given credit for standing up to a powerful left-wing union by making clear that she will not support or condone, either actively or by her silence, union thuggery, while the so-called right-wing Victorian Premier sits on his hands. But then maybe it should not come as a surprise. The Prime Minister would have as much understanding as most of how Victoria’s so-called right-wing Premier is beholden to this bizarre alliance between the National Union of Workers, the shop assistants union and the CFMEU.

The fact is that Labor used taxpayers’ money to pay off the CFMEU by ensuring they got the work at the desalination plant, and Victorians are paying and will continue to pay a huge price for this tawdry deal. The excessive wages and conditions being paid to construction workers have been well documented. Tradesmen stand to earn more than $200,000 annually on this job. The long-term ramifications for Victoria, which already has a reputation for being expensive to build in, are serious. Now we have the allegations of poor productivity because of the employment, at the insistence of union officials, of employees who are not properly qualified.

It is time for the Victorian government to put the interests of taxpayers first rather than their Labor Party factions and subfactions. There should be full and frank disclosure on the part of the Victorian Minister for Water, Tim Holding, as to all the advice, both informal and formal, that he received from his department detailing any recommendation, advice, opinions and views about the awarding of the tender for the construction, operation and maintenance of the Victorian desalination plant project.
Likewise, Ministers Pakula and Holding should disclose details of all meetings, telephone discussions, teleconferences, videoconferences and correspondence between them or their office and any representative, employee, official, member, lobbyist or consultant acting for or on behalf of the NUW, the CFMEU, the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, the Australian Workers Union, the Victorian Trades Hall Council, Thiess Degremont joint venture and John Holland Leighton joint venture discussing the Victorian desalination plant project.

The dispute at the Victorian desalination plant does not look like being resolved any time soon. The project has become an industrial quagmire that needs to be fixed and fixed fast. It is therefore a great pity that the Victorian Premier has tied his own hands on the matter and is unable or unwilling to intervene. The people of Victoria deserve much better.

**Main Committee adjourned at 12.50 pm**
QUESTIONS IN WRITING

Muscular Dystrophy
(Question No. 29)

Mr Morrison asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, in writing, on 30 September 2010:

(1) Has any Government funding been appropriated for the establishment of a national database for all types of muscular dystrophy; if so, when will the database be established, and what dystrophies will it include; if not, why not.

(2) Has any Government funding been provided to the National Health and Medical Research Council for research into Facioscapulohumeral Dystrophy (FSHD) in Australia.

(3) Has any funding been appropriated for the establishment of a diagnostic clinic for FSHD within Australia; if so, what sum; if not, why not.

Ms Roxon—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

(1) No. However, in 2009-10 the Commonwealth Government provided project funding of $112,200 to the Muscular Dystrophy Association to develop a website containing information that addresses the medical, paramedical and psychosocial care of people with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy.

(2) No.

(3) No. The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC), under its Act, has specific requirements for its research funding, which is provided on a competitive basis following extensive peer review. It is not practical to review NHMRC records to determine if any applications were received for a diagnostic clinic that did not fall within the fundable range.

National Long-Term Tourism Strategy
(Question No. 54)

Mr Baldwin asked the Minister for Tourism, in writing, on 28 October 2010:

What proportion of the Government’s $6 million election commitment for the National Long-Term Tourism Strategy will be allocated to (a) 2010-11, (b) 2011-12, (c) 2012-13, and (d) 2013-14, outside the forward estimates; and how will the Government’s $6 million election commitment for the National Long-Term Tourism Strategy be allocated to each working group.

Mr Martin Ferguson—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

(1) (a) $0 in 2010-11
   (b) $1.4 million in 2011-12
   (c) $1.4 million in 2012-13
   (d) $1.4 million in 2013-14 and a further $1.8 million outside the forward estimates period

(2) The allocation of the $6 million to each of the National Long-Term Tourism Strategy Working Groups will be determined by the Tourism Ministers’ Council.

