COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

House of Representatives

Official Hansard

No. 4, 2011
Tuesday, 22 March 2011

FORTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION—SECOND PERIOD

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SITTING DAYS—2011

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FORTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION—SECOND PERIOD

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

House of Representatives Officeholders

Speaker—Mr Harry Alfred Jenkins MP
Deputy Speaker—Hon. Peter Neil Slipper MP
Second Deputy Speaker—Hon. Bruce Craig Scott MP

Members of the Speaker’s Panel—Ms Anna Elizabeth Burke MP, Hon. Dick Godfrey Harry Adams MP, Ms Sharon Leah Bird MP, Mrs Yvette Maree D’Ath MP, Mr Steven Georganas MP, Kirsten Fiona Livermore MP, Mr John Paul Murphy MP, Mr Peter Sid Sidebottom MP, Mr Kelvin John Thomson MP, Ms Maria Vanvakinou MP

Leader of the House—Hon. Anthony Norman Albanese MP
Deputy Leader of the House—Hon. Stephen Francis Smith MP
Manager of Opposition Business—Hon. Christopher Maurice Pyne MP
Deputy Manager of Opposition Business—Mr Luke Hartsuyker MP

Party Leaders and Whips
Australian Labor Party
Leader—Hon. Julia Eileen Gillard MP
Deputy Leader—Hon. Wayne Maxwell Swan MP
Chief Government Whip—Hon. Joel Andrew Fitzgibbon MP
Government Whips—Ms Jill Griffiths Hall MP and Mr Christopher Patrick Hayes MP

Liberal Party of Australia
Leader—Hon. Anthony John Abbott MP
Deputy Leader—Hon. Julie Isabel Bishop MP
Chief Opposition Whip—Hon. Warren George Entsch MP
Opposition Whips—Mr Patrick Damien Secker MP and Ms Nola Bethwyn Marino MP

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

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## Members of the House of Representatives

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<td>Bonner, QLD</td>
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<td>Washer, Malcom James</td>
<td>Moore, WA</td>
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## Members of the House of Representatives

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

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

## Heads of Parliamentary Departments

- Clerk of the Senate—R Laing
- Clerk of the House of Representatives—B Wright
- Secretary, Department of Parliamentary Services—A Thompson
GILLARD MINISTRY

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

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

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

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

Leader of the Opposition
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]
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Shadow Minister</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Employment Participation</td>
<td>Hon. Sussan Ley MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Justice, Customs and Border Protection</td>
<td>Mr Michael Keenan MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Assistant Treasurer and Shadow Minister for Financial Services</td>
<td>Senator Mathias Cormann</td>
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<tr>
<td>and Superannuation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Childcare and Early Childhood Learning</td>
<td>Hon. Sussan Ley MP</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Universities and Research</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Brett Mason</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Youth and Sport and Deputy Manager of Opposition Business in the House</td>
<td>Mr Luke Hartsuyker MP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Indigenous Development and Employment</td>
<td>Senator Marise Payne</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Regional Development</td>
<td>Hon. Bob Baldwin MP</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Special Minister of State</td>
<td>Hon. Bronwyn Bishop MP</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for COAG</td>
<td>Senator Marise Payne</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Tourism</td>
<td>Hon. Bob Baldwin MP</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Defence Science, Technology and Personnel</td>
<td>Mr Stuart Robert MP</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Veterans’ Affairs and Shadow Minister Assisting the Leader of the Opposition on the Centenary of ANZAC</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Michael Ronaldson</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Regional Communications</td>
<td>Mr Luke Hartsuyker MP</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Ageing and Shadow Minister for Mental Health</td>
<td>Senator Concetta Fierravanti-Wells</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Seniors</td>
<td>Hon. Bronwyn Bishop MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Disabilities, Carers and the Voluntary Sector</td>
<td>Senator Mitch Fifield</td>
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<tr>
<td>and Manager of Opposition Business in the Senate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Housing</td>
<td>Senator Marise Payne</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Chairman, Scrutiny of Government Waste Committee</td>
<td>Mr Jamie Briggs MP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Cabinet Secretary</td>
<td>Hon. Philip Ruddock MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary Assisting the Leader of the Opposition</td>
<td>Senator Cory Bernardi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance</td>
<td>Hon. Teresa Gambaro MP</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Roads and Regional Transport</td>
<td>Mr Darren Chester MP</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary to the Shadow Attorney-General</td>
<td>Senator Gary Humphries</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Tax Reform and Deputy Chairman</td>
<td>Hon. Tony Smith MP</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Coalition Policy Development Committee</td>
<td>Senator Fiona Nash</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Education</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Ian Macdonald</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Northern and Remote Australia</td>
<td>Mr Don Randall MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Local Government</td>
<td>Senator Simon Birmingham</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for the Murray-Darling Basin</td>
<td>Senator Gary Humphries</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Materiel</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Ian Macdonald</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for the Defence Force and Defence Support</td>
<td>Dr Andrew Southcott MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Primary Healthcare</td>
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</tbody>
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Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Health Services and Indigenous Health  Mr Andrew Laming MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Supporting Families  Senator Cory Bernardi
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for the Status of Women  Senator Michaelia Cash
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Environment  Senator Simon Birmingham
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Citizenship and Settlement  Hon. Teresa Gambaro MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Immigration  Senator Michaelia Cash
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Innovation, Industry, and Science  Senator Hon. Richard Colbeck
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Fisheries and Forestry  Senator Hon. Richard Colbeck
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Fair Competition  Senator Scott Ryan
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Tuesday, 22 March 2011

The SPEAKER (Mr Harry Jenkins) took the chair at 2 pm, made an acknowledge-ment of country and read prayers.

MINISTERIAL ARRANGEMENTS

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (2.01 pm)—I table for the information of the House a revised ministry list reflecting a change to the ministry made earlier this month. The change is the appointment of the Hon. Warren Snowdon MP as Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on the Centenary of ANZAC. I seek leave to have that document incorporated in Hansard.

Leave granted.

The document read as follows—

SECOND GILLARD MINISTRY

3 March 2011

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<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Minister</th>
<th>Other Chamber</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prime Minister</td>
<td>The Hon Julia Gillard MP</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Chris Evans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government</td>
<td>The Hon Simon Crean MP</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Nick Sherry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for the Arts</td>
<td>The Hon Simon Crean MP</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Mark Arbib</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Social Inclusion</td>
<td>The Hon Tanya Plibersek MP</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Mark Arbib</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Privacy and Freedom of Information</td>
<td>The Hon Brendan O‘Connor MP</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Joe Ludwig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Sport</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Mark Arbib</td>
<td>The Hon Kate Ellis MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Minister of State for the Public Service and Integrity</td>
<td>The Hon Gary Gray AO MP</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Penny Wong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on the Centenary of ANZAC</td>
<td>The Hon. Warren Snowdon MP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cabinet Secretary</td>
<td>The Hon Mark Dreyfus QC MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Kate Lundy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treasurer (Deputy Prime Minister)</td>
<td>The Hon Wayne Swan MP</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Penny Wong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Treasurer</td>
<td>The Hon Bill Shorten MP</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Nick Sherry</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation</td>
<td>The Hon Bill Shorten MP</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Nick Sherry</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer</td>
<td>The Hon David Bradbury MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Jobs and Workplace Relations (Leader of the Government in the Senate)</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Chris Evans</td>
<td>The Hon Simon Crean MP (Jobs and Workplace Relations)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth</td>
<td>The Hon Peter Garrett AM MP</td>
<td>The Hon Peter Garrett AM MP (Tertiary Education and Skills)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Employment Participation and Childcare</td>
<td>The Hon Kate Ellis MP</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Chris Evans</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Indigenous Employment and Economic Development</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Mark Arbib</td>
<td>The Hon Jenny Macklin MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for School Education and Workplace Relations</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Jacinta Collins</td>
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<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Minister</td>
<td>Other Chamber</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy (Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate) Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on Digital Productivity</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Stephen Conroy</td>
<td>The Hon Anthony Albanese MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Foreign Affairs</td>
<td>The Hon Kevin Rudd MP</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Stephen Conroy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Trade</td>
<td>The Hon Dr Craig Emerson MP</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Stephen Conroy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Trade</td>
<td>The Hon Justine Elliot MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Pacific Island Affairs</td>
<td>The Hon Richard Marles MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Defence (Deputy Leader of the House)</td>
<td>The Hon Stephen Smith MP</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Chris Evans</td>
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<tr>
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<td>The Hon Warren Snowdon MP</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Chris Evans</td>
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<td>The Hon Jason Clare MP</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Chris Evans</td>
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<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Defence</td>
<td>The Hon David Feeney</td>
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<tr>
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<td>The Hon Chris Bowen MP</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Kim Carr</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Kate Lundy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Infrastructure and Transport (Leader of the House) Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure and Transport</td>
<td>The Hon Anthony Albanese MP</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Kim Carr</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Health and Ageing</td>
<td>The Hon Nicola Roxon MP</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Joe Ludwig</td>
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<td>The Hon Warren Snowdon MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Health and Ageing</td>
<td>The Hon Catherine King MP</td>
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<tr>
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<td>The Hon Jenny Macklin MP</td>
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<td>Senator the Hon Jan McLucas</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities Parliamentary Secretary for Sustainability and Urban Water</td>
<td>The Hon Tony Burke MP</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Stephen Conroy</td>
</tr>
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<td>Minister for Finance and Deregulation</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Penny Wong</td>
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<tr>
<td>Special Minister of State</td>
<td>The Hon Gary Gray AO MP</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Penny Wong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister Assisting on Deregulation and Public Sector Superannuation</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Nick Sherry</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Carbon Pricing

Mr ABBOTT (2.01 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Today I visited Paragon Printers Australasia, an environmentally sensitive, medium-sized business in Fyshwick whose electricity bill will rise by almost $50,000 a year under a $26-a-tonne carbon price. I ask the Prime Minister: how will she compensate this business so that printing jobs do not migrate to countries like China and India that do not have a carbon tax?

Ms GILLARD—To the Leader of the Opposition I say this: no matter how ferocious the scare campaign, we will stay the course and we will get this done because it is the right thing to do by the country. Of course, the Leader of the Opposition has only one speed as a politician and that is ‘wreck’. Here he is in this parliament making figures up. What is remarkable to me is that some days the Leader of the Opposition comes into this place and criticises the government for not giving enough detail about carbon pricing and then on other days he comes into this parliament and makes figures...
up as though he can use those figures with any authority. You cannot have it both ways.

Mr Pyne interjecting—

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

Ms GILLARD—As the Leader of the Opposition well knows, this is a government committed to pricing carbon. That means we will make the biggest polluters pay and we will use the revenue that is paid by the big polluters to assist households, to assist businesses to make the transition and to tackle climate change programs.

I understand that as the Leader of the Opposition goes around the country he is making people afraid. I am sure he went to that small business today for the sole purpose of making people afraid. But to the Leader of the Opposition I say this: we are a Labor government and we will deliver this change fairly. In the great tradition of reforming Labor governments we will get this done and we will get it done with fairness. I say to the Leader of the Opposition as well: I hope he took the opportunity during his travels to this small business today to say to every person that he met along the way that, if he is elected and we have provided tax cuts, he will take those tax cuts away; that, if he is elected and we have increased pensions, he will take those increases away; that, if we provide assistance through direct assistance to households and he is elected, he will take that assistance away.

I think the Leader of the Opposition should be very clear with Australian families, after the announcement made by his shadow Treasurer yesterday: what he stands for is ripping money out of the purses and wallets of Australians which the government wants to provide. The government is committed to making the biggest polluters in this country pay and using that money to assist households, to assist businesses and to tackle climate change. The proposition is to tax polluters and help households. The Leader of the Opposition’s proposition is to tax households and help polluters. That is what he stands for—taking money off decent hard-working Australians and giving it by way of subsidies to the biggest polluting businesses in this country. We will get this job done because it is right for the country, no matter how ferocious the Leader of the Opposition’s scare campaign.

Economy

Mr CHEESEMAN (2.05 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Why is it important to deliver economic reform through a bipartisan commitment to act in the national interest—in particular on climate change?

Opposition members interjecting—

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for Corangamite for his question and know he is guided in this place by serving the national interest. We had the opposition laugh at this question because this is an opposition that think the word ‘reform’ and the concept of reform are to be laughed at. That is their only contribution to the public debate. It was not always like this. The Liberal Party did not historically lie as low as it does today. Historically the big economic transformations in this country have had bipartisan support. That was true under the Hawke and Keating governments when major reforms like floating the dollar and reducing tariffs got strong bipartisan support.

Of course, I was never a fan of former Prime Minister John Howard, but I do give him this: faced with the choice when he was in opposition of going and looking for fear or supporting economic reform in the nation’s interest, he chose to support economic reform. Now, in the challenge that we face today, a challenge of pricing carbon, what do we see? Each and every day we see the Leader of the Opposition putting his political
interest before the national interest. That is what he does every day that he comes into this place. He uses a scare campaign before even giving the matter any proper consideration or using his better judgment.

Let us go through the examples. On national health reform, before I even announced the new national health reform agreement, the Leader of the Opposition was on people’s TV screens, bagging it and saying it was wrong. He did not even bother to read it before saying no. On the National Broadband Network, the Leader of the Opposition, who clearly does not understand the power of this technology, before he bothered to inform himself about the economic benefits and the service benefits for Australians, just said no. On the flood levy—and it is a very important example today—when this government were working through how we would fund our commitment to rebuilding Queensland and rebuilding the nation, the Leader of the Opposition just said no. A levy was good enough for him to fund his election promises but it was not good enough for him to support the people of Queensland by supporting that levy.

Now, in the tradition of those scare campaigns, we have the Leader of the Opposition trying to raise fear on pricing carbon. I say to the Leader of the Opposition that we will keep staring his fear campaign down. What the Leader of the Opposition needs to do is come clean on his attitude to climate change. He should stand before the Australian people and admit that he is a climate change denier. He should come before the Australian people and say that he has supported a carbon tax in the past and that the only reason he says no now is that he is motivated by the politics of the issue. And he should say to the Australian people that he stands for taking assistance out of their hands. If we provide tax cuts to assist, he will take them away. If we provide pension increases to assist, he will take them away. If we provide direct payments to assist, he will take them away. The Leader of the Opposition stands for taking money from Australian households. He should come very clean about that.

**Carbon Pricing**

**Mrs MARKUS** (2.10 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Can the Prime Minister confirm that Labor’s $30-a-tonne carbon tax could increase rail fares by up to $70 a year? Given that a carbon tax is meant to encourage people, not discourage people, from using public transport, how will the Prime Minister compensate state public transport authorities so that fares do not skyrocket as a result of her carbon tax?

**Ms GILLARD**—The member who asked the question started her question with the word ‘given’ and then went on to say something to this parliament—

*Mr Hockey interjecting—*

**Ms GILLARD**—You can always rely on the shadow Treasurer for a bit of help. I thank him for that; he is much more supportive of me than he is of the Leader of the Opposition and he is being very supportive now! I thank the shadow Treasurer for absolutely admitting to this House that the opposition is predetermining its questions on figures that it is just grabbing—that, of course, it is coming into this parliament to raise fear and, in order to do that, it is making things up. The question asked by the member is just about making things up.

What I would say to the member opposite is: how is she going to feel in the 2013 election campaign? How is she going to feel—

*Mr Christensen interjecting—*

**Mr Simpkins interjecting—**

**The SPEAKER**—Order! The member for Cowan! The member for Dawson!

*Mr Simpkins interjecting—*
The SPEAKER—The member for Cowan is warned! The Prime Minister has the call.

Ms GILLARD—Thank you very much. I say to the member who asked the question: how is she going to feel in the 2013 election campaign after this government has successfully priced carbon—

Mrs Markus—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. With all due respect, this question is about a $70 increase on rail. I would like the Prime Minister to come to the question and explain how she—

The SPEAKER—The member for Macquarie will resume her place. The member for Macquarie has made her point of order. Prime Minister.

Ms GILLARD—Thank you very much. I say to the member, who continues to float figures that she has just made up: how will she feel at the next election campaign when we have successfully priced carbon through this parliament? How will she feel at the next election campaign, when she is honour bound to go to every constituent in her electorate and say, ‘The assistance the Gillard government gave you, Tony Abbott wants back’—that, if we have provided tax cuts, those tax cuts will be taken away and that, if we have provided pension increases, those pension increases will be taken away.

Mr Abbott—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. If she is accusing us of inventing a carbon price, she should stop inventing tax cuts which do not exist.

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

Mr Swan interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The Deputy Prime Minister will withdraw.

Mr Swan—I withdraw, Mr Speaker.

The SPEAKER—The Leader of the Opposition knows that that was not a point of order, and I say to him that even though it has been the tradition to give leeway to leaders on either side he is stretching the leeway by approaching it in that way. I think that he should leave it at that point.

Mr Abbott—Mr Speaker, further to my point of order: I take your point and I accept your admonition but, in the same spirit, surely the Prime Minister is also stretching things? I would ask you to ensure that she genuinely answers the question.

The SPEAKER—Now that the Leader of the Opposition has raised as a point of order what could be characterised as asking me to ensure that the Prime Minister is directly relevant to the question, the Prime Minister has the call and she knows the requirement to be directly relevant to what is a question that, perhaps for my blood pressure, I might have considered ruling out elements of. The Prime Minister has the call.

Ms GILLARD—I say to the member as well: how will she feel in her electorate of Macquarie, saying that her political party is led by a climate change denier and that she stands for no effective action on climate change?

The SPEAKER—Order! The Prime Minister will relate her material to the question.

Ms GILLARD—On the question of the opposition’s determination to repeal compensation, let me take the House to some very relevant facts—

Mrs Mirabella—You can’t even explain your carbon tax! You can’t sell it; it’s a dud!

The SPEAKER—The member for Indi is warned.

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Under standing order 89, I think the words being used by the Prime Minister would be regarded as offensive words. We all know the connotation that the Prime Minister is trying bring about by using the word
denier’. We know that she is trying to allude to the Holocaust. It is offensive and it must stop.

The SPEAKER—With all the sensitivity that the chair can muster, I think that the construction that the Manager of Opposition Business has placed at this point in time is stretching it. The Prime Minister has the call, and the House will come to order.

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, after 18 years in the Parliament I do not think there is anybody in this place who would ever accuse me of making light of the Holocaust or any issue to do with the state of Israel. I was 11 years as chairman of the Parliamentary Friendship Group on Israel. I make the connection between climate change denier and Holocaust denier. I find it offensive and I am sure the Leader of the Opposition finds it offensive, and in that spirit I would ask you to ask her to withdraw it.

Government members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! If people want to personalise this, as a member of this House for 25 years, and in making my ruling earlier, I indicated that I was making that ruling with as much sensitivity as I could muster. No matter how my learned colleague the member for Sturt wants to put his case, I think that it is stretching the bounds of the way in which this House has conducted its business for a member to put his construction on a statement and forcing a withdrawal.

I simply say to the House that, actually having come to this flashpoint, I would hope that members take a deep breath and behave in a manner that those who observe us from outside would expect. That would apply to both sides—actually turning down the heat and returning to the basics of what we are here for: that is, to debate the issues and not get into the personality clashes that we have seen over many question times. I conclude, regretfully, that we are judged on this hour and a half of our proceedings, and not on the cooperation that is seen about issues that are myriad—including the sensitive issue that I am being lectured upon by a member. The Prime Minister has the call.

Mr Abbott—Mr Speaker, further to the point of order and your comments, which I accept and understand, to assist the House I wish to indicate that I find the Prime Minister’s statement both untruthful and offensive. If you do not wish to ask her to withdraw, I just wish to place on the record that it is untruthful and offensive.

Government members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! I hope that the whole membership of the House would see that as a full stop. The Prime Minister has the call.

Ms Gillard—Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. I simply refer the House to the Leader of the Opposition’s many past and completely contradictory statements on the question of accepting the climate change science. I also refer the House to the shadow Treasurer’s words from yesterday—facts that the member for Macquarie may be interested in, facts on Sky Agenda, where he was asked by the host, ‘You’ll repeal the compensation?’ to which the shadow Treasurer said, ‘Of course.’ That is why I am putting to the member for Macquarie that, if we give tax cuts, you are committed to taking them away; if we give pension increases, you are committed to taking them away; and if we give direct payments then the Leader of the Opposition has committed you to taking them away. Be honest about that with your electorate.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The SPEAKER—Before calling the member for Robertson, I inform the House that we have a group of students from Matsusaka High School—I apologise for my mispronunciation—who are here in Canberra
on exchange. Whilst the school is not directly affected by the quake and tsunami, I think that as young citizens of a nation that is in our thoughts it is appropriate that I give them a warm greeting on behalf of the House.

Honourable members—Hear, hear!

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Carbon Pricing

Ms O’NEILL (2.24 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Why is bipartisan support for a carbon price necessary so Australia does not get left behind in the race to invest in clean energy?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for Robertson for her question. She is right. It would certainly be better if we saw bipartisan support for the major reform that lies in front of this nation. It would be better if the opposition had not given way to denial of the science of climate change. It would be better if the Liberal Party had not turned its back on its traditions and denied the power of markets. It would be better if the Liberal Party accepted what I believe it would have accepted at any other point in its history, which is that it is not right to take money from taxpayers and use that as a subsidy for big polluters, which is what the Leader of the Opposition stands for. It would be better if this major transformation of our economy so we can be a prosperous nation in the future and so we can make our contribution to combating climate change—this big reform—had bipartisan support.

Of course, pricing carbon has had support from time to time before they gave way to being in perpetual scare campaign mode and standing for absolutely nothing except raising fear in the community. The government is committed to pricing carbon. We are committed to doing that because I do not want this nation left behind. I want us to invest in a clean energy future. We have to make a start because the rest of the world is moving. We have a high-pollution economy and we cannot afford to be left behind. We need to start to have our economy transition.

Yes, this is going to be a difficult process of reform; I absolutely accept that. But it is a reform the government is determined to lead notwithstanding the fear campaign and scare campaign coming from the opposition. I take the House to the following words—it would be better if the opposition remembered some of these words:

Despite an initial protest from industries taxed not only have they survived but many have flourished because the cleaner industry has often proved to be more efficient.

Mr Hunt—That is my 1990 thesis.

Ms GILLARD—These words were from an opposition member: ‘Pollution taxes encourage companies to decrease discharges of pollutants to the extent that it is less costly to treat waste than to meet the tax bill.’ He said these words: ‘Producers have responded to the tax in two ways. First, they have switched to less polluting production processes. Secondly, they have developed new technology to minimise waste created by existing production processes.’ There we go. We have those wise words and the member for Flinders owning up to them. No, it was not the member for Wentworth who said that. It was not the member for North Sydney. It was the member for Flinders in his 1990 thesis. We know, of course, that then he was a believer in dealing with climate change. We know that he then endorsed carbon pricing.

The truth is that many thinking members of the Liberal Party still do. I appeal to them to be their best. I appeal to them to walk in the reform tradition of the Liberal Party. I appeal to them not to give way to this fear and climate change scepticism and denial. I appeal to them to maintain the historic mission of the Liberal Party: understanding the
power of markets. What that means is that they will not be able to follow this man any longer.

**DISTINGUISHED VISITORS**

The SPEAKER (2.28 pm)—Before calling the member for Goldstein, I inform the House that we have present in the gallery this afternoon Ms Helen Evans, who is the interim Chief Executive Officer of the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation. I am sure that we all would wish her the best in her role, and on behalf of members I give her a warm greeting.

Honourable members—Hear, hear!

**QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE**

**Carbon Pricing**

Mr ROBB (2.29 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to her comments this morning on radio that she could not provide forecasts of China’s or India’s future carbon emissions. How does she reconcile that statement with the fact that Professor Garnaut provided her with a report just last month that shows that China’s emissions will triple and India’s will more than triple in the next 20 years? Can the Prime Minister explain how hitting every Australian with a carbon tax is in the national interest when the growth of emissions from China and India alone will completely undo any reductions in emissions in Australia? (Time expired)

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for his question. Of course, we have been through these debates before. When we were reducing tariffs there were plenty of people who said, ‘Don’t do that until the rest of the world has done it,’ and fear was raised about the reduction of tariffs. What has been the outcome of that major economic reform? A more prosperous country that is more resilient to economic shocks, including the global financial crisis; more people in work; and a country that is making its way in the world. But on any day when we were involved in that major economic debate people said that we should not do those things; we should not reform our economy until the rest of the world had acted. To the great credit of the Liberal Party then it believed in economic reform. Unfortunately, the Liberal Party no longer believes in reform of anything. It no longer believes in putting the national interest in front of its political interest.

The answer to the honourable member’s question is that the rest of the world is moving. President Obama committed to 80 per cent of energy coming from clean energy sources by 2035. China is acting on climate change by closing small, inefficient, dirty power stations and replacing them with bigger, more economically efficient and environmentally friendly ones. China is making new commitments to climate change and to reducing greenhouse gases, including commitments to reducing its carbon emissions per unit of GDP. India is taxing coal from all sources in order to fund clean energy initiatives. India will in April move to an energy credits trading scheme.

These are the things that are happening around our world. Here we are in Australia with per capita the highest carbon polluting economy in the developed world. That means that the journey of transition that we need to make is a bigger journey. It is in our national interest.

Mr Robb—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I ask whether I should repeat the question. The Prime Minister is so all over the place and not answering the question, I ask you to bring her back to being relevant.

The SPEAKER—The Prime Minister will directly relate the material that she is using to the question.

Ms GILLARD—I was asked by the member for Goldstein if it was in Australia’s
national interest to act. The answer I am giving leads to one conclusion: unambiguously yes. If you want a prosperous country in the future then you are for carbon pricing. If you want to make a difference to climate change and to the degree of carbon pollution emissions in our economy then you are for carbon pricing. If you do not care about jobs, if you do not care about the challenges of the future and if you do not care about the environment then you stick with your scare campaign. We know that the opposition do not care about any of them. The Leader of the Opposition does not care about the prosperity of this country and the future. The Leader of the Opposition does not care about doing the right thing by our environment. That is why, when faced with the choice to act in the national interest, we got this tawdry political display instead.

The SPEAKER—The member for Kennedy should thank the member for Braddon. The member for Kennedy has the call.

Water

Mr KATTER (2.34 pm)—My question without notice is to the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities. Is the minister aware that the Gulf Country has 131 million megalitres of water whilst all the rest of Australia put together has only 255 million megalitres? Since half of Australia’s food is produced in the Murray-Darling with only 22 million megalitres, would the minister not agree that, with Australia becoming a net importer of food within six years, it is imperative to make a start on the proposed microresource development program for the designated five gulf and mid-west towns? These projects, whilst small, nevertheless will each create an extra 100 jobs and double the size of four of these towns. Finally, could the minister assure the House that the program’s interdepartmental task force, promised to be set up in 2010—

Honourable members interjecting—

Mr KATTER—Can I take some of my time off their time later on, Mr Speaker?

The SPEAKER—Keep going.

Mr KATTER—will at least now be set up and operating within the next fortnight?

(Time expired)

Mr BURKE—I want to thank the member for Kennedy for his question. The member for Kennedy raises an issue that he has championed long in this House—the importance and possibility for agricultural growth in the north of Australia. It is true that there are extraordinary quantities of water available in the north and, unless mechanisms are found to be able to better harvest that water, the communities there will not be able to fully take advantage of that. When the Northern task force reported—I think it was a couple of years ago now—I was asked a question about the possibilities here, and on behalf of the government I reaffirmed that there is no government policy against the building of weirs or dams and that these were issues that we were very happy to look at.

Some of the work that is relevant to what the member has asked goes to the Northern Australia Sustainable Futures Program. It is worth $6 million. It builds on existing government programs to advance the economic, social and cultural interests of people living in the north. Because there are so many different departments and agencies involved, there is now a new Northern Australia Ministerial Forum, which had its inaugural meeting on 13 December last year. I am advised it was highly successful in facilitating genuinely collaborative action in Northern Australia.
The question also goes to what work is being done purely within government, here, in getting the various agencies in the Commonwealth government to better align to make sure that these programs and possibilities for Northern Australia can finally be brought together. As the member for Kennedy notes, we are not necessarily talking about massive projects but, in terms of the impact on those towns, a very substantial difference in employment prospects and for the future of those areas.

On the working group to which you referred, I am advised that, with the approval of the Prime Minister, a working group is being established which will be convened under Minister Ludwig, the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. The Minister will be well placed to bring together the key elements of reconstruction following Cyclone Yasi as well as more broadly ensuring that there is a long-term plan for agriculture in Northern Australia.

The working group will look at resourced development in the five towns of the Queensland Gulf and Midwest in harvesting local water and inland resources. There is no doubt that throughout Australia there are opportunities to better use and more effectively use the water that we have. On many occasions, I have referred to the ambitions the government has within the Murray-Darling, of making sure that we can get healthy rivers, strong communities and sustainable food production. Those same three principles can just as easily be levelled towards the opportunities for Northern Australia.

Climate Change

Mr SIDEBOTTOM (2.38 pm)—My question is directed to the Treasurer. Treasurer, why is it important to address the cost of carbon pollution through a market based mechanism?

Mr SWAN—I thank the member for Braddon for a very important question because the government, unlike the opposition, believes that climate change is real and that we do need to transform our economy. But this is a very big reform for our economy, a very big structural reform. One of the reasons Australia has had 20 years of continuous growth is past governments and members of this House have signed up to fundamental market based reforms, which have given us a strength and resilience that have served us well and that have given us 20 continuous years of growth. This is a reform that we must embark on to ensure that we have another 20 years of continuous growth and do not fall behind the rest of the world. That is why economists like Nichols Stern and Ross Garnaut are telling us that there is a fundamental problem here that must be fixed. The problem is that the largest polluters just continue to pump pollution into the atmosphere, and that has cost. It has cost to the environment, it has cost to the community and it has cost to our economy. That is why we must have a market based approach to deal with it. We need to give the largest polluters the incentive to reduce carbon pollution and that is what we have to do. That is why we describe this as a fundamental market based reform. Of course, we are not alone in this view. That is what the Treasury believes we must do. That is what the Productivity Commission believes we must do. It is what the OECD believes we must do. But all the oddballs on the other side of the House are now in climate change denial.

The SPEAKER—Order! The Treasurer should really be careful with his language.

Mr SWAN—It has become very clear in the House today that there are many on that side of the House who are climate change sceptics.
Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, on a point of order: as I have been asked to withdraw Pinocchio in the past, I think the Treasurer should be asked to withdraw oddball.

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The Minister for Defence will withdraw.

Mr Stephen Smith—I withdraw, Mr Speaker.

The SPEAKER—Whilst not calling upon the Deputy Prime Minister to withdraw, it is starting to be really hard to see how the point in his response is directly relevant to the question, as it was asked. The Treasurer has the call and he will be directly relevant to the question.

Mr Swan—The point I was making was that those opposite do not believe in the power of markets any more. This is a fundamental point. Nor do they apparently believe in the science of climate change. That is a powerful, destructive combination. Not believing in climate change, not believing in global warming and not believing in markets makes them almost the equivalent to the central planners of Russia, decades ago.

The SPEAKER—Order! The Treasurer will not debate as much.

Mr Swan—They are in denial all of the time about the basic facts, not believing in the basic science and not believing in the basic economics. About 18 months ago some of them did believe in the power of markets, the power of markets to deal with carbon pollution. This is what the shadow Treasurer had to say to David Uren and Lenore Taylor, in 2010:

I was acting industry minister in 2002 when Peter Costello, David Kemp and I argued ... in the Howard cabinet that we should have an ETS.

He then went on to say—

I believe the market mechanism is the best way to price a commodity.

That is what the shadow Treasurer, Mr Hockey, believed in 2002. That is what he told a couple of prominent authors in their book about the power of markets and where the view was in the Howard cabinet. It is not the view now. That is why I do describe them—like the British conservative politician did—as oddballs, because they do not believe in the power of markets and they do not believe in the science of climate change. I can see the member for Wentworth over there somewhat embarrassed by the company that he now keeps. The shadow Treasurer has had more positions on climate change than hot dinners and there are plenty of others on that side of the House that fit into the same category. We on this side of the House approach this fundamental—(Time expired)

Mr Hockey—I seek leave to table the minutes of the special meeting of the federal parliamentary Labor Party caucus where it says, ‘Wayne and Julia said abandon the ETS.’

The SPEAKER—The member for North Sydney will return to his seat.

Mr Billson interjecting—

Mr Swan interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The Treasurer and the member for Dunkley might be given the opportunity to have an hour to discuss their debate outside. The angelic member for North Sydney will get back to being quiet.

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—He hoodwinked me by his angelic presence and he approached the dispatch box outside of the procedures that I have allowed and has been very lucky.

Carbon Pricing

Ms Marino (2.46 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to the statement by the Chairman of BlueScope Steel, Graham Kraehe, today that the carbon tax meant that there was ‘a high
risk of the steel industry reaching a tipping point where it will no longer be viable to keep a steel industry in Australia; and compensation to industry is ‘like putting a bandaid on a bullet wound.’ Will the Prime Minister guarantee workers in industries like the steel plant at Kwinana in outer metropolitan Perth that not one Australian job will be lost overseas as a result of her carbon tax?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for her question. I am aware of media references to the supposed impact of a carbon price on BlueScope. I am aware of that. The government is aware of the issues confronting BlueScope and will continue to consult with them about the introduction of a carbon price.

BlueScope and the broader steel industry were heavily consulted during the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme debate regarding assistance for emissions-intensive, trade exposed industries. Our commitment is to consult with the steel industry. Our commitment is to consult with businesses. We have a business round table for that purpose and, of course, we have a broader outreach than that. As we engage in that broader outreach, let me explain to the member that, with the carbon price mechanism we have announced, we will be putting a price on carbon and we will be getting the biggest polluters in this country to pay that price. That is because we want to cut carbon pollution. At the moment they can put that carbon pollution into the atmosphere for nothing. We will put a price on it. That will drive innovation and change. Then the money raised through that will be used to compensate households.

Ms Marino—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order on relevance. My question was whether the Prime Minister would guarantee that not one Australian job will be lost overseas.

The SPEAKER—I assume that the member for Bowman is having a discussion with himself. The point of order raised was whether the Prime Minister is being directly relevant, but it was supported by a case that could be characterised as seeking a direct answer. The standing orders were not changed to require that; so, to the extent that precedent exists, I am using that precedent. There is no way that the chair can dictate how the question is answered, as long as the material is directly relevant. I am listening closely to the Prime Minister’s response but, at this stage, I believe it to be directly relevant.

Ms GILLARD—Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. I was making a point about the use of the revenue raised by putting a price on pollution, paid by the biggest polluters. We have already canvassed in question time today the use of that revenue, and it will be our single highest priority to assist Australian households. That is the assistance that the opposition is opposed to and would take away.

The second use of that revenue will be to assist Australian industry. We understand that there is a transition that needs to be made here, and we will be supporting Australian industry in that transition. That is because I believe that we need to act to make sure that our economy has prosperity in the future. We want to protect Australian jobs. We want to make sure Australia has the clean-energy jobs of the future. That is why we need to price carbon.

The third use of the revenue raised by putting a price on pollution, which will cut pollution, will be to fund programs to tackle climate change. On the direct engagement of BlueScope, can I say to the member who has asked the question: I referred a little earlier in my answer to the business round table that is continuing to meet and provide feedback...
to government. BlueScope is represented on that round table. Paul O’Malley was in attendance when the round table met in November and in February. We will continue to have that round table meet to provide assistance to government in the further design of the carbon pricing scheme.

**Climate Change**

**Mr Murphy** (2.51 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency. Will the minister explain the scientific basis to take action on climate change? Minister, is there a credible scientific basis not to take action?

**Mr Combet**—I thank the member for Reid for his question, because he has had a long and continuing interest in climate change policy. Climate scientists are telling governments all around the world that carbon pollution is contributing to climate change. The scientific advisor to the government’s Multi-Party Climate Change Committee, the well-recognised scientist, Professor Will Steffen of the ANU, has indicated to the committee that there is 100 per cent certainty that temperatures are increasing globally and that there is 95 per cent certainty that human activity through carbon emissions is contributing to those increased temperatures. Of course, 2010 was the equal warmest year on record and the period 2000-10 was the warmest decade on record. The scientific evidence is very clear—and it is advice that it has been provided to all governments internationally. But not everyone in this House seems to agree. Eighteen months ago the Leader of the Opposition said: ‘We can’t conclusively say whether man-made carbon dioxide emissions are contributing to climate change.’

**Mr Pyne**—Mr Speaker, on a point of order, I put it to you that the question that the minister was asked—which I am sure you were listening to as closely as I—did not allow any discussion for the Leader of the Opposition’s views on climate change, carbon taxes or emissions trading schemes. It asked about the science to do with climate change, not about people’s views in this House.

**The Speaker**—Order! I will listen carefully to the manner in which the minister directly relates the material to the question. He must directly relate the material to the question.