National Long-Term Tourism Strategy
(Question No. 55)

Mr Baldwin asked the Minister for Tourism, in writing, on 28 October 2010:

In respect of the National Long Term Tourism Strategy, for the (a) Destination Management Planning, (b) Digital Distribution, (c) Indigenous Tourism, (d) Industry Resilience, (e) Investment and Regulatory Reform, (f) Labour and Skills, (g) Tourism Access, (h) Research and Development Advisory Board, and (i) Tourism Quality Council of Australia, working groups, what total sum of funding is available to each
through the Tourism Ministers’ Council; and of this, what is the Commonwealth’s contribution (to each).

Mr Martin Ferguson—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

On 30 April 2010 the Tourism Ministers’ Council (TMC) approved a total budget of $2.2 million ($485,560 and $1,711,160 for 2009-10 and 2010-11 respectively) to enable the Working Groups implement key elements of the National Long-Term Tourism Strategy. Funding is shared on a 50-50 basis between the Commonwealth and the states and territories.

The table below provides details of the Commonwealth’s notional contribution to Working Group budgets through the TMC. Working Group allocations are based on initial work programs developed by the Working Groups at the beginning of 2010.

Commonwealth contribution to ASCOT-TMC budget as agreed by TMC on 30 April 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Working Group</th>
<th>2009-10</th>
<th>2010-11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Labour and Skills Development Working Group</td>
<td>86,601</td>
<td>134,112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investment and Regulatory Reform Working Group</td>
<td>50,012</td>
<td>352,585</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destination Management Planning Working Group</td>
<td>29,007</td>
<td>104,001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism Access Working Group*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry Resilience Working Group</td>
<td>54,513</td>
<td>2,501</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism Quality Council of Australia</td>
<td>4,951</td>
<td>55,013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous Tourism Working Group</td>
<td>5,001</td>
<td>10,002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital Distribution Working Group</td>
<td>2,501</td>
<td>50,012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research and Development Advisory Board</td>
<td>10,252</td>
<td>147,535</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* As at 30 April 2010, no budget was allocated to the Tourism Access Working Group but an amount of $92,522 for 2010-11 has since been made available to the Working Group by the Commonwealth.

Tourism Industry: Award Modernisation Process and Superannuation

(Question No. 57)

Mr Baldwin asked the Minister for Tourism, in writing, on 28 October 2010:

In respect of the first key performance indicator of Program 4 of his department that tourism interests be considered in the broader context of Government policy development and implementation, to what extent were tourism interests considered and reflected as part of the Government’s (a) award modernisation process, and (b) decision to increase employer-funded superannuation guarantee from 9 to 12 per cent.

Mr Martin Ferguson—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

(a) award modernisation process:

Modern awards are the responsibility of the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR).

Throughout the award modernisation process the Department of Resources, Energy and Tourism worked with key stakeholders including the then Minister for Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, the Hon Julia Gillard MP and industry associations to ensure the concerns and interests of the tourism and hospitality industry were considered.

Following consultation with the Department of Resources, Energy and Tourism and the industry associations, Minister Gillard requested a variation, asking the Australian Industrial Relations Commission (AIRC) to “create a separate modern award covering the restaurant and catering industry, separate from those sectors of the hospitality industry providing hotelier, accommodation or

QUESTIONS IN WRITING
gaming services”. On 26 September 2009, Minister Gillard announced the AIRC had set out the provisions of a proposed Restaurant Award 2010.

The decision recognises the business circumstances of the industry. (b) decision to increase employer-funded superannuation guarantee from 9 to 12 per cent

Policy responsibility for the employer-funded superannuation guarantee (SG) rests with the Treasury.

More than 90 per cent of tourism and hospitality businesses are small businesses and the Government has given consideration to the impacts on small businesses and employees. This is reflected in the phase in arrangements. The lead time will allow employers and employees time to adapt, and for the increased SG contributions to be taken into account when negotiating future wage agreements.

**Tourism Australia: Leased Premises**

(Question No. 59)

Mr Baldwin asked the Minister for Tourism, in writing, on 28 October 2010:

(1) What number of premises is leased by Tourism Australia, and for each, (a) what is the address, and (b) what sum of money is charged (i) per square metre, and (ii) in rent per annum.

(2) Where Tourism Australia shares premises with another agency or department, what, if any, financial contribution does it make towards the operating expenses of those premises.

Mr Martin Ferguson—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

Details on the premises leased by Tourism Australia are in the below table. Tourism Australia shares lease 13 London (below) with the Department of Foreign Affairs. The financial contribution made towards operating expenses is AUD14 per sq ft. per annum.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OFFICE LOCATION</th>
<th>OFFICE ADDRESS</th>
<th>Annual Rent per sqm (AUD)</th>
<th>Annual Rent (AUD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Los Angeles</td>
<td>Suite 1150 6100 Center Drive Los Angeles CA 90045 USA</td>
<td>AUD 440</td>
<td>AUD 350,732</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Hong Kong</td>
<td>Suite 6706 67th Floor Central Plaza 18 Harbour Road Wanchai Hong Kong</td>
<td>AUD 781</td>
<td>AUD 388,776</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Kuala Lumpur</td>
<td>Suite 12-1 Faber Imerial Court Jalan Sultan Ismail 50250 Kuala Lumpur Malaysia</td>
<td>AUD 172</td>
<td>AUD 35,897</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Seoul</td>
<td>20th Floor Youngpoong Building 33 Seorin-dong Chongro-ku Seoul 110-752 Korea</td>
<td>AUD 577</td>
<td>AUD 149,331</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Shanghai</td>
<td>Unit 1501, 15/F Citigroup Tower 33 Hua Yuan Shi Qiao Road Lujiazui Pu Dong Shanghai 200120 China</td>
<td>AUD 490</td>
<td>AUD 197,904</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Singapore</td>
<td>101 Thompson Road United Square #08-03 Singapore 307591</td>
<td>AUD 1,183</td>
<td>AUD 431,695</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Mumbai</td>
<td>52, Nariman Bhavan 5th Floor Mumbai 400021 India</td>
<td>AUD 1,075</td>
<td>AUD 138,687</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Tokyo</td>
<td>Marunouchi Trust Tower Building N, Marunouchi 1-8-1, Chiyoda-Ku, Tokyo</td>
<td>AUD 1,438</td>
<td>AUD 384,069</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Auckland</td>
<td>Level 3 125 The Strand Parnell Auckland New Zealand</td>
<td>AUD 256</td>
<td>AUD 107,429</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Sydney</td>
<td>Level 18, Tower 2 Darling Park 201 Sussex Street Sydney NSW 2000</td>
<td>AUD 573</td>
<td>AUD 1,334,454</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mr Baldwin asked the Minister for Tourism, in writing, on 28 October 2010:
For each of the land and buildings owned by Tourism Australia, what is the (a) monetary value, (b) date of the last valuation, and (c) address.

Mr Martin Ferguson—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:
Tourism Australia does not own land or buildings.

Tourism Industry: Expenditure
(Question No. 61)

Mr Baldwin asked the Minister for Tourism, in writing, on 28 October 2010:
(1) What proportion, by sum and percentage, of the expenditure in Program 1.1 for industry development is spent in (a) Australia, or (b) in Australian dollars.
(2) What proportion, by sum and percentage, of the expenditure in Program 1.2 for strengthening the travel distribution system is spent in (a) Australia, or (b) in Australian dollars.
(3) What proportion, by sum and percentage, of the expenditure in Program 1.3 for is spent in (a) Australia, or (b) in Australian dollars.