**Mr Combet**—The Leader of the Opposition also infamously said that climate change is absolute crap.

**Opposition members interjecting**—

**The Speaker**—Order! The minister will relate it to the question.

**Mr Combet**—The point is that these views contradict all mainstream scientific opinion. But, of course, the Leader of the Opposition does not want to be seen as an extremist or a denier these days. He is trying to invite a cloak of respectability.

**Mr Pyne**—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The minister is defying the indication you gave to him that he must relate his answer to the question. He was not asked about anyone’s views in this House.

**The Speaker**—The Manager of Opposition Business will resume his seat.

**Mr Albanese**—Mr Speaker, my point of order goes to the provisions in the standing orders to deal with disruptive conduct. Today we have had points of order to every question that has been asked during question time. It is only permissible for there to be one point of order with regard to relevance. That was the second by the Manager of Opposition Business during this question.

**The Speaker**—The minister will relate directly the material that he is using to the question as it was asked. The question asked—and I paraphrase—was: will the min-
ister explain the scientific basis for taking action on climate change and is there a credible scientific basis for not taking action? The minister must respond in a directly relevant way to that question. Whilst I appreciate that there can be argument that is directly relevant—and I have some concerns about allowing argument—the argument must directly relate to the question.

Mr COMBET—I was asked whether there was a credible scientific basis for not taking action on climate change. Of course, when you stop denying the climate science, we will stop calling you a denier. That is the fact of the matter.

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The minister will ignore interjections and he will not respond. I am not revisiting an earlier discussion that we had. The minister will directly relate his material to the question. The minister has the call.

Mr COMBET—The Leader of the Opposition has occasionally tried to suggest that he respects the science. Apparently, he has instructed the shadow cabinet to keep the debate away from climate science so that they can focus on their scare campaign tactics. He could not even follow his own advice.

Carbon Pricing

Mr HUNT (2.58 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to the climate change minister’s confirmation today that his department has been in discussion with advertising agencies to conduct an ad campaign to promote her carbon tax broken promise. How is that consistent with her statement on Sunday that no decision had been made to conduct an advertising campaign? When did the government first approach advertising agencies about a carbon tax ad campaign? Why should Australians ever trust her again?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for Flinders for his question. I have been studying material written by the member for Flinders, and it makes interesting reading. I found this article from 20 May 1990, ‘A tax to make the polluter pay,’ by Greg Hunt and Rufus Black. It made very interesting reading. In responding to this question from the member for Flinders, I want to let him know that I tracked down that article from 20 May 1990 because he cited it as a source in his thesis, would you believe? ‘Hunt on Hunt’—that is how he sourced his thesis.

The SPEAKER—The Prime Minister will put the prop down. The Prime Minister has the call, but she will no longer use the prop.

Mr Hunt interjecting—

Ms GILLARD—I am giving you a commercial.

The SPEAKER—The Prime Minister will resume her place, and the member for Flinders will stand quietly awaiting the call. The member for Flinders.

Mr Hunt—Mr Speaker, on a point of relevance: I would be delighted if the Prime Minister would table the article and my thesis, as well as her views on the—

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

Mr Hunt interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Flinders is warned. I remind him that a warning is a precursor to naming. Saying this may get me into trouble with some, but the question was badly crafted in that it perhaps had a little too much argument and concluded with something that widened the possibility of a response not directly relevant. Having said that, I think that the Prime Minister has taken that opportunity a bit too far. She will relate her material directly to the question.
Ms GILLARD—Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. I was talking him up and I will stop doing that right now. On the question of the advertising campaign that the member for Flinders has asked me about, can I just say the following to him: the government is not ruling any options out; however, at this point the government has taken no decisions on advertising. The department is examining a number of options for public communications and this involves contact with public relations agencies, as is standard practice.

Carbon Pricing

Mr CRAIG THOMSON (3.02 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Resources, Energy and Tourism. Why is a price on carbon needed to provide investment in the energy sector?

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—The debate about a price on carbon is a complex and difficult economic debate. As minister for energy, I know that better than most in the House. When you look at the fundamentals of the Australian economy, a highly efficient market energy driven system has been the key to the Australian economy. The Australian energy market is actually held up as the most efficient in the OECD world. That goes to a key issue which has to be resolved: our responsibility as a community to debate and finalise the debate about how we put in place once and for all a price on carbon. That goes to the question of certainty. At the moment, the Commonwealth parliament is not responsible for the substantial increases in the price of electricity. There are quite substantial price increases going through the system, because of the need to invest in distribution and transmission. But our problem is that the CEOs in the energy sector have outstanding investments of many billions of dollars going to the question of additional capacity from the point of view of electricity generation.

When we talk about this additional capacity, let us deal with a few facts, because these are the problems that confront us as a community from an economic point of view at the moment, because of our lack of certainty with respect to where we go on a price on carbon. Firstly, it is estimated that over $17 billion of capital is required for power generation assets—that is, refinancing, capital expenditure and new build over the next five years. Secondly, and importantly, it is estimated that $6.4 billion of that $17 billion has to be refinanced for existing generation prior to the end of 2012. That is why Brad Page, CEO of the Energy Supply Association of Australia recently said on ABC. He said, ‘We are not talking about short-term investments. We are talking about investments made by the sector that really last for 40 or 50 years and we need stable policy.’

With respect to some of these investments, these decisions have to be made in the next two or three years. That is complex at the best of times, because it goes to difficult issues going to environment or regulatory approvals. But, before we can even get to that point, to be able to bank these investments we have to know what the investment horizons are from the point of view of what is a price on carbon. If we do not get this right, then for the first time ever the Australian community will turn its sights on the Commonwealth parliament, because we will be the ones correctly held responsible for failing to guarantee the reliability of the Australian electricity sector. Historically, it has been a state and territory responsibility. If you have any doubts about that from a political point of view of potency, have a look historically at what happens to state and territory governments of all political persuasions when the lights go out. They are held responsible and they soon disappear from office. So I simply say, in conclusion, that the time has come for us to finalise this debate so as to
maintain Australia’s energy security and reliability and to ensure that the economic vandalism—which the other side of the House will be responsible for, for not allowing us to finalise this once and for all—is overcome.

Asylum Seekers

Mr MORRISON (3.06 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to the case of three asylum seekers on SIEV 36 who were found by the Northern Territory Coroner to be part of a plan to cripple the boat that led to the deaths of five people, injured 40 more and put the lives of our Defence Force personnel at risk. Will the Prime Minister confirm that each of these people has been granted a permanent visa?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for Cook for his question. I say to the member for Cook that I will make inquiries and report back to the House. Of course, I am not in a position to answer questions about individual visa matters across the many thousands of visas that are granted in the course of a year, but I will look at the matter and, if I have something to report back to the House, then I will.

Mr ABBOTT—Mr President, I ask a supplementary question to the Prime Minister: if these character test provisions were not sufficient to keep out those who sank SIEV 36, how can she say that they will be sufficient to keep out those who are destroying the detention centre on Christmas Island and assaulting Commonwealth officers and destroying taxpayer property?

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locations by realigning the existing track, and this move alone will cut rail transit times across the seaboard by an hour.

Under the Howard government, the proportion of freight carried by rail between Sydney and Brisbane actually fell from 24 per cent to 19 per cent. We are determined to reverse that decline. That is why we have a draft national freight strategy out there. That is why we have a national ports strategy integrating land transport with our port system. This is investment in critical economic infrastructure. It will strengthen our economy and help secure our future and, in the meantime, it has created 2,000 construction jobs in the sector as well as supporting jobs in manufacturing at factories including those at Grafton in the electorate of the honourable Member for Page. This is good for business, good for productivity and good for reducing our emissions.

Asylum Seekers

Mr KEENAN (3.12 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister confirm that, in order to comply with the commitment given to rioting asylum seekers on Christmas Island for outstanding security assessments to be completed by the end of April, ASIO will not conduct individual risk assessments for each case but instead make a general assessment for each of the regions from which the asylum seekers originate?

Ms GILLARD—We have questions based on chain emails, by the sound of it. I thank the shadow minister for immigration for his question. I can advise him of the following. The security assessment process that we do for people whose applications are being processed is, of course, an important part of our border security regime. We, as a government that has deployed more assets patrolling our border than ever before, will of course not be compromising on this very important part of our border security regime. I understand that floating out there are some chain emails and the like, but the facts are these. There has been no deal in regard to security assessments—that is completely untrue. You may have picked that up from an email sent to you, but it is untrue. Over recent months there has been ongoing collaboration between the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation and the immigration department to streamline security checking arrangements to reduce processing times without compromising national security. That means that, for most existing cases, security checking for people whose claims have now been accepted will be completed progressively by the end of April. As you would expect, in some individual cases, completing security assessments will take more time. That is important for Australia’s national security and important for the protection of the Australian community, and of course the time necessary will be taken to do those security assessments. That is the answer to the member’s question.

Carbon Pricing

Ms BURKE (3.14 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency. What would be the impact of rolling back a carbon price on the family budgets of low- to middle-income earners?

Mr COMBET—I thank the member for Chisholm for her question. A carbon price will, of course, be paid by the large polluters in our economy for every tonne of pollution that they omit. The number of companies that will be liable under a carbon price mechanism will be less than 1,000. Importantly, every dollar raised from the large polluters in our economy will be used to assist low- and middle-income households to support jobs in the most affected industries and to tackle climate change. The assistance that the government will provide will pay particular attention to pensioners and low-
income households. That is because we are a Labor government and we look after people who need help the most.

Yesterday, the shadow Treasurer confirmed that, if the coalition are elected, the coalition will abolish any assistance Labor provides to households. If they are elected, the Liberals will reach into the pockets of pensioners and low-income households and families and abolish any assistance—

*Mrs Bronwyn Bishop interjecting—*

The **SPEAKER**—The member for Mackellar knows that she needs the call before she will be heard. I was waiting for the House to come to order.

*Mrs Bronwyn Bishop—*Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. Page 553 of the *Practice* states, under the old paradigm, that it was irrelevant to compare policies of the opposition with those of the government—that is under the old paradigm. For it to be, under the new paradigm, a direct answer to the question and for the minister to remain in order and continue his answer, he must come back to answering the question and not make those comparisons. It is the third paragraph of page 553, Mr Speaker.

The **SPEAKER**—I thank the member for Mackellar for her point of order. It is a point of order that she did raise on a number of occasions in the last parliament. For the sake of precision, the *Practice* does not refer to new or old paradigms—she added that. She should not have suggested that the *Practice* states that, but that is okay. As she has done in the past—and it is a very good aspect of her training—she has selected parts of page 553 that support her case. I simply invite her to read the full section about content of answers, which indicates that debates, regrettably, within answers have been allowed about the opinions of the opposition or others in the House. Whilst I have concerns, I believe that I have raised those concerns and it is for the House to decide whether it wishes to take action. I am listening carefully to the minister’s response because I would have thought that he is very conscious in this second opportunity to be directly relevant to the question. I will listen carefully in that context.

**Mr COMBET**—Thank you, Mr Speaker; I certainly am conscious of that issue. I was asked about what impact a rollback of the carbon price would have on the assistance provided to family budgets of low- and middle-income earners. As the Prime Minister made the point earlier, if we take the commitment that was made by the shadow Treasurer yesterday on behalf of the coalition to withdraw any assistance provided, if that assistance is provided in the form of tax cuts, the coalition is going to increase taxes. If that assistance is provided in the form of a pension increase, the coalition is going to cut pensions. If it is provided in the form of an improved family tax benefit, the coalition is going to cut the family tax benefit.

We all know the truth about all of this: the coalition does not care about the pressure that households are under. Why would they take the assistance away?

The **SPEAKER**—Order! The minister should not drift too far!

**Mr COMBET**—The fact of the matter is that, by withdrawing this assistance by potentially increasing taxes and cutting pensions, the coalition need that money to fund their subsidy scheme for large polluters. What we have is a very clear choice in politics: a carbon price paid by the large polluters, the revenue from which can be dispersed partly to support households, pensioners and low- and middle-income households in particular; or, alternatively, we have a slug to taxpayers to the worth of $30 billion, the equivalent of $720 a year for an average household—that is what their policy means—in order to pay that money as a sub-
sidy to hand-picked large polluters. That is the contrast in politics at this point in time. It highlights the reason why the use of a market mechanism is extremely important in pricing carbon in our economy.

This is what former Prime Minister John Howard had to say at the Melbourne Press Club on 17 July 2007 in relation to this specific issue of the use of market mechanisms. He said, in relation to people who will not respect the market:
They are the real climate change deniers because they deny ... rational, realistic and sustainable policy solutions.

He went on to say:
The moralising tone of utopian internationalism is also not helpful. Institutions will only work and endure if they harness national interests.

(Time expired)

Mr Hunt—Mr Speaker, I seek leave to table the climate change minister’s pledge of 7 March that households would receive 100 per cent of compensation.

The SPEAKER—Order! The Boothby precedent will be applied to the next person who does that. I have indicated that I will allow those who ask a question to attempt to seek leave to table material relating to their question. On two occasions in this question time there has been an attempt by members other than those who have asked questions to table material by leave, and that would give me some sympathy with the Leader of the House’s case that that is disruptive behaviour.

(Time expired)

Mr Albanese interjecting—
The SPEAKER—Order! The Leader of the House should not get too excited.

Immigration: Christmas Island Detention Centre

Mr CHESTER (3.22 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship. Will the minister detail when he or his office received warnings about the potential for increased violence on Christmas Island and who provided those warnings?

Mr BOWEN—I thank the member for Gippsland for his question. I think the member for Gippsland refers to two reports in today’s media. One was an Australian Federal Police report, looking at the added managed security at the North West Point Detention Centre. That report made nine recommendations and my advice is that all nine recommendations were adopted. That report also dealt with the potential for a detention centre capacity of 2,300, which was substantially more than the detention centre capacity at North West Point at the time of last week’s riot. I think that the honourable member is also referring to a report from a manager of Serco in relation to staffing at the North West Point Detention Centre. Both of these reports and any other reports that were provided by the department are matters for investigation by the independent review that I have established.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The minister is not entitled to redefine the question. He was not asked about two reports in the media today. He was asked about any warnings that he or his office were provided with about the potential for increased violence at Christmas Island. That is the question he needs to answer.

The SPEAKER—Order! As I have indicated in the past, this illustrates the dilemma that a Chair is in. The Chair does not know the answer. The question has been asked and I am in a position where I have to make sure that the standing order, which is direct relevance, is what we are seeing in the response. So far, I believe that is the case. I understand—and I have repeated this—that sometimes when people ask questions they expect
an answer in some form, but I cannot direct
the form of the answer.

Mr BOWEN—Thank you, Mr Speaker. The honourable member asked me about reports and I am referring to the two reports that I am aware of. These reports and other reports will be referred to the independent investigation that I initiated, the independent investigation which will be led by two eminent former bureaucrats, Dr Allan Hawke and Ms Helen Williams. I would invite the honourable member to share any information he has with that review.

Health

Mr GEORGANAS (3.25 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Health and Ageing. What progress has been made to reform Australia’s health system? How have these reforms been received? What is the government’s response?

Opposition members interjecting—

Ms ROXON—I thank the member for Hindmarsh for his question. It was a great pleasure to be in his electorate with the Minister for Mental Health and Ageing just a fortnight ago announcing the details of the implementation plans resulting from health reform in South Australia. It was very good news in South Australia that, of the 179 sub-acute beds that are being provided, 159 of them are mental health beds that will be provided across South Australia. There are also upgrades to Modbury Hospital in the electorate of Makin and the Women’s and Children’s Hospital in the electorate of Adelaide. But even some of those opposite who are interjecting might be interested to know that there are investments at the Repatriation General Hospital in the electorate of Boothby, investments in Whyalla in the electorate of Grey, Mount Gambier in the electorate of Barker—

Mr Dutton interjecting—

Mr Briggs interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order, the member for Dickson and the member for Mayo!

Ms ROXON—Each of those electorates is receiving 20 extra beds. Those who are interjecting need to understand that they are not on the record as indicating whether they support a single cent of those investments that are being rolled out across the country. In New South Wales, for example, there are already 300 beds that are open due to health reform—18 at Blacktown Hospital, 45 at Westmead Hospital, 21 in Wollongong Hospital—and those opposite have never told the public whether they support our investments in those facilities.

Last week I was in the electorate of the Minister for Trade announcing $175 million boost to the Logan Hospital that will add 50 more beds and triple the capital works upgrade at the hospital. Similarly, the member for Moreton and I announced a doubling in the size of the emergency department at the QE2 hospital with more help for Brisbane South families.

Interestingly, as we get on with the business of health reform, we have also been moving legislation through this parliament. Yesterday the first piece of significant health reform legislation passed in parliament. It was opposed in this House by the Liberal Party. It was opposed in the Senate and again in the House yesterday and, ironically, the opposition led by Mr Abbott actually has opposed legislation that is permanently establishing a body that the Leader of the Opposition established temporarily when he was the health minister. I make this point because it seems that, whether it is carbon, health reform, or whether it is a rolled-gold, rock-solid guarantee, the Leader of the Opposition changes his mind from day to day. He is not just a weathervane on carbon; he cannot make up his mind what he wants to
do on health. He has been inconsistent, uncertain and just downright weird. Listen to what the Leader of the Opposition said when he introduced and established the Safety and Quality Commission.

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, I ask you to ask the Minister for Health and Ageing to withdraw her last statement.

Government members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! For those on my right that ask why, you can ask me, because I adjudicate on these matters. I took an adjudication in running that, whilst it is a robust and perhaps an extreme sort of comment, I in the past indicated when I had another role that the member for Warringah is not necessarily a precious petal and he has a hide. Whilst it may be unfortunate I decided it was not something that I would ask to be withdrawn. But I did not take that point of order as an interruption. I think that that was properly raised with me, but I will allow it on this occasion.

Ms ROXON—I want to quote to the House the comments from the member for Warringah in 2005 when he was the Minister for Health and Ageing in the days when he supported the need for a safety and quality commission. He said:

… a national safety and quality commission will make it more important for doctors to have comprehensive records, access to the best possible information retrieval systems, and useable checklists against avoidable mistakes.

Apparently these are now good and important changes for the health system that the Leader of the Opposition and the Liberal Party no longer support because they are inconsistent and uncertain about every possible policy issue we are debating in this parliament.

Ms Gillard—Mr Speaker, it being after 3.30, I ask that further questions be placed on the Notice Paper.

Mr Morrison—Before the Prime Minister leaves, it is often the practice of the Prime Minister to come back to the House with an answer to a question posed earlier. Mr Speaker, I ask you to ask the Prime Minister if she has been able to ascertain whether the three people who scuttled the boat received protection visas.

The SPEAKER—The member for Cook will resume his seat. He has made his point.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Cook will absolutely understand that there is no precedent without an order of the House for the Speaker to take the actions that he has asked for. That is why I think when I say with generosity that he has made his point he should leave it at that.

DOCUMENTS

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (3.32 pm)—Documents are presented as listed in the schedule circulated to honourable members earlier today. Full details of the documents will be recorded in the Votes and Proceedings. I move:

That the House take note of the following documents:

Migration Act 1958—
Section 91Y—Protection visa processing taking more than 90 days—Report for the period 1 July to 31 October 2010.
Section 440A—Conduct of Refugee Review Tribunal (RRT) reviews not completed within 90 days—Report for the period 1 July to 31 October 2010.

Debate (on motion by Mr Hartsuyker) adjourned.

COMMITTEES

Selection Committee

Membership

The SPEAKER—I have received advice from the Chief Opposition Whip that he has nominated Mr Ruddock to be a member of
the Selection Committee in place of Ms Marino.

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (3.33 pm)—by leave—I move:

That Ms Marino be discharged from the Selection Committee and that, in her place, Mr Ruddock be appointed a member of the committee.

Question agreed to.

DOCUMENTS

Mr McCLELLAND (Barton—Attorney-General) (3.33 pm)—For the information of members I table the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements Determination 2011.

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Gillard Government

The SPEAKER—I have received a letter from the honourable 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 act competently and provide factual information to the Australian people

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) (3.34 pm)—This matter of public importance debate is about the dishonesty and incompetence of the Gillard government. It is with deep regret that I come into this parliament to accuse this government of a pattern of conduct which is not straight, which is not honest, which is not upfront with the Australian public. But it is my job to tell the truth to the Australian public. It is my job to tell the truth about this government, and the truth is that this government has hardly given a single commitment, at the election and subsequently, which has turned out to be truthful.

Let me go through a by no means exhaustive list of the deceits and deceptions of this government. There was the carbon tax that was not going to happen before the election but is going to happen after the election. There is the citizens’ assembly that would happen before the election but is not going to happen after the election. There is the East Timor detention centre that was definitely going to happen before the election but which is never going to happen after the election. There were the onshore detention centres that were definitely not happening before the election but which are happening in superabundance since the election. There is an onshore detention centre coming to a disused military barracks near you, Mr Speaker, as a result of this government’s deception.

There was the mining tax, which was totally settled, allegedly, before the election but which has completely unravelled and dissolved after the election. There was the Murray-Darling Basin Plan, which was going to be adopted, sight unseen, before the election but which has completely unravelled after the election. There was the hospital takeover that was so absolutely essential for the good governance of the public hospitals in this country. It was definitely happening before the election but was completely redundant and unnecessary after the election. There was the cash for clunkers scheme that was so important to preserve the environment of this country and indeed the whole planet before the election but which was swiftly dumped after the election. There was the national curriculum that was absolutely—honest to God, hand on heart and hope to die if I tell a lie—going to happen at the start of this year before the election. Now, of course, it is absolutely not going to happen. Then, of course, there was the tax
summit that immediately after the election was definitely happening in the first half of this year and was going to debate all of the big issues. Now it is happening in the second half of the year and it is not going to debate any of the big issues. The summit has become a forum, which has become a kind of knitting circle because of the deceit of this government.

The Prime Minister will not put a price on carbon. She will not be honest with the Australian public and put a price on carbon right now. I tell you what, Mr Deputy Speaker: she will pay a price for her consistent deceptions. What we have seen from this Prime Minister is a consistent pattern of behaviour. We have seen it since the election, but we saw it before the election. Remember when the member for Sturt was consistently asking questions about the Building the Education Revolution program? He was making it all up! Nothing was going wrong! Everything was perfect—not a single bit of waste; a model of transparency! Now we know that there has scarcely been a more wasteful program in the history of this Commonwealth.

This is a Prime Minister who, I regret to say, is addicted to falsehoods. What about the ad campaign? Before the election in 2007, the Prime Minister would tell us that taxpayer funded advertising was an abuse. That is what she said. But soon the printing presses would be rolling and there would be taxpayer funded propaganda galore to defend the Prime Minister’s pre-election lie.

But it does not stop there. She knows so much about China! This is the country which, according to the Prime Minister, is closing down coal-fired power stations left, right and centre, and yet the truth is it is opening a new coal-fired power station every fortnight to feed its voracious appetite for energy. This is the Prime Minister who tells us that as a result of her carbon tax there will be jobs galore. There will be jobs at the corner store thanks to the carbon tax! All sensible economists have concluded that at least two jobs are killed in traditional industries for every so-called green job created as a result of carbon taxes and emissions trading schemes. She tells us on the one hand that the rest of the world is acting on climate change and that we have to catch up. Then she tells us on the other hand that we have to provide an example to the rest of the world so that they might finally act on climate change. Then there is the fantasy island that this Prime Minister is living on when she starts telling the parliament, as she has repeatedly over the last few days, that somehow the coalition wants to hit people for a $30 billion carbon tax to fund our direct action program.

We heard the Prime Minister yesterday boasting in the parliament about all the scripture she knows. Ooh, yes! Didn’t she pay a lot of attention in scripture classes all those years ago! Well, I can remember one passage of scripture. I might not be able to cite scripture to match the Prime Minister, but I do remember ‘thou shalt not bear false witness’—and she has hardly done anything else in this parliament over the last few weeks. Somehow that must be one of the passages of the Bible that she forgot when she made that little stroll from scripture class to the Socialist Forum. Somehow, as she went from God to Marxism, she forgot that bit of the Bible that says ‘thou shalt not bear false witness’. In fact, I am not a doctor, but I think we are in the presence of a condition, a chronic condition: TDD—truth deficit disorder. That is what we have seen from our Prime Minister in recent days. As she comes into this parliament it is almost as if she is trying to earn frequent liar points, as she lies through question time. I have to say, I reckon frequent liar points would be a marketable commodity inside this Labor caucus.
Let me tell the truth about the government’s carbon tax. It is that at $26 a tonne—and that is the price that the Treasury put on carbon for the purposes of modelling the emissions trading scheme—a carbon tax will add $300 to the average family’s power bill—just for starters. At $26 a tonne it will add 6½c to a litre of petrol—just for starters. At $26 a tonne it will add $6,240 to the price of a new house—just for starters. Let me say this: no compensation is adequate for the seismic shock that this carbon tax will deliver to our economy.

There will be 126,000 jobs lost in regional Australia, according to Access Economics. There will be 16 coal mines shut and 10,000 jobs lost in the coal industry alone, according to ACIL. There will 24,000 jobs lost in the mining industry more generally, according to Concept Economics, and there will be 45,000 jobs gone in energy-intensive industries, according to Frontier Economics. It is this cost in jobs and this hit on people’s standards of living—the hit on the standard of living of struggling families who are already finding it difficult to cope—which meant that the Prime Minister had to tell an untruth before the election. That is why she had to deceive the Australian people before the election.

I put it to you, Mr Deputy Speaker: does anyone in this chamber or this country honestly believe that the Prime Minister would now be in the Lodge if she had honestly said six days out from the election, ‘Yes, I cannot tell a lie; there will be a carbon tax under the government I lead’? Everything that this Prime Minister had to tell an untruth before the election. That is why she had to deceive the Australian people before the election.

Let me make a few observations, if I may, in response to some of the claims that we have had from the Prime Minister and her ministers in question time this week. A carbon tax is not an economic reform; a carbon tax, in the absence of comparable action by the rest of the world, is nothing but economic self-harm. It will seriously damage the Australian economy. Above all else, it will export jobs overseas. Under this government, Australia’s latest export is going to be your job: that is the message to the workers of Australia. It will export jobs and it will damage the standard of living of Australians.

Increasing taxes is not economic reform; reducing taxes—that is economic reform. A tax cut based on a tax increase is not a cut: that is a con. A tax cut based on a tax increase is a mirage—it is an absolute mirage, and yet that is what we are being offered by this government.

Let me give some fundamental economics to members opposite: robbing Peter to pay Paul is not tax reform. Robbing Peter to pay Peter is even less tax reform, and what we have from this government is not tax cuts and not even the rumour of tax cuts. If they are fair dinkum about tax cuts, let us see them in the budget. The hole in the heart of the budget that is coming up will be its complete failure to reference (a) a carbon tax or (b) any tax cuts. This is a fraud from a fraudulent government.

I say this to members opposite: if they are serious about tax reform, they know how it is done—or they should know how it is done, because they have the example of the former government to guide them. Serious tax reform is based on a serious and permanent reduction in government spending. Serious tax reform is based on a permanent policy-induced improvement in Australia’s competitive position or in its productivity. That is the foundation of serious tax reform and that is...
the kind of thing that they would get from this coalition, should we have the chance. And that is the kind of thing that you will never get from this government—all you will get from this government is the kind of consistent deceit on a carbon tax that we have seen over the last few days.

Not only is this government deceptive but it is a government which is increasingly a shambles. We saw that on the weekend: here you had the Prime Minister doing a half-hour interview on tax while, unbeknownst to her, the Deputy Prime Minister was tweeting about the tax summit. Here you had the Prime Minister of this country saying one thing about a no-fly zone while the foreign minister was saying a completely different thing about a no-fly zone. The fact is that they do not know what they are doing—they cannot even talk to each other. This is not a government; it is more like Wollongong council than an adult government of a decent country.

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (3.49 pm)—You have to admire the irony of the member for Warringah coming in here and speaking to a broadbased, broadbrush MPI—there are no specifics in it at all—about conviction and about truthfulness. The member for Warringah—the Leader of the Opposition—is indeed a conviction politician. He has a conviction that he should have been Prime Minister and that he should have won the election last August. But he lost, and what we have seen since then is played out before all of the Australian people: that frustration and anger. Do you remember the Mark Riley moment? All of us saw that there, and we see it across the chamber in question time all the time: the anger, sheer frustration and aggressiveness that a position which he believes is his by right should not be just given to him. Let me tell you: you have to earn the trust of the Australian people.

There is no reason whatsoever why the community should trust the Leader of the Opposition. You just have to listen to what he said himself. On 17 May last year in an interview on The 7.30 Report he said:

... sometimes, in the heat of discussion, you go a little bit further than you would if it was an absolutely calm, considered, prepared, scripted remark, which is one of the reasons why the statements that need to be taken absolutely as gospel truth is those carefully prepared scripted remarks. So forget about everything that he has said in here today; he himself in his own words says that you cannot believe him because they were not carefully scripted remarks. There is no wonder that there is some nervousness from those behind him, because his colleagues do not trust him either. He said this during the Howard years, episode 4—it is a great little quote about the Howard-Costello leadership:

Inevitably in those conversations you, to give comfort and reassurance to people, probably say things like “Mate, it’ll be your turn pretty soon and I’ll be on your side when that turn, when that time comes.”

... ... ...

Look, all sorts of things get said in those late night comfort sessions and I’m not going to say that I never said anything like that.

... ... ...

But it’s one thing to pledge undying love late at night after lots of booze, another thing in the cold light of day to actually do some of these things. And it’s wrong to think that late night love talk is necessarily going to be acted upon in the same way that a legal contract is going to be acted upon.

The Leader of the Opposition in his own words—deceitful not just to the Australian public but to his own colleagues.

Remember after August, when the Leader of the Opposition made grand statements about a kinder, gentler parliament? Remember that we were going to agree that the
Speaker and Deputy Speaker would be paired. We were going to change the operations of this parliament. But he said, ‘I think we can have a kinder, gentler polity;’ on 24 August. On 18 September he said:
The important thing in the weeks and months and years ahead is to channel that disappointment and that frustration constructively and the only constructive way to channel that frustration and disappointment is to redouble our attacks on the Labor Party.

That is what we have seen from the Leader of the Opposition: whether it is on the National Broadband Network, national health reform or tackling climate change, his first instinct—indeed, his only instinct—is to oppose. Remember that he said on 3 February 2010 on the Neil Mitchell program:

No, no, we’ll go to the election campaign, Neil, with a list of promises, a list of commitments and we will fund them without new or increased taxes.

That lasted till May and his budget reply, when he said on 13 May 2010:

… the fairest way to have a paid parental leave scheme anytime soon is through a modest levy on companies’ taxable income …

Lasted three months, that one. But, of course, earlier on, when he was actually in government and in a position to do something about something that this government has fixed, he said:

I’m dead against paid maternity leave as a compulsory thing.

… compulsory paid maternity leave: over this Government’s dead body, frankly. It just won’t happen.

So when he is in opposition, after this government takes action on this issue, he says:

It's high time this country had a national paid parental-leave scheme.

Of course we remember what he had to say about Work Choices. He says, of course, that they are not going to return to Work Choices, but this is what he had to say on 19 March 2008:

The Howard government’s industrial legislation was good for wages, it was good for jobs and it was good for workers and let’s never forget that.

He went on, on 13 August, to say that workplace reform was one of his greatest achievements. In *Battlelines* in July 2009 he said:

Work Choices was a political mistake, but may not have been an economic one.

So we know from the whole frame of policy that the Leader of the Opposition is someone who has no vision for the country and is determined to oppose for opposition’s sake. That is no way to appear to be an alternative leader of the country.

But, of course, there is nowhere more critical to his failure than in his attitude towards taking action on climate change. He was part of a government that was frozen in time while the world warmed around it. While other countries were taking action—while the north-east states in the US were setting up an emissions trading system, when the Chicago Climate Exchange was being established, when the Europeans were introducing an ETS—the Howard government, of course, captured by climate and market sceptics, refused to act until the end. We know that the then Treasurer, Peter Costello, in 2002 took an ETS to the cabinet and got rolled. Then Prime Minister Howard refused to take action on climate change until he was in trouble in the lead-up to the 2007 election.

He had a bit to say at the Melbourne Press Club at the Hyatt hotel on 17 July. I encourage those opposite, who say they are the inheritors of the Howard legacy, to go have a look—not the shadow Treasurer, who gets it and knows in his heart of hearts that action on climate change is necessary, as do the member for Wentworth and a range of people
over on that side of the House. They know that some action has to be taken on climate change. But this is what Prime Minister Howard said in 2007. Think about the current debate that is going on when you listen to these words:

In the face of risk, a prudent conservative takes insurance. We should, in the words of Rupert Murdoch, give the planet the benefit of the doubt given the potential dangers of climate change.

That is a pretty good sentiment. We agree with that. He also spoke about the responsibility that this generation has to future generations. He termed it, perhaps differently from how I would:

The Burkean sentiment—that society is a partnership between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are yet to be born—comes as second nature.

I disagree that it is second nature to those opposite. I think one of the defining divisions in Australian politics today is between those on the two sides of the chamber. We take a view about the long term, whether it be action on climate change, action on the National Broadband Network, investing in education or investing in infrastructure. But this is what then Prime Minister Howard had to say further on:

Now we must position Australia for a low carbon future. We face a major new reform challenge in designing an emissions trading system and setting a long-term goal for reducing our emissions in the absence of a global carbon scheme.

He then said:

Australia brings formidable assets to this challenge: an educated, can-do and adaptable people a modern; flexible economy; world class scientific expertise; deep global engagement and an enviable reputation for institution-building and reform. We have mobilised these assets before and will do so again to help build a new global climate change framework and to facilitate Australia’s transition to lower carbon emissions. No great challenge has ever yielded to fear or guilt.

I ask the Leader of the Opposition to think about that. I say to those opposite that this government will also not be yielding to the fear campaign of the climate sceptics opposite, led by the Leader of the Opposition.

Indeed, then Prime Minister Howard went on to talk about the importance of market based mechanisms and those who oppose market based mechanisms. He said:

They are the real climate change deniers because they deny rational, realistic and sustainable policy solutions.

He went on to say:

Being among the first movers on carbon trading in this region will bring new opportunities and we intend to grasp them.

It is extraordinary that those opposite have walked away completely from that view. It took John Howard a long time to get to that view, but eventually he did get there—in July 2007.

We know that Lord Stern in his seminal report referred to climate change as the world’s greatest market failure. Indeed it is. Because we fail to put a price on emissions, high carbon polluters can emit for free and someone else pays the cost. The idea that it is free is an illusion. The cost is paid not just by this generation but by future generations, which is why this government is determined to ensure that polluters pay and that we use that payment by the big polluters—up to the 1,000 top companies emitting pollution—to provide assistance to households and businesses for adjustment and support for climate change action.

Those opposite want to take taxpayers’ money and give it to the big polluters—$30 billion of it; $720 each. They want to put their hand in everyone’s pocket. The shadow Treasurer said yesterday that they not only want to remove the price on carbon but will remove any assistance that is there, whether it be tax cuts, direct payments and assistance,
support for pensioners or support for industry. That is an extraordinary proposition from those opposite.

Of course, the Leader of the Opposition has made a fundamental error, because straightaway he was out there just opposing the price on carbon. The second position he took was that he would not just oppose that but oppose the assistance measures that will occur. And then there is this nonsense about, ‘Put it in the budget.’ We have announced when it comes in—1 July 2012. We have made that announcement, so you can discount this nonsense and windbaggery from those opposite.

The third and perhaps most significant mistake he made was completely aligning the opposition with the climate change sceptics and ratbags. There are people out there who have extreme positions on these issues and the Leader of the Opposition wants to mobilise them in his so-called people’s action—and we will see some of it outside Parliament House tomorrow. He has become a hostage to these climate change deniers and that is why we see contradictions day after day. Last week, within 24 hours, we saw: ‘Climate change is nonsense; the science is not proven,’ and, ‘No, I think climate change is real.’ That was within 24 hours because he is, as the member for Wentworth said, trying to be a weathervane on these issues.

The same person who says, ‘There is no doubt that climate change is real; there is no doubt that mankind contributes to it,’ is just as capable of saying, ‘Climate change is crap.’ Then he has the gumption to come before this chamber and speak about truthfulness and being fair dinkum with the Australian people. Just as the flood tax scare did not work, the scare campaign on this will not work. The Australian people are better than that. They want a positive future not just for them but for their kids and their grandkids.

Those of us in this chamber who have had the privilege of seeing the Great Barrier Reef want our kids and grandkids to have that privilege as well. (Time expired)

Mr HOCKEY (North Sydney) (4.04 pm)—As each day passes in this place and in public life you build your integrity, like putting aside grains of sand one at a time, with the Australian people and the people you represent in this place. Over time when you have to make hard decisions you will go to that bank and spend a bit of the good fortune. What we have seen from this government, particularly in relation to the carbon tax, is the expenditure of everything in the bank and a request for the Australian people to go into deficit.