Mr Martin Ferguson—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:
(1) Program 1.1 Industry Development (a) A$10.7 million (83% of total program spend.)
(2) Program 1.2 Strengthening the Travel Distribution System (a) A$7.5 million (48.1% of total program spend.)
(3) Program 1.3 Increase Demand for Australia (a) A$22.7 million (20% of total program spend.)

Tourism Australia: Research
(Question No. 62)

Mr Baldwin asked the Minister for Tourism, in writing, on 28 October 2010:
In (a) 2009-10, (b) 2010-11, (c) 2011-12, (d) 2012-13, and (e) 2013-14, excluding the activities of Tourism Research Australia, what sum of money did/will Tourism Australia spend on research.

Mr Martin Ferguson—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:
(a) 2009/10 $3.1 million;
(b) 2010/11 $2.7 million;
(c) 2011/12 $2.7 million;
(d) 2012/13 $2.7 million;
(e) 2013/14 $2.7 million.
Tourism Australia: Trade Events
(Question No. 63)

Mr Baldwin asked the Minister for Tourism, in writing, on 28 October 2010:

(1) In respect of trade events that Tourism Australia organised, coordinated, or participated in during 2009-10, (a) what was the name of each event, (b) where (ie, city, State or Territory, country) was each event held, and (c) what was the financial cost of, or profit made from, each event.

(2) In respect of trade events that Tourism Australia has and will organise, coordinate, or participate in during 2010-11, (a) what is the name of each event, (b) where (ie, city, State or Territory, country) will each event be held, and (c) what will be the financial cost of, or profit made from, each event.

Mr Martin Ferguson—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

Tourism Australia participated in or coordinated 33 international trade shows, travel markets and trade missions around the world during 2009/10. A list of dates and locations is in the below table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OzTalk North America</td>
<td>07/08/09–09/08/09</td>
<td>United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India Mega Famil and Workshop (IMFW)</td>
<td>10/08/09–14/08/09</td>
<td>Australia (Gold Coast)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International French Travel Market (IFTM – formerly Top Resa)</td>
<td>22/09/09–25/09/09</td>
<td>France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Odykh Leisure Show Moscow</td>
<td>22/09/09–25/09/09</td>
<td>Russia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dreamtime</td>
<td>12/10/09–6/10/09</td>
<td>Australia (Sydney)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater China Travel Mission (GCTM)</td>
<td>08/11/09–2/11/09</td>
<td>China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Travel Market (WTM)</td>
<td>09/11/09–12/11/09</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Australia Exploratory Mission to India</td>
<td>16/11/09–20/11/09</td>
<td>India</td>
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<tr>
<td>China International Travel Mart (CITM)</td>
<td>19/11/09–22/11/09</td>
<td>China</td>
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<tr>
<td>The European Incentive, Business Travel &amp; Meetings Exhibition (EIBTM)</td>
<td>01/12/09–03/12/09</td>
<td>Spain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATEC Meeting Place</td>
<td>02/12/09–03/12/09</td>
<td>Australia (Sydney)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Luxury Travel Market (ILTM)</td>
<td>07/12/09–10/12/09</td>
<td>France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vakantiebeurs (VAK)</td>
<td>12/01/10–17/01/10</td>
<td>Netherlands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G’Day USA (Los Angeles, San Francisco and New York)</td>
<td>13/01/10–27/01/10</td>
<td>United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FITUR 2010</td>
<td>20/01/10–24/01/10</td>
<td>Spain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FESPO</td>
<td>28/01/10–31/01/10</td>
<td>Switzerland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borsa Internazionale del Turismo (BIT)</td>
<td>18/02/10–21/02/10</td>
<td>Italy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confax</td>
<td>23/02/10–25/02/10</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan Australia Mission (JAM)</td>
<td>24/02/1025/02/10</td>
<td>Japan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korea Travel Mission (KTM)</td>
<td>26/02/10</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Africa Workshop</td>
<td>01/03/10–05/03/10</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia Pacific Incentives &amp; Meetings Expo (AIME)</td>
<td>02/03/10–03/03/10</td>
<td>Australia (Melbourne)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internationale Tourismus Börse (ITB)</td>
<td>10/03/10–14/03/10</td>
<td>Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Australia Business Events Educational (TABEE)</td>
<td>15/03/10–17/03/10</td>
<td>China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European New Product Workshop</td>
<td>16/03/10–18/03/10</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OZTalk New Zealand</td>
<td>19/03/10–21/03/10</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Product Workshop USA</td>
<td>25/03/10–26/03/10</td>
<td>United States</td>
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<tr>
<td>ATEC Symposium</td>
<td>20/04/10–23/04/10</td>
<td>Australia (Hobart)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘See Australia’ Latin Famil Workshop</td>
<td>30/04/10</td>
<td>Australia (Sydney)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For 2010/11, Tourism Australia has taken part in or has planned to take part in 26 international trade shows, travel markets and trade missions. A list of dates and locations is in the below table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corroboree Europe</td>
<td>06/05/10–08/05/10</td>
<td>Australia (Melbourne)</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Worldwide Exhibition for Incentive Travel, Meetings &amp; Events (IMEX)</td>
<td>25/05/10–27/05/10</td>
<td>Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Tourism Exchange (ATE)</td>
<td>29/05/10–04/06/10</td>
<td>Australia (Adelaide)</td>
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<tr>
<td>India Travel Mission 2010</td>
<td>30/08/10-1/09/10</td>
<td>India</td>
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<tr>
<td>Japan Australia Mission (JAM) Downunder</td>
<td>06/09/10-08/09/10</td>
<td>Australia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Corroboree – The Americas</td>
<td>10/09/10-13/09/10</td>
<td>Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East Asia Mission (SEAM) 2010</td>
<td>20/09/10-22/09/10</td>
<td>Vietnam</td>
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<tr>
<td>International French Travel Market (IFTM – formerly Top Resa)</td>
<td>21/09/10-24/09/10</td>
<td>France</td>
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<tr>
<td>Odxkyh Leisure Show Moscow</td>
<td>21/09/10-24/09/10</td>
<td>Russia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater China Travel Mission (GCTM)</td>
<td>31/10/10-3/11/10</td>
<td>China</td>
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<tr>
<td>World Travel Market (WTM)</td>
<td>08/11/10-11/11/10</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
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<tr>
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<td>18/12/10-21/12/10</td>
<td>China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The European Incentive, Business Travel &amp; Meetings Exhibition (EIBTM)</td>
<td>31/11/10-02/12/10</td>
<td>Spain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATEC Meeting Place</td>
<td>02/12/10</td>
<td>Australia (Sydney)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vakantiebeurs (VAK)</td>
<td>11/01/11-16/01/11</td>
<td>Netherlands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>15/01/11-31/01/11</td>
<td>United States</td>
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<td>FITUR 2011</td>
<td>19/01/11-23/01/11</td>
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<td>01/03/11-03/03/11</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
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<tr>
<td>Internationale Tourismus Börse (ITB)</td>
<td>09/03/11-13/03/11</td>
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<tr>
<td>ATEC Symposium</td>
<td>TBC</td>
<td>Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘See Australia’ Latin Famil Workshop</td>
<td>TBC</td>
<td>Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Tourism Exchange (ATE) 2011</td>
<td>02/04/11-08/04/11</td>
<td>Australia (Sydney)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corroboree Europe</td>
<td>02/06/11-05/06/11</td>
<td>Australia (Darwin)</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Worldwide Exhibition for Incentive Travel, Meetings &amp; Events (IMEX)</td>
<td>24/05/11–26/05/11</td>
<td>Germany</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The aim of Tourism Australia’s coordination/participation in these trade events is to provide Australian tourism businesses with opportunities to meet travel agents and wholesalers, foster new business relationships and distribution networks for Australian tourism products. Tourism Australia does not profit from these events.