This government from the very beginning, as my leader said earlier today, has engaged in deceit. It has engaged in deceit on a spectacular level. The now Prime Minister wants the Australian people to believe that she has had to undertake this deceitful path because she does not control the numbers in the House, but the truth is that in the caucus minutes of the special meeting of the federal parliamentary Labor Party on Thursday, 24 June, Wayne Swan and Julia Gillard were referred to specifically by the Prime Minister they had deposed overnight. That Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, said:

Equally strong was the advice from Wayne and Julia that the emissions trading scheme policy had to be abandoned.

He did not say why. This Prime Minister feigns significant concern about the environment. I do not know whether she has been asked this question but I think she needs to give the Australian people an answer: why did she in April last year advise the then Prime Minister to dump the emissions trading scheme? Why did the Treasurer advise the then Prime Minister in April of last year to dump the emissions trading scheme?
Now everyone in this 24-hour opinion cycle has a view, but the view I want is from the mouth of the Prime Minister. Why did she advise Kevin Rudd to dump the emissions trading scheme? If it is a matter of such grand principle, if this is the fight to end all battles, the Prime Minister needs to explain to the Australian people why she shirked that fight in April of last year. And the Prime Minister needs to go further and explain to the Australian people exactly why she emphatically promised them not once but twice during the course of an election campaign that she would not lead a government that had a carbon tax—specifically referring to a carbon tax. The Prime Minister was doing that with the full knowledge that, were she to be re-elected, she would rely, almost inevitably, on the Greens for the balance of power in the Senate. That is the second great deceit in relation to this matter.

The third great deceit is the announcement, in the presence of Bob Brown and Christine Milne, of the carbon tax itself. I am still amazed that the Treasurer of Australia, the Deputy Prime Minister, was not there for the announcement of what he keeps referring to as a major economic reform. It is quite extraordinary that the Treasurer was not there. But what is more interesting is that the Greens’ deputy leader said it was a shared power arrangement between the Labor government and the Greens. I wonder what the earlier speaker in this debate, the member for Grayndler, would have thought about that—as he comes to the point where his wife is about to be knocked off by a Green in her seat in New South Wales on Saturday. There is the Prime Minister praising the Greens, and now the Greens are the mortal enemy of the Labor Party in New South Wales. How does that work? Not only is Carmel Tebbutt in serious trouble, but the member for Grayndler’s protege, Verity Firth, is in trouble. If there are going to be those defeats on Saturday, I say to you: Julia Gillard’s unstinting praise of the Greens must have had some impact, because Julia Gillard was endorsing the Greens when she was not endorsing Carmel Tebbutt, Verity Firth, the Labor candidate in Melbourne or Labor senators who have aspired to try to knock off the Greens in the Senate. What a confused web we weave.

It goes further. The government then sees that it is bleeding. It announces a tax without a price. It announces that it is going to exclude one industry, agriculture, but it does not talk about other industries. It is a confused announcement. Out of that we had a great revelation. It was the fact that the government was caught without any clothes in relation to compensation. The government was clinging to the debate about the environmental justification for the carbon tax but it was losing; it was sinking. Along comes Ross Garnaut, who says: ‘Well, here’s the Henry review. Remember this? We’ll dust it off.’ The government adopted three of 138 recommendations. ‘Guess what: let’s grab the Henry tax review tax cuts. That’s the way we can provide compensation.’ At first the government thought that was a great idea and its great advocates in the gallery and great commentators out there were saying: ‘This is brilliant politics. Give tax cuts. The coalition can’t oppose them.’

The only problem was that the Henry tax cuts actually delivered significant financial benefits to people earning above $200,000. In fact, if you earned $300,000 you would get nearly $5,000 in the Henry tax cuts. We do not oppose those sorts of tax cuts, but what we have a problem with is that middle Australia is going to pay more. Those on $40,000 to $90,000 are actually going to pay more, not less. The government went, ‘Hang on; this is a problem. We didn’t think about this when we talked about Henry. Ross Garnaut? Well, he’s an adviser. He’s not part of the team, really.’ So what happens is another
thought bubble from the government, the low income tax offset. ‘Let’s pull that out of the can: the low income tax offset, a great idea. We can run with that. That’s how we’ll provide compensation to low-income Australians.’ There is just a little problem. Ken Henry recommended it be abolished. ‘Don’t worry about Ken Henry. No, we’ll get the dust back on that report. We’ll never see it again. Aha—the low income tax offset!’ But there is just a little problem: it is a rebate, so people will be out of pocket as the tax kicks in. They will only get a rebate at the end of the financial year—or, for some, they will get up to 50 per cent, but they will be worse off. Oh dear! The government says, ‘We’re going to give compensation and we’re going to give tax cuts.’

Today, on Neil Mitchell’s program, the Prime Minister was asked repeatedly about the numbers. She could not answer. That is because they do not have an answer. That is because they are making it up as they go, and this is the fundamental point. When we get criticised by some for winding back compensation it is a simple point: if you do not inflict pain, you do not need painkillers. It is simple. And do you know what? This government wants to impose a carbon tax. You do not have to have compensation if you are not penalising people with a carbon tax. I felt I was in another universe during today’s question time, when the Prime Minister was speaking like a modern-day riddler. What the hell was she saying? How confused is this debate that the Prime Minister has led Australians down? All she can do is say that we are running a scare campaign. We are not doing it—the Prime Minister is doing it. It is all her own work. She is the master of the evil. She is the one that is running this scare campaign, because she does not understand what she is saying.

So I say to you, Mr Deputy Speaker, we will oppose the carbon tax because it is bad policy. We will not need to compensate people because we will not inflict pain on the Australian people. This is a government that does not know what it is doing. You have a Treasurer that did not know that John Fahey was going to be appointed. You have a Prime Minister that did not know a Treasurer was going to announce a tax summit. You have a government that is in confusion and denial. You have a foreign minister that is declaring war on Libya and a Prime Minister that does not want to do it. What is going on in the joint? The clowns are running the show. (Time expired)

Ms O’NEILL (Robertson) (4.15 pm)—I relish this opportunity to speak to today’s matter of public importance. I seize it as an opportunity—I will see if I can keep the volume up to the same level as the member who has just finished speaking—to put on the record yet again evidence of the competence of this Labor government and to highlight our proud record in these dark days of fear and loathing propagated by those opposite. What we have endured today is just another tedious moment in the farrago of fear campaigns mounted by those opposite. That is right: a farrago of fear campaigns.

This Labor government respects facts and their context. That is why we are getting on with the job of dealing with the pressing realities that we face as a nation—not the myths and mysterious machinations of those opposite who are trying to create some ‘fear bubble’ that will prevent the whole of Australia from moving forward.

I particularly want to point out the facts around our determination to move to a clean energy future for our kids and for our nation. Carbon pricing: it is the hot topic. You want to talk about it? Well, to quote a great Australian woman, our Prime Minister: ‘Let’s bring it on.’ Let’s talk about the factual basis and the reality that we need to face on cli-
mate change. Let’s talk about the fact that the multidecadal trend from 1980 to 2009 has been warming at 0.2 degrees Celsius per decade. That is a fact; let’s get some facts on the table instead of this hypocrisy that we are hearing from the other side of the chamber today. This trend has not slowed down during the 2000-09 decade. It is a fact that the decade 2000-09 was the warmest decade on record—significantly warmer than the 1990s, which in turn were significantly warmer than the 1980s. These are inconvenient facts for those opposite, and we have seen them take every political position on this issue from 1980 through to today. They have form in this area, a vacillation: ‘We do believe it’, ‘We don’t believe it’, ‘We do believe it’. It changes quicker than the weather.

Take a look at the spike in the graph of the northern hemisphere surface temperature in the post-industrial age. It is a fact. It cannot be denied by those who attend to facts, but those who want to make it up as they go and change the story from day to day continue to look for signs that they read in the waters or something, about the mythology that they create daily here in this place.

Look at the loss of the Arctic Sea ice. Look at the graph of global sea-level change between 1970 and 2008. Warming of the climate system is unequivocal. It is really happening, guys. You need to open your eyes, you need to look around, and you need to listen to the factual evidence—

Mr Laming—Mr Acting Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I would ask that the member address members by their title.

Ms O’Neill—Climate change is evident from all of these increases in global average air and ocean temperature. There is melting of snow and ice. There is a rising of sea levels. This is scientific fact—not science fiction, as preferred by those opposite. It is this government that is taking the action necessary to meet the reality that exists right before our eyes.

In the past, conservatives in our society have been wont to deny science that challenges their cozy little world view. With Darwin and the theory of evolution, Galileo and the fact that the Earth revolves around the sun, Einstein and the theory of relativity: there were sceptics to all of these things. However, these are scientific facts. They are facts that challenged the orthodoxy of the time and they were hotly disputed. As surely as the Earth goes around the sun, there will be those who, for whatever reason, are challenged by science fact. Perhaps they did not pay attention in year 8 science and they did not quite get the concepts mastered. If most of the scientists in the world are scientists who publish in peer reviewed journals, if 97 out of 100 specialists in a field are telling us that something is a fact, it is time to pay attention.

There were people in the 19th century who misconstrued the theory of evolution and insisted that they were not a monkey’s uncle. Just as we had that kind of wilful misconstruing of the facts in the 19th century, we have it as well today in relation to the climate change debate by those opposite. In place of the monkey’s uncle, we have got the modern equivalent in this chamber. We have people like the member for Tangney, who plays games like dunking bits of carbon at the doors. They rail and rant against the increasing and overwhelming body of reputable scientific evidence. It is clearer every day to the Australian people that our government, the Gillard government—in stark contrast with those opposite—is willing and has the courage to act on factual information across so many policy areas. It just so happens that these are the areas of policy failure amongst those opposite.
And so to the matter of competence. Competence begins from a base when you actually get the facts right. We got the awful facts right when we took over from the Howard government and had to clean up the mess that the Leader of the Opposition left in his previous role as John Howard’s minister for health. What we inherited was a completely run-down system from which $1 billion had been ripped out. It was a system that was in crisis due to a lack of foresight and a loss of vision for this country, a system that had been robbed of proper funding and training places for doctors and nurses, a system that was experiencing crises in staffing every day because those opposite could not see the reality. They could not identify the facts. They still cannot; but we did. That is why, since we were elected, we have moved to implement our landmark health and hospital reforms: reforms that will provide better health and better hospitals for Australian working families. This was the most significant reform to the Australian health and hospitals system since the introduction of Medicare—and it took a Labor government to do it. We are not frightened of the big tasks that lie at the heart of leading this great nation.

What was the Leader of the Opposition’s response? As the Prime Minister noted in question time today, the day she forged the agreement with the states, he denounced it before she had even announced it. Carping negativity can do nothing to enhance the outcomes for our Australian people. What a disgrace! These health reforms, which will deliver $7.3 billion in investments over the next five years, 1,300 new sub-acute hospital beds, elective surgery delivered in clinically recommended times for 95 per cent of Australians and training for 6,000 more doctors, including doubling the number of GPs trained every year, were denounced before they were announced. We know the Leader of the Opposition suffers from envy. Perhaps it is the only way in which he is ‘green’. And why would he not be envious of this great government led by our Prime Minister?

There will be better support for nurses working in GP and primary care, aged care and mental health; a national after-hours GP service, with a 24-hour hotline that provides GP advice and can arrange a follow-up visit in your local community; support to upgrade around 425 GP practices and health clinics across the country so that GPs can expand their facilities and locate more services in a single community location; support for 2,500 additional aged-care beds; a personally controlled electronic health record for every Australian who wants one; new investments in prevention, including tough new action tackling smoking; and new investments in mental health services, with 20,000 extra young people per year to get assistance.

This is a small smorgasbord of our competent action in the area of health. It is a testimony to the fact—yes, the fact—that it is the Gillard Labor government that is absolutely acting in the interests of ordinary Australians. Our action is competent, welcomed and determinedly improving the health and wellbeing of our young, our aged, our environment, our economy and our future. When it comes to health, infrastructure and climate change, it is not just an inconvenient truth. When it comes to all the substantial issues of fact that we are addressing as this government, the Leader of the Opposition just cannot handle the truth. He is far more comfortable with—what is that word we are not allowed to say?—denial.

Mr MORRISON (Cook) (4.25 pm)—Today’s matter of public importance deals with the government’s failure to act competently and provide factual information. In my own portfolio of immigration and citizenship—to borrow a phrase from the previous speaker—there is a lot of inconvenient truth
for the government. In the short time I have available, there are many matters that I could mention to highlight how misleading and how untruthful the government has been and the extent of the failures of this government in this area of policy.

We could go back to the great statement of the former Prime Minister, who said in relation to the Oceanic Viking that there was no special deal. We all remember that one, and we all remember the very special deal that they received on that occasion. Or we could go to another example—when, as recently as this morning, the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship told Fran Kelly on the ABC that all of those who had broken out of the North West Point detention centre had been accounted for. But in the Senate this afternoon we learnt that all had been accounted for except for four. Apparently, four detainees here or there breaking out of our detention centre is not something we can take terribly seriously, according to the minister.

This is a government that continually peddle mistruths, misunderstandings and inaccurate information about the scale of their failings. Most fundamentally, these failings and these mistruths appear in one of the most important documents the government publish each year, and that is their own budget. In the budget this year, for 2010-11, the government came in here and asked for $471 million for asylum seeker management. That is a lot of money—and it is certainly a lot more money than they asked for the previous year, which was around $170 million. What was more troubling was that they said that this was only going to be in order to accommodate some 2,000 arrivals this financial year. That figure was exceeded by about December in this financial year, if not earlier. The government then came back into this place for their own budget most recently and asked for another $290 million, on top of the $470 million, to pay for the blow-out in their costs due to the failure of their policy of asylum seeker management in this country. It is now costing $760 million in the additional estimates.

But the untruths do not stop there, because it says in the additional estimates that the costs for asylum seeker management are going to fall from $761 million this year—and this is in the government’s budget—to $239 million next year. So there is going to be a half a billion dollar decline in the government’s budget from this year to next financial year. That is the untruth that this government are trying to present to the Australian people about the cost of their failures in border protection. If costs stay at the current level of $760 million a year over the next three years, that is going to blow a $1½ billion hole in the government’s budget. That is on top of the $1.4 billion excess they have already had in blowing out costs in this area. So the government cannot even get the costs right in their own budget or tell the truth about the real costs of their policy failures.

Then there is the great statement from the government about push factors causing the problems that we are seeing writ large on a daily basis—whether it is riots or boats turning up or the various other chaos we see around the country in relation to this matter. They say that it is all because of push factors and they are not to blame. The UNHCR recently released their figures for the first six months of 2010. That showed that, in the 44 industrialised countries, there was a 13 per cent decline in asylum applications around the world, but in Australia there was a 78 per cent increase. There was a 78 per cent increase in Australia compared to a 13 per cent decline all around the world—whether you are talking about the European Union, where figures fell by as much as 15 per cent, or if you are talking about non-European countries or North America, where figures showed there was an 11 per cent decline. In
Australia we defied the rest of the world, and the government say it is due to push factors. No, it is due to their own policy failings.

They also said that Nauru and the Pacific solution did not work. I do not know what figures they are using to back that up; all I know is that in the six years that followed the introduction of that solution the boats basically stopped coming. One day in 2008 they started coming again; that was when they reversed the policies of the previous government.

They said that the Pacific solution was a terribly costly solution. In fact, Senator Evans, in February 2008, said:
The Pacific solution was a cynical, costly and ultimately unsuccessful exercise introduced on the eve of a federal election by the Howard government.

By the government’s own admission in this statement, the total running costs for the Pacific solution at both Nauru and Manus Island was—and you may remember this figure—$289 million. That is less than the government asked for in this year’s budget alone as a top-up. Apparently that $289 million was an excessive waste of money over almost six years; but they spent that in six months. This is what the government says is a waste of funds.

They also say that basically everyone who went to Nauru and Manus was ultimately resettled from the OPCs to Australia or other countries. In fact, they say it was 90 per cent; that is the minister’s favourite figure. But I have to refer him to the statement of Senator Evans:

A total of 1,637 people—
this is while Senator Evans was the minister for immigration—
were detained in the Nauru and Manus facilities, of whom … 70 per cent—
not 90 per cent but 70 per cent—
were ultimately resettled from the OPCs to Australia or other countries. Of those who were resettled, around 61 per cent … were resettled in Australia.

Of more importance was the report by Labor Senator Peter Cook about the Pacific Solution. He said:
The so-called Pacific Solution has achieved its objective of preventing on-shore processing of unauthorised boat arrivals. … those who are successful in their claims have no presumed right to resettlement within Australia.

That is why the boats stopped: because we took away the certainty of the product that the people smugglers were selling in Indonesia and throughout the region. That is why it worked. The government does not want to believe this works, but the figures speak for themselves: the boats stopped and the program worked. It has cost less in six years than this government asked for in six months, yet they peddle this myth that they do not want to go back to Nauru.

They also said before the election that they would not be expanding the onshore detention network. They were almost right—except for 4,900 additional beds that they have announced since the election. This is a government that has announced more beds in the detention network than they have announced for public hospitals—and they are apparently the ‘health government’. Maybe, if public patients were able to get a bed in a detention centre, they would be better off. But they cannot get a bed there because all of those beds in our detention network are very much full. This is a government who said they would not be expanding the onshore detention network.

They did say they would open beds in East Timor though. It has been eight months since the Prime Minister stood at the Lowy Institute and said, ‘We are going to establish this you-beaut processing centre in East Timor.’ Eight months and more have passed...
and we are no closer to it today—in fact, we are further away from it than at any time prior.

I compare that to the performance of the Howard government, who announced the establishment of Nauru and 19 days later it was open for business. So in 19 days John Howard achieved what this government has not been able to achieve in eight to nine months. We continue to see this East Timor processing centre being something of the never-never.

There is also the great deterrent the minister has talked about, ‘If people get a no, they go home.’ On 19 October the minister said that the biggest disincentive we could put on people coming to Australia is, ‘If you are not a genuine refugee, you will be sent home.’ Senate estimates revealed that over a period of two years when the boats have come, four people from Afghanistan have gone home voluntarily. This is the big disincentive and it does not operate when you get to the ground.

Finally, I note that the asylum freeze has probably been one of the greatest contributing factors—other than boats arriving—for this government which has created the chaos we have seen on Christmas Island in recent times. The Prime Minister described this when she was Deputy Prime Minister as a ‘decision in the national interest’. I ask her this: is it in the national interest that we have riots on Christmas Island caused by the failure of this government to get a handle on its borders and its detention network. It is clearly not the case.

Ms GRIERSON (Newcastle) (4.35 pm)—It is a great pleasure to rise on what I see as an MPI set by this incompetent opposition—an own goal, all its own work. It is quite ironic to be speaking on a motion that speaks of the failure to act competently or provide factual information. I noticed when the Leader of the Opposition was speaking, he was not speaking from carefully prepared and scripted remarks. So I suppose again: no gospel truth, nothing we can rely on, and acts of deceit quite possibly.

What a great opportunity this MPI presents to outline what it feels like to be part of a competent government: a government that does act in the national interest, that is committed to reform, that will make the tough decisions and that will make those decisions informed by evidence and sound advice, just as we acted competently in the global financial crisis—again providing leadership in the national interest; again, a government that will contribute on the national and international stage to resolve the challenges of this century.

We will continue to act competently. We will continue to make the reforms that are needed, because we are not afraid to create the future for this nation. We are not afraid to introduce the big reform agenda that we are currently prospering and delivering. We will not use fear, we will not use scaremongering and we will not diminish the economic and scientific evidence put forward by Australians, fine Australians, great Australians and great Australian institutions—institutions like the CSIRO and economic advisers like Ross Garnaut.

We will not tear down those things that make this a great nation: the power of science, innovation and knowledge; the wealth derived from the skills and talents of our people; the value of economic policy informed by experts. We will continue to act competently and we will deliver the big reforms such as the National Broadband Network, which will transform the way we live, the way we do business and the way we engage with each other. Big reforms such as the NBN will create economic opportunity for regional Australia. We will continue to invest in infrastructure such as the Hunter Ex-
pressway and the ARTC infrastructure, through which we can envisage the possibility of high-speed rail on the east coast of Australia, and we will continue to have a national ports and freight strategy and to look at our airport strategies. These things were lacking for 12 miserable years. We will keep finding ways to use the revenue from the mining boom to invest back into our economy for future prosperity, and we will do the big one—the price on carbon.

I know the power of reforms because I am the member for Newcastle. I know that the path to prosperity is through reform and change. The economic transformation of Newcastle over the last 10 to 15 years from a heavy-industrial, one-company town to a leading centre for innovation, productivity and prosperity is something that we can be proud of. We have gone from 17 per cent unemployment in the mid and late 1990s to five per cent unemployment now in 2011. Over 88,000 jobs have been created in my region in the last decade—and why? Because we invested in high-tech and in knowledge; we invested in innovation. We diversified our economy and took on the skill challenge. By the end of 2010, employment in knowledge based industries had increased to the point where it was around 66 per cent higher than employment in goods-producing industries such as coal.

What a turnaround has occurred—and why? Because of reforms undertaken by Hawke and Keating, Rudd and Gillard. We know now that our future prosperity will depend on putting a price on carbon. That is something we embrace and have waited for much too long. We want some consistency. Business wants some consistency. They want some certainty and they want to know what things will look like in the future. They want to know what they can do to create the optimum outcomes for themselves, and the most powerful market signal will be a price on carbon. We also know that it is the early adopters in this world, in business and in life, who thrive and survive. Yet I look across at the Neanderthals on the other side and despair for the nation should they ever regain government. They have no imagination, they diminish those who could advise them well and they rush headlong into a divided world of scaremongering and fear.

A price on carbon will allow industry to start auditing and measuring their carbon footprint and to do the economic modelling that could make their businesses successful. They will know the cost of that pollution, and they will then know the opportunity for new investment and what it is worth. They will know what the use of offsets will do to create businesses of the future. I know a little bit about those wonderful businesses of the future because in Newcastle we have the Australian Solar Institute, the Clean Energy Innovation Centre, the Smart Grid, Smart City initiative, the CSIRO Energy Transformed Flagship and the energy centre for the nation. We know that these innovation centres will create the future, but I want to tell you how hard that will be without a price on carbon.

Last week Commercialisation Australia and AusIndustry met at the Newcastle University Institute for Energy and Resources, which was also funded and set up by the Labor government. We were looking at two great products. One was solar paint—water-based paint—and the other was geothermal capacity to increase the efficiency of existing power plants. Commercialisation of these ventures is very attractive to overseas markets, but it is not attractive to Australian markets because there is no incentive to invest in these new products. How tragic it would be if these great innovations were to go overseas. Yet that is what the opposition would see happen.
Neanderthal man across there—the Leader of the Opposition—has aligned himself with the climate change sceptics. He has aligned himself with people who deny science and deny the future, he has diminished the credible voices that would shape that future and he is certainly committed to political expediency. He has gone from the argument that climate change is ‘crap’ to the following, which he said at his press conference on the day he took over the leadership:

Look, certainly I think the politics of this issue have changed. I don’t think my assessment of the science or of the policies ever changed that much. I think all that really changed was my assessment of the politics of the issue.

So we have over there a leader who will use political expediency. He does not care about the science and asserted he does not care about the national economic benefits; he only cares about the politics of this issue. I guess he has put forward his credibility and his competency in this MPI discussion. His competency saw him put forward a policy on climate change that was unfunded at a cost of $10 billion. Who would pay for that? The shadow finance minister answered that question today. He said, ‘You have to actually cut spending to pay for things.’ That is exactly what they will do it if they want to have their action agenda on climate change—they will cut spending. Yet Tony Abbott would not say where he would make those spending cuts. As the Leader of the Opposition during the election campaign, costing of his election commitments found a $10 billion hole. That is the real Tony, a fairly incompetent Tony and one whom I think brings great disrepute to the party and this parliament.

Then, of course, we have the member Cook wanting to talk today. He was hidden from this parliament for the last couple of days, but he must be getting his act together now. All he wants to do is to say that the policies of the Howard government were successful. No, they were not. We remember SIEVX and we remember TPVs that made people have to beg to survive in this country. It was a ruthless regime that paid absolutely no attention to the displacement caused by international events. I think it is shameful that the other side continue to diminish the parliament and diminish this nation. (Time expired)

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—As there are no other speakers on the MPI, the discussion is now concluded.

COMMITTEES
National Broadband Network Committee Membership

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—I have received a message from the Senate informing the House that Senator Ludlam has been appointed a member and Senator Xenophon a participating member of the Joint Committee on the National Broadband Network.

AUSTRALIAN CIVILIAN CORPS BILL 2010

Consideration of Senate Message

Consideration resumed from 21 March.

Senate’s amendments—
(1) Clause 5, page 3 (after line 22), after the definition of overseas, insert:

**Presiding Officer** means:
(a) the President of the Senate; or
(b) the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

(2) Clause 17, page 7 (line 9), omit “employees; and”, substitute “employees.”.

(3) Clause 17, page 7 (lines 10 to 17), omit paragraph (6)(c).

(4) Clause 17, page 7 (lines 18 to 21), omit sub-clause (7).

(5) Page 7 (after line 28), after clause 17, insert:

17A Review of decisions relating to breaches of Australian Civilian Corps Code of Conduct

(1) A person who is, or has been, an Australian Civilian Corps employee is entitled to review, in accordance with the regulations, of any of the following decisions:
(a) a determination that the person breached the Australian Civilian Corps Code of Conduct when the person was an Australian Civilian Corps employee;
(b) a decision to impose a sanction on the person for breaching the Australian Civilian Corps Code of Conduct when the person was an Australian Civilian Corps employee.

(2) However, a person is not entitled to review under this section of a decision to impose a sanction that consists of termination of the person’s employment as an Australian Civilian Corps employee.

(3) The regulations may prescribe exceptions to the entitlement.

Note: For example, the regulations might provide that there is no entitlement to review if the application for review is frivolous or vexatious.

7 Person or committee to conduct a review

(4) The Director-General must arrange for:
(a) a person; or
(b) a committee constituted in accordance with the regulations;

to conduct a review under this section.

(5) The Director-General must not arrange for a person to conduct a review under this section unless the Director-General is satisfied that the person has appropriate knowledge, skills and experience.

(6) A review under this section must not be conducted by a person if the person is:
(a) the Director-General; or
(b) an APS employee in AusAID; or
(c) an Australian Civilian Corps employee.

(7) The Director-General must not arrange for a committee to conduct a review under this section unless the Director-General is satisfied that each member of the committee has appropriate knowledge, skills and experience.

(8) A review under this section must not be conducted by a committee if a member of the committee is:
(a) the Director-General; or
(b) an APS employee in AusAID; or
(c) an Australian Civilian Corps employee.

Powers and procedures

(9) Without limiting subsection (1), regulations made for the purposes of that subsection may provide for the powers available to a person or committee that conducts a review under this section.

Recommendations in a report on a review

(10) A person or committee that has conducted a review under this section (the reviewer) may make recommendations in a report on the review but does not
have power to make any binding decision as a result of the review, except as provided by the regulations.

(11) If the reviewer is not satisfied with the response to recommendations contained in a report on a review under this section, the reviewer may give a report on the matter to:

(a) the Minister; and
(b) either or both of the following:
   (i) the Prime Minister;
   (ii) the Presiding Officers, for presentation to the Parliament.

(6) Clause 23, page 10 (line 10), before “The Director-General”, insert “(1)”.
(7) Clause 23, page 10 (after line 13), at the end of the clause, add:

(2) The notice must set out the ground or grounds for the termination.

(8) Clause 27, page 13 (after line 6), at the end of the clause, add:

(4) Paragraph (2)(a) does not apply to a grant of leave to an employee unless the employee has requested the leave.

(9) Page 15 (after line 8), after clause 29, insert:

29A Prohibition of patronage and favouritism

A person exercising powers under this Act or the regulations:

(a) in relation to the engagement of Australian Civilian Corps employees; or

(b) otherwise in relation to Australian Civilian Corps employees;

must do so without patronage or favouritism.

Mr RUDD (Griffith—Minister for Foreign Affairs) (4.45 pm)—I move:

That the amendments be agreed to.

Over the past few years, we have witnessed the unfolding of many natural disasters and many conflicts across the world, far too many for all of us. Regardless of their causes, disasters and conflicts shake nations and communities to their absolute core. The familiar is replaced by the unfamiliar. We have a natural instinct to want to help when our fellow human beings are in trouble. The Australian Civilian Corps has been set up to do exactly this. Australians are among the most generous people in the world, so it is no surprise that, when disaster strikes, one of the most common questions that people ask is: how can I help? The Civilian Corps will provide another way for Australians to help out in times of crisis across the world.

Australia is joining other members of the international community in establishing a capacity for deploying civilian specialists. This idea emerged from the 2020 Summit in 2008. This is an important initiative that enables rapid deployment of skilled civilian specialists to assist countries experiencing or emerging from natural disaster or conflict. Australians will assist these countries to restore essential services, rebuild government institutions and support economic and social stability. The corps will have the flexibility to deploy in a stand-alone capacity or alongside Australian military or police personnel. In some cases, the corps may work closely with civilian corps from other countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada.

The Australian Civilian Corps Bill 2010, incorporating a number of government amendments, has now passed the Senate. The government amendments address the recommendations by the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee. As recommended by the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee, the bill has been amended to provide for external instead of internal review of decisions made by the Director-General of AusAID concerning the contract of Civilian Corps personnel. A number of minor amendments have also been made to implement other recommendations that are consistent with the intention of the bill. For example, the bill has been amended to expressly
prohibit patronage and favouritism in relation to the engagement of Civilian Corps employees.

I thank the senators who spoke on the bill yesterday for their strong support for this legislation. If you are ever thinking about a career change, I would say to those in the Senate—and perhaps also to those in the House—that the Australian Civilian Corps lies waiting for you.

I would like to provide some clarification of a number of the issues raised in the debate. The Australian government takes its responsibility for the safety of Civilian Corps personnel seriously. Before AusAID conducts a deployment, a comprehensive security assessment will be undertaken. The risks will be anticipated and we anticipate also to manage those risks appropriately. The Director-General of AusAID will ensure appropriate safety and security arrangements are in place for Civilian Corps personnel, in compliance with AusAID’s legal obligations as the employer of those personnel, in order to mitigate those risks.

As to who will determine whether a person will be deployed as an AusAID employee or a Civilian Corps employee, the Director-General of AusAID is best placed to make operational and staffing decisions based on the particular requirements of the host country.

This is a significant initiative: $52.3 million has been allocated over five years to meet the costs associated with the establishment of the Australian Civilian Corps and to manage its operations. Accordingly, the bill itself has no financial implication. AusAID aims to build a register of 500 trained personnel for the Austrian Civilian Corps by 2014. To date, 47 civilian specialists have been selected, screened and trained for inclusion in the Australian Civilian Corps register, and recruitment is ongoing. I am pleased to inform the House that the first deployment from the register is expected to be to Haiti next month. This deployment will complement Australia’s $24 million commitment to help rebuild Haiti following the devastating earthquake in 2010 that killed more than 200,000 people.

By providing an employment framework tailored to the Civilian Corps, the bill enhances Australia’s capacity to meet both the needs of developing countries and the desire of Australians to lend a hand. The corps will make a significant difference to those receiving assistance but will also make a difference to the lives of Australians. It gives Australians the opportunity to make a meaningful contribution to the lives of those struggling to recover after disaster and conflict. There is no better feeling than helping to lift others up when they have been knocked down.

This is a good piece of legislation; it is a good piece of public policy. I commend those opposite on the bipartisan spirit they have brought to this legislation both in the House and in the Senate. Once again, I commend the legislation.

Ms JULIE BISHOP (Curtin) (4.51 pm)—I am pleased to again speak in support of the Australian Civilian Corps Bill 2010, with the amendments. The events of the past few months have given us reason to reflect on the terrible impact of natural disasters and the need for a coordinated response effort. Disaster after disaster has been felt not only here at home but also by our friends abroad. Australians were united in grief as images from Christchurch were relayed into our living rooms and again when the Japan earthquake occurred, where the loss of life, devastation and destruction were on an unimaginable scale. We have also witnessed historic moments in Egypt and Tunisia, where freedom has emerged from years of repression and is looking to take root. Out of these
movements, a window of opportunity has opened for Australia and other members of the international community to work with the people of Egypt and Tunisia to bring about long-lasting reform.

In speaking in support of the bill last year; I drew on the idealism and inspiration of John F. Kennedy who challenged American students to appreciate the bigger picture around them. Like the United States Peace Corps, an Australian Civilian Corps will harness the boundless energy, goodwill and abilities that are present in the Australian community and put them to work where they are most needed. In passing on the skills and knowledge that participants have developed over their careers, an Australian Civilian Corps will help rebuild those communities that have suffered the ravages of natural disaster or conflict. It is the coalition’s hope that this initiative will bring the prospect of a brighter future to parts of the world where little hope existed.

In speaking on this matter last year, I did raise two concerns. The first concerned the financial impact of the bill. While the explanatory memorandum stated that there would be no financial impact from the bill, according to AusAID:

The Australian Government will provide $52 million to enable the rapid deployment of Australian civilians into overseas disaster or conflict affected countries.

It was important that this confusion was removed.

My second concern related to the potential for a conflict of interest involving government employees. Given that many of the eligible public sector employees will be existing staff of AusAID, it is important that safeguards are put in place to ensure that potential conflicts of interest are properly managed. For these reasons the coalition recommended that the bill be referred to a Senate committee for inquiry and the Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade has looked at both these matters and has reported back to parliament.

I note the strong support from the committee for this bill. While questions still remain over the final cost of the initiative, the coalition accepts the view of the committee that matters relating to the cost of the program will become clearer as the Australian Civilian Corps is further refined. The coalition also accepts the view of the committee and the Australian Public Service Commission that existing procedures governing the Australian Public Service are sufficient to manage the selection and management of personnel on the Australian Civilian Corps Register. We join with the committee in calling on the government to ensure that ‘the selection process is transparent without patronage or favouritism and based on merit’. In referring the bill to the committee, the coalition has acted to strengthen what is an important step forward in Australia’s overseas development program and a valuable way of encouraging development and reconstruction in other parts of the world. I commend the bill to the House.

Question agreed to.

FAMILIES, HOUSING, COMMUNITY SERVICES AND INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (ELECTION COMMITMENTS AND OTHER MEASURES) BILL 2011

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 21 March, on motion by Ms Macklin:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER(Mrs D’Ath)—The original question was that this bill be now read a second time. To this the honourable member for Menzies 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. The question now is that this will be now read a second time.

Ms OWENS (Parramatta) (4.55 pm)—It is with great pleasure that I rise to speak in support of the Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Other Legislation Amendment (Election Commitments and Other Measures) Bill 2011. It is a bill that will have a positive effect on many of my constituents in Parramatta and it is a bill which delivers on a number of election commitments that the government made prior to the 2010 election—commitments that I was pleased to see made and which I am even more pleased to see on their way to delivery today.

There were three main election commitments and all are very special for people in my electorate. The first was to provide for baby bonus claimants to have a large proportion of their baby bonus paid to them upfront from 1 July 2011. The second one provided benefits to families with children aged between 16 and 19 who are in full-time secondary or vocational education, and the third extended the pension work bonus to better reflect the realities of many pensioners who work on an ad hoc or part-time irregular basis. It is these last two that I am particularly going to speak about today.

The bill through its improvements to the work bonus expands on a great deal of work we have already done when it comes to pensions. We delivered the Secure and Sustainable Pension Reform package back in September 2009 that already built on a $500 bonus which was paid to pensioners in 2008. But the provisions introduced through that Secure and Sustainable Pension Reform package were the most significant reforms to the pension system in 100 years and they were reforms that were well and truly overdue.

We introduced a one-off increase in the base rate of the pension, a new pension supplement, a pension work bonus and a new indexation system. From 20 September we delivered one-off increases of $32.49 per week for singles who receive the maximum rate of the pension, and $10.14 a week combined for couples on the maximum rate. These increases were made up of a rise in the base rate for single pensioners and a new increased pension supplement for all pensioners.

We also changed indexation arrangements to make them fairer and to respond to pressures on the cost of living, indexing them twice yearly. In fact, from 20 March this year pensioners receive an extra $13.20 per fortnight for singles on the maximum rate, and $19.80 a fortnight for couples on the maximum rate, and increases every six months tend to reflect similar kinds of amounts. This is a significant improvement from the way the pensions were indexed before 2009.

We also increased the utilities allowance from $125 to $500 a year, and that utilities allowance was first paid in March 2008. For the first time the utilities’ allowance was also extended to all recipients of the carer payment, disability support pension, widow B pension, income support supplement, partner service pension, wife pension, and bereavement allowance. The Commonwealth seniors health card holders and certain veterans’ affairs gold card holders also received an increase in seniors concession allowance of $500 a year, which was paid quarterly in line with the utilities allowance. We also increased the telephone allowance to $132 a year for those who have the internet at home. This is available for eligible veterans, income support recipients of age pension and a
number of others who have home internet connection—all very important contributions to the quality of life of seniors in my electorate and around the country.