Tourism Australia does not record trade event expenditure by specific event, rather expenditure forms part of Tourism Australia’s total marketing activity. In 2009/10 trade event expenditure totalled $7.1 million and 2010/11 will total $8.2 million.
Tourism: Aussie Specialist Program
(Question No. 64)
Mr Baldwin asked the Minister for Tourism, in writing, on 28 October 2010:
As at 1 July 2009 and 2010, what was the number of travel agents in the Aussie Specialist Program.

Mr Martin Ferguson—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:
In July 2010 there was 11,734 Qualified Aussie Specialists and in July 2009 there was 11,059 Qualified Aussie Specialists.

Tourism Australia: Stakeholder Satisfaction Surveys
(Question No. 65)
Mr Baldwin asked the Minister for Tourism, in writing, on 28 October 2010:
For each calendar year since 1 January 2005 (to 27 October 2010), what proportion (as a percentage) of stakeholders has indicated that Tourism Australia helps their business (under key performance indicator for Program 1.2).

Mr Martin Ferguson—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:
According to the 2009/2010 Stakeholder Satisfaction Survey, 81% of respondents rated the value of Tourism Australia’s functions to their business as “excellent”, “very good” or “good”.
According to the 2007/2008 Stakeholder Satisfaction Survey, 80% of respondents rated the value of Tourism Australia’s functions to their business as “excellent”, “very good” or “good”.
According to the 2005/2006 Stakeholder Satisfaction Survey, 85% of respondents rated the value of Tourism Australia’s functions to their business as “excellent”, “very good” or “good”.
Stakeholder Satisfaction surveys are conducted every second year.

Business Events Australia
(Question No. 66)
Mr Baldwin asked the Minister for Tourism, in writing, on 28 October 2010:
For (a) 2009-10, (b) 2010-11, (c) 2011-12, (d) 2012-13, and (e) 2013-14, what was/is the total budget for Business Events Australia, and total sum of the contribution from (i) the Commonwealth, (ii) industry sources, and (iii) other sources.

Mr Martin Ferguson—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:
(a) For 2009/10 the actual budget for Business Events Australia was (i) $4.1 million (ii) $1,160 and (iii) $0. In 2009/10 Business expenditure included $1 million from the $9 million stimulus.
(b) For 2010/11 the budget for Business Events Australia was (i) $3 million (ii) $1,059 and (iii) $0.
(c) For 2011/12 the estimated budget for Business Events Australia is (i) $3 million (ii) $1,059 and (iii) $0.
(d) For 2012/13 the estimated budget for Business Events Australia is (i) $3 million (ii) $1,059 and (iii) $0.
(c) For 2013/14 the estimated budget for Business Events Australia is (i) $3 million (ii) $1,059 and (iii) $0.


Tourism Australia: Marketing  
(Question No. 67)

Mr Baldwin asked the Minister for Tourism, in writing, on 28 October 2010:

(1) For (a) 2009-10, (b) 2010-11, (c) 2011-12, (d) 2012-13, and (e) 2013-14, what sum of money was/is allocated under Program 1.3 of Tourism Australia to (i) domestic marketing, and (ii) international marketing.

(2) For each international market, (ie, China, Japan, United Kingdom, etc), in what currency is marketing procured by Tourism Australia.

Mr Martin Ferguson—The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

(1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>(i) Domestic '000</th>
<th>(ii) International '000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009/10</td>
<td>10,299</td>
<td>118,415</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010/11</td>
<td>10,332</td>
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<tr>
<td>2011/12</td>
<td>11,453</td>
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<tr>
<td>2012/13</td>
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<td>115,628</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013/14</td>
<td>11,717</td>
<td>117,046</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(2) Local currency other than Indonesia and Latin America where procurement is in US dollars.