We also provided extra assistance for dental and aged-care costs and worked with state and territory governments to introduce national reciprocal transport concessions for older Australians with a seniors card when they travelled interstate. All these reforms have meant that since September 2009 pensioners on the maximum rate have had their pensions increased by around $115 a fortnight for singles and $97 a fortnight for couples combined. These are changes to the circumstances of pensioners that I am very proud of.

This bill builds on that work by improving the existing work bonus. We have already introduced a work bonus which provides that the first $250 of $500 that a pensioner earns each fortnight would be exempt from tax. But the reality for many pensioners is that they do not work regular weekly jobs; they actually work for a number of weeks of the year. For example, some of them may work in schools, so they may work 40 weeks of the year and they do not get paid for the remaining 12. Others may come back at tax time—they may be a retired accountant who works for a few weeks or a few months around tax time. For them, because their income is averaged over the year, the amount that they earn perhaps impacts on their pension more than it should. This change to the work bonus recognises that. It allows a pensioner to earn $250 a fortnight without it being assessed as income under the income test, and pensioners are able to build up any unused amount of their $250 bonus every fortnight to a maximum of $6,500 a year. Pensioners will effectively be able to annualise their income and carry forward an income bank of up to $6,500 across years.

In Parramatta we have a significant number of pensioners, currently about 21½ thousand of them, with all sorts of work arrangements. It is a very large number of pensioners for one electorate. You can compare that to Warringah or Wentworth, which have about 11,000. I am very pleased to see this legislation introduced to parliament today because it will dramatically impact on many of their lives.

The second thing I want to talk about was, again, a great announcement made during the election campaign, and it is great to see it delivered through legislation today. There was a promise to reform the family payment system to encourage more teenagers to stay at school and to help families meet the higher costs of older children. It is very important that students finish their education because it gives them the best possible chance to fully participate in life, to get a job and the skills they need to flourish in society. The ‘How young people are faring’ report of 2008 found that young people who leave school early without adequate qualifications struggle in the move from school to work. They are at high risk of becoming disadvantaged and they are at high risk of spending long periods of time out of work, especially in times of economic slowdown. We also know that children from low-income families have lower levels of school completion.

We want to stop the cycle of disadvantage and target support for children from low-socioeconomic backgrounds so that they can gain a foothold in society and have what so many of us take for granted. A strong educational system will compensate for an unequal start. As the Prime Minister stated when first making these election promises:

I don’t want to live in a nation where we stand by and kids can get lost. They can get lost out of their school journey; they can fall out of school, fall out of work, end up in aimlessness, drifting through their latter teenage years, meaning that
for the rest of their lives, they will probably struggle to get a job and hold down a career.

What we want to do is to make sure we are investing in kids so they can stay in school.

As early as 1999, researchers such as R Cowie were finding that deliberately targeted federal government policy such as the Hawke government’s Participation and Equity Program, a successor to the Disadvantaged Schools Program, could significantly reduce the numbers of young people leaving full-time education. This government is doing all we can to undo the effects of the inertia around educational opportunity that characterised the Howard years.

One of the great failures of the Howard government was its inability to accept the recognised link between investment in education and innovation on one hand and economic growth on the other. Under the Howard government, Australia was the third lowest investor in primary and secondary schooling in the OECD and spent twice as much as other OECD countries on private education. His government cut programs like the Disadvantaged Schools Program, which was started under the Whitlam government, and we are facing the consequences of his lack of vision.

For the last decade of the Howard government retention rates to year 12 in Australia did not improve in any meaningful way. They increased from 40 per cent to 72 per cent under the previous Hawke and Keating governments and essentially stagnated between 72 per cent and 74 per cent for the next 12 years. Those retention rates are low by OECD standards. I point out that 12 years is the length of time it takes a child to go through school from start to finish, so it is clearly more than enough time to impact on the number of children that stay at school. This government is committed to improving year 12 or equivalent vocational completion rates and to reach our target of a 90 per cent year 12 attainment rate by 2015. We have already seen retention rates increase to around 78 per cent in 2010.

This bill is a great example of how tackling this issue in a holistic way through a number of initiatives across portfolio areas contributes to strong outcomes. We are spending $723 million over four years on our National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions program to improve retention rates. This includes $100 million for the states and territories in reward payments for increasing school participation. We are investing heavily in early childhood education because the research shows that this is crucial to retaining students long term. The National Partnership on Low Socio-Economic Status School Communities which will address the complex challenges facing students in disadvantaged communities will also ensure that children from those areas do not fall through the gaps.

This bill goes further, by helping families whose children are between 16 and 19 to keep those children in school. Under the existing system, the maximum tax benefit part A drops from $214 per fortnight to $53 a fortnight when a child turns 16. This is a significant drop in income and encourages teenagers to leave school early if their family is unable to support them in full-time study or training. We all know that the costs of children do not go down as kids grow up. This bill raises the minimum rate for family tax benefit part A. Payment rates for eligible children aged 16 to 19 who are in full-time secondary or vocational educational will be the same as for 13- to 15-year-olds.

As promised, the maximum rate of family tax benefit part A will be increased by around $160 per fortnight, a significant increase for families in the low- to middle-income bracket. Over the next five years, the
families of around 590,000 teenagers will benefit from up to $4,000 per year in additional financial assistance. These amendments will also mean that older children will now be eligible to be considered a rent assistance child. Rent assistance was previously only claimable for 13- to 15-year-olds. We are also simplifying the system by helping families with kids under the age of 18, making FTBA the main payment for at-home children in high school or a vocational education equivalent.

This bill targets issues that are very real for many families in Parramatta. Around 23.3 per cent of Parramatteans have a schooling level lower than year 11, and in Merrylands this rises to 32.5 per cent. We have an incredible amount of work to do with our younger generation in areas such as this to improve those statistics. There are more than 16,000 families in Parramatta receiving family tax benefit part A, and many of these families potentially stand to benefit from the bill before us.

On average, nearly 20 per cent of Parraamatteans are classified as low-income households. In Dundas Valley this rises to 23.9 per cent and in Telopea to 27.5 per cent. These households receive less than $500 per week before tax, so the kinds of increases that we are talking about in family tax benefit part A are substantial for many, many families in the Parramatta region. These are sobering statistics, and ones that we are determined to do something about. In summary, I commend the bill before the House. As the Prime Minister has stated, no child’s fate should be predetermined before they reach adulthood.

Mrs Mirabella (Indi) (5.09 pm)—I rise to specifically support the amendments to the Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Other Legislation Amendment (Election Commitments and Other Measures) Bill 2011 put forward by the member for Menzies, and I note that the issue of an inequitable youth allowance is a matter that the Labor Party desperately do not want to talk about. They want it to go away and they certainly do not like the opposition talking about it. They do not want to debate it because they know that they have been wrong. We all know that most of those who sit opposite do not really have much affinity with country people because they do not represent many country electorates. I suspect, though, that some Labor members who do reside in or have some experience with regional areas must be as frustrated as we on this side of the House are regarding the government’s total neglect of and lack of respect for regional students and the particular difficulties and challenges they face in accessing tertiary education.

We have a Prime Minister who loves nothing more than to gloat about her passion for education. She talks about education as the great equaliser and says she believes that every young person deserves the right to a quality education. If that is the case then her actions need to match her rhetoric. If you look at the Prime Minister’s position on the youth allowance, it becomes clear that her statements regarding education are nothing more than empty platitudes designed to give the impression that she genuinely cares about educational equality, but when it comes to regional students it seems she does not. Labor’s changes to the youth allowance legislation fly in the face of everything the Prime Minister supposedly stands for and they exemplify a very inequitable and hypocritical position taken against country students.

When these ridiculous, discriminatory changes were legislated, there was uproar within the rural and regional student community. Students in my electorate were absolutely gobsmacked. Having been advised of the rules that applied to youth allowance eli-
gibility, they planned their gap years and made appropriate arrangements, only to discover that everything they had been told was about to change. Labor effectively said: ‘Well, too bad. You can’t go to university anymore; we’ve decided to change the rules.’ In fact, they have not even apologised about the distress and the disorientation they caused in regard to the academic careers of many country students. They arrogantly lectured country students that the Gillard government knew what was best for them.

Now I am somewhat encouraged that, after some 12 months of pressure and much community activity—and I commend all of those who have been involved in community rallies and who have pressured their member of parliament, particularly Labor members—the Labor Party has admitted that it got it wrong. However, its commitment to the Independents to bring forward a review of the youth allowance to report by 1 July this year does not address the problem now, and there are students now who are faced with this inequality created by the government’s legislation. Furthermore, Labor has not given any firm commitment to fixing the independent youth allowance problems.

In a media release, the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Jobs and Workplace Relations, Senator Evans, stated:

The review will report by 1 July this year, and the Government will move to implement any new eligibility arrangements from 1 January 2012.

Senator Evans said the review will consider appropriate savings that can be made to pay for any extensions in eligibility for Youth Allowance. Any new arrangements must be offset by savings.

So, even if they do make the appropriate changes after the review, it is going to be too little too late for those classified as inner regional students who left school in 2009 and had a gap year in 2010, as they are now still required to work an average of 30 hours a week and defer their studies up to two years. Had the coalition’s bill passed, they would now be relieved of these unfair criteria. Last year’s school leavers are also left in limbo, wondering what to expect after the review, and there are clearly already cracks in Labor’s deal with the Independents and, of course, many unanswered questions.

How can regional students and their families trust Labor to deliver on this promise given this government’s dismal record on delivering on its promises? They cannot, and that is what is creating great anxiety out there in rural and regional communities. Labor has shown nothing but arrogant disregard for country students. There has been report after report and survey after survey that clearly illustrates the divide between country and city students. There are clear disadvantages that are faced by students from non-metropolitan areas. You would think that any reasonable government, particularly one that purports to place education high on its list of priorities, would make it a priority to address the imbalance between rural and city students. Yet not only has the Labor Party not sought to remedy this inequity; they have actually made it worse.

For the benefit of those who sit on the other side, it is important to put some facts on the table. I appreciate that the Labor Party has a limited understanding of some of these issues, so it is important to put them on the record. Firstly, most students from regional areas need to relocate to attend a university because there is no university in their local town, and often one that is there may not offer the appropriate courses that they wish to pursue.

Secondly, public transport is severely limited or nonexistent for towns that are close to large regional centres with tertiary institutions. In most cases, students actually have to drive or get their parents to drive them. Take, for example, a couple of local young women
in my electorate, Stephanie Butler and Eliza Flanagan. They drive more than 150 kilometres from Wangaratta to Charles Sturt University over the border in Thurgoona because they cannot afford to live out of home. If Labor had not inflicted these discriminatory rules on the youth allowance, Stephanie and Eliza would have been able to move closer to Thurgoona and commit considerably more time to their studies. They would not have to spend about two hours a day on the road and hundreds of dollars a week on petrol. But Stephanie and Eliza are the lucky ones; fortunately for them, their courses are offered at a university relatively close to home. What about students who want to study courses that are only on offer in city universities? Does this government expect them to drive more than three hours each way to attend classes?

The reality is that the 30-hour workplace rule that Labor has inflicted upon country students is so strict that most students from areas classified as inner regional areas will be unable to qualify for the higher, of course, independent rate of youth allowance, and many of them will not get the opportunity to go to university at all as a consequence. The requirement to average either 120 hours in each of the 19 periods of four weeks or 390 hours in each of the six periods of 13 weeks is quite simply unworkable and unreasonable.

What the Labor Party does not understand is that much of the work that is available in country Australia is actually seasonal. People work very long hours during the busy times of sowing, picking, mustering and harvesting, but the work is not available on an even scale throughout the year. It makes life extremely difficult for students attempting to meet these ridiculous criteria. Manufacturing and factories in regional areas also have seasonal work available: it is not always an option to have the same hours available for part-time, casual or even permanent staff. Let us be very clear from the outset: if these rules introduced by the Labor Party remain in place, fewer country students will actually attend university.

This point goes beyond the realms of education; it goes to the sustainability of regional economies. Country Australia faces many challenges, and labour shortages are one of the biggest challenges impacting on growth in regional and remote Australia. Countless studies have shown that people who are most likely to live and to work in the bush and those who are most likely to take career steps away from the urban environment are those who have spent time in regional Australia. Whilst there may be a percentage of workers in the areas of health, education and public administration who come from the city to work in country Australia, most serve their obligatory two or three years and return to the cities. But the ones who tend to stay on and serve country communities for greater periods of time, often in a more meaningful way, are those who originally came from country Australia themselves. They are the ones who are our long-term workers and community leaders.

If we place university participation hurdles in front of those who come from regional areas classified as inner regional areas, we will actually shrink the pool of people who serve and work in country Australia. Our higher education students who come from inner regional areas are exactly the same people who often want to stay longer in regional and remote Australia when they commence and continue their careers. By denying them an opportunity to gain a higher education—which is effectively what is happening to many of them through these changed eligibility rules on the youth allowance—we are in the long term denying rural Australia the ability to attract and retain the much-needed workers.
With all of this in mind, I do respectfully ask the regional Independent members of the House to consider the impact of the Labor Party’s legislation on their own communities. I am sure that there are plenty of students in those electorates who want nothing more than to pursue their dreams of tertiary education to find meaningful roles for themselves in their communities and to contribute to them in a meaningful way. I am also sure that those communities face the very same challenges that communities in my electorate in north-east Victoria face.

If we are serious about maintaining the viability and facilitating the prosperity of communities outside major cities then we need to lay the appropriate social infrastructure and foundations for future growth. That necessarily demands fair access to support during tertiary education studies. If we want to maintain first-class services and retain skilled workers in country Australia, we cannot continue to place hurdles in front of aspiring students.

I understand the difficult position that this puts the member for New England and the member for Lyne in, because both have previously sided with the Labor government in relation to youth allowance, but I ask them to please consider the pleas of students not only in their own electorates but in electorates across Australia. They have an opportunity to fix in a constructive way a mess that has been created by this government—an opportunity that often does not happen in this place in the term of the same government. It is an opportunity to right a wrong and an opportunity to help create a better life for regional communities.

Mrs D’ATH (Petrie) (5.23 pm)—It is my pleasure to be speaking in support of the Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Other Legislation Amendment (Election Commitments and Other Measures) Bill 2011. Labor has always been at the forefront of ensuring fairness for those most in need in our community. We saw it in our first term of government—2008, 2009 and 2010—with the reforms that we took up in relation to families and pensioners. We saw an increase in the childcare benefit to assist those families most in need with their costs. We saw it with the increase in the base pension rate and the change to the indexation to ensure that adequate increases were occurring in line with cost-of-living pressures. We saw it, when the government needed to step forward to deal with the global financial crisis, in how it gave money to individuals and homeowners through the stimulus package. That stimulus package went to those most in need in our communities.

This is just another step in Labor’s commitment to those most in need in our community to ensure fairness in how we deal with them and also how we provide support for them in the workplace and in the home. That is why it is my pleasure to support all of the initiatives in this bill—for example, the work bonus. My electorate has a large elderly population—over 20 per cent of my electorate are 65-plus—and they welcome this initiative. The groups that I have had the opportunity to talk to at retirement villages about these improvements in the work bonus certainly look forward to these changes being implemented. We came a long way with the Secure and Sustainable Pension Reform package in 2009, when we introduced the work bonus. Now, arising from our commitment in the 2010 election, we take that even further to help those in our community.

So what does this bill provide for? The amendments contained in this bill have two main components in relation to the work bo-
nus. Firstly, the first $250 of employment income a fortnight, rather than 50 per cent of the first $500 as it is currently, is excluded from assessment under the income test for pensioners of age pension age or qualifying age. Secondly, an employment income concession bank is introduced to enable pensioners to accrue any unused amounts of the $250 fortnightly exemption to a maximum of $6,500. Any credit in this bank could then offset employment income that would otherwise be assessable in the future. This is a great benefit to those in our community who are retired and on the pension and want to supplement their pension but who quite often do it irregularly. For example, they may pick up some extra work at Christmastime. We have heard the example that many may help with tax returns at the end of the financial year. This will give them the benefit of being able to accrue that concession bank and offset up to a maximum of $6,500. I am very proud of the improvements to the work bonus that will come about in accordance with this bill and that those changes will occur from 1 July 2011.

Second is the assistance for families with studying teenagers. As parents, whether your child is a teenager or not, we remember when we were teenagers, and the fact is that teenagers certainly do not eat less and certainly do not cost less when they are still living at home. I think this is an important amendment that is probably long overdue. We will probably all sit back and go, ‘Why wasn’t this done earlier by anybody?’ but the fact that it is a Labor government doing it should not surprise anyone. The fact is that we have acknowledged that children from 16 to 19 years old do cost more money, not less than and probably not even equal to younger children. We are bringing some equity to this.

And what does this amendment mean? From 1 January 2012, the maximum rate of family tax benefit A will increase by around $160 per fortnight for teenagers aged between 16 and 19 who are in secondary school or a vocational equivalent or who are exempt from this requirement. And it is important that we emphasise that these young people still need to be at school or in full-time vocational studies to be getting this, because we want these young people to be going out to get their education. But we need to support these families at home to help them deal with that. Under the existing system, the maximum rate of family tax benefit A drops from $214 per fortnight to $53 per fortnight when a child turns 16. It is unbelievable that that is the drop in the rate. It is with great pride that I stand here today as part of a Labor government to say we are going to bring equality in family tax benefit A for families with children up to the age of 19. Importantly, those children are still at school or in full-time vocational equivalent. So this is a great benefit that will assist families in my electorate.

Mr Tehan interjecting—

Mrs D’ATH—The member for Wannon may not care whether families in his electorate benefit from this—

Mr Tehan interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)—The member for Wannon! You may want to get your chance to speak.

Mrs D’ATH—I can say very confidently that the families in his electorate who have teenagers between the ages of 16 and 19 will appreciate this change that the Labor government is bringing in.

In addition, we are making improvements to the baby bonus. I am a big supporter of the changes we previously made to the baby bonus—that it be fortnightly payments. We also need to acknowledge that, when you are having a baby, there are up-front costs. There are costs involved in purchasing cots, nappies
and all the things that come with having a baby. As any parent knows, although they do not eat a lot of food at that age, the family certainly do need a lot of things at home in those first few days and weeks. That is why it is important we are making these changes to the baby bonus.

There will be a part lump sum up front to assist families and the remainder of the payments will be made over a period of time. The baby bonus will be paid in 13 fortnightly instalments. As a result of this change, from 1 July 2012 claimants will receive $500 more in the 2011-12 financial year in the first fortnightly instalment, and then in the 12 subsequent fortnightly instalments they will receive the remainder of the baby bonus. I think that is a fair way to provide this assistance to families, and I certainly support it.

There are other important amendments. I guess too often across our society now we forget about the people who were affected by thalidomide. We should not, because there are still survivors of thalidomide in Australia. There are 36 Australians who are dealing with the devastating effects of the drug. They have birth defects as a consequence of their mother taking that drug. It is important that amendments are made to ensure fairness in relation to how the payments made to the survivors under the arrangement entered into by Diageo plc, which acquired the company that initially distributed the drug, affect their social security payments and the income and assets test. This is a really important amendment, and I certainly support it.

There are some other amendments in this bill in relation to income management. I do not intend to go through those in detail, but they are important measures that again go to improved administration and support for families and pensioners across my community and across the country. On that note, I reiterate that all the initiatives in this bill are important. They will see benefits flow to people in my electorate. They are commitments that the government made in the 2010 election. There are three election commitments and two non-budget measures dealt with in this bill. It is my pleasure to support this bill before the House.

Mr TEHAN (Wannon) (5.34 pm)—I rise on behalf of equality and fairness this afternoon and supporting the second reading amendment that should be made to the Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Other Legislation Amendment (Election Commitments and Other Measures) Bill 2011. The amendment reads:

That all words after “That” be omitted with a view to substituting the following words: “whilst not declining to give the bill a second reading, the House require the government:

(1) urgently to introduce legislation to reinstate the former workplace participation criteria for independent youth allowance, to apply to students whose family home is located in inner regional areas as defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics instrument Australian Standard Geographical Classification; and

(2) to appropriate funds necessary to meet the additional cost of expanding the criteria for participation.

It is an absolute disgrace, what the Gillard government have done—with the changes they have made to the independent youth allowance—to regional and rural students. They say they are a government of fairness. Well what they have done to regional and rural students is not fair. I have received numerous letters that highlight this fact.

I received a letter from Rosanne Baird, which states:

Dear Dan

I am writing to you regarding the current Austudy boundaries. Our son Nicholas has just completed a ‘gap year’ and is heading off to University of
Ballarat to study business/sport management in late February. I contacted Centrelink today to see what he was eligible to claim.

Nic has worked hard for the past four years, commencing a part time job at the local supermarket, going onto full time during school holidays and then gaining full time employment once he had completed his VCE. He resigned from the supermarket in December 2010, and commenced at the local abattoir, working 40 hours per week.

It is therefore very disappointing to discover that he is not able to claim Austudy automatically, as we live in Stawell, 5 minute drive from us at Deep Lead is in the eligible area!!!!! I am at a loss to understand how these kids are to further their education under this system, we are rural people and all should be treated the same—making life a little easier for our kids.

I know we have to prove that Nic has earned ‘X’ amount of $ and worked ‘X’ amount of hours—this will not mean that he will be eligible—it only gives him a chance! My husband and I earn just on $100,000 per year, whilst it sounds okay, it is not enough to be able to support a full time student and another child still at school.

We are not eligible for anything under the family tax benefit because we earn too much!!!

The only answer for this family is for my husband or I to get a second job to support Nic in his studies.

I would be pleased if you would consider our plight, on behalf of average working families trying to support our kids education.

A second letter that I received is from Anna Zebra. It reads:

Dear Dan

It is with pleasure that I take the opportunity to write this letter to you after speaking with your office. I have been increasingly frustrated with the Youth Allowance situation and the fact that it directly disadvantages country students. I am more than happy for you to use our situation as an example, and will outline our story.

We have four children, and at this stage two have chosen to pursue a tertiary education, which in both cases involves them moving over two hours from home to do so. We live about 10 minutes from Hamilton in a small town called Tarrington. Unfortunately we are not in a financial position to support two children living away from home.

My daughter Jaz completed year 12 in 2008 and took a year off in 2009 to work and travel, then commenced her tertiary study in Melbourne in 2010. She qualified for Youth Allowance as an independent having satisfied the requirements, and is continuing to study and support herself this year.

My son Tyler completed year 12 in 2009 and also took the following year off to work so that he could also qualify for Youth Allowance. Unfortunately the requirements were changed …

And who changed them? We know—the Gillard government, in spite of their so-called fairness.

… in this period so that now due to the “zoning” rule he cannot receive the payments and will have to try to support himself in studies at Ballarat University.

I will outline his situation in point form below:

- completed year 12 2009
- accepted into Ballarat University; deferred position for 12 months to work
- worked full-time at Iluka for 12 months from Nov 09 to Nov 10
- tried to apply for Youth Allowance for tertiary study commencing in 2011 (realising he would not be able to receive any payments until a full 18 months had passed from the time he finished year 12), satisfied all the requirements as an independent student except the residential location, thus due to this he cannot receive any payments
- other students who live 10 minutes from us in towns such as Penshurst are zoned differently so will be able to qualify.

I hope that this is enough information for you to be able to use our case.

This poor boy—his older sister is getting independent youth allowance and going to university, he has met exactly the same requirements as she has and he cannot. Fellow students who live five to 10 minutes down the road are also eligible to get independent...
youth allowance, but he is not. This policy is an absolute disgrace. It is unequal, it is unfair and Prime Minister Gillard, whose policy this is, should act to change it immediately, because if she does not then she is disadvantaging regional and rural students.

I want to touch on a few points that are relevant here and go to the heart of the two amendments. I would especially hope that all rural and regional members of the ALP—and I know there are not a lot of them—would support us in making sure that these amendments are supported. Here are some facts about what we are dealing with. Finding full-time employment in regional areas and small communities is often very difficult for these students, so they have a hard time trying to just get the employment. When they do and they qualify we should enable them to get independent youth allowance so they can go and get a tertiary education. The legislation does not take into account seasonal employment sectors such as tourism and agriculture in regional areas, creating further barriers for regional students. So it is hardship upon hardship that the government is putting on these rural and regional students.

Rural and regional students face significantly increased costs associated with relocating for study; this is proven and factual, with no debate. Everyone knows that this is true, yet what we are seeing is a government that will not stand up and do the right thing by these students. Many regional students have no choice but to relocate to study. The major universities are in our capital cities. We have some, fortunately, in regional areas. We have a very good university, Deakin, in Warrnambool in my electorate, and RMIT in Hamilton, but unfortunately they do not yet offer the variety of subjects that all students need, so students are forced to go to the capital cities—and that costs them a serious amount of money. Evidence has shown that it is a financial barrier of between $15,000 and $20,000. These students are prepared to do the work so that they have some money to go to university, but what is the Gillard government doing? It is taking away from them the opportunity to get some assistance for these costs.

Mr Craig Kelly—The education revolution!

Mr TEHAN—Yes, the education revolution! It is all about education, all about fairness and all about equality—the so-called education revolution. All it has done is revolutionise the difficulty for these regional and rural students to access tertiary education, and there is not an issue that young people raise with me more than independent youth allowance and what this government has done to make it harder for them to go and get a tertiary education. We have had petitions. We have never seen such support for petitions that have been put in the offices of people right across the country, and I am sure that in Townsville the response has been equally strong as in Warrnambool, Hamilton and other areas where regional and rural students have been disadvantaged.

Another fact that we need to take into consideration is that students who defer tertiary studies for longer than 12 months are less likely to attend university. So it is not even a great policy to ask students to defer so that they can earn the income to qualify for independent youth allowance. Very few universities accept deferments longer than 12 months, meaning that those who have to work a 30-hour week for 18 months over a two-year period will have to give up their spot and reapply later. The university enrolment system that is in place also makes it harder for regional and rural students. Yet we have a government which continues to defend this shameful policy—which was introduced under the concept of fairness. There is nothing fair about it. In fact, a Senate inquiry
found that 55 per cent of metropolitan students go on to tertiary education compared with only 33 per cent of students from regional areas.

Given that fact, you would think that the government would be working towards assisting regional and rural students to go and get a tertiary education. You would think that they would like to close that gap. If your core belief is education, if that is at the heart of what brought you to this place, you would think that you would try to close that gap. Yet what we are seeing is a policy which is going to make that gap widen.

We are proposing a couple of amendments. I say to those opposite: if you want to do the right thing, if you want to get on the side of fairness, if you want to get on the side of equality, you will support our amendments. The figures and the facts are there for all to see. I could read into *Hansard* a lot more letters and a lot more cases than what I have outlined today. This policy is a disgrace. It is hurting and harming regional and rural students who want to get a tertiary education. We have two simple amendments to this bill. They are not complex. All you need to do is come across to this side and you will do something which will help to bridge the gap between regional and rural students and their city cousins.

We have no issue with 55 per cent of metropolitan students going on to tertiary education. That is a good statistic, and hopefully we can see that rise. But we need to also see an increase in the number of students from regional areas going on to get a tertiary education. Thirty-three per cent is not good enough. We need to get that figure up above 50 per cent. These two amendments will do it. I call on the two country Independents in particular to get behind these amendments, because their electorates are hurt by Prime Minister Gillard’s policy which has done more than anything to damage the attempt to bridge that gap. I call on the two rural Independents to get on the side of right, get on the side of fairness, and support the coalition on these two amendments. This is their chance to stand up for their electorates. It is their chance to get on the side of the coalition, which cares about regional and rural areas and which goes in to bat for regional and rural areas continually. This is their opportunity. Stop the game playing; these two amendments will do more than anything else to help these regional and rural students. I call on them to vote with us and to make sure that these two amendments get up.

Ms RISHWORTH (Kingston) (5.49 pm)—What we are seeing from the opposition today is politics. Before the House today we have some very sensible legislation, the Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Other Legislation Amendment (Election Commitments and Other Measures) Bill 2011. Perhaps it is because this legislation deals with Labor election commitments that the opposition find that they just cannot deal with it. We have not heard from members of the opposition as to whether they will even support our sensible legislation which has been welcomed by the community. Instead they are playing politics with this important legislation. I am not sure why. Perhaps it is part of the Leader of the Opposition’s tactic to continually oppose everything, to start scare campaigns and to not work in a bipartisan way on anything.

It is not surprising that we have seen these tactics today. I am not sure when these tactics were dreamt up by the opposition, but before the House today we have some very sensible, important and meaningful legislation, and I hope that members of the opposition will actually address the substantive legislation and tell us whether or not they are going to vote yes for the substantive legislation. As I said, the reason for these tactics
might be that this legislation delivers on Labor’s election commitments, but I would welcome the opposition showing some bipartisanship for once and working in the nation’s interest and in the community’s interest, because this legislation is widely supported.

I am pleased to support the substantive legislation. The Gillard government is committed to providing support and financial assistance to Australians who are most in need. This bill delivers on three significant election commitments that were made by Labor during the election to support families and senior Australians. The bill also gives effect to non-budget measures which will make things fairer for Australians affected by the morning sickness drug thalidomide and which will better support Australians on income management.

Firstly I would like to deal with the work bonus. This bill delivers on our commitment at the recent election to expand the existing seniors work bonus measure to allow working pensioners to keep more of their pension when they undertake paid employment. Introduced in September 2009 as part of the government’s secure and sustainable pension reform package, the seniors work bonus allows for a certain amount of income earned by a person who is eligible for the age pension to be disregarded for the purposes of social security and veterans’ affairs income tests. This way, senior Australians are able to earn a little extra money to help out with everyday expenses without losing out when it comes to the government assistance they receive.

This initiative is about acknowledging the valuable contribution senior Australians who choose to undertake part-time work or occasional work make to our economy and to the communities around the nation. By providing financial incentives, we are encouraging other senior Australians to do the same if they wish. That is why we have committed to expanding the work bonus so that the first $250 earned in a fortnight will not be treated as income for the purposes of social security and veterans’ affairs income assessments. This will mean that senior Australians can earn more without affecting their pension.

Furthermore, this bill will make things fairer and simpler for senior Australians who undertake intermittent or seasonal work. Although the work bonus is an extremely popular initiative in my electorate of Kingston, a number of constituents have raised with me the fact that it is not always worthwhile participating in seasonal paid employment, because you can lose as much from your pension as you gain from the work. This often happens. We heard from the member for Petrie about accountants and people who just work at tax time. One of my constituents works as a Father Christmas—a job which I am sure many people can imagine is a very seasonal job. He raised this issue with me—as did a number of others. He said that, under the current system, the income he derives from his work in the Christmas period—although some might say that Father Christmas has to work all year round, but he specifically works during the Christmas period—is assessed for social security purposes and his pension is significantly reduced for that period, making it hardly worth his while to have undertaken the paid employment in the first place. One would say that it is a valuable job, because he does bring a lot of joy to the young people in the community—and it is unfair, because he does not earn any additional income for the rest of the year. This bill will do away with the anomaly by effectively annualising the work bonus.

Senior Australians will now be able to build up any unused amount of their $250 bonus every fortnight up to a maximum of $6,500. The income bank amount can be
used to offset future employment earnings. Seasonal workers will now be able to save up their fortnightly work bonus throughout the year so that more income they derive from seasonal work will be exempt from the income test. This is a very important change, and a change that I think is wildly welcomed by many seasonal workers across the country. I urge the opposition to indicate whether or not they support this important change. As of yet, from the contributions from those opposite, we have not heard whether or not they do support these important measures.

In addition, this bill looks at assistance for families with studying teenagers. It delivers on our commitment to provide more financial assistance to families with teenagers who are still at school or a vocational education equivalent. We know that families are struggling with the rising costs of living, and it is not cheap to send children to school. We also know that the costs actually increase rather than reduce as children get older and their clothes and school supplies start costing more. That is why the government is increasing the maximum rate of family tax benefit part A by around $160 per fortnight for teenagers aged 16 to 19 years of age. This could mean up to $4,200 a year for Australian families with teenagers who are studying and will bring their rate in line with what is available for 13- to 15-year-olds.

Under the current system, the maximum rate of family tax benefit part A drops from about $208 per fortnight to $51 per fortnight when a child turns 16 and rent assistance stops completely at this point. This sharp drop in financial assistance can make it really tough for parents to continue to support their children to finish their studies. I have heard from many people in my electorate just how tough this is. We as a government want to make sure that we encourage families to encourage their children to stay at school and to finish year 12, because we know that finishing year 12 is a passport to the rest of their educational life. So it is incredibly important. As the member for Petrie said, it is not surprising but it is a Labor government that is bringing this in. This is something that we committed to in the election and we are now delivering on in this parliament.

We are investing in education to raise secondary school or vocational equivalent completion rates for all Australians regardless of their socioeconomic background. We do not want the suburb people live in to be a barrier to reaching their potential to gaining an education. That is why this measure is so important. By providing greater assistance to families of teenagers at this critical point, we are helping to reduce the financial pressures associated with supporting teenagers who are studying and we are helping to diminish the necessity for teenagers to leave school to support themselves. There are 2,150 local families in my electorate who are set to benefit from the increased financial assistance and around 590,000 families are expected to benefit nationally over the next five years alone. This is about making a real difference, and it is this government that is doing that.

Youth allowance will of course still be available for teenagers aged 18 who are independent and eligible for the away-from-home rate and not in full-time secondary study. This payment will continue to provide ongoing support to young people as they progress into further education and training.

The third element is improvements to the baby bonus. Additionally, this bill will improve the way the baby bonus operates so that parents of newborns are better equipped to meet the initial costs associated with adopting or having a new baby. The birth of a child is a wonderful time for parents but it can also be a stressful time. The baby bonus
recognises the extra costs incurred at the
time of birth and helps parents with some of
these expenses. Under the current rule the
baby bonus is paid in 13 fortnightly instal-
ments. This is really important to ensure that
there is ongoing support over that initial pe-
riod of time. However, the changes that we
are bringing in today recognise that there are
some up-front costs when having a baby and
that a little extra cash does go a long way at
the time of having a baby.

From 1 July 2011 parents of newborn ba-
bies who receive the baby bonus on or after
the date will receive $500 more in the first
fortnightly instalment than the 12 subsequent
instalments to assist in meeting the initial
costs of welcoming a child into the family.
This is about providing parents with a little
extra money to purchase some of the bigger
and more expensive items that one needs
straightaway—things like prams and cots.
Although the total amount of the baby bonus
will remain the same, the passage of this bill
will adjust the baby bonus to assist families
with the up-front costs of having a new baby
when they need it most. The three examples I
have outlined are examples of this govern-
ment getting on with the job of implementing
our election commitments.

As I said before, I would like to know
whether or not the opposition are going to
support these important amendments that
will make a real difference to people’s lives.
Obviously we have seen the opposition come
in here today and play politics with it. I wish
they would be up-front and make it clear
whether or not they will support these, be-
cause I know that there are people in my
electorate who are eagerly waiting to hear
that these amendments have gone through
the parliament.

There are a number of other non-
budgetary measures in this bill. One includes
looking at the payments provided to people
affected by thalidomide. Although this
amendment does not apply to many people,
just 36 Australians, it is very important to
those who are affected, so I certainly wel-
come this measure. This measure is not com-
ensation; it provides important payments to
those who are affected.

In addition, there are some minor adminis-
trative improvements to income management
provisions. Under the current match savings
scheme payments, payments are made to
people who are subject to compulsory in-
come management and who accumulate sav-
ings while undertaking an approved financial
management course. However, at present,
only savings accumulated after the com-
mencement of the course qualify. The bill
before us today simply modifies this so that
these people can begin saving as soon as
they have registered for a course. It is a mi-
nor change but one that I am sure will make
a difference. This bill also clarifies the role
of nominees under income management ar-
rangements and will improve debt recovery
so that customers on income management
are not out of pocket.

These measures deliver on significant
election commitments, allowing pensioners
to keep more of their pensions when they
undertake part-time paid work, providing
families with greater assistance to support
teenagers who are completing their secon-
dary studies and changing the way the baby
bonus operates so that parents of newborn
babies receive more money immediately af-
ter the birth. It also improves income man-
agement provisions and provides a fairer
income test for thalidomide survivors.

The substantive bill is an incredibly im-
portant one. I would urge the opposition to
stop playing politics with these important
issues before the House today and to support
these measures which are widely welcomed
by people across Australia. People are wait-
ing for these measures to be introduced. I commend the substantive bill to the House and call on the opposition to support it.

**WYATT ROY** (Longman) (6.04 pm)—Today I rise to speak in support of the Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Other Legislation Amendment (Election Commitments and Other Measures) Bill 2011, which seeks to introduce legislation that will re-introduce previously applicable criteria for the assessment of eligibility for youth allowance by inner-regional students.

Prior to the government’s changes to the eligibility for youth allowance, it could be assessed in a variety of ways. Students could work part-time for 15 hours a week for two years after leaving school. Students could have been out of school for 18 months and have earned at least 75 per cent of the maximum rate of pay under wage level A of the Australian pay and classification scale in an 18-month period. Students could work an average of 30 hours per week for 18 months out of two years. Now inner-regional students can only access youth allowance under the third criterion. The only criterion applicable to them is that they must have worked an average of 30 hours per week for 18 months out of two years. This change is going to make it much harder for some regional students to access tertiary education. Fewer students from regional areas are going to be in a position where they can go to university.

Thirty hours a week is practically a full-time job, and finding full-time work in the regions can be difficult. Many students in regional areas access seasonal employment in the agricultural and tourism sectors, and the government’s changes to youth allowance eligibility criteria simply do not take this into account.

In addition to these issues associated with the availability of work, there are issues associated with entry into university after 18 months. Many universities do not accept deferrals for periods longer than 12 months. If any more time is needed, students are required to re-apply for a place in a university course of their choice. But eligibility criteria for courses change. Whilst you may get into your chosen course one year, there is no guarantee that this will be the case two years later. In addition, the longer students defer, the less likely they are to pursue tertiary study.

It is already the case that over 20 per cent more students from metropolitan areas go to university than regional students. Instead of attempting to facilitate access for regional students and narrow this gap, the changes to youth allowance will only make it more difficult for these young people. Not only are there costs of studying incurred by having to move away from home to pursue study; there are also significant re-allocation costs to be met—estimated as being in the vicinity of up to $20,000. This is a further significant barrier to regional students wanting to go on to tertiary study.

Unrestricted access to further education is vitally important for our nation. Further education and the attainment of skills will improve productivity and make Australia more competitive. Many regional areas rely on their young people returning to the regions to work after they have completed their study. For example, medical professionals are very difficult to source in the regions. A witness to the Senate inquiry made two points: firstly, that the government should make it easier for regional students to access university education in the hope that some may return to share their expertise with their communities and, secondly, that professional people living in the regions should not feel forced to move because their children cannot receive the education they want. It is important that all young people, regardless of where they live,
be able to pursue further education if that is what they want to do. The government’s changes to youth allowance eligibility criteria have just made this so much harder for many young people in regional Australia. There is no equality and no fairness in this.

The restriction of access to youth allowance is having many detrimental effects on young people who are classified as living in regional areas. Many are suffering, as they feel—and rightly so—that an option they once had has been removed. They are feeling isolated and guilty for putting pressure on their families to send them to university. Some families are having to make impossible decisions about which children to send to university. The provision of equal access to further education is fair and right. This is a big issue for these students and should be a big issue for this Labor government. It is a big issue for the coalition, and honourable members would be aware that the Social Security Amendment (Income Support for Regional Students) Bill 2010 introduced by Senator Fiona Nash was passed in the Senate during the last sitting period. Senator Nash reiterated the coalition’s position that ‘regional students should have fair and equitable access to educational opportunities.’ The Labor-Greens coalition opposed this bill whilst it was supported by Senators Nick Xenophon and Steve Fielding, who voted with the coalition.

A Senate inquiry held into the Social Security Amendment (Income Support for Regional Students) Bill 2010 [2011] recently received over 200 submissions and heard testimony from witnesses who overwhelmingly stated that the revised criteria for accessing youth allowance by inner-regional students is unfair. These students and their families are asking for a hand up, not a handout. They want to access university studies on an equal basis to their metropolitan counterparts. In conclusion, I urge all members to support this bill in the interests of fairness for all regional students.

Mr Lyons (Bass) (6.10 pm)—I rise to speak on the Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Other Legislation Amendment (Election Commitments and Other Measures) Bill 2011. I am pleased to speak on this bill today because the bill will make a real difference for many Australians. This bill essentially gives effect to three election commitments and two non-budgetary measures: expanding the seniors work bonus; supporting families with teenagers through family tax benefits; making improvements to the provision of the baby bonus to eligible families; ensuring annuities are paid to people affected by thalidomide; and making minor administrative amendments to income management measures. The amendments that the Gillard Labor government has put forward today demonstrate its commitment to the Australian people.

For seniors, this bill seeks to expand the existing seniors work bonus measure to allow working pensioners to keep more of their pension when they undertake paid work. This is a very important measure. Older Australians have made our nation strong and prosperous and deserve to be supported in their later years, whether in work, in retirement or in their caring roles. Many age pensioners take on part-time or occasional work and should be encouraged and rewarded for these valuable contributions to our community. This expansion will allow this to happen. Many age pensioners or veterans affairs income support pensioners of qualifying age, and even some of the grey nomads, want to undertake seasonal work but are concerned about the impact on their pension. These reforms will increase the amount age pensioners can earn before the income affects their pension. This follows on from the Labor government’s election commitment to expand the existing seniors work
bonus, which was introduced in September 2009 as part of its secure and sustainable pension reform package to support pensioners who are continuing to make a valuable contribution to the economy via their part-time employment.

I am sure pensioners in my electorate of Bass will be pleased about this measure. If they choose to work a few hours a week over the Christmas period or to help out in a busy season, they will now be able to do so with our more generous work bonus. The new work bonus will allow pensioners to earn $250 per fortnight without its being assessed as income under the income test. Importantly, under these changes, the work bonus can be annualised. This means that pensioners will be able to build up any unused amount of their $250 bonus every fortnight for up to 12 months, and the unused amount can be carried forward between years up to a total of $6,500 per year. This measure improves awards for age pensioners who work and ensures that they will be able to keep more of their pension when they are working part-time.

The second measure I wish to speak on today relates to helping Australian families with teenagers. This bill delivers on the government’s key election commitment to increase family assistance by up to $4,200 a year for teenagers in secondary studies. Currently, most low- and middle-income families experience significant reductions in government assistance when their child turns 16. This is despite the fact that most 16- to 17-year-olds, and a significant number of 18- and 19-year-olds, remain in full-time study and under the primary care of their parents. From 1 January 2012, the maximum rate of family tax benefit part A will increase by around $160 per fortnight for teenagers aged between 16 and 19 who are in secondary school or its vocational equivalent. During the election, we announced that the level of assistance would be increased for 16- to 18-year-olds, but the Labor government has extended this to 19-year-olds who are finishing off their schooling. This significant increase will help families meet the higher costs of older children and encourage more teenagers to stay at school. This initiative supports the Gillard Labor government’s objective to improve completion rates of year 12 and its vocational equivalents.

Research shows that children from lower income families have lower levels of school completion. This finding demonstrates that the cost of educating teenage children is an important barrier for families on low incomes. The independent review of Australia’s future tax system recommended:
Rates of payment should increase with the age of the children to recognise the higher costs of older children.

The Gillard Labor government recognises this, knowing that families with older children can face higher costs, including the costs of groceries, clothes and family activities. But, under the existing system, the maximum rate of family tax benefit part A drops from $208 a fortnight to $51 a fortnight when the child turns 16. Rent assistance also stops when a child turns 16 and families may lose eligibility for family tax benefit part B, the large family supplement and the multiple birth allowance. This sharp drop in family support can encourage teenagers to leave school early if their family is unable to support them in full-time study or training. The drop in family assistance when a child turns 16 is also one of the features of the family assistance scheme most frequently criticised by parents.

This government understands the importance of this measure for Australian families. With this measure, we are resolving problems of the past. We are a government that is listening to the community and supporting
families. The Gillard Labor government is committed to a fair family payment system that targets family support to lower and middle income families. The Labor government believe in supporting families to bring up children, continuing the education revolution to give every child a great start in life. We will continue to support families as they raise children and encourage their children to continue in education. Every child deserves the right to a good education and every child should be given the opportunity to meet their full potential.

Another election commitment was to change the baby bonus to help Australian families. This amendment provides for eligible baby bonus claimants to have a larger portion of their baby bonus paid to them up-front, from 1 July 2011, to assist them to meet the initial costs of welcoming a child into their family. Under the changes, parents will be able to get an up-front $500 payment of the baby bonus to help with the arrival of a child. This will help Australian families buy some of the essentials that they need—a safe car seat or a pram, for example. The changes will give families better access to their entitlements in a way that more directly meets their needs.

I am sure this is a measure that the people of Bass will warmly welcome. This is a move that shows that the Gillard Labor government understands the issues facing Australia families and is taking steps to address these issues. The people of Bass know that the Labor government will look after them. We have a good track record with families, with measures including paid maternity leave and investing in our children through building infrastructure in schools with the Building the Education Revolution projects. The people of Bass know that those opposite are a risk to their families. They know this because some of those opposite were key players in orchestrating the most family unfriendly policy in Australian history: Work Choices. Families need security. Without security families are unhappy—it is as simple as that—and the Liberal Party found out about that in 2007.

This bill delivers on three of the government’s important election commitments: improving support for families, improving the delivery of the baby bonus to new parents and better supporting pensioners who work. The bill also makes minor amendments to income management and recognises the unique plight of thalidomide survivors.

The Gillard Labor government is committed to supporting Australian pensioners, families and students. We will continue to strengthen our support through these measures. I commend the bill to the House.

Mrs GASH (Gilmore) (6.19 pm)—I wish to speak to the amendments to the Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Other Legislation Amendment (Election Commitments and Other Measures) Bill 2011 relating to families with teenage children. I agree with the member for Bass that every child should have the opportunity to reach their full potential, but that is where my agreement ends.

First of all, I want to thank the hundreds of students who attended the public meetings in our electorate with their parents and told me about their concerns with regard to the youth allowance. The Prime Minister and her Labor Party clearly do not understand or care about our regional students. They do not understand the huge financial hurdles regional students are facing to even get to a university. The train line in my electorate of Gilmore does not even make it to Nowra. The electric track stops at Kiama and an infrequent diesel service only goes to Bomaderry. Students in the southern part of Gilmore have almost no option but to take the costly
option of moving away from home to attend university—not by choice.

Students in Gilmore are doing it hard. The Labor Party is simply out of touch on this issue. The Shoalhaven youth unemployment rate is higher than 20 per cent, yet the government still demands that students from this area find an average of 30 hours work every week for 1½ years before it will give them given adequate help to get to university. Is this opportunity? Is this choice? I think it is particularly relevant to point out the fact that it was the Prime Minister herself who personally changed the rules.

Employment of young people in the Shoalhaven is overwhelmingly seasonal. Employment comes and goes with the tourist season. Some weeks ago, the coalition introduced the Social Security Amendment (Income Support for Regional Students) Bill 2010 into this place to change the independent youth allowance rules back to what they were under the Howard government. If the government had passed our bill, instead of having to work 30 hours every week for 1½ years, students would be automatically eligible to receive independent youth allowance as soon as they earned $26,000, regardless of their working hours, within those same 18 months. The government were too afraid to debate their mistake. They hid behind pomp and procedure to avoid even talking about the real issues. I know the coalition’s change does not seem like much to those opposite, but the truth is that regional students are doing it tough, and this would be one small change that would have allowed tens of thousands of regional students a real chance at university education.

Many families from Gilmore have two or three children going to university and it is very difficult to explain that students in adjoining areas are eligible, yet in Gilmore they are not. The families should not have to choose which child they can afford to send to university. It is time for the government to put aside their pride and admit that they have made a mistake. On behalf of the hundreds of students in Gilmore that have been cheated by this government, I am begging the Prime Minister to put aside her pride and change back the rules. I have heard all the horror stories and I am sure that she has too. We do not need another inquiry. We do not need another review. We need real action from this government. If the Labor Party truly cared about our regional students, they would stand up, show some courage and pass the coalition’s amendments.

Mr GEORGANAS (Hindmarsh) (6.22 pm)—It gives me great pleasure and a certain amount of satisfaction to be here today to speak in support of the Social Security Amendment (Income Support for Regional Students) Bill 2010 [2011]. The content of this bill was the subject of communications and discussions within my electorate of Hindmarsh during the 2010 election and people in my area did support these measures—they supported them with their votes. The interest in these policies was clearly evident after the announcement by the Prime Minister and prior to the day on which most electors cast their votes. The satisfaction that I feel in supporting this bill comes from my knowledge of the benefit that people will derive from the measures contained therein. These measures will make a material difference to many, many people’s lives. People favoured these policies in the context of an election. They voted accordingly and it is satisfying to recognise that they will have the value they placed in their democratic participation meaningfully acknowledged through legislative change.

As we heard earlier from the many speakers who have spoken on this side of the House, there are two principal elements to this bill, and I would like to note them today.
The first of these is the effective removal of the distinction within the family payment structure between 13- to 15-year-olds, and 16- to 19-year-olds engaged in full-time secondary study or a full-time vocational education equivalent. The impact of this measure is up to $4,000 more per year for a family with a teenager. That is a terrific amount of money and additional assistance to help families keep their children focused on successfully completing their secondary education.

The family tax benefit part A has dropped by 75 per cent once a child turns 16, the age at which secondary schooling becomes ‘voluntary’. The benefit has dropped from $208 per fortnight to $51 per fortnight. Rent assistance also stops when a child turns 16. This drop in family support is one of the main issues that parents consistently raise concerns about with the government.

We do need young Australians to take on many highly varied occupations and, as we have heard before in debates in this place, not all need either a university education or extensive training. There are opportunities for young people to engage in work and develop skills and a career within the workforce. Nevertheless, I think on balance we would all prefer the great majority of young Australians to complete their secondary schooling or equivalent and enjoy the experience without acute financial pressures. This bill will help families of some 590,000 teenagers avoid those financial pressures over the next five years alone.

I also hope that young people stay at school long enough to practise and learn and to get the benefits of personal reading and self-managed study that they will require. This mode of learning, evident in late secondary education but typically more so at university, will invariably be the mode of learning engaged in by the majority of people through most situations they find themselves in and it will help all people immeasurably throughout their lives.

People’s lives, their work lives and their private family lives, may well be more dynamic and subject to radical change over time than ever before as the workforce and technology change. Be it as a result of increasing reliance on private wealth invested in topsy-turvy stock markets, technological revolutions, shorter careers within any one field of work, or the greater choices that are made available to people through their lives, the one thing that we can predict these days is how unpredictable life is likely to be. We fare better if we can adapt to what life throws at us. Hence, to me, learning the utility of study and how to study are the greatest and most priceless lessons of all. The lessons I hope most young people learn in later secondary education will better equip them to successfully navigate in an ever-changing world for the long haul.

Another thing that has been changing over time is how much longer our lives are likely to be. We face opportunities through considerably longer lives, but with that also comes uncertainties. With better health and greater longevity, age pensioners are not relying exclusively on their pension. Senior Australians are keeping more cash coming into their households through wages irrespective of when they ‘retired’. Many cannot do that, but those who can and do should be congratulated for their ongoing ability to manage their life situation and their cash flow and the way they govern their own quality of life.

For years we have heard governments of both persuasions encouraging people who reach retirement age to continue to work and fund their lifestyles. There have been structural elements which may have discouraged pensioners from doing so in the past. People may have been able to take two steps for-
ward only to have the impact within the social security system slide them one step back, or more. For increasing numbers of age pensioners more of what they earn over the threshold is effectively lost to the government through decreased pension payments. The age pension income test has been increased for new pensioners from 40 per cent to 50 per cent on additional income over the threshold.

I have said this before in this place: I favour a system in which the rate of withdrawal of the age pension is similar to marginal tax rates. But I do acknowledge that this change was made in September 2009 to help fund the substantial increase in the age pension at that time, further helping hundreds of thousands of pensioners doing it tough out there, especially the bulk of single pensioners who need to pay a much greater proportion of their pension on the basics, be it accommodation, vehicle or electricity costs.

Ongoing comparatively high effective marginal tax rates do, and will continue to, decrease people’s incentive to engage in post-retirement work. The government in its wisdom created the work bonus system introduced as part of the Secure and Sustainable Pension Reform of September 2009. It provided additional incentives for age pensioners to engage in work by quarantining wages of a certain value each fortnight from the pension income test. People in semi-retirement do not always have a steady, uniform income throughout the year. Many have a period of casual or contract work. I met someone recently who had some contract work marking exams that only came around for a short period a couple of times a year. This is all within the seasonal work market.

This type of work is labour intensive but only for a short period of time each year. The fortnightly income earned in such a period is no reflection whatsoever of what a person earns over the course of the year. It is fundamentally wrong, I believe, for these fortnightly incomes to be extrapolated and used to calculate a person’s pension going forward through the year, wrongly presuming very high ongoing income.

The measure within this bill adjusts the work bonus scheme to increase the amount of income a pensioner may earn external to the pension income test to $6,500 per year. The first $250 earned in any one fortnight will not be treated as income for the purposes of social security and veterans’ affairs payment calculations. Most importantly, where a person does not have uniform earnings of at least $250 each and every fortnight, this bill will enable those pensioners to roll over any unused fortnightly work bonus value to successive fortnight reporting periods up to a maximum of $6,500 per year. If you do not learn anything in one fortnight, you do not lose the potential value of the work bonus; you carry it forward through successive fortnights until you do the work.

The $6,500 value is not limited in its application or use to the one financial year from which it was derived. The work bonus can be accrued from one financial year to the next. A person who earns wages each December, for instance, will not be limited to the value of the work bonus unused since 1 July of that year. People in this situation will have access to the value of the work bonus accrued since they last work, which would be December of the previous year.

These changes to the work bonus system will commence from 1 July 2011. We have in this bill measures that will substantially increase the capacity for people doing it tough to get by. Whether they be families raising teenagers engaged in their last year of very important secondary studies or retirees working an amount of casual or sessional work to
make it just that little bit easier to make ends meet, these measures will be a great assistance to many. I wholeheartedly commended the bill to the House.

Mr COULTON (Parkes) (6.34 pm)—I rise tonight to speak on the amendment moved by Mr Andrews to the Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Other Legislation Amendment (Election Commitments and Other Measures) Bill 2011. This youth allowance saga has been running for some time now in this place and the effects of it have been felt widely across regional Australia, no more so than in my electorate. It seems rather unfortunate that we are trying to deal with this as an amendment to this piece of legislation when the Prime Minister would have the ability to fix this today if she so chose. We are at this point, having to take measures such as this to get this issue dealt with in the House, basically because of the Prime Minister’s stubbornness in dealing with this issue. Indeed, her original changes to youth allowance when she was education minister started this whole process going. Over a period of time through different actions we have had the original criteria for youth allowance restored to remote and outer regional students. Indeed, they have been restored to a large geographic area of my electorate. Unfortunately, my biggest town, Dubbo, and probably the second-biggest town in my electorate, Mudgee, have missed out.

While the independent youth allowance is by no means a perfect way of financing tertiary education, I believe it has been quite effective. A person leaving school and working independently for 12 months to gain that $19,500 income and then being able to start university the following year is a good thing for a couple of reasons: it gives those students a time to reassess their priorities, re-think maybe what their interests are at university; and it gives them an opportunity to be truly independent—to work for someone else. Indeed, if they are going into tertiary education, sometimes when they go back into the workforce it is at a higher level and the work that they do in that year of qualifying for independent youth allowance is good grounding for them so that when they go back to work in a management position, they understand the other end of the workforce spectrum because they have spent time at end.

Students in my electorate traditionally get jobs during the grain harvest driving tractors and headers; they go and pick grapes, apples and oranges; they stack meat in abattoirs. They have done all sorts of jobs to earn that money. They then go off to university at the start of the next year and by June they are eligible for independent youth allowance. Now with inner regional areas being disqualified from independent youth allowance, I have the anomaly in my electorate of people living on opposite sides of the street where the people on one side are eligible while those on the other side are not.

When we talk about educating rural kids, is we think about kids who are living out on farms and away from town. Indeed, there is a proportion of those kids and it is very important they get the education they deserve. But the families that are impacted now are living in Dubbo and Mudgee. The people who have been contracting me have been police officers, school teachers, people who work on the council or in health—all those vital services that country areas rely on. In a city like Dubbo that services a large part of western New South Wales, a large number of public servants are in that area. What they are telling me is if they have two, three or four kids they are deciding which one they can afford to send to university and which one will have to make other arrangements for employment. That is a disgusting situation in 2011. I be-
lieve in Australia we should have equal access to education regardless of where we live.

Country kids, given the opportunity to gain an education, go on to become wonderful productive Australians because that resilience, that independent streak and that benefit of growing up in a community where they know their neighbourhood, where they are respected for who they are as a child and a young adult is a great grounding. After the grounding they get at the good country schools, once they get the opportunity for tertiary education, they go on to be very high-achieving Australians and very productive Australians. Hopefully, they will decide eventually to come back to the regions that supported them in the first place and continue to contribute to regional Australia.

It is not a huge amount of money we are speaking about to fix this. I cannot believe the pig-headedness of the Prime Minister over this issue. In the four years I have been in this place, from when she was education minister and now as Prime Minister, she has defined herself as someone who is an advocate for education, who has succeeded because of the education she received growing up, but she cannot see the double standard that she has inflicted on the students of regional Australia by not allowing them the same opportunity.

The effects of this go further than the education of those children because, ultimately, what is happening in regional Australia is that whole families are relocating so they can do the best for their children. My wife and I raised three children, 50 kilometres from the nearest town. The one thing that we were focused on with those children of ours was to give them a decent education. If these families cannot afford to give their children the education they need then they relocate to the city. Not only are we losing the child, we are losing entire families. So we have massive gaps in service delivery and a lack of professionals in these regional towns like Dubbo and Mudgee. As the congestion in the cities grows, people are forced to live in metropoli
tan areas under a lower standard and quality of life, but they are doing that to give their children an education and so regional Australia misses out.

It is with great frustration that I am standing here tonight speaking on an amendment on a bill that is to do with something else but we are determined, on this side of the House, not to let this issue die. I would call upon those that sit behind me in this place, the crossbenchers, to stand up for the electorates they represent. During the debate on the motion moved on this issue by the member for Melbourne some weeks ago, we had the bizarre situation where the member for Lyne seconded the motion, went outside, had a conference with the Prime Minister for 20 minutes, came back in and voted against the motion that he had seconded. The people of regional Australia, quite frankly, have had a gut full of these smart deals that go on in shady rooms around this place to try to keep government going rather than focus on service delivery for country students.

There is no greater investment that a country and a government can make than the education of the next generation of Australians. We have a double standard where if someone lives in a metropolitan area they can live at home with mum and dad and attend university—they would probably have a choice of several universities—but someone that comes from regional Australia, from a town like Dubbo or Mudgee, would miss out purely because of a line on a map.

These kids are getting a good education. There are excellent education facilities in Dubbo; likewise, in Mudgee. They are getting up to the point where they are becoming
young adults and they have done very well. They are getting huge tertiary education rankings and then they are being cut off at the knees because of the lack of an opportunity, financially, to attend university. So I strongly support the amendment moved by Mr Andrews to this bill and, hopefully, when we come to divide on this later on we will gain the support of the crossbenches. Supposedly, in that conference that the member for Lyne had with the Prime Minister some weeks ago, there was some deal done. From what I can find out—and please correct me if I am wrong—there has been a promise of a review that may happen later in the year, but the students that left in 2009 and 2010 are going to miss out. That is why there is an urgency. That is why we keep putting up this amendment. We need to make sure that those students who left in 2009 and 2010 do not become a gap where one whole cohort of students have missed out on a tertiary education because of the pig-headedness and the stubbornness and the deals done in this place to keep government going at the expense of country students. I strongly support Mr Andrews’ amendment.

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (6.46 pm)—I speak in support of the Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Other Legislation Amendment (Election Commitments and Other Measures) Bill 2011. I will first address the issue of the amendment put forward by those opposite. Through their amendment they want to reinstate the former workplace participation criteria—and I want people who are listening to note that—and to appropriate funds necessary to meet the additional costs of expanding the criteria for participation. So they want us to reinstate workforce participation criteria and to allocate more money. That is pretty much what the coalition always likes to do, because they have never found an opportunity to spend money that they did not like. We saw that in the last five years of the Howard coalition government: real spending growth of 3.7 per cent per annum, five times greater than the average spending growth over this year and the budget estimates, which is 0.75 per cent. This is from a mob who say we should appropriate more money but are blocking $5.2 billion of savings measures we have previously proposed in respect of private health insurance reforms and replacing the chronic disease dental scheme with a Commonwealth dental health plan. They have opposed those measures and many of our $83.6 billion in savings over the last three years. So: spend more money and block the savings that are necessary to spend it. That is what we have seen.

I warmly welcome the announcement by the federal Labor government to bring forward by 12 months a comprehensive review of student income support, particularly focusing on the capacity of rural and regional students to access higher education. The eligibility for youth allowance is of particular significance and importance to students and families in regional and rural areas. We recognise that we need to eliminate eligibility distinctions between inner regional and outer regional students. That review will report by 1 July this year—contrary to what the member for Parkes had to say—and the government will move to implement any new eligibility arrangements by 1 January 2012. The review will consider appropriate savings and pay for the extension of eligibility for the youth allowance.

Improving university participation for regional students is central to the federal Labor government’s commitment to higher education reforms. The changes we brought in to the parental income test have benefited 492 young people in Ipswich and the Somerset region and a further 661 young people have benefited from student start-up scholarships in my electorate of Blair. In addition, 102
young people in Ipswich and the Somerset region have benefited from the relocation scholarship. A better deal under us than under those opposite—those are the facts, not the fiction we have heard from those opposite.

I have two universities in my electorate of Blair: the University of Queensland Ipswich campus and the University of Southern Queensland Springfield campus. They do a fantastic job. Let us look at a few facts when we talk about youth allowance statistics. We have got over 100,000 students benefiting from the increase in funding that we have provided and assistance we have given. The parental income threshold increased from $33,300 to $44,165, with a 20 per cent family taper introduced. So 100,000 students have benefited who would not have benefited before, and students are allowed to earn more money through part-time work before their payments are affected. Those are the facts, not the fiction from those opposite.

Now let us have a look at what they would do. They went to the 2010 federal election with a plan to cut hundreds of millions of dollars in funding designed to attract low-income students to attend university. Look at their policy—not what they say in this chamber nor in the Senate just down the corridor, but what they took to the last election. Despite what they say here today, they actually took a plan to the last election to cut funding for universities which would attract low-income students. That is the reality. Their changes, recklessly introduced, would mean spending of more than $300 million without identifying additional savings to pay for it. That was their policy. When they came up with the idea of some savings, and the Treasury and the Department of Finance and Deregulation had a look at it post the election—because the coalition did not have the courage, fortitude or indeed the honesty to submit it under the Charter of Budget Honesty, which they had brought in—what was found was $10.6 billion worth of black hole. When we proposed and brought in the flood levy they said it was going to be easy to find savings. But did they come up with any? They came up with another billion dollar black hole across the forward estimates. Now they say, ‘Let’s spend another $300 million,’ but not one dollar of savings are they proposing. They say, ‘We want to help regional and rural students; we want to lift their workplace participation, change the criteria and do it.’ Well, let us look at their record, not what they say.

During the coalition’s time, when John Howard sat at the table—where the member for Blaxland is currently sitting—and behind him sat Peter Costello, the Treasurer, what happened to participation rates for regional and rural students? Did they go up? No. And, gee, didn’t the National Party do a good job then in influencing John Howard and Peter Costello! Did participation rates for regional and rural students in this country increase? They did not. The fact is they went down. For example, between 2002 and 2007, participation rates for regional students at tertiary institutions fell from 18.715 per cent to 18.08 per cent. That workplace participation criterion helped them a lot! It really assisted regional and rural students! The fact is that the changes we brought in benefited people in rural and regional electorates like mine. Hundreds and hundreds of young people will get additional assistance through the changes we have made.

The Nationals say one thing here, parading and prancing about in the House, and say another thing back in their electorates. But the reality is that, when they had a chance to increase participation rates for rural and regional students at universities—when they had stewardship of the treasury benches—they did nothing. In fact, things went backwards. Then they took a policy to the last
election to actually reduce funding assistance for university students and participation of students from rural and regional areas. That is the reality, as opposed to the rhetoric, from those opposite.

This legislation is important. It fulfils election commitments and some non-budget measures. One is in relation to the work bonus, and I am pleased to speak on and support that. The work bonus allows working pensioners to keep more of their pension when they undertake paid work, and a number of my caucus colleagues have given the particulars of that in the chamber. The second election commitment fulfilled provides better access to family payments for families with a teenager aged 16 to 19 in full-time secondary education or the vocational education equivalent. Everyone who has teenagers knows that the cost does not decrease as they get older. Clothes, shoes, high-school textbooks, recreational pursuits—the costs all increase. The funding provided for here will benefit families and will have the effect, we believe, of lifting high school completion rates from that miserable 75 per cent of students under the Howard coalition government to an aspirational 90 per cent by 2015.

The third election commitment fulfilled, which I fully support as well, is improvements to the provision of the baby bonus. We changed the baby bonus arrangements to make them fortnightly across 13 fortnights—a good measure, in my view—and we are also providing an upfront payment of $500 in the first instalment which will assist in terms of prams, nursery items and the other things that mums and dads need for a new baby once it is born. While there is no change to the overall amount, I think that upfront measure will help. A further measure in the bill exempts payments to people affected by thalidomide from being assessable for welfare or income tax purposes.

Today, those opposite have waxed lyrical about their commitment to helping families, but I think they need a bit of a history lesson on assistance to families in regional and rural areas and communities across this country. The global financial crisis did not stifle our government’s commitment to reform when it came to tax relief, and we brought such measures forward three years in a row. Nor did it stifle our commitment to reforms for pensioners. We have assisted our 3.3 million pensioners—age pensioners, disability support pensioners, carers and others. Indeed, as early as March 2008, we extended the utilities allowance of about $590 per annum to disability support pensions, something that was never graciously given by John Howard when he was in power. Those opposite discriminated between people on disability support pensions and those on age pensions.

The 2009-10 budget provided $14.2 billion under our secure and sustainable pension reforms, increasing the adequacy of the level of support; increasing certainty in terms of payments; making the pension system in this country simpler, more understandable and more flexible; and making sure our social security system is secure and sustainable. From 29 September 2009, there was a weekly increase in the age pension of $32.49 for singles and $10.14 for couples. We also legislated to make sure there was a benchmark that guaranteed the pension for singles would be 27.7 per cent of MTAWE. We gave $1,400 to singles and $2,100 to couples at the time of the global financial crisis as a short-term stimulus payment. The new permanent carer supplement helped about 500,000 people across Australia who make significant sacrifices to assist their loved ones each and every day. You cannot solve their problems, but you can give them a helping hand. About 140,000 carers who receive the carer payment received a supplement of $600 annually.
As I said, we increased the single rate for the age pension—in accordance with the recommendations of the Harmer review—to bring it up to two-thirds of the combined couple rate, and we changed the indexation with respect to pensions as well. We said that there should be a new pensioner and beneficiary cost-of-living index and that, if it was higher than the CPI, which it has proved to be, it would keep better pace with the rising prices of goods. In particular, I think that the work bonus will be greatly appreciated by pensioners, because many of them do not fully leave the workforce when they transition to retirement. Part-time work for pensioners is important in terms of their financial independence, but it is also good for our economy and our community. Workforce participation is encouraged by the work bonus introduced by this government.

So the work bonus we are achieving for our senior citizens was introduced by a federal Labor government. Again, the coalition failed in this regard. The Howard government’s pension bonus scheme was too complex and failed to achieve the objects of increasing workforce participation. Do not just trust me on this because that is what the Harmer review found in relation to workforce participation. Whether it is participation and universities for regional and rural students or workforce participation for our senior citizens—those making the transition into retirement—the coalition’s record in this regard is atrocious, absolutely disastrous.

They had no commitment to the value of work; they had no commitment to regional and rural areas. They will say whatever they need to make sure that they get their fear campaigns heard in their local country newspapers and on their country radio stations, but when it comes to delivering for regional and rural areas they know nothing. They know nothing about road, rail, community infrastructure which we delivered in these areas for the first time. They know nothing with respect to education reforms. In my regional and rural seat, for the first time, we have seen education treated as a priority. We have seen 220 projects and $108 million under the BER funding. This is the kind of commitment to regional and rural Australia that is so evident by this federal Labor government that cares for those who need it.

Ms Marino (Forrest) (7.01 pm)—I rise to speak on the amendment moved to the Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Other Legislation Amendment (Election Commitments and Other Measures) Bill 2011 by the member for Menzies in relation to the youth allowance and workplace participation criteria for independent youth allowance. I would have to ask why this government continues to discriminate against students in my electorate and right around Australia who meet the inner regional classification? That is the one question that no-one is prepared to answer: why is it that this government continues to discriminate against educational opportunities for these great young people and put additional pressure on families.

We have heard that families have to move and I deal with these families on a regular basis. I had a parent ring me just recently to say that his daughter who will not qualify, because of the deal that has been done between the Independents and the government in the latest review, given her position as a 2009-10 student now has to stop her tertiary education because she cannot afford to continue. She was hoping to be one of those who would achieve support through youth allowance. She now has to come back to her hometown and her dreams of an education and a career have been seriously compromised.

This is the reality that this decision has delivered to regional areas. Apparently there
are up to 20,000 great young people around this nation who are affected by this decision. The requirement that forces these young people to find 30 hours of work a week over 18 months is sometimes impossible in a regional area. It really reinforces to me the fact that a Labor government does not understand how a regional area works. I have young people who live in places like Donnybrook, Dunsborough, Brunswick, Harvey and Collie. These are not necessarily big community centres, but how do these young people find 30 hours of work a week over 18 months? A lot of employment that is available is seasonal, so it is just not possible for these young people to meet the commitments of having to find 30 hours of work a week and meet the blocks that they are required to do. Plus they then will have two years away from study. Our concern is that their participation rates will fall even further because the longer they stay away from tertiary education the less likely they are to continue with their higher education.

So this is where these young people find themselves. I have had mothers in supermarkets say to me, ‘We now have to try to find a second extra job ourselves’. These are husbands or wives who have to fund their child’s university education. This is Australia. This is what we have done. This is what the Labor government has done for these great young people and these families. We are seeing a loss, a drain, of these young people and families from our communities. The students already face significant problems in accessing youth allowance and in accessing an education. All they are asking for is a fair go—access to youth allowance—and they will go on and do the best they can and come back and work within the regional areas quite frequently and bring great skills and knowledge back to our communities.

They have no choice but to relocate to study. That is the way it is in a regional area. You cannot just go up the road to the university, there is not one there. You have no choice but to relocate and yet you are being denied the opportunity to access youth allowance to do so for at least two years. The universities are even saying now that they are not going to hold their places. Where does this leave those young people?

The 2009-10 cohort are in no-man’s-land. They were not picked up by the previous criteria and they are certainly not now under the current review. They are nowhere. What plans do they make? What plans do their families make? They cannot plan. This is where this has left them. It is the most appalling discrimination. When the families ask me, ‘Why has the government done this?’ I do not have an answer. Why are your children not eligible but other ones in the same school are? I do not have that answer, only the government has that answer. Only the Prime Minister has that answer because she made this decision. We do know already that 55 per cent of metropolitan students go on to tertiary education compared to only 33 per cent of students from regional areas. The disadvantage is quite serious already but this is enhancing that disadvantage and I do not understand why the government has made this decision.

We have repeatedly, as have the parents and the students, made the government aware of just what this is doing to the students. The government have had opportunity after opportunity, through motions and through bills and even through their own decisions, to change this. Why not introduce a bill or a motion yourselves? Why not fix it? Why not introduce yourselves the opportunity to fix it? The opportunity is there every day in this parliament to fix this anomaly that you have created. Please take that opportunity. Do not continue to discriminate against these students and do not continue to put their lives, their careers, their families and their
I have here one of the latest emails I have received. It says:

I am a 2009 school leaver classified … as an Inner Rural student, meaning that I have to work an average of 30 hours per week over … 18 months … At the time of my graduation, the new changes were still unconfirmed, and so I chose to take a gap year in the hope that I would still be able to qualify somehow.

How does that make us feel? I know how it makes me feel and I hope that is how it makes some on the other side feel. The email continues:

I live at best, two hours by car (and longer if taking public transport) away from my university … There is no public transport in the majority of regional areas. It is not there, and certainly not to a university that is in Perth. She actually lives over two hours away from a university, and that is not even taking into account the cost of travelling, such as petrol—or, if she were able to access public transport, by train or bus. She says:

… my only real option is to move up to the city, where I’d need to find and pay for accommodation.

Under the old Youth Allowance laws, I would have had to earn … 75 per cent of the minimum wage. When the changes were announced, we’d originally hoped that at the very least, I could qualify by working 40 hours a week for … 12 months therefore averaging the same amount of hours …

But that is not possible under what the government has done. She continues:

My university will not let me defer for any time period longer than a year, and under the new laws I would have to relinquish my place were I to pursue Youth Allowance.

How do you think this makes this young lady feel? How do you think it makes her parents feel?

One of the most tragic real-life stories I have heard—it is not a story; it is the reality—comes from the parent who says to me, ‘We have to choose which one of our children we can afford to send to university.’ How do you choose and what happens to the family dynamic? What happens to those who you cannot afford to send? When I go into schools, what is even worse is that great young people in regional areas like mine say to me when I meet them: ‘I have actually changed my year 11 and 12 focus. I am not going to pursue the courses that will take me to university because my family cannot afford to send me.’ So they are consciously making the decision. Some of the drop-out rates will not be showing because these young people are making very practical decisions that have been forced on them by the decisions that this government has made. They will not show up in some of the figures and statistics, but these kids will be victims of this. That is what is ahead of us here. These young people have to take the decision now of not doing year 11 and 12 as they should be doing. They are taking a voc ed or other type of course or they are going to make another decision to do some form of training if they can secure it. These are conscious decisions that are being made by young people in inner regional areas.

I have another email here. It says:

Thankyou for your continuing efforts to get our kids the same financial opportunities as all other regional kids when they choose to attend university education.

I also find the changes very frustrating, restrictive and unfair with regards to the 18 month criteria. My son and many others from his school finishing in 2009 have chosen to begin their university studies this year because their course does not allow them to defer longer than 12 months or they want to begin following a 12 month enforced break.
My son has very little chance of qualifying for youth allowance now because he has not fulfilled the criteria of the 18 months. He will be using his savings to fund his university course and all living expenses incurred as a result of having to relocate to Perth.

I cannot understand why the 18 month timeframe, other than a means by which many more students will be eliminated from receiving any financial assistance.

This mother says at the bottom of the email:
What else can concerned parents do to make Labor and the independents see what they are doing?

I have asked that question over and over. My colleagues and I have tried over and over to get this changed, to give these great young people equity of opportunity. They are asking simply for a fair go.

As I said here previously, there were many phone calls to my office when the Prime Minister made her statement in Washington—when she said that perhaps the ultimate importance is the right to education, that she was passionate about education, that education is the key to all our opportunities and that education is the one thing that no-one can ever take away from us. That is true, Prime Minister, but you have to be able to access the education in the first place. Prime Minister, the changes that you have made have disaffected great young people. They have taken away the opportunity for education from those young people who have no choice but to not pursue their preferred courses and their preferred career. They have no choice because they cannot afford to go to university. They cannot afford to go without the support of the independent youth allowance.

So many people have said to me, ‘If the Prime Minister is really genuine about that, why isn’t she making the changes that she has been given the opportunity to make?’ My other request is: why can’t the Prime Minister and this government make those changes voluntarily? Why does it have to take the will of the people, the will of the two houses here? Both houses voted for the changes to youth allowance because they wanted fairness and equity for the great young people in this nation—the great young people from the areas defined as inner regional. The government has resisted this opportunity over and over. But why? Why would you resist the chance to give an opportunity to a young person in a regional area to pursue higher education?

Education should be a priority. It is a priority for me and I was hoping that it was a priority for members of both houses. Both houses voted for this and I have presented petitions. The will of the people, through the voices in both chambers, is for this government to fix this, but the government continues to resist it. I support the amendment. This offers the government yet another opportunity to fix a problem that they have created.

It is a problem that has been visited upon these great young people and their families in rural and regional areas. As I said earlier, all they are asking for is simply a fair go. They want a fair go because they will make the most of the opportunity. They come from a regional area. They will go; they will study; they will learn; they will commit themselves. Hopefully, part of the development of regional areas will come from these great young people who bring their skills back to us. That is the key to regional development in so many senses. It is not necessarily well understood by some, because if it was, the government would not have made these changes. These young people will bring so much back to the regional areas and
I support the amendments as moved by the shadow minister.

Ms HALL (Shortland) (7.16 pm)—I rise to support the Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Other Legislation Amendment (Election Commitments and Other Measures) Bill 2011 legislation that we have before us in the parliament today and to oppose the amendment. This piece of legislation is good news for Australian families. It is good news for Australian seniors and it is good news for those people who are having children. This legislation gives effect to three election commitments and two non-budget measures. I will come back to discuss these in detail.

The first election commitment in the bill is the expansion of the existing seniors work bonus measure to allow working pensioners to keep more of their pension when they undertake paid work. The second election commitment provides for better access to family payments for families with teenagers aged 16 to 19 in full-time secondary school or vocational education equivalent. The third election commitment provides improvements to the provision of the baby bonus for eligible families. The fourth measure ensures the annuities paid to people affected by thalidomide are not treated as assessable income for income support tests or for income tax purposes. Lastly, the bill makes minor administrative amendments to the income management measures.

I will start with one of the last measures—that which deals with thalidomide. I think this is an important measure. Those of us who are familiar with thalidomide know that it was a morning sickness drug that was given to mothers back in the sixties and seventies. It led to birth defects. A trust has been set up and payments have been made. This legislation exempts those payments from income tests. That is really in the spirit of what was intended. These annuities will be excluded from social security and veterans affairs income tests and from income tax. These annuities are not compensation payments, so they can be treated in that way, whereas a compensation payment does have an impact on income tax and on social security and income tested benefits. These are annuities and not compensation payments and this measure ensures that those payments are treated as was intended.

The other issue that I would like to touch on quickly is the matched savings scheme payment. That is designed to assist those who are on compulsory income management. Currently the qualifying savings period starts when the person commences a course. This will be changed so that the person can begin saving as soon as they register for a course rather than having to wait. That is a very positive change, which will help people to save a lot quicker.

I would like to turn to the three parts of this legislation that were election commitments. The first of those relates to the baby bonus. This legislation allows for the first payment of the baby bonus to be $500 and the remaining 11 payments be reduced slightly. The impact of this is to allow a larger upfront payment at a time when families or mothers need that payment. Particularly if it is your first child you have to buy cots, bassinettes and prams. Even that $500 goes nowhere near the cost that will be incurred. For a subsequent child there are still costs associated with the birth. So this is a very sensible change. It is a change that recognises the fact that families—mothers—incur a greater cost at the time of the birth of their child. I feel that this is really good news for families. This is a change that will benefit all people who need to have that little bit extra up front at the time of the birth of their child.
The next measure in this piece of legislation provides better access to family payments for families with a teenager aged 16 to 19 in full-time secondary school or vocational education. Under the current scheme, payments for family tax benefit A are reduced when the young person reaches the age of 16. From 1 January 2012, when this legislation comes into force, family tax benefit A will increase by around $160 per fortnight for teenagers aged 16 to 19 who are undertaking study. Under the existing scheme, the benefits paid under the family tax benefit decrease from $214 to $53 per fortnight when the child turns 16. It is important for the House to note that the later years of study are the years that attract the greatest cost.

The Henry review argued:

Family payments should be the main form of assistance for children—or young people—aged up to 18 years, or until the completion of secondary school …

This change recognises that family tax benefit will be the main form of support for those young people. It continues:

Beyond these points, youth payments focused on encouraging study … should be available.

There should be a seamless transition from family assistance to income support for young people. This should be based on the person’s circumstances and only one payment should be available …

This legislation picks up on that recommendation in the Henry tax review. The Gillard government views education as vitally important and recognises that, if a young person completes their education, their work opportunities are much greater. This change will encourage young people to stay at school longer. It provides greater support to families and, in doing so, gives those young people better opportunities for the future.

This is a very important change and one that I am sure all members of this House will embrace.

I would like to turn to the changes to the work bonus. The introduction of the work bonus by this government in 2009 was groundbreaking. Currently we are trying to encourage more people with skills to stay in the workforce. The work bonus was introduced as part of the government’s Secure and Sustainable Pension reform package and worked as an incentive for older Australians to stay in the workforce and thereby stay engaged, utilise their skills and continue to contribute to the welfare of our country—although I might add that people who choose not to work after the age of 65 still make enormous contributions. This is a way of utilising the skills of a very important group in our community. When the work bonus was introduced it was groundbreaking legislation, encouraging senior Australians to engage. This legislation expands the work bonus. The first $250 earned in a fortnight will not be treated as income for social security and veterans affairs purposes. Pensioners will be able to build up any unused amount of their $250 fortnightly bonus in an ‘income bank’, up to a maximum of $6,500. This ‘income bank’ can be used to exempt future earnings from the pension income test.

I—and, I am sure, a number of members of this parliament—have been approached by pensioners and seniors that work in blocks. Two particular groups in my electorate of Shortland come to mind. One is the group of people employed as Santa Clauses. Santa Clauses only work at one particular time of the year, and they earn a significant amount of money—although nowhere near $6,500. It is seasonal, intense employment, in which they earn more than the $250 a fortnight that they are exempt. This legislation will allow all those seniors that really enjoy working as Santa Clause at Christmastime to bank their
work bonus. The other significant group—a very significant group—is seniors and pensioners who work supervising university exams. A number of pensioners who have come along to see me have said that the $250 exemption is great but it does not work as effectively for them as it could. The changes in this legislation allow them a maximum of $6,500, which well and truly covers the amount of money they earn. The changes will ensure that pensioners are able to keep more of their pension when they work.

At this time I would like to put on record that I think that one of the truly untapped resources of our society is senior Australians, those people that would still like to contribute through working. I feel that as a nation we need to embrace the fact that they have skills to offer and we need to be more mindful of the fact that mature workers in Australia should be embraced and welcomed into the workforce. This is one way of acknowledging that older Australians that are in receipt of a pension can make an enormous contribution. This is great legislation. It is really good news for all those Australians that are affected by it and I recommend it to the House.

Mr Chester (Gippsland) (7.30 pm)—I rise to speak in support of the amendment to the Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Other Legislation Amendment (Election Commitments and Other Measures) Bill 2011. This is a very important amendment which seeks to provide a fairer and a more equitable system of student income support via the independent youth allowance. In particular, this amendment deals with the workforce participation criteria for the independent youth allowance and the discriminatory system of inner regional and outer regional classifications, which is unfairly affecting students in Gippsland and across regional Australia. I have spoken on the broader issue of income support on many occasions during my almost three years in this place. It is important to remind the House about some of the history of this debate and, some would say, the history of this debacle.

The former Minister for Education Julia Gillard created a mess in the May 2009 budget with her attack on gap year students. The retrospective nature of the government’s legislation caused the problems for regional students in the first place. What erupted was a fight right across regional Australia—not just in Gippsland but in every regional community. The member for Cowper, who is with me tonight, and other members right across regional Australia were inundated with calls from students, from teachers and from parents and friends of students. They were angry and they are still angry today. Dozens of petitions were presented to this place, with many thousands of people protesting about the gap year arrangements as proposed by the education minister of the time. There were rallies in many regional communities where students spoke out against the injustice that was forced upon them by Julia Gillard as education minister.

To her credit, the minister finally backed down, but the only reason she backed down was that she realised she had a political problem. I would like to tell the Prime Minister now that she has another political problem. This system of discriminating against regional students on the basis of lines on a map will hang around her neck like a dead albatross until the next election. Regional MPs opposite may think that this is some sort of political game. Let me assure them that when it comes to student income support I am not about political games. This is about achieving a fair and equitable outcome for regional students who right now are being discriminated against by this government—and this government knows it. The political futures of regional MPs—and I include Labor MPs and
Independent MPs—are at stake in this debate. There is a depth of passion in regional communities which you probably have not noticed. If you do not wake up to it soon, the price you will pay at the ballot box will be extreme.

I appeal to Julia Gillard as a former education minister and as Prime Minister to finally understand: you have completely misread regional Australia. You have completely misread this issue from start to finish. Rural people are very slow to anger, but I can assure you they do not forget and they will not forget a Prime Minister who had the capacity to deliver a fairer and more equitable system of student income support and failed. They will never forget that they had a Prime Minister who came in here and talked about the education revolution, who staked her whole career on her reputation in relation to education, but who, when she had the chance to do something which was in the interests of students right across regional Australia, failed miserably. Students across Australia and their parents and teachers want us to fix this mess, and this amendment before the House tonight is the first step.

I am concerned that the Independent MPs from the regional communities—the member for Denison, the member for Lyne and the member for New England—have fallen for the sucker punch here. They believed this government’s assurances just a couple of weeks ago that it will take action in January next year to try and fix the mess in relation to the inner regional and outer regional classifications. But surely they are beginning to realise that a promise from this government is not worth anything and it is certainly not worth anything to the students from the 2009 and 2010 cohorts who will miss out while the Independent MPs continue to support the Gillard government’s procrastination on this issue.

The workforce criteria problems as they exist right now exist because we have two systems in place—this classification of outer regional and inner regional. If you are regarded as an outer regional student, you face easier criteria to achieve the independent status, but for students in inner regional areas—and in my electorate these include towns like Sale, Maffra, Hayfield; these are very small towns which are regarded as inner regional—finding full-time employment in those regional areas and small communities is often very difficult for the students. They struggle to achieve the independent criterion of 30 hours per week over a total two-year time frame.

This legislation also does not take into account the seasonal nature of many jobs in regional communities—particularly the tourism sector and the agricultural sector in my electorate—which creates another barrier for regional students, and here I am referring particularly to inner regional students. What we are talking about here tonight with this amendment is a system of fairness and equity of access for all regional students, who, as we understand, are often forced to move away from home to pursue higher education. The Prime Minister needs to end the hollow rhetoric about an education revolution and start cleaning up the mess that exists in student income support. Even the current Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Jobs and Workplace Relations has acknowledged this is a mess. He was on ABC Gippsland radio recently and said the current system ‘was an inelegant solution’ and he also admitted it was ‘a bit untidy’. The students, parents and teachers listening would have other words to describe the mess that has been created by this government.

The pathetic solution that is being put forward now is to bring forward an inquiry and make it report a bit earlier, by 1 July this year. But the minister himself is already
backing away from any suggestion that he will address the issue of inner regional and outer regional classifications for the purpose of accessing independent youth allowance. The Independent MPs should be taking note of every word that comes out of the education minister’s mouth in relation to this. They did a deal a fraction over two weeks ago, and he is already backing away from that deal. I take note of the earlier comments of the member for Shortland. She said that the Gillard government views education as vitally important. People on this side of the House view education as vitally important as well, and we are demanding a fair go for students in regional communities. This, as I said, is a major issue right across regional Australia, and it is another fundamental breach of trust by the Gillard government.

The members who shake their heads—who come from metropolitan areas or from regional communities and who think that we are playing a game on this particular issue—need to understand the stress and the uncertainty that they have created right throughout regional Australia with these changes. I would probably be getting 10 calls a week in my office from parents in the inner regional area who are trying to find a way for their child to access youth allowance. I acknowledge that there are two ways to access youth allowance: either dependent youth allowance or independent youth allowance. I acknowledged from day one that the changes to the income threshold for dependent youth allowance have been well received in regional communities and they have been seen as positive steps right throughout regional Australia. I commended the Prime Minister for those changes when she was previously the Minister for Education. But the issue of independent youth allowance is where the government has failed miserably and caused enormous confusion and enormous uncertainty.

What people opposite do not seem to understand is that these students make their decisions years in advance of actually going to university. They start setting their career pathways in year 9 and year 10, in consultation with their careers advisers and their school principals. So this uncertainty and the confusion over how the criteria will apply for independent youth allowance has already affected students from the 2009 and 2010 cohorts. Continuing this holding pattern until January next year is just making it more difficult for students right throughout regional areas. The real holding pattern from 1 July this year should be to abolish the current arrangements of inner regional and outer regional and give all regional students the same access to independent youth allowance. That should be the holding pattern until this review is completed. Then the review should continue, and the review should completely overhaul the system of student income support. The changes from 1 January next year, rather than talking about changes in inner regional and outer regional, should be looking at a complete overhaul of student income support, with a tertiary access allowance which addresses this fundamental inequity for regional students.

Mr Deputy Speaker Kelvin Thomson, I acknowledge that you represent an inner Melbourne seat. But the members who represent regional seats see that the extra costs borne by parents from our community to send their children to university are becoming such an onerous burden that students are simply bailing out of the system. We have young people who have the potential to go on to achieve great things at university who are making the decision, for economic reasons, to remain in a regional community, and I fear we are selling those children short. I believe we can do better in this place than to have regional students curtailing their ambitions and forfeiting their dreams of higher
education simply because we have a government that talks big about an education revolution but fails to deliver when it comes to real support for regional families. This is a social issue and it is an economic issue. We are taking money out of regional towns to pay for the accommodation for country students when they go to metropolitan areas to attend university. We are stripping wealth out of regional communities to do that. There is no compensation whatsoever for the families, and it is becoming more and more difficult in these times of increased costs of living for families to make those financial commitments.

As you heard the member for Parkes refer to earlier, families are making very tough decisions and having to choose which one of their children can attend a university and which student has to remain in the regional community. We in this place need to reduce the economic barriers for regional students who are forced to leave home to attend university. The social issue is very apparent to all of us who live in a regional area. The importance of regional communities having opportunities to train our own young people to take on roles in areas such as health, engineering or other tertiary-qualified areas is well understood. We know—and various studies have proven this—that if country kids get the opportunity to go to university then they are more likely to return to a regional community in the future and contribute their skills to that regional area. They are much more likely to return and address some of those major issues we have, particularly in the area of health services. But our participation rates in regional communities when it comes to tertiary courses are much lower than those of our metropolitan counterparts.

Unless you fundamentally believe that country kids are dumber than city kids, there must be an issue. The issue is the economic barrier. We in this place have the power to start reducing the economic barrier and stop robbing country kids of the opportunity to achieve their full potential. This is a chance for us here in this place to stand up for regional students. It is a chance for those opposite to live up to their rhetoric about the education revolution and actually start delivering on the transformational power of education that they talk about but unfortunately have failed to deliver in their time in this place.

Finally, I would like to thank my colleagues, both in this chamber and in the other place, for their determination in pursuing this issue. Those opposite may be getting sick of us standing up here, talking about youth allowance. They may be getting sick of us attaching amendments to various bills. Let me assure them that we will continue to pursue this issue until we finally get a fair result for regional students. I want to thank the thousands of parents, teachers and students who have rallied to support this cause right throughout Australia. From the day we rallied together in 2009 to stop the unfair treatment of gap year students, we have held the Rudd government and the Gillard government to account on this issue. We must continue that fight. To those people from regional communities who are listening tonight, let me assure you that there are members in this place, on this side of the House—such as the member for Parkes, the member for Cowper, the member for Mallee, the member for Menzies, the member for Calare and the member for Mackellar, who are all in the chamber—who are determined to fight this case until we finally get a fair and equitable system for regional communities.

I would also particularly like to thank Senator Fiona Nash for the work that she has done on this issue, along with the member for Sturt—the shadow minister for education—and the member for Forrest, who we have heard from tonight. They have been at the forefront of this issue and are continuing
to pursue the government in relation to getting a fairer deal for regional students. There have been many other coalition members—I have just named a few—who have fought the good fight. We will continue that fight, and I urge all concerned Australians who may be listening to this broadcast tonight to raise this issue at every opportunity. Write to your Labor regional MP. Write to your Independent MP in regional communities and demand a better deal. Write to them. Send them an email. Ring them up. The only way they are going to listen is with people pressure. Once this Prime Minister realises she has a political problem, she will take action. That is the only way this government listens to the people of Australia. We must continue to highlight this issue in the interests of fairness and the interests of equity for regional Australian students. I thank the House.

Mr JOHN COBB (Calare) (7.45 pm)—I rise to support the amendment to the Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Other Legislation Amendment (Election Commitments and Other Measures) Bill 2011. You just heard the comment made that this is a social issue and an equity issue. It is also an issue about the future of regional Australia. It is a very well-known fact that when Australian kids go to a place like the UK they have no trouble getting a job, because their work ethic is recognised. It is also a well-known fact that when country kids go to the city they have no trouble getting a job in Australia, because their work ethic is recognised. We do not have a problem in the bush and regional Australia about having kids with a work ethic and the desire to use it. But we do have a problem in that the professionals we need and who we retain—the medical profession in particular—tend to be the ones who were born and grew up there.

Most of the occupations to which I refer require further education after year 12 in high school. By and large, they cannot get that in regional Australia. It is a very real issue, even in an electorate like mine is now—almost small, as opposed to before; it is a mere 30,000 square kilometres—which does have a university at Bathurst and various outreaches. The chances are that even in that area either students cannot get into the course they want to do or the course does not exist where they want to do it.

As you have heard others say, the Prime Minister only backed down on the youth allowance in the outer regional and more remote areas of Australia when she had no choice politically. What is the difference from living in Cobar and having to travel to Sydney? You still have to live away from home. They are great people in Cobar; I know them very well. However, if you live in Orange, Bathurst, Lithgow, Forbes or Parkes the chances are that you will not be able to do your tertiary education locally unless you are lucky enough to get into Bathurst—and most cannot. You have to go to Armidale, Canberra, Sydney or one of the other universities in Australia. You certainly cannot go there and live at home. So I am rather puzzled as to why—quite correctly—the decision was made that the more remote areas should have the old system applied of one year in which you had the opportunity to earn the $15,000 when those who live in what is now termed as ‘inner regional’ do not.

It is extraordinarily important for our future and for the ability of regional Australia to stand on its own two feet and not to have up to 45 per cent of our doctors foreigners brought in; not to have professionals from outside; and not to have to go away when you need to get a medical service done.

Mr Deputy Speaker, you just heard my colleague make comments about thanking people for what they do. I remember when
the original Senate inquiry was held; four students from Orange and Cowra gave evidence to that Senate inquiry. They had never done anything like that before, and these were kids who were still at school. I have never seen a school community—teachers, parents and students, including ones who had already left school—combine on an issue like it in my life. I have never had so many calls on an issue from desperate and frightened parents in my life. The need for their children, and for their own community, to get that extra education, university opportunity or whatever is just enormous. I keep coming back to the fact that if you have to leave home then you have to leave home. Quite correctly, outer regional areas have that ability now to have the one-year gap and not to lose their places as the two-year gap does, making it almost impossible for them.

I am totally puzzled as to how any bureaucrat or politician could sit there and say, ‘The outer regional people have to leave home but the inner regional people do not’—of course they have to leave home. It is a very real and serious matter. It is not as though most of them can leave home and go to the regional universities that are easier and cheaper to live in; to do things like medicine there is absolutely impossible. They have to go to the metropolitan areas.

I think this is simply an issue of fairness. The cost of children going that distance is just prohibitive. Australia needs the people who probably have the best work ethic of any young people in the whole country. They come from an area where they totally know and expect it—as most do. In country Australia it is just accepted that that is what you do. We should give those people the opportunity to have the education to be whatever we and their communities need them to be. I always say when I go to schools, ‘Go away, as you have to finish your education and your training—but come home to practise it.’ It is the kids who are born out there who will come home to practise it, but mostly they cannot obtain the qualification that they need, that we need, that the community needs, that regional Australia needs and that the whole of Australia needs them to have.

It is an issue about the future of regional Australia. It is an issue of justice. I can only say to the previous Minister for Education, the current Prime Minister, that this is not something that will go away. It is not something that all those people who believe so strongly in it will let die. It is something that is incredibly necessary. Please think about this from the point of view of the people who live out there.

Ms COLLINS (Franklin—Parliamentary Secretary for Community Services) (7.53 pm)—During the election campaign this government made a number of significant commitments to better support older pensioners who work, families with teenagers in full-time secondary study and families with new babies. The Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Other Legislation Amendment (Election Commitments and Other Measures) Bill 2011 delivers on these commitments. The seniors work bonus is expanded by this bill, so an age pensioner or service pensioner of qualifying age will be able to earn $250 per fortnight without any of those earnings affecting their pension entitlements. A pensioner will also be able to bank unused amounts of their work bonus, up to a maximum of $6,500. These banked amounts can be used to offset income that is earned in a later period. These changes will provide additional support to age pensioners and service pensioners who work, particularly those who undertake part-time or occasional work.

This bill also makes changes to the family assistance law to help families with teenagers in secondary study or a vocational educa-
From 1 January 2012, the maximum rate of family tax benefit part A for teenagers age 16 to 19 who are in full-time secondary study and under the primary care of their family will increase to $214 per fortnight, bringing it into line with the rate for teenagers aged 13 to 16. In addition, these changes will extend rent assistance to families with children aged 16 to 19 who receive more than the base rate of the family tax benefit part A. This additional financial assistance will help families support their teenagers’ continued participation in secondary education or a vocational education equivalent.

This bill also improves the delivery of the baby bonus, providing for parents of new babies who are eligible for the baby bonus to receive more of their payment up front. In 2011-12, the up-front amount will be $500 in addition to a regular fortnightly instalment. This will assist families with meeting the initial costs of welcoming a new baby into their family.

This bill also exempts annuities paid by the Thalidomide Australia Fixed Trust from income tax and from social security and veterans’ affairs income tests. These annuities are paid to people who have been affected by the morning sickness drug thalidomide. This bill ensures that these annuities are not taken into account as income in the hands of the beneficiaries.

Finally, the bill makes some minor amendments to the income management arrangements. Amongst other things, the start date of a savings period for the matched savings payment scheme is clarified so that people can begin saving as soon as they register for an approved course.

This bill delivers on a number of important government election commitments that will benefit families and pensioners. On behalf of the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs I want to thank speakers for their contributions to the debate. Disappointingly, for the opposition even these important measures for pensioners and families are not above political games. Instead of supporting this bill and supporting measures to assist Australian families and seniors, the opposition has once again employed its customary cheap ambush tactic and moved amendments that could jeopardise the passage of an important bill.

As those opposite will know, the government has brought forward a legislative comprehensive review of student income support with a particular focus on the capacity of rural and regional students to access higher education. But the opposition continues to wreak havoc, pull down and play games with the Australian people. While they put politics above policy, the Gillard government is getting on with the job of delivering on our election commitments and delivering for Australian families and seniors. Accordingly, the government will oppose the opposition’s amendments and commends the bill to the House in its current form.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr KJ Thomson)—The question is that the words proposed to be omitted stand part of the question. There being more than one voice calling for a division, in accordance with standing order 133(b) the division is deferred until after 8 pm.

Debate adjourned.

COMMITTEES
Public Works Committee
Report

Ms SAFFIN (Page) (7.57 pm)—On behalf of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works, I present the following report of the committee: Report 2/2011: referrals made in November 2010.

Ordered that the report be made a parliamentary paper.
Ms SAFFIN—by leave—On behalf of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works, I present the second report of 2011, addressing referrals made in November 2010. This report deals with two public works, with a total estimated cost of $69.5 million. In both cases the committee has recommended the House of Representatives agree to the works proceeding. One work, for the Department of Defence, involves the construction of workshops, vehicle bays, hardstands, classrooms, warehouses and a gatehouse at various locations in Queensland and Victoria. The second work is a building fit-out for the Australian Taxation Office in Albury, New South Wales.

Let me first turn to the Land 121 project for the Department of Defence. This work will provide the department with new facilities to assist with the rollout of new vehicles for the Australian Defence Force. The facilities will provide for the reception, inspection, refitting, operator training and maintenance training associated with these new vehicles. The committee sought evidence from Defence about why they had chosen the particular sites in question and how the facilities would fit into the overall defence infrastructure. The committee is satisfied that the scope of works proposed by Defence will meet the needs of the project.

The committee was concerned to learn at its hearing that there has been a significant delay in the transfer of a piece of land from the Department of Immigration and Citizenship to the Department of Defence necessary for the project to be completed. Due to Immigration’s uncertainty, Defence is unable to give a date by which the land transfer will be complete. The committee is not satisfied with this state of affairs. Whilst Defence has assured the committee that this will not delay the commencement of works, the committee is nonetheless uneasy that Defence was only informed of the latest development regarding this transfer on the date of the hearing. Agencies must ensure that they are aware of factors outside of their control, such as the decisions of other agencies, and that these factors do not cause surprise at the last moment.

The second work addressed in this report is the fit-out for the Australian Taxation Office in Albury. This is the third fit-out project for the ATO that the committee has considered in the past year. The committee is always interested in ensuring that the Commonwealth gets good value for money. The ATO gave evidence at the hearing that the project will save money over the long term due in part to more efficient building systems. The ATO is a major employer in Albury and the site in Albury is one of the ATO’s larger facilities. The committee was pleased to see that the project will create significant local employment during construction as well as ensuring the ATO can remain a significant employer in Albury.

I thank members and senators for their work in relation to these inquiries. I commend this report to the House.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr KJ Thomson)—I will deal with the division that was called earlier. I took the view that the deferred division should not be proceeded with until the member speaking at 8 pm had completed her speech, and so I did not interrupt the member. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for a later hour.

FAMILIES, HOUSING, COMMUNITY SERVICES AND INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (ELECTION COMMITMENTS AND OTHER MEASURES) BILL 2011

Second Reading

Debate resumed.
The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr KJ Thomson)—In accordance with standing order 133, I shall now proceed to put the question that the words proposed to be omitted stand part of the question concerning the second reading of the Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Other Legislation Amendment (Election Commitments and Other Measures) Bill 2011.

Question put

That the words proposed to be omitted stand part of the question.

The House divided. [8.06 pm]

(The Speaker—Mr Harry Jenkins)

Ayes……….. 71

Noes……….. 69

Majority…….. 2

AYES

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

NOES

Alexander, J. Andrews, K.
Andrews, K.J. Bishop, B.K.
Bishop, J.I. Briggs, J.E.
Broadbent, R.
Buchholz, S. Christensen, G.
Chester, D. Cobb, J.K.
Ciobo, S.M. Crook, T.
Coulton, M.* Dutton, P.C.
Entsch, W. Fletcher, P.
Forrest, J.A. Frydenberg, J.
Gambaro, T. Gash, J.
Griggs, N. Haase, B.W.
Hartseyker, L. Hawke, A.
Hockey, J.B. Hunt, G.A.
Irons, S.J. Jensen, D.
Jones, E. Keenan, M.
Kelly, C. Laming, A.
Ley, S.P. Macfarlane, I.E.
Marino, N.B. Markus, L.E.
Matheson, R. McCormack, M.
Mirabella, S. Morrison, S.J.
Moylan, J.E. Neville, P.C.
O’Dowd, K. O’Dwyer, K.
Prentice, J. Pyne, C.
Ramsey, R. Randall, D.J.
Robb, A. Robert, S.R.
Roy, Wyatt Ruddock, P.M.
Scott, B.C. Secker, P.D. *
Simpkins, L. Slipper, P.N.
Smith, A.D.H. 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

Gillard, J.E. Abbott, A.J.
O’Neill, D. Baldwin, R.C.
Mitchell, R. Somlyay, A.M.
Rowland, M. Schultz, A.

* denotes teller
Question agreed to.
Bill read a second time.
Message from the Governor-General recommending appropriation announced.

Ms MACKLIN (Jagajaga—Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs) (8.11 pm)—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.
Question agreed to.
Bill read a third time.

COMMITTEES
Public Works Committee

Report

Ms SAFFIN (Page) (8.12 pm)—On behalf of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works I present the committee’s 74th annual report concerning the committee’s activities in the calendar year 2010.

Ordered that the report be made a parliamentary paper.

Ms SAFFIN—by leave—This report is a requirement under section 16 of the Committees Act and the committee presents its summary of its proceedings shortly after the end of each year. During 2010, the committee conducted inquiries into nine works with a combined cost of $491.5 million. Appendix A of the report lists all works and their individual costs. The committee also considered 51 medium works projects, those with a budget of between $2- and $15 million and the combined costs of these works was $416.8 million. Appendix B of the report lists these works. The committee held 24 meetings throughout the year in Canberra, Melbourne, Adelaide, Perth, Darwin and Sydney and these are all listed in appendix C of the report.

There are a few matters that I would like to highlight. The committee is rightly proud of the efficiency with which it conducts inquiries. In 2010, the average time from the referral of a work to tabling the report was nine weeks. The committee also introduced a new procedure manual, which increases the detail of the committee’s scrutiny of Commonwealth expenditure with new referral requirements for agencies proposing works. These requirements seek information that has not previously been collated by agencies. Agencies have reported that the new requirements help improve their internal preparation as well as providing the committee with more useful detail for its scrutiny role. The committee reiterates the importance of all Commonwealth agencies fulfilling their obligations to the parliament, including the requirement to bring medium works to the committee before any contracts are let. The committee continues to work hard to ensure that projects do not fall through the cracks.

A number of works were exempted from committee consideration in 2010 and the committee considers this an unacceptable state of affairs. The exemption provisions in the Committees Act are for unforeseen and truly urgent circumstances, not for remedying poor planning by agencies.

As I noted before, the committee has a speedy process and the committee expects all agencies, no matter how big or small, to be aware of their obligations to the parliament under the Public Works Committee Act. I would like to give special thanks to officers of the Special Claims and Land Policy Branch of the Department of Finance and Deregulation, who assist agencies in preparing their proposals for committee consideration. I also thank members and senators for their work throughout 2010 and, in particular, I thank the members of the committee of the 42nd parliament and my immediate predecessor as chair, Senator the Hon. Jan McLucas. I would also like to specially mention the deputy chair, Senator the Hon. Judith Troeth, who has been able to offer me very professional and collegiate support in my role coming in as a new chair.
I would also like to thank the committee secretariat, including the previous secretary, Sharon Bryant; acting secretary, Alison Clegg; inquiry secretary, Anthony Overs; senior research officer, Thomas Gregory; and administrative officers Shaun Rowe and Claire Young. I commend the report to the House.

**Australian Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity Committee**

**Report**

Ms PARKE (Fremantle) (8.16 pm)—On behalf of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on the Australian Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity, I present the committee’s report entitled *Examination of the annual report of the Integrity Commissioner 2009-2010*, together with evidence received by the committee.

Ordered that the report be made a parliamentary paper.

Ms PARKE—by leave—I am very pleased to speak on the tabling of the Joint Standing Committee on the Australian Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity’s examination of the Integrity Commissioner’s annual report 2009-10. As a matter of process, I can say at the outset that the committee has found that the annual report is fully compliant with the Law Enforcement Integrity Act 2006 and regulations as well as with other relevant government requirements. This annual report is the fourth provided by the Integrity Commissioner and covers ACLEI’s third full year of operation.

The committee’s review of the annual report is one of its critical recurrent functions, and as the committee chair I am happy to say that the 2009-10 annual report demonstrates the further evolution of ACLEI, which in a short time has become an important part of Australia’s anti-corruption architecture.

As part of its review of the annual report, the committee has noted the changes that have been made to ACLEI’s reporting framework, in the form of a revised program statement whose first outcome is to provide independent assurance to the Australian government that Commonwealth law enforcement agencies and their staff act with integrity by detecting, investigating and preventing corruption. The second outcome is to detect, investigate and prevent corruption in prescribed law enforcement agencies and to assist those agencies to maintain and improve the integrity of their staff.

In terms of the substantial work and operations of ACLEI, it is pleasing to see reported that there has been an increased rate of referrals to the commission, indicating that it is becoming established as an effective and trusted recipient of matters which include integrity or corruption concerns. Indeed, as I have noted previously, ACLEI has experienced constant growth in potential corruption issues notified and referred since it commenced operations. It was therefore appropriate that the government announced an additional $1.6 million over four years in the 2010-11 budget. This additional funding has enlarged ACLEI’s capacity, and the corresponding expansion of its activity has been supported by a range of operational and resource improvements, namely: new funding for five staff; the near completion of a secure operations facility, which will help to ensure ACLEI’s functional independence from other agencies; and a new strategic approach to counter the possible relationship between corrupt law enforcement agency staff members and organised crime.

The committee is well aware that significant challenges lie ahead for ACLEI, notwithstanding its strong achievements to date, and particular consideration has been given to the opportunities and adjustments that are likely to flow from the expansion of ACLEI’s jurisdiction to cover the Australian
Customs and Border Protection Service, as of January this year.

ACLEI was created to detect, investigate and prevent integrity failures in law enforcement agencies. An important issue noted by the committee during its review of the annual report is the need for ACLEI to move towards its third objective, which is prevention measures, in addition to the work it is already doing in the areas of detection and investigation. Corruption prevention, by building and promoting cultures of integrity, ought to be a key activity of ACLEI in the future, and the committee will be working with the agency to explore how that role can be developed and resourced.

On receipt of the annual report, the committee commends the Integrity Commissioner and the staff of ACLEI for their essential contribution to Australia’s system of anti-corruption checks and measures.

Finally, I take this opportunity to thank all my fellow committee members including, of course, the deputy chair, Senator Ian Macdonald. I also thank the committee secretariat for their continued hard work in supporting us. I am very sorry to note that committee secretary Tim Watling will shortly be moving to another area, so I would like to take this opportunity to thank him for his invaluable assistance and to wish him well.

Health and Ageing Committee
Report

Mr GEORGANAS—by leave—On behalf of the Standing Committee on Health and Ageing, I am pleased to present the committee’s Advisory report on the National Health Reform Amendment (National Health Performance Authority) Bill 2011. The bill was referred to the committee by the Selection Committee on 3 March 2011. This bill is the next step in the process of the government’s historic agreement with all states and territories to undertake fundamental reform of our health and hospitals system.

The bill amends the proposed National Health and Hospitals Network Act 2011 to establish the National Health Performance Authority, which will be the new watchdog for Australia’s health system. This new watchdog for Australia’s health system, the performance authority, will develop and produce reports on the performance of hospitals and healthcare services, including primary health services, and it will transparently and publicly report on primary healthcare services and the outcomes in local communities.

The committee takes very seriously its responsibility in dealing with a matter referred to it by the parliament. In determining the nature of this inquiry, the committee noted the history associated with this matter and, in particular, the two previous Senate inquiries into the proposed National Health and Hospitals Bill as well as the separate Senate inquiry into the proposed financing arrangements to give effect to these changes. So, in executing the present inquiry, the committee was cognizant of the previous inquiries conducted in to the National Health and Hospitals Bill.

The submissions that the committee received were largely supportive of the need to establish a national framework of health service standards, monitoring and reporting, and recognised the performance authority as an integral component of this. Much of the sup-
port for establishing a National Health Performance Authority was premised on the belief that the collection of robust and meaningful data is an important mechanism to drive improvement in the quality and efficiency of health services at a national level. The committee is of the view that the bill to establish the performance authority adequately sets out the authority’s essential operational and structural parameters.

The committee was particularly interested in considering different mechanisms to enhance the performance authority’s reporting requirements with a view to improving the overall transparency of the data collected on the performance of healthcare services. With greater transparency comes a greater change of improving public services and empowering the public to make decisions that are based on the best information. Accordingly, the committee recommends that the House pass this bill with a further amendment that the performance authority presents a compilation of its performance monitoring activities to the parliament annually in addition to its publication on the authority’s website.

The committee, in recommending that the National Health Reform Amendment (National Health Performance Authority) Bill 2011 be approved, concluded that the parliament, through its publicly elected members, will ultimately have to resolve this matter.

Mr IRONS (Swan) (8.25 pm)—by leave—On behalf of the coalition members of the committee, the member for Hasluck, the member for Parkes and myself, and in my capacity as the Deputy Chair of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health and Ageing, I rise this evening to speak to the dissenting report to the committee’s inquiry into the National Health Reform Amendment (National Health Performance Authority) Bill 2011. We cannot support the government’s sole recommendation from this inquiry that:

The Committee recommends that the House of Representatives pass the National Health Reform Amendment (National Health Performance Authority) Bill 2011 with a minor amendment to clause 60(1)(b) relating to reporting requirements. Throughout the course of the inquiry it became clear that a wide range of stakeholders are concerned about the lack of deal in the legislation, especially with regard to the functions of this proposed authority.

In short, we believe that this inquiry has raised more questions than the government has been able to answer and, as such, should not be debated in the House before the government has clarified the areas causing concern to stakeholders. Many of these problems have been acknowledged by the inquiry in its report; yet the government response has failed to address them, saying it is of the view that the bill adequately sets out the authority’s operational and structural parameters. We do not accept this as a good enough response to some serious questions raised by the stakeholders.

As stated in the dissenting report, there is confusion over several aspects of the functions of the proposed authority. These include (1) the range of health services to be monitored; (2) how the data will be obtained; and (3) how requests for data will be enforced, given that the powers of the authority will be limited. With stakeholders suggesting that they are struggling with a significant regulatory burden already, any proposed compliance burden is clearly important and needs to be clarified and addressed.

In addition, a fourth concern has been raised by stakeholders in relation to what the reporting requirements for the proposed authority would be. We acknowledge that the report recommends an annual report be prepared by the authority and presented to the
parliament, but there is no explanation as to what form this report should take. For example, it is unclear whether the authority will use the data collected to produce league tables which will be published on the MyHospitals website.

A further area of concern for the stakeholders is the relationship between the proposed authority and two other agencies the government has created or is creating. The first is the recently legislated Australian Commission on Safety and Quality of Health Care and the second is the proposed Independent Hospital Pricing Authority. As documented in the chair’s report, the Australian Medical Association in their submission stated:

We are also concerned that the legislation does not provide for appropriate interaction between the Authority and the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care (the Commission) or the proposed Independent Hospital Pricing Authority.

It is unclear what the interactions between these organisations will entail and where the responsibilities will lie. Data-sharing arrangements, responsibilities and functions of these government agencies have not been properly justified or explained. It is unclear whether these organisations will overlap.

I want to make one more point before tabling this dissenting report on behalf of the coalition members of the committee. In addition to the concerns about the workability and functionality of this proposed authority, it is understood that a number of stakeholders who wanted to contribute to this inquiry were unable to because of the haste with which this inquiry has been conducted. As the inquiry details, the bill was referred to the Standing Committee on Health and Ageing by the Selection Committee on 3 March. We are reporting today, just 19 days later. The time allocated for submissions was little more than a week. And it is noted that more public hearings were unable to be arranged due to the short reporting time frame. In fact, there was just one public hearing and only people from the Department of Health and Ageing were allowed to attend. None of the private stakeholders concerned with this bill were given the opportunity to attend. Given this, until the stakeholders have had adequate opportunity to raise their concerns and have them properly addressed, it would be unwise for the committee to advise the House of Representatives to pass this legislation.

The coalition members of the committee believe there are too many unanswered questions about the National Health Performance Authority, its role and functions and whether it can fulfil its stated aims for the government. In conclusion, the House should not debate this bill until the government clarifies this matter.

CUSTOMS AMENDMENT (SERIOUS DRUGS DETECTION) BILL 2011
MILITARY REHABILITATION AND COMPENSATION AMENDMENT (MRCA SUPPLEMENT) BILL 2011
THERAPEUTIC GOODS LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (COPYRIGHT) BILL 2011
TRANS-TASMAN PROCEEDINGS AMENDMENT AND OTHER MEASURES BILL 2011
HUMAN SERVICES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2010

Referred to Main Committee

Ms COLLINS (Franklin—Parliamentary Secretary for Community Services) (8.31 pm)—I move:

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

Question agreed to.
COMMITTEES
National Broadband Network Committee
Membership

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott)—The Speaker has received advice from the Chief Government Whip, Chief Opposition Whip and Mr Oakeshott nominating Members to be members of the Joint Standing Committee on the National Broadband Network.

Ms COLLINS (Franklin—Parliamentary Secretary for Community Services) (8.32 pm)—by leave—I move:

That Mr Symon, Mr Husic, Ms Rowland, Mrs D’Ath, Mr Turnbull, Ms Ley, Mr Hartsuyker, Mr Fletcher and Mr Oakeshott be appointed members of the Joint Standing Committee on the National Broadband Network.

Question agreed to.

Christmas Island Tragedy Committee
Membership

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott)—The Speaker has received advice from the Chief Government Whip and Chief Opposition Whip nominating Members to be members of the Joint Select Committee on the Christmas Island Tragedy.

Ms COLLINS (Franklin—Parliamentary Secretary for Community Services) (8.33 pm)—by leave—I move:

That Mr Perrett, Mr Husic, Mr Champion, Mr Keenan and Mrs Markus be appointed members of the Joint Select Committee on the Christmas Island Tragedy.

Question agreed to.

TOBACCO ADVERTISING PROHIBITION AMENDMENT BILL 2010
Second Reading

Debate resumed from 28 February, on motion by Ms Roxon:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mrs D’ATH (Petrie) (8.34 pm)—I rise today in support of the Tobacco Advertising Prohibition Amendment Bill 2010. I cannot recall an easier bill to speak in support of. Smoking kills Australians every day. How can members of this place do anything but work as hard as they can to prevent this? We have heard the statistics listed during this debate and they are grim. Approximately three million Australians smoke every day, and smoking is the leading cause of preventable death in Australia. Not only does smoking kill 15,000 Australians every year; it also costs the economy over $31 billion. Smoking leaves a horrendous trail of destruction through our lives, at a horrible cost to our society and our economy. I believe it is up to us to take action; we cannot afford not to. This bill is another step forward in tackling this issue.

This bill will make it an offence to advertise tobacco products on the internet or any other form of electronic media unless compliant with state or territory legislation or Commonwealth regulations. As part of the Gillard government’s ambitious health reforms, we are taking strong action through a multifaceted and comprehensive plan to reduce smoking. All governments have committed through COAG to reduce the daily smoking rate among adults to 10 per cent by 2018 and to halve the daily smoking rate among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. This year the government offered smokers support to quit by subsidising nicotine patches and the antismoking drug varenicline through the PBS for the first time. We already have a history of coordinated federal and state plans to reduce smoking. Through historic bans on smoking in the workplace and public spaces and removing advertising, we are making it harder for Australians, and particularly for our children, to fall into the trap of taking up smoking.
This bill is just the next step in the government’s antismoking plan. It includes a 25 per cent excise increase, announced in 2010; a record investment in antismoking social marketing campaigns; and legislation to mandate plain packaging of tobacco products. This government is offering the community the best support it can to help kick the habit. By helping to communicate the dangers of smoking and by offering support through subsidised medication, we are encouraging and supporting Australians to quit for good. This is the responsible thing to do. This is the right thing to do.

Why do we need this bill? In 1992, the Keating government introduced the Tobacco Advertising Prohibition act—the TAP Act—to comprehensively ban tobacco advertising in this country. Since the passage of the act, however, we have of course seen an explosion in the use of the internet and mobile phones. The application of the act to internet and mobile phone advertising of tobacco products is currently not clear. The use of the internet and mobile phones as advertising media has become increasingly widespread. In using these technologies, our young people are increasingly exposed to tobacco advertising. There is not much point in regulating other forms of advertising while allowing the internet and mobile phones to be a free for all where tobacco can be promoted without regulation. This lack of arbitration also undermines the effectiveness of the rest of the TAP Act. It is an unregulated loophole that we must close.

It is important in considering this bill to also consider the ever-increasing number of young people accessing the internet and the number of young people smoking. The Australian Bureau of Statistics report titled Tobacco smoking in Australia: a snapshot, 2004-05 noted:

People who start smoking when they are young are more likely to smoke heavily, to become more dependent on nicotine and to be at increased risk of smoking-related illness or death.

I note the youth trends in the explanatory memorandum of the nationally conducted study, led by the Cancer Council of Victoria’s Centre for Behavioural Research in Cancer, called Smoking behaviours of Australian secondary students in 2005. This study found that in 2005 just over 140,000 Australian school students aged between 12 and 17 were then current smokers. This equates to around seven per cent of 12- to 15-year-olds and 17 per cent of 16- to 17-year-olds. With the use of the internet in the everyday lives of our youth, we need to ensure that we provide the same amount of protection from tobacco advertising through this medium as we provide from tobacco advertising through other media.

Research shows us that messages and images promoting the use of tobacco products can normalise tobacco use, increase the uptake of smoking by our young people and act as a general disincentive to quit. There is a good reason that you do not see movie stars promoting smoking as glamorous and cool anymore. Since the introduction of the 1992 TAP Act, most forms of tobacco advertising have been banned. This bill will tighten up the gaps that threaten public health by limiting the broadcasting and publication of messages and images that promote the use of tobacco products via electronic channels.

This bill will clarify the grey areas that currently exist in the act by bringing the advertising of tobacco products on the internet and other electronic media into line with restrictions already in place on other media. It is currently not clear if the advertising of tobacco products on the internet is permitted. The intended effect of the draft bill is to clarify the TAP Act by making it a specific offence to advertise or promote tobacco products on the internet and all other electronic media and future technologies unless com-
pliant with state or territory legislation or Common-wealth regulations. It will also enable the making of regulations on internet tobacco advertising prescribing the size, content, format and location of tobacco advertisements as well as the inclusion of health warnings, warnings about age restrictions on the sale of tobacco products, information about any fees, taxes and charges payable in relation to tobacco products and age-restricted access systems for access to tobacco advertisements. It is important to note that this bill brings penalties into line with other forms of advertising and promotion. The penalties for offences contravening tobacco advertising regulations will be set at a maximum of 120 penalty units, which currently equates to $13,200. This bill is a comprehensive plan to regulate tobacco advertising, and I call on the opposition to support it.

The Labor Party does not accept political donations from tobacco companies anymore. The Labor Party made the ethical decision to walk away from tobacco company donations. This is why the big tobacco companies are placing all their bets on the Liberal Party’s preventing these changes to laws affecting the promotion of tobacco products; unfortunately, the Liberal Party does not see any difficulty in accepting money from the tobacco industry. We saw during the last election campaign the massive $5 million advertising blitz from big tobacco targeting the Labor Party. Why did tobacco run this campaign? Simple—the bill will contribute to a reduction in the uptake of smoking. That is why Labor seeks to introduce this legislation, and I hope the opposition will support it as well.

The Gillard government wants to encourage smokers to choose a healthy and long life over sickness, disease and premature death. Last year the Labor government increased the tobacco excise duty by 25 per cent. This measure alone is expected to reduce the number of Australians smoking by approximately 87,000. Increasing the price of tobacco products is an effective incentive to help smokers quit. From July 2012, when a smoker walks into a store to buy a packet of cigarettes, they will see a range of plain coloured packets with no logos or colours except the confronting and very real health warnings. All these measures make it harder for tobacco companies to sell their products and remind every Australian that each cigarette brings you closer to a premature death.

When we consider the cost to our economy, estimated at over $31 billion every year, we are of course motivated not only by consolidating a uniform range of regulatory arrangements but also by the health costs relating to the consumption of tobacco. These costs not only are an incredibly expensive drain on the health sector and taxpayers but also exact a terrible social cost on families afflicted by smoking related disease and what can be very long and painful periods of illness. This government is committed to reducing the debilitating effects of tobacco on Australians. The federal Labor government is committed to preventive health. It was this Labor government that sought to establish a preventive health agency to ensure a nationally coordinated approach to national health strategies and research. It was this Labor government that introduced the alcopops tax to reduce the amount of binge drinking amongst younger people, particularly young females. It is this Labor government that has invested more funds in preventive health over its first term in government than the previous government did in 11 years.

In comparison, the opposition has blocked many health reform bills put before both the current parliament and the last parliament, including legislation to tackle preventive health such as the Australian National Preventive Health Agency Bill 2010. The To-
bacco Advertising Prohibition Amendment Bill 2010 will address a glaring ambiguity in the Tobacco Advertising Prohibition Act. It has the support of all Australian governments. It will not place a financial burden on the Australian government above any current costs of the act and will in fact both reduce contributions from taxpayers to the economy and increase the quality of life of the of Australians through health benefits—and, let us not forget, it will save lives. Smoking remains one of the leading causes of preventable death and disease among Australians, and we owe it to them to take the strongest action we can both to help support smokers make a decision to quit for good and to stop new smokers taking up the habit. I commend this bill to the house.

Ms ROXON (Gellibrand—Minister for Health and Ageing) (8.44 pm)—in reply—I thank the member for Petrie for her contribution. The Tobacco Advertising Prohibition Amendment Bill 2010 is obviously very important for the government and I know that she has been really interested and involved in a lot of health initiatives, not only the super-clinic in her electorate but a whole range of others. This is one where we believe that the passage is a pretty important step towards reducing the national smoking rate, reaching our 10 per cent target for the population by 2018 and, hopefully, halving the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander smoking rate, which, of course, is much higher than that of the general population.

Since the passage of the Tobacco Advertising Prohibition Act 1992, the use of the internet and other electronic means as advertising mediums has become increasingly widespread, as the member for Petrie noted. Unregulated internet advertising undermines the effectiveness of the Tobacco Advertising Prohibition Act. It can weaken tobacco controls by allowing sales to minors, promoting smoking and permitting the purchase of cigarettes without graphic health warnings.

These amendments make it a specific offence to advertise or promote tobacco products on the internet and all other electronic media and future technologies unless compliant with state and territory legislation or Commonwealth regulations. They will also enable the making of regulations in relation to internet tobacco advertising to be similar to those placed on over-the-counter sales, and online sales will no longer be different.

I welcome the member for Boothby’s comment:

The coalition are supporting the passage of this legislation because we recognise there is more to be done in the area of preventative health and there is still more to be done in the area of tobacco control.

The member for Boothby is correct in stating that there is still more to be done, and I might encourage him to start by looking in his own backyard. It would be a good start to get the Liberal Party to break its own expensive habit with big tobacco. We know that in 2009-10 the Liberal Party accepted over $290,000 from donations from big tobacco. In 2008-09 that figure was $300,000. This is a big chunk of money which is going to the Liberal Party and we are concerned this may have an impact.

I am pleased that the Liberal Party have indicated they will support this piece of legislation. So far they have not indicated whether they will support our plain-packaging legislation, which will be introduced later this year. We do not want to be in a position where the allegation can be made that that is a case of opposition for hire. We make the very simple point that many thousands of Australians still die every year as a result of smoking and all of us can do more to make sure this number is reduced. Even members of their own political party find this
situation embarrassing. I note that the Premier of Western Australia supports the Labor position of not accepting donations from big tobacco.

Our very strong view is that the government must take action in this area. That is what this bill does. We believe the opposition’s position on tobacco control lacks legitimacy and is an embarrassment to them. We remain determined and committed to implementing comprehensive strategies to further reduce smoking rates in Australia. This piece of legislation is part of our broader reforms that put Australia at the forefront of international action on tobacco control and builds on our commitment to introduce world-first legislation to mandate plain packaging of tobacco products by 1 July 2012, our 25 per cent increase in tobacco excise from 29 April last year and our record investment of $85 million in anti-tobacco social marketing campaigns, including the national campaign which was launched at the end of January this year, showing that every cigarette you smoke brings you closer to cancer. We have made access to nicotine patches available through the PBS and invested $5 million of extra support into Quitline services.

The choice here could not be starker. The choice could not be easier. This is an important additional piece of protection for Australians, at last bringing the internet and new technologies under the same remit as other forms of media. I commend this bill to the House and urge all members to support it.

Question agreed to.
Bill read a third time.

COMBATING THE FINANCING OF PEOPLE SMUGGLING AND OTHER MEASURES BILL 2011

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

Ordered that this bill be considered immediately.
Bill agreed to.

Third Reading

Dr MIKE KELLY (Eden-Monaro—Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry) (8.50 pm)—by leave—I move:
That this bill be now read a third time.
Question agreed to.
Bill read a third time.

TAX LAWS AMENDMENT (TEMPORARY FLOOD AND CYCLONE RECONSTRUCTION LEVY) BILL 2011

INCOME TAX RATES AMENDMENT (TEMPORARY FLOOD AND CYCLONE RECONSTRUCTION LEVY) BILL 2011

FAMILY ASSISTANCE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (CHILD CARE REBATE) BILL 2011

Returned from the Senate
Message received from the Senate returning the bills without amendment or request.

ELECTORAL AND REFERENDUM AMENDMENT (PROVISIONAL VOTING) BILL 2011

Second Reading
Debate resumed from 2 March, on motion by Mr Gray:
That this bill be now read a second time.

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP (Mackellar) (8.51 pm)—I rise to speak to the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Provisional Voting) Bill 2011. I do so in the knowledge that in 2006 the then government introduced amendments to ensure that a loophole that was identified as existing in the rules surrounding provisional voting was closed. We realised that the integrity of the electoral roll was at risk because the system was vulnerable to potential abuse by people who enrolled in marginal electorates, despite not living in them, and voted to influence a close result. Accordingly, we introduced legislation, which was passed, which required anyone wishing to make a provisional vote to provide evidence of identity, either at the time of voting or within seven days of the voting day, to show that the vote would be valid.

There are four basic reasons why one would cast a provisional vote. The first is that you are found not to be on the roll, the second is that somebody has already voted in your name, the third is that the electoral officer does not like the look of you, and the fourth is that you are on the confidential or secret roll because you are a person who for personal security reasons does not wish to be on a published roll. On 21 February 2011 the Electoral Commission presented a submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters. That submission contains a section dealing with the integrity of the electoral roll. It says:

3.7.1 Maintaining the integrity of the electoral roll is a key component of the AEC’s work. The AEC defines roll integrity as consisting of the following elements:

- **Entitlement** – the person meets all legislative qualifications for enrolment on the electoral roll, information provided by the individual is tested to detect and prevent enrolment fraud;
- **Accuracy** – the person is enrolled for the address at which they are entitled;
- **Completeness** – all persons who are entitled to enrolment are enrolled;
- **Processing Correctness** – information provided by persons and organisations is entered correctly and completely on the roll, addresses are correctly and completely described, classified and aligned; and
- **Security** – the electoral roll is protected from unauthorised access and tampering.

3.7.2 As part of standard AEC processing procedures, all enrolment applications are checked to determine if they have been completed in accordance with legislative requirements and that information on the enrolment form is accurate.

The number of people casting provisional votes has steadily grown over the years. In 1993, 112,344 provisional votes were taken, and virtually 60 per cent of those were rejected. In 2004, the year before the 2006 amendments were made, 180,878 provisional votes were taken, of which 50 per cent were rejected. In 2007, after the amendments were made to further protect the integrity of the roll, 167,682 provisional votes were taken and 85.56 per cent were rejected. In 2010, 203,488 provisional votes were taken, of which 81.65 per cent were rejected.

The interesting things are as follows. In 2007, between 75 and 80 per cent of people who wanted to cast a provisional vote presented with evidence of identity. In 2010, this number rose, and 96 per cent of those people presented evidence of identity. In that year, of the 81 per cent of votes that were rejected, only 28,000 were rejected on the basis of evidence of identity not having been provided. The other reasons that votes are rejected are entirely different than not presenting evidence of identity.

The Special Minister of State in his second reading speech said that the reason he wanted to get rid of the evidence of identity requirement was that the 2006 amendments
treated provisional votes as different from other classes of declaration votes. They include postal votes, prepoll votes and absent votes as well as provisional votes. That argument does not hold water because the government itself, in the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Pre-poll voting and other Measures) Bill 2010, treated prepoll declaration votes differently by saying that they no longer had to be placed in an envelope with a signature and be subject to preliminary scrutiny—they would be put straight into the count. So already the government has said that there is no need to have all classes of declaration votes treated in exactly the same manner. It was sensible to say that prepoll votes should be counted on the night and therefore not be subjected to preliminary scrutiny, as this class of vote previously was. We sometimes did not see that result for an inordinately long time, so this was sensible—just as our 2006 amendments to require people who wanted to make provisional votes to present with evidence of identity were sensible. The efficacy of these provisions resulted in the situation where, in 2010, 96 per cent of people who wanted to cast a provisional vote presented with evidence of identity—80 per cent on election day itself and a further 16 per cent in the allowable time after the casting of that vote.

The argument put forward by the Special Minister of State indeed does not hold water. It is more likely that there is a perceived advantage for the Labor Party if the integrity of the roll is not protected in the way we think it should be. I cite an article written by the member for Melbourne Ports where he asserts that all 166,000 votes that were rejected in the 2010 poll were rejected because they did not have evidence of identity and really all those people would have had a chance to vote Labor, which would have won four more seats. It is not an argument which can be supported.

On this side of the House we are very concerned that the integrity of the roll is always protected. We are concerned to see that amendments or changes that are made to voting procedures are done to enhance the integrity of the roll. I am concerned, for instance, with the proposition that has been put forward that for future federal elections we might go the way of, say, the New South Wales Labor government, which have already changed the enrolment provisions to encompass automatic enrolment whereby people’s details will merely be taken from other agencies such as the Road Transport Authority, school rolls or whatever they decide can be dealt with.

Those people in New South Wales being put on the roll for the election next Saturday will simply have been written to twice to say that they have now been put on the roll and if they have not written back and said ‘No, you can’t put me on the roll’ they are automatically on. How then can you check the validity of someone and their address against their signature when there is no signature because they have been put on automatically? The problem with going to the provisional voting situation is that we have the requirement, if a vote is in question, under these new provisions going back to the old system that the electoral office checks the most up-to-date signature, which is most likely the application for enrolment. There does seem to be support for the government wanting to go this route. Should that happen and these amendments are cast then there will simply be no application for enrolment, which the electoral commission holds and against which any signature on the declaration vote can be compared. Again, it opens up the difficulty that is encompassed in trying to protect the integrity of the roll.

The submissions being put to the JSCEM are starting to come in. I know that there are submissions saying that the original dissent-
ing report of the opposition to the JSCEM report of 2007 should be upheld. In that report it was said that:

According to the Electoral Commission, approximately 75 per cent of provisional voters showed evidence of identity when voting. Of the 33,900 provisional voters who failed to provide such identification on polling day, only one in five subsequently provided proof of identity by the cut-off date—that is, the close of business on the following Friday.

That was the 2007 report and, as I mentioned in my earlier remarks, in 2010 there was a 96 per cent compliance with providing evidence of identity. The rejection of the large number of provisional votes was for reasons other than failing to present evidence of identity. The case being made by the member for Melbourne Ports that this was somehow a rort imposed by the Liberal Party when we had control of the Senate simply is not borne out. In fact, it was introduced with the very best of motives—that is, to protect the integrity of the roll. It remains the position of the opposition that we wish to see the integrity of the roll protected in the very best possible way, and the best way in which that can be done is to maintain a system of having evidence of identity required to be presented by those seeking to make a provisional vote.

Ms SMYTH (La Trobe) (9.06 pm)—I am very glad to participate in this debate on the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Provisional Voting) Bill 2011 because essentially it is a question of the value we place on universal franchise in this country. It is about the value that we place on participation in our democracy of all individuals who are eligible to do so. It is ultimately about confidence in our electoral system. It is about ensuring that we do not seek to make it harder for any individual to participate in our democratic processes, to participate in our elections, and that we do not make it prohibitive or something which ultimately results in individuals being disenfranchised.

As we have heard, a person can be asked to cast a provisional vote in circumstances where their name cannot be located readily on the roll, if the roll shows that the person has already voted, if polling officials have doubts about the identity of the voter, or if the voter is registered as a silent elector and their address does not appear on the roll. The Electoral Act and the referendum act, as they currently stand, require that a person who casts a provisional vote provide evidence of his or her identity by the first Friday following polling day. Under those acts, as they stand, a failure to provide that evidence of identity by that time will mean that the vote of that person does not proceed to preliminary scrutiny and is not counted. This is a curious requirement which was put in place by the Howard government in 2006. It meant that provisional votes would be and have been dealt with in a way which is inconsistent with the way in which other types of declaration votes are handled.

Voters who would otherwise be eligible to have an absentee vote, a postal vote or a pre-poll vote are treated differently if they instead cast a provisional vote. If a voter who is otherwise eligible to vote does not provide evidence of their identity by the prescribed deadline, his or her vote will not be counted. This bill is about ensuring the franchise of voters and their confidence in the system of administration of voting in Australia. It will remove the requirement imposed by the Howard government for provisional voters to provide evidence of identity before their votes are admitted to preliminary scrutiny. If there is doubt about the entitlement of the voter to vote, the signature of that person on the provisional voting envelope will be compared to the signature of the elector on previously lodged enrolment records.
There might be a number of reasons why an elector does not provide evidence of identity by the deadline. There might be certain reasons which relate to their availability following an election date or a referendum date. A further possible explanation may be that an elector might ultimately not be determined to provide evidence of their identity after polling day if the result of an election is perceived by then to be known, so it does not necessarily indicate an attempt by electors to fraudulently vote. That is the first point of distinction between the position of the government and the position put by the member for Mackellar earlier. We are concerned with ensuring franchise and doing our best to ensure universality of franchise, while those opposite are largely concerned with procedural technicalities and their perception of some sort of irregularity with voting processes.

The AEC has indicated that some 200,000 provisional votes were cast at the 2010 general election. Of these, over 28,000 provisional votes were rejected because the voter did not provide evidence of identity by the first Friday following polling day. Further examination by the AEC of those provisional voting envelopes found over 12,000 instances where the name of the voter was ultimately found on the certified list. That is rather an alarming figure in the context of those voters who obviously did not get to cast their vote at first instance. We also know that the acceptance rate of provisional voting went from around 50 per cent in the 2004 election to around 14 per cent in the 2007 election. I take a different view from the member for Mackellar on these figures. I consider this to be particularly concerning in the context of disenfranchisement.

One wonders why the coalition has maintained its opposition to the amendments proposed by this bill. The amendments give consistency to the treatment of provisional, absentee, postal and prepoll means of voting. They are aimed at better ensuring that all eligible Australian voters are able to cast a vote and participate fully in our democracy. So why then is this, which is apparently fairly reasonable, opposed by the coalition? Let us look at the likely identity of many provisional voters. Many of these people will be younger Australians moving house between elections—and we know how attractive the coalition has shown itself to be to young people at the ballot box. The people who the Howard government requirement was most likely to disenfranchise were people who rent or move residence regularly, people who do not have a driver’s licence and, in particular, young people. So one wonders whether it was in fact the intention of the Howard government in its amendments in 2006 to make it more difficult for those categories of person to cast a vote.

Our changes mean that it will not be more difficult to cast a provisional vote than any other type of declaration vote. The Howard government’s tinkering with the Electoral Act in 2006 meant that more people casting provisional votes were disenfranchised than ever before, and we have to question who the people were who were more likely to be disenfranchised. The amendments proposed to this bill address the particularly urgent matter of otherwise valid votes being excluded from further scrutiny. The bill will implement the recommendations of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters report into the conduct of the 2007 federal election, and we know that this measure was also one of this government’s 2007 election commitments. We also know that the amendments proposed in this bill were supported by the AEC, which, in its submission to the inquiry of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters into the 2010 federal election and related matters, recommended that the requirement for production of evidence of
identity by provisional voters should be repealed. In the context of that support, and bearing in mind the categories of people who are most likely to be and who have been detrimentally affected by the existing regime, I certainly commend the bill to the House and am pleased to be able to lend my voice to support on this significant issue.

Mr DANBY (Melbourne Ports) (9.13 pm)—My interest in democracy and democratic practices in Australia long predated my role as a parliamentarian, which I have had since 1998. Unfortunately I am not involved with the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters anymore, but no-one has argued longer, harder and in more detail on this issue than I have about these malevolent changes to the Commonwealth Electoral Act made by the previous Liberal government in 2006. The 2006 legislation was brought in by the then Liberal government with the worst possible intentions, as the previous speaker, the member for La Trobe, suggested. At the time, the purported reasons for the change were that the legislation was designed to improve the integrity of the electoral roll. However, the actual reason for the 2006 changes was exactly the opposite. Simply put, the real intent of the 2006 changes was that they were expected to assist the Liberal Party in the 2007 and subsequent elections.

The particular change that this legislation will repeal is the onerous requirement whereby one group of declaration voters—those casting a provisional vote—must provide some form of identification for their vote to count, usually photo identification. Provisional votes are sought when a voter arrives at a polling booth on election day and gives their name to the official but finds that they are not on the roll. The AEC provisionally issues a vote, the voter fills it out and it is put in an envelope with their name and address on it. Under Liberal government changes brought in in 2006, the voter must provide valid ID, like a drivers licence, on the spot or present to an AEC office with a valid ID within a week. Later in the week the Australian Electoral Commission checks the voter’s details and agrees that they should, indeed, be on the roll. Their ballot paper is then counted if their vote is considered valid under this existing system.

Previously, what was the system under which the Liberal Party won the 1996, 1998, 2001 and 2004 elections? It was the quite logical system of matching signatures. If an Australian voter turned up at a polling booth and signed the outside of his envelope to say that he was that person, then the highly responsible officials of the Electoral Commission took this back to the AEC, matched it with the voter’s existing signature and they were then included on the roll. The ethos of the Australian Electoral Commission and Australian democracy ought to be to include as many valid votes as possible—not to find excuses to exclude them because they belong to inconvenient categories of people who might vote for a different political party.

Of course, this whole issue of provisional voting and the so-called integrity of the roll is completely the wrong issue. The real issue for Australian democracy ought to be the fact that there are 2.5 million Australians who did not cast a vote at the last election. That is the scandal of the electoral system at the moment, not the fact that the so-called integrity of the roll is invalid in any way. At the 2007 election 27,544 citizens voted provisionally but had their votes rejected because of the new requirements. Similarly, at the extremely closely fought election of 2010, 28,011 citizens voted but were later disqualified because of the Liberal changes. Further, the AEC has noted that the admission rate for Senate provisional votes fell from 62.23 per cent in 2004 to 25 per cent in 2007, concluding that if the 2004 admission rate had pre-
vailed in 2007 an additional 62,000 Australians would have been counted in the Senate voting. Sixty-two thousand of our fellow citizens were excluded from voting by these bodgie changes, which we promised to get rid of at both elections. I am very proud to be associated with this legislation, to re-enfranchise my fellow Australians.

Why do people not present photo ID when they vote, you might ask. Mostly, because they do not have a drivers licence. ‘Okay,’ you might ask, ‘but provisional voters still have the opportunity to provide the AEC with their ID within a week after the election. Why don’t they do that?’ Just think of how people think—ordinary Australian citizens who are not as involved in politics as we are in this House, on both sides. The election result is already decided. Who would take time off from work, go and find an AEC office and fill out a form to cast a vote that no-one would pay any attention to? People are busy working, and how many know where their Australian Electoral Commission office is? I bet you the Deputy Speaker’s Electoral Commission office is miles and miles from many of his voters. My inner city electorate is forced to share an office with the electorate of Melbourne, and it takes you an hour to drive around Casselden Place to find an existing parking space. This is another attempt to make things difficult for people that should be made easier. In some regional electorates the AEC and the post office are many hours away, as I said. Not only do they have to prove their identity with a drivers licence or other prescribed document, there are other requirements for ID, including proving the validity of their signatures. Basically, it is a lot of paperwork that people are not willing to bother with after an election.

These Liberal changes to the provisional voting method resulted in many voters being disqualified who were admitted in the past. You might say that votes being disqualified would reflect the wider voting pattern across the nation, so that in the big scheme of things the disqualification of 30,000 votes or so really would not affect the overall result. This is not so. The types of people who make provisional votes fit into a particular demographic type, very capably outlined by the member for La Trobe in her speech. Of course, this is why the legislation was introduced, against all of the advice from the Australian Electoral Commission and the psycological experts, including Professor Colin Hughes and Malcolm Mackerras—a person who the Liberal Party often quotes as a great electoral expert. All of these people testified and argued against this; it was quite clear that this was being done for political purposes. The average number of provisional votes in the 10 most Indigenous seats in this country is 1.76 per cent of the total vote, and the national average is 1.23; in other words, it is half a per cent higher in areas with large Indigenous populations.

Without a licence, provisional voters need to provide a passport or a birth certificate in order to vote. No-one expects to have to present their birth certificate when they vote. For most Australians there is no need to prove ID at a polling booth at all. It will not surprise anyone with passing knowledge of Australian politics if I point out that the particular demographics described vote largely for Labor, Greens or left-of-centre parties. I argue that this is the reason that the previous government made these terrible changes to provisional voting.

In my view, if the number of provisional votes in the 2004 election were compared to the number in the 2007 election, enough Labor voters were disenfranchised to allow the coalition to win at least four seats—Bowman, Dickson, McEwen and Swan—that otherwise would have been won by the previous Labor government in 2007. It did
not affect the election result, fortunately, because Labor won by a sufficiently large margin for those four seats not to be germane to the result. But that was not the plan of the people who put this nefarious legislation into practice.

Professor Brian Costar of Swinburne University of Technology, one of Australia’s most respected political scientists, told the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters:

I think a case can be made that it changed the result … We know that provisional voters, because of their choice, are not a mirror image of the electorate as a whole. They tend to be more Labor and Green than they are Liberal, National, or anything else.

I expect that the rejection of the 28,000 voters in the 2010 election may have affected the results in a number of electorates as well. In light of the result of the 2010 election, every Australian now knows that the fate of one electorate can decide the fate of a government. So, if the 2007 result of changing the result because of these provisional voting changes had been effected at the 2010 election, these malevolent, nefarious, bodgie changes which are now being invalidated by this legislation would have won the Liberal National Party office on these antidemocratic manoeuvrings.

Australia, despite being a young country, is in fact an old and strong democracy, especially when we look at it in a global context. Even before Federation Australia was known for its progressive electoral policies, including, as the member for Mackellar knows, giving women the right to vote before many other countries—in fact, leading the world in that—and introducing the secret ballot, which for many years was known throughout the world as the Australian ballot because it was not done in other countries. However, the Liberals’ 2006 changes to the provisional voting procedures are an example of regressive rather than progressive electoral policy. This bill will restore the Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918 to its pre-2006 statutes with the law, custom and practice established over almost a century. I would have thought that was the conservative practice with which the member for Mackellar would identify instead of regressive changes designed to affect the result at two elections. The voter’s signature provided on the declaration envelope in which the provisional votes are contained would be compared with the signature of the elector which exists in its original or subsequent enrolment forms which were held by the AEC. It was good enough for the Liberal Party in 1996. It was good enough for the Liberal Party in 1998. It was good enough for the Liberal Party in 2001. It was good enough—

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop interjecting—

Mr DANBY—Are you arguing, Member for Mackellar, that all of those elections were somehow fraudulent? Are you saying that they were not won on a proper basis? We, of course, conceded the fact that they were won by your side of politics. And the system of comparing signatures, which we had had for nearly a century, was the system at the time. Come on. We know why these changes were made in 2006. It is blindingly obvious to everyone now.

Perhaps the most powerful endorsement of this legislation comes from the key institution responsible for safeguarding the integrity of our elections: the Australian Electoral Commission. In its submissions to the inquiries of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters into the 2007 and 2010 federal elections, the AEC—the neutral body responsible for our electoral legislation—commented that the requirement of evidence of identity for provisional voters should be repealed. A knife-edge federal election and the strong support of Australia’s key election
body—I cannot think of any better reasons for repealing this unjust and politically motivated legislation brought in by the Liberals in 2006.

There are many things that this government is doing in the areas of early closure of the rolls in this area of provisional voting. They are completely the wrong issues. They are the issues that were focused on by the conservatives in order to divert from the fact that in a compulsory voting system we have 2.5 million Australians who for a variety of reasons did not participate in the last Australian election. This is a pattern that has been obvious for a long period of time. The Australian Electoral Commission, working neutrally, will do as much as it can if it is given the powers by this parliament to enrol as many people as possible. Surely this is the ethos that should inform all democrats in this parliament. As many Australians should be empowered to vote as possible, and getting people off the roll is exactly the wrong attitude. Disenfranchising Australians is the wrong attitude, and this is what we are addressing with this legislation. I am very proud to be associated with this bill.

Mr FLETCHER (Bradfield) (9.27 pm)—When you go into a bank to transact, you produce an identification document. When you check in for a flight, you produce an identification document. In so many other situations in modern life, you are asked—and you do so without complaint—to produce an identification document. When you go into a bar or a club, at least until you reach the advanced age which characterises most of us in this place, you are frequently asked for an identification document and you produce it. When you go into a video store, you are often required to produce an identification document. None of these requirements are considered to be unduly onerous. None of these are considered to be unreasonable. None of these are considered to be some kind of outrageous imposition on the civil liberties on the persons from whom those identification documents are requested. Instead they are understood to be part of the normal, sensible, efficient operation of a modern society. Yet for some reason the Labor Party is remarkably squeamish about the requirement that, in certain circumstances, if you wish to cast a provisional vote you are required, under the law as it presently stands until such time as the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Provisional Voting) Bill 2011 is passed, to produce documents to verify your identity.

I wish to make three brief points. We must take every necessary step to protect the integrity of our voting system in this country. That is the first point I wish to make. The second point is that the costs of requiring identification from those seeking to cast a provisional vote are modest. The benefits of the system are significant. Third, it is with some regret that I must also add that there are good reasons to doubt Labor’s motives for proposing the changes inherent in the bill before the parliament this evening.

Let me turn first to the proposition that we must take all reasonable steps to protect the integrity of our electoral system. All of us in this place are united by our pride—

Debate interrupted.

ADJOURNMENT

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott)—Order! It being 9.30 pm, I propose the question:

That the House do now adjourn.

North Africa

Middle East

Mr FRYDENBERG (Kooyong) (9.30 pm)—I rise today to speak about the turmoil enveloping the greater area of North Africa and the Middle East and the fears I hold for the future of peace and stability in the region.
It was former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger who once said, ‘Each success only buys an admission ticket to a more difficult problem.’ It is an adage which could equally apply to the coalition’s current bombing campaign over Libya. In accordance with UN resolution 1973, there was never any doubt that the numerical and technical superiority of the British, French and American military would quickly establish an effective no-fly zone, but with the resolution authorising member states to ‘take all necessary measures to protect civilians and civilian populated areas’ but ruling out ‘a foreign occupation force of any form’ the question remains: what happens next? What happens when Colonel Gaddafi, a tyrannical leader with more than 40 years experience in the dark arts of maintaining his brutal leadership, seeks to carry out his threats to cleanse Libya of his enemies, house by house?

The lessons of the no-fly zones over Bosnia and Iraq are instructive. The UN Security Council established a no-fly zone in October 1992 but it was not enough to stop the Srebrenica massacre in July 1995 and it was only when the mission significantly expanded, with NATO ground forces in Bosnia, that civilians were fully protected. The no-fly zone over Iraq, in place for 12 years from 1991 to 2003, did help protect the Kurds in the north but only because Saddam knew he would face heavy retribution if he sent his troops to attack the Kurds.

The message is clear: should Gaddafi be allowed to remain in Libya his people will never be safe. Bellicose and brutal, his threats should be believed. His record as a terrorist and his wanton and indiscriminate attacks on civilians have few parallels. History would suggest a no-fly zone in itself may not be enough. With military action underway, America, its allies—the British and the French—and, importantly, the Arab League cannot afford to let a stalemate develop. To do so will not only abandon the Libyan people but undermine the credibility of those in the international community calling for action. What will the next dictator think when he is pushed into a corner—that, if he momentarily pulls back, he will be able to remain in office? Such an outcome would create a dangerous precedent that in time would embolden others.

Minister for Foreign Affairs, your advocacy for a no-fly zone has been loud enough for all to hear, particularly by the Prime Minister, but please tell us what the next stage is of your very public campaign. Why have you dodged the question about regime change? Do you agree with the Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Mullen, who said Gaddafi’s survival is certainly potentially one outcome? Or was British Defence Secretary, Liam Fox, closer to the mark when he said the Libyan leader is a legitimate target?

The Minister for Foreign Affairs cannot have it both ways. He cannot ring every foreign leader who will listen to modestly offer his expert advice but not provide a straight answer on the key question of whether the international community will accept an outcome that sees Colonel Gaddafi stay in place. The truth is that, while Colonel Gaddafi remains in control, the civilians will not be safe. Indeed, it is this danger of mission creep that those on the Security Council who abstained from the vote—China, Russia, Germany, India and Brazil—all feared. Fragile support from the Arab League is also at stake.

This is no fly-in, fly-out mission. Gaddafi has made it clear he is up for the fight. It is this reality that our foreign minister must now confront. He was bold enough to advocate for international military action on behalf of others; now it is time he told us how it ends.
Carbon Pricing

Dr LEIGH (Fraser) (9.35 pm)—Tonight I rise to speak about the Liberal Party’s backflip on using market mechanisms to deal with dangerous climate change. We have heard in parliament today quotes from the honours thesis of the member for Flinders, Greg Hunt—a work titled ‘A Tax to Make the Polluter Pay’. We have heard in the media from the member for Wentworth, Malcolm Turnbull, who articulately argued that the most cost-effective way of reducing Australia’s greenhouse gas emissions is through a market based mechanism. The Liberal Party in their 2007 election policy document informed us:

Climate change means we must undergo a fundamental transformation to a low-carbon economic future.

A re-elected coalition government will establish an emissions trading system, the most comprehensive in the world, to enable the market to determine the most efficient means of lowering greenhouse gas emissions.

These views were expressed by Liberal Party parliamentarians as recently as 16 months ago. Senator Alan Eggleston on 30 November 2009 said:

One way of avoiding the volatility of an emissions trading scheme would be to have a carbon tax. A carbon tax provides a very steady and known price for carbon, if you like, which is only varied by varying the tax. That tax can be set at a level that allows renewable energy systems to be competitive.

Senator Sue Boyce said on 30 November 2009:

My own background is as a manufacturer. In that sphere, I know the benefits of early adoption. I would just like to point out to the Senate that it was the Shergold task force, commissioned by the Howard government, who said, long before we got to this place, that Australia should not wait until a genuinely global agreement has been negotiated, because there are benefits which outweigh the costs in early adoption by Australia of an appropriate emissions constraint.

Senator Judith Troeth said on 30 November 2009:

By having a price on carbon, people can decide whether they really want to use these carbon-intensive products. It is an effort to move people away from carbon towards other alternatives, and the most effective and efficient way to do this is through a price signal.

The member for Dunkley, Bruce Billson, claimed credit for the last market based mechanism, saying on 29 October 2009:

It was actually the coalition that instigated work on the emissions trading scheme. In fact, I have in my hand a report that I helped author back in 1998 which talks about regulatory arrangements for trading in greenhouse gas emissions—1998!

The member for Mayo, Jamie Briggs, said on 3 June 2009:

I believe an emissions trading scheme is one of the policy levers that can be used to change the energy mix in Australia. An ETS will be, by definition, a price on carbon.

The member for Cook, Scott Morrison, said on 3 June 2009:

There are a suite of tools we need to embrace to reduce emissions. I believe an emissions trading scheme is one of those tools in one form or another. Placing a price on carbon, as the Leader of the Opposition has said, is inevitable.

The member for Paterson, Bob Baldwin, said on 3 June 2009:

I would like to make it clear: the coalition will support an emissions trading scheme …

We know the Liberal Party used to stand up for the market. Former Prime Minister John Howard told Tony Jones on 5 February 2007:

That doesn’t sound very much to me like a market mechanism, when you compel somebody to apply a particular technology. It is far better, if you want to keep faith with the market approach, to develop a carbon pricing or carbon trading system …
The member for North Sydney, Joe Hockey, was quoted in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 17 April 2010 as saying:

There has been a distortion … There’s an argument that over time we haven’t paid a proper price for water. We haven’t paid a proper price for fossil fuels. We haven’t paid a proper price for land, etc. You would hope you can remove the distortions.

Climate change is real and it is happening not only in the environment but also in the Liberal Party room. A party that once had a proud tradition of supporting markets has now fallen victim of the populism of direct action. As the temperature goes up on the Leader of the Opposition, let us see whether the Liberal Party can again find its faith in markets.

**Wright Electorate: Queensland Floods**

Mr BUCHHOLZ (Wright) (9.39 pm)—I rise to update the House and the nation on the progress of the Lockyer Valley and how my community is dealing with the aftereffects of one of Queensland’s most horrific natural disasters.

It will take many months and potentially years for families to recover from the life-changing floods that inundated the Lockyer Valley on 10 January this year. We still have families, displaced from their homes, who are staying with relatives and friends, and that is starting to become a tough gig for them. We have many families who are waiting for insurance companies that are procrastinating on claims and we have insurance companies which have rejected claims and are squarely in the crosshairs of my fury and will feel the full wrath of my fury as time rolls on. Insurance companies that reject claims are in the forefront of my mind, constantly. Believe me, you have not got off lightly and I have not begun on you yet. I anticipate supporting evidence, in the coming weeks, to support my people with their insurance claims.

With reference to our priorities in the region at the moment, we want to try to get the locals back into their normal routines. That means getting our little service station up and running, getting our little corner store up and running and, most importantly, getting our little pub up and running. The pub is a place where community groups and members would have their meetings of an evening and where the men would come in from the paddocks and have a beer and share their stories of the day’s activities. The winter crops throughout the district are all planted, which brings comfort to our landscape. The paddocks have been sown with cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli and a variety of lettuces. On Anzac Day we will start to plant onions and, of course, beetroot, which is a staple product throughout the area.

The landscape is still scarred from the torrent of water that went through the area. However, it gives me great comfort to report that the wonderful acts of kindness and the overwhelming donations of gifts, household goods and cash are making a difference. Cash donations are many; however, there is considerable unrest in the community about the delays in the funds reaching the ground, where they are most needed, particularly those funds from the Premier’s flood appeal. We are seeing a trend away from funds being donated to the Premier’s flood appeal and a stronger concentration of funds being directed to two local funds. Those two funds are the Lockyer Valley Flood Relief fund and the Grantham Community Flood Fund.

Whilst I am truly humbled by the generosity of Australians and the business sector, I would like to recognise a number of organisations which have shown considerable generosity and given not necessarily the biggest donations but donations that come with a
story. The Heritage Building Society has given half a million dollars. The Reader’s Digest, an international organisation, has given $10,000—they do not get a lot of return out of it but it was a great effort. The story which touches me is the Alpha Isolated Children’s Parents Association. They have an annual fundraiser up in Alpha where 28 cricket teams come for one day of the year. That is their major fundraiser and they donated all the proceeds of that day, their biggest fundraiser for the year, to the appeal. I would like to acknowledge the donation that Tony Abbott made the other day at a fundraiser in Sydney—he auctioned his bike from the Pollie Pedal fundraiser and those funds were well received. There is also the ACT Wine Industry Network, which we will be making an announcement about tomorrow.

To all of you and to all Australians who have donated, thank you, thank you on behalf of my people. However, we still have a long way to go. We have a lot of rebuilding to do and there is a short time to get there. I encourage any community groups conducting fundraisers who wish to assist with the clean-up to contact my office, so we can assist you with advice that will get funds to the people on the ground quicker and to those people on the ground who need them the most.

On a lighter note, the spirits of the community were lifted over the weekend by the anticipated visit of a very special visitor, a visitor who gave us short notice, which we overcame as a community, a visitor who was known to everyone in the district and who needed no introduction. Yes, you guessed it—all the way from overseas and having just landed in Australia the day before, it was none other than Kevin Rudd. I mentioned in my condolence speech the bipartisan support that the region experienced and I would like to thank Kevin for his compassion and the way he interacted with the local people.

### Braddon Electorate

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM (Braddon) (9.44 pm)**—Tonight I would like to discuss a potpourri of projects and events in my electorate of Braddon on the north-west coast of Tasmania, and there is none better than the Building the Education Revolution projects in my region. I would remind you, Mr Speaker, and colleagues that my region has benefited from investment of some $100 million through the Building the Education Revolution for some 63 schools and 95 projects. These projects include new facilities which are available to the community and they have, importantly, enabled us to sustain employment during very, very difficult economic times. Indeed, times are tight and relatively difficult in my region today. We have experienced the closure of a number of paper mills, a carpet factory and a vegetable processing factory.

But we had great news the other day when National Foods—and I am sorry if it has affected other parts of Australia—chose Burnie, in my region, for a major upgrade of something like $120 million. Apart from the skills and the fantastic supply of milk in my region, there is the iconic name that our region has for cheeses. They are also the owners of King Island cheese and an upgrade of $12 million is being provided as well. That is great news for my region, particularly during these difficult times.

More specifically in relation to the BER, last Friday I was honoured to join the Vicar-General for Tasmania, Father Mark Freeman, at St Brendan-Shaw College, a Catholic college, for the opening of the science centre. I was able to reflect on the importance of science in our community and was able to share that with the students at St Brendan-Shaw College, who were also the beneficiaries of a trade training centre. I congratulate the Catholic system; they always seem to have
projects on the shelf and they have greatly benefited from the BER and are very happy to say so throughout the whole country.

I was also at Marist College recently—again towards Burnie—which is another Catholic college. They opened a language and learning centre. It is a fantastic centre dedicated to the name of St Peter Chanel. That college has also been a successful beneficiary of a trades training centre, which they are going to benefit from very soon.

I was also at the Cooee Primary School—Cooee is a great name, along with Penguin, further along the coast. The Cooee Primary School has a new multipurpose hall. They are a fantastic little school with quality education and quality people. Further up the coast at Wynyard, at Table Cape—which you might remember, Mr Speaker, when you have passed through there on a number of occasions—the Table Cape Primary School also got a fantastic new multipurpose hall and new classrooms as well. It has been an amalgamation of primary schools. There have been some fantastic results from the BER, and there are so many more BER projects that I am looking forward to opening—and I know everyone in this parliament is pleased to see these projects in their electorates, although some pretend otherwise.

I have been referred to as many things, but sometimes I am referred to as the ‘lad from Brad’—just as the former member for Bass used to be the ‘lass from Bass’. There is an organisation in my electorate called BRAD, which stands for the Business Regional Analysis Database. It is an initiative by the Braddon Enterprise Centre, who have partnered with the Institute for Regional Development of the University of Tasmania. Essentially, they have set themselves up as a major database collector for small businesses and medium-size businesses for the region. Like many rural and regional areas, they know so little about each other in order to get together to be able to plan for the future. I congratulate that fantastic organisation from BRAD.

Gippsland Electorate: Wild Dogs and Foxes

Mr CHESTER (Gippsland) (9.49 pm)—I rise to highlight an issue of critical concern to farmers in my electorate, that being the horrific social, economic and environmental costs of wild dogs and foxes. I recently attended a Victorian Farmers Federation function in Omeo, where local residents provided first-hand accounts of the damage being caused to stock. Their graphic accounts of dogs emerging from areas of public land to prey on young lambs were disturbing. It was obvious that the stress of encountering the slaughter of stock was playing on the minds of our community.

With lambs fetching in excess of $200 per head, the economic toll is also considerable. A recent report into the cost of wild dog attacks put the economic impact at $18 million per year in Victoria alone, but with the increased lamb prices there is no doubt the true cost will be much higher in subsequent years. It is also virtually impossible to calculate the opportunity cost for landholders who have stopped stocking their properties with sheep and lambs because of the impact of the wild dogs.

The tone of the VFF meeting in Omeo was one of barely concealed anger and frustration. This has been a long-running issue. Consider this report in the Bairnsdale Advertiser under the heading, ‘We’ve had a gutful’. VFF Omeo branch president and local farmer Simon Turner talked about the failure of the previous Labor government in Victoria. He said:

There has been no action on wild dogs for the past 10 years and the dog population is exploding, and when the department does look as though it is
taking action it is basically only to settle the media and the political situation.

He goes on to say:

… these dogs are eating people’s livelihoods, and as the farms further out throw in the towel and give up because of dogs, the weeds take over and the dogs follow stock closer in to communities. We have seen packs of 10 at one time.

We need authorities to take a focus, use it all—dog-proof fencing, baiting, trapping, shooting and more than anything else, get into educating new trappers.

There are also these comments from Swifts Creek grazier and shearer Scott McColl:

If you have dogs killing sheep, the best way to be sure of getting rid of them is to trap them. It is labour intensive, but if it is done properly it is really effective.

He goes on to say:

I have run out 4½ kilometres of electric fencing to try to stop the dogs. All these added costs and losing sheep is cutting our income in half.

My community has had enough of the abject failure by the former state Labor government and wants action to reduce the impact of wild dog and fox predation on their stock.

To its credit, the new coalition government has committed to the reintroduction of a fox and wild dog bounty, to encourage licensed shooters to help control this vermin. There is also a willingness to undertake aerial baiting, but I believe the biggest improvement is going to come through improved practices on the ground involving the Department of Primary Industry wild dog controllers and local residents. It will take a partnership approach and a willingness from the new state government to allow more flexible working arrangements and to allocate more resources to professional trapping and shooting.

I agree with Simon Turner: we need to use all the tools at our disposal. As I have said before in this place, we need to adopt a national approach and get serious about reducing the impact of these feral species across state borders. I know from experience that the member for Eden-Monaro, across the border, well understands the impact of the predation of wild dogs on stock in his electorate. There is no question that the dogs do not respect state borders, and it is important that we have a national approach to controlling the enormous impact that these animals are having on both domestic stock and our native wildlife.

In addition to the economic impact on our farming communities, wild dogs and foxes are feasting on native wildlife. It continues to disappoint me that the city based Greens and the Labor Party talk a lot about the environment but they really have been missing in action when the practical work has to be done to protect our native species. As part of integrated pest animal management, commercial harvesting can be part of the solution—and putting a price on the head of wild dogs and foxes is a form of commercial harvesting. So I congratulate the Victorian state government in that regard.

I would urge the federal government to take a close look at the Victorian experience and make a financial contribution to a similar bounty in support of other states that may introduce a scheme as part of a more national approach to controlling these pest species. Farmers and the natural environment would benefit from a national commitment to practical and direct action—not more reports and empty promises. As I have said in this House previously, these economic costs can be measured—$18 million per year to Victoria—but the environmental impacts of wild dogs and foxes feasting on our small native species are very difficult to measure. But there is no question that they are having a dramatic impact on the native fauna.
The big issue for us, I believe, is the cost to the human capital in communities like East Gippsland. The social impacts are the ones that concern me most in terms of East Gippsland and the north-east of Victoria. I am concerned about the impact on mental health and the stress that this is placing on our families. Our landholders have to go out to their paddocks in the morning and do not know what is going to confront them. That is a very real issue and one we all need to be concerned about in this place. It is really beyond the capacity of our farmers to deal with this kind of stress on an almost daily basis when wild dogs are about. (Time expired)

Automotive Industry

Ms RISHWORTH (Kingston) (9.54 pm)—I rise tonight to speak about the future of the Tonsley Park site in my home state of South Australia following the decision by Mitsubishi Motors to cease operations there in 2008. The decision by Mitsubishi to close the engine plant at Lonsdale in 2004 and cease operations at its Tonsley Park site in 2008 was certainly disappointing for the people who worked there and many people in my electorate of Kingston. Following the decision, local workers affected by this decision benefited from an $80 million support package jointly funded by the Commonwealth and state governments. I am very pleased to say that the majority of Tonsley workers have now been retrained or have found new jobs.

It is critical now to look at the long-term future of this site. Both the Southern Economic Development Plan and the labour studies commissioned by the University of Adelaide have identified the lack of available light industrial land as one of the most significant barriers to growth in sectors such as manufacturing in the southern suburbs of Adelaide. So it was fantastic to see the South Australian Labor government purchase this land at the Tonsley site in 2009 with the aim to redevelop it into a mixed-use sustainable technologies precinct. I commend the South Australian government for its commitment of $125 million for the construction of a sustainable industries education centre to be built on this site in collaboration with TAFE SA, the three universities and industry. This centre is expected to provide training to more than 8,000 students in trades such as building construction and plumbing, with a strong focus on sustainable and clean technologies and renewable energy.

We know that a price on carbon will transform our economy and drive new jobs in the clean energy and clean technology sector. As new global markets emerge pursuing ways of living and working which have a minimal effect on the environment and reduced carbon emissions, sustainable manufacturing will become the way of the future. So it is vital that we support sustainable manufacturers to successfully establish themselves in southern Adelaide. It will be good for industry and good for local jobs.

The 61 hectares of light industrial land at this site presents us with a unique and valuable opportunity to create more jobs and expand the regional economy in southern Adelaide by encouraging a vibrant hub of sustainable manufacturing alongside the sustainable education centre. The close proximity between the education hub and the manufacturing hub will promote enormous synergy between the manufacturing sector and the highly skilled workforce being trained in the education centre.

I believe that we all need to work together to support the development of a high-tech, clean and green manufacturing hub at the Tonsley Park site in southern Adelaide. The Tonsley Park site presents us with immense opportunities. We know that this is the direction that the world is going. Despite the op-
position often not wanting to recognise this, the world is transforming to cleaner, greener energy sources. There is a lot of demand around the world for technologies that reduce our demand on carbon. Despite the opposition never acknowledging this and thinking that things just go along as they are, this is the way that our economy will transform into the future. It is very important that we have a skilled workforce ready to be part of this future and that we have manufacturers creating jobs in our local area of southern Adelaide.

As we move forward, it will be critical to ensure that we all work together to make the hub at Tonsley Park a green, clean energy hub that will manufacture sustainable technologies and skill-up our workforce. Clean and sustainable manufacturing is going to be the way of the future. It is important that we recognise this and that we are part of it. The Tonsley site presents us with the perfect opportunity to support the advanced manufacturing sector to establish a presence in southern Adelaide so that we are at the forefront of sustainable manufacturing in a future where the use of clean technologies will be essential.

With this land, now owned by the state government, there are real opportunities to not only establish a world-class training facility in clean technologies but also support the development of a hub of sustainable advanced manufacturing. A clean, green manufacturing hub at Tonsley Park will create new local jobs, bolster our regional economy and mean that we are able to expand into new markets. This is a huge opportunity and I look forward to working with all levels of government to make this a reality. (Time expired)

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**Intercountry Adoption**

**Forde Electorate: Waterford West State School**

**Mr Van Manen** (Forde) (10.00 pm)—Before discussing the achievements of one of the Forde electorate’s public schools, I wish to draw the attention of the House to an important issue. Australia currently recognises the importance of intercountry adoption to family creation and is a party to the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption. However, there are countries not on the list of countries that our nation can adopt from. One such location is the small African country of Burundi.

With an estimated population of almost 8.7 million, Burundi is one of the 10 poorest countries in the world. The children living in this country are privy to a poor legal system, an eight out of 10 chance of living below the poverty line and a lack of access to education. And they are at risk from the proliferation of HIV-AIDS. Nearly 57 per cent of children under the age of five suffer from chronic malnutrition.

The issue of intercountry adoption with Burundi was brought to my attention by constituents Carolyn Bird and her husband Ray Spiteri, a couple in my electorate who spent over five years attempting to adopt their now six-year-old son from Burundi. After fighting the Queensland and federal governments, they are now the only Australian couple to successfully adopt a child from Burundi—because there is no agreement between the countries.

Ms Bird has handed me a petition with 438 signatures of people who call on the Attorney-General to initiate an intercountry adoption program with Burundi to allow Australian parents to adopt Burundian orphans. According to UNICEF, there are over
500,000 of these orphans. I present this petition.

The petition read as follows—
To the Honourable the Speaker and members of the House of Representatives
This petition of the Australian adoption community
Draws to the attention of the House:
The need for the Attorney-General to initiate an intercountry adoption program with Burundi to allow Australian parents to adopt Burundian orphans. According to UNICEF, there are around 500,000 orphans in Burundi, while the National Council for the Fight Against AIDS recently concluded that there are more than 830,000 Burundese orphans living in extreme conditions. Burundi is a signatory to the Hague convention for the protection of children and has been since 1993. Burundi orphans have been successfully adopted in Italy, France, the USA, Canada and Australia.
We therefore ask the House to:
Implement an adoption program with Burundi.
from 438 citizens
Petition received.

Mr VAN MANEN—Along with determined and inspiring residents, the Forde electorate is fortunate to be home to many brilliant and innovative public and private schools. One of our primary schools, Waterford West State School, my old school, has come up with the clever idea of teaching pupils business skills. Year 5 teacher Cassandra Bruce decided to teach her students about business skills early in life, by instructing them to create, market and sell their own line of smoothie drinks. Mrs Bruce wanted to create a project that tied real-life experience with the students’ English, maths and science studies. For the project, the students had to investigate the best way to create healthy yet tasty and cost-effective smoothies.

Mrs Bruce is very proud of her students and has said that they have worked so much harder this term as it is a real-live project. This project has also introduced some friendly competition between two groups to see who can sell the most products and has provided the students with an insight into the realities of business and the importance of an effective marketing campaign. The students also learned the importance of giving to the community by donating a percentage of the profits to the Queensland flood relief appeal.

The year 7 students of teacher Mrs Stokes are learning to make cheese. These students hope their cheese will taste good enough to enter the Brisbane exhibition show competition later this year. They are learning measurement, chemical reactions of different ingredients, where raw products come from and how to be self-sufficient. They are developing confidence in their own abilities.

It is truly inspiring to see children become so excited about business and health. As a small-business owner previously, I find it exceptional that schools would teach their students at such a young age the importance of understanding business skills. I would like to commend the principal, staff, teachers and students of Waterford West State School on their willingness to teach and learn important life skills in a fun and inviting way.

La Trobe Electorate: Autism Spectrum Disorder Secondary School Action Group

Ms SMYTH (La Trobe) (10.04 pm)—
Last Friday I had an opportunity to meet two very determined and dedicated women: Louise Anderson and Cathy Hammond. Each of them has a profoundly autistic son. They met several years ago after Cathy wrote a letter to the local newspaper seeking some assistance and emphasising the need for more appropriate schools for autistic children and young adults in eastern Melbourne.

In 2008, they formed an action group to campaign to have an autism-specific secondary school in the outer-eastern suburbs of
Melbourne. The ASD Secondary School Action Group is an impressive group. Caring for one or more profoundly autistic children together with meeting work and other family commitments means that it is often a tremendous effort for parents of autistic children to take on the additional work of campaigning for a better education for their children, but they certainly do it.

Many people locally have got behind them and continue to support them as they continue in their campaign. Since 2008 they have lobbied and campaigned for an autism school in eastern Melbourne. Following a process of review, the Brumby Labor government committed to the construction of an autism specific primary to year 12 school on the site of the old Ferntree Gully High School on Dorset Road in my electorate. Planning and design was funded and commenced in June 2009. Stage 1 funding of $8 million was provided in the May 2010 budget. Stage 2 funding was committed and was included in Labor’s costings.

It was after this that local state Liberal MPs confirmed that they would match Labor’s promise, and this seeming commitment was confirmed very readily in local newspapers. Ms Anderson and Ms Hammond have presented me with a folder of materials which chronicle in great detail the entirety of their campaign. It includes an impressive collection of statements of support, letters and countless newspaper articles from those who are now holding the purse strings in the Victorian government. It makes very interesting and very telling reading. I gather that the materials which the action group have provided to me are merely a snapshot of their campaign and that there is much more documentation besides this which supports their case and which would reasonably have led them to expect that this was an initiative which had bipartisan support.

The commitment is now very much in doubt following the election of the Baillieu government. Ms Anderson and Ms Hammond have been advised by the Victorian government that the stage 2 build will be part of an ongoing budgetary process. They now have no meaningful time line for the establishment of a full, primary to year 12 autism school. It is particularly hard for Ms Anderson, whose son, Dean, is now reaching an age where he will require secondary education, and his future education is in limbo. The stage 2 building was to have seen the school’s first year 7 enrolments for the 2012 school year, but it appears that now this will not proceed.

Several weeks ago in this place, I called on the Baillieu government to honour the commitment made by Victorian Labor to the establishment of the school. Since then, I understand, the Victorian government has informed Ms Hammond and Ms Anderson that this stage 2 build will be subject to ongoing budgetary processes. Local Liberal MPs who had vocally supported the campaign said that they were committed to the project but could not confirm the extra money needed to complete it. Here is the thing: this government commits to education—it commits funding and it commits in policy terms—and the Victorian Labor government committed similarly. But now we see the time honoured tradition of the Liberal Party tearing funding away when they snatch government.

This is yet another example of ‘whatever-it-takes’ politics. You tell people that you are going to fund their project before the election, fail to include it in your costings—as has been reported in local newspapers—and then fudge responsibility when you get elected. It is the Liberals’ standard operating procedure. I certainly saw an attempted campaign in my own electorate to do the same, where the Liberals conveniently put up fund-
ing commitments which were not included in their subsequent costings at five minutes to midnight before the end of the campaign. It is another example of the many and varied backflips of the Baillieu government in education, in health, in policing—the list goes on—since its very recent election to office.

Mr Tudge interjecting—
Mr Ruddock interjecting—
Ms Smyth—I gather from the interjections of the members opposite, including those of a local federal MP, that there is a bit of interest in this issue. I suspect that they will make their own inquiries, and I really hope that they do. I simply ask those opposite to use whatever means are available to them to encourage the Victorian government to honour its commitment to the completion of stage 2 of the Eastern Autism School within the time frame in which was due for completion under Labor’s proposals. Let us hear less about alpine grazing and more about what your real commitments are to education. I expect there will be more to say on this issue as the campaign continues. I will be supporting the campaign, as will other members on this side.

(Time expired)

Indigenous Education

Mr Tudge (Aston) (10.09 pm)—How can we get education up to scratch in the schools which have the most disadvantaged students and where the teachers have a less-than-average amount of experience? This is the challenge for many schools, especially those in remote Indigenous communities. Noel Pearson and his colleagues in the Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy have produced the most convincing analysis of this problem, and perhaps they are also coming up with the best solution.

In broad terms, Cape York’s analysis and policies are in alignment with the government’s official Closing the Gap strategy, but in their details the education policies are unique in Australia and deserve close attention by this parliament. If they continue with their success, Cape York’s policies should be replicated elsewhere. Their policies are in two parts. First, there are broad community reforms with the objective of ensuring that children turn up to school and are school ready. Measures such as alcohol management, conditional income management and student education trusts have been introduced to meet this end. Second, there are school reforms. I focus my comments this evening on the latter—on school reforms—but acknowledge that both community reform and school reform are necessary to achieve progress in this area.

To achieve uniform and comprehensive school reform, the Cape York Academy struck a unique agreement with the Queensland government. Under this agreement, the academy takes responsibility for policy leadership, for selection of the school principal and for the choice of the teaching method. Meanwhile, the Queensland education department continues to provide the teachers and the school facilities. There is a large group of Indigenous students who are so far behind that you cannot find students comparable to them in other developed countries. There are community schools where previous testing appears to have understated the problem and the entire cohort of students is clustered around the kindergarten to year 1 level.

The academy therefore set out to identify and implement an instruction method that has been proven to be able to bring severely underperforming students to mainstream levels and beyond. They chose direct instruction, a method developed by Siegfried Engelmann, founder of the National Institute for Direct Instruction in the United States. Direct instruction is based on decades of scientific research into children’s learning. The instruction is non-categorical. All disadvantaged
students benefit from the same instruction no matter whether their initial difficulty is social, cultural, linguistic or an individual learning disability. Regular and frequent testing is integral to the method. Students are grouped and taught at their current level, which is determined through weekly testing, and are only moved to a higher level when they master the content at their current level. Students from four or more different nominal year levels can be taught together if necessary.

For the disadvantaged students to catch up, all details of direct instruction teaching are controlled ‘to minimise the chance of students misinterpreting the information being taught and to maximise the reinforcing effect of instruction’. Direct instruction lessons are therefore highly scripted. Some elements of direct instruction lessons—where students answer in uniform in response to a prompt from the teacher—would appear unfamiliar to some people, who would mistake it for rote memorisation. But the controlled nature of the instruction makes the outcome relatively independent of the teacher’s aptitude. Almost any teacher, or indeed non-teacher, who is trained by the specialists to deliver the programs will achieve good results. This is particularly important in remote communities, where it is very difficult to attract and retain high-quality, experienced teachers.

In remote communities we need instruction that is constantly externally monitored, as the direct instruction programs are, and work well even with inexperienced, relatively transient teachers. Direct instruction programs have been running for a year in two communities in Cape York, and a third started this year at the community’s request. So what are the results? One year into the program, there are signs of considerable improvement. Many students in years 4 to 7 who could not read or count a little more than a year ago have already reached year 2 or year 3 levels. These results are incredibly promising and, with the wealth of data being collected, we will in this parliamentary term be able to categorically say whether this represents the breakthrough in Indigenous education that it promises. If it is indeed this kind of breakthrough, then the government should support in this term of parliament the rollout of direct instruction along with community reforms in other parts of Australia where there is entrenched educational disadvantage, be it in remote Indigenous communities or in mainstream communities. (Time expired)

**Morris Iemma Indoor Sports Centre**

**Mr MELHAM** (Banks) (10.14 pm)—Last Saturday, 19 March 2011, I attended the opening of the Morris Iemma Indoor Sports Centre at Riverwood in my electorate. It will come as no surprise that the centre has been named after the former New South Wales Premier, who opened it officially on Saturday. The $9 million centre is located in Mr Iemma’s former electorate of Lakemba. It was jointly funded by the New South Wales government and Canterbury City Council.

The sports centre is an ultramodern resource with two indoor sports courts catering for a variety of sports including indoor soccer, basketball, netball and volleyball. This wonderful facility houses a cafe, internet facilities, physiotherapy and childcare services, and change rooms. There is also a modern gym with cardio, functional and strength training zones with fitness rooms, an indoor spin-cycling room and outdoor training zones. The centre will be operated on behalf of Canterbury council by the YMCA and will deliver programs focused on improving the health and fitness of all age groups.

This new centre is located in Belmore Road opposite the Riverwood Community
Centre. I have previously spoken in this place of the work done at that centre under the guidance of Pauline Gallagher. The community centre hosts many programs arising from the needs of the local community. These include family support, youth services, a neighbourhood aid program, a community care program, housing and community service programs, a Links to Learning program, employment assistance and skills development, a child sexual assault service and a tenants resource centre. The two centres will complement each other in the Riverwood community.

Riverwood is a community that has done it hard over the years, but the community has a huge collective heart and fantastic spirit. I am thrilled that the new sports centre has now been opened to offer more to the community members. It will provide residents with a place to get fit and healthy and enable them to participate in another respect of community life in a safe environment.

The fact that the sports centre has been named after the former New South Wales Premier speaks volumes about the esteem in which Morris is held by the community. He still lives in the community, in a nearby suburb—indeed, he grew up there. Pauline Gallagher was interviewed by Stateline on 29 July 2005 on Morris’s promotion to Premier, and her very astute summing up of the reason for his popularity was:

He listens. He listens to what people say. That’s why everyone likes him.

Many of Morris’s friends from the local community were at the opening. His parents were present, as was his wife, Santina, and his children. It was a wonderful community celebration for a great bloke. My congratulations to Canterbury City Council, the YMCA and the people who made this happen. Most of all, my congratulations to Morris Iemma. He is very worthy of this honour.

In politics you make very few true friends. I am very proud to call Morris Iemma a friend. I was elected to the federal seat of Banks on 24 March 1990. On Thursday, it is 21 years to the day since I was elected. Morris was elected to the local state seat at the state election of 1991. Until his resignation as Premier a couple of years ago, he basically represented a large part of my federal electorate. We got on well. He had a genuine commitment to the local community. It was a disadvantaged community with a high non-English-speaking background, but he provided services for them and he continues to walk amongst them. He gets great pleasure in shopping at Roselands with his family. I thought the best part of his speech on Saturday was when he pointed out that he was born nearby the centre and intended to stay there. He is proud of what he is; the community is proud of him. It was a great honour and a worthy honour to have this centre named after him.

**Berowra Electorate: Multiculturalism**

Mr RUDDOCK (Berowra) (10.20 pm)—I commend the member for Banks on his very gracious speech about his colleague and, in the spirit of the occasion, I will add no further remarks. I take this opportunity to remind the House that, on 23 February 2009, I spoke about the nature of our multicultural society and commended particularly the Australian Chinese Charity Foundation on its work in raising over $343,000, given to the Australian Red Cross, to help those who had suffered as a result of the Victorian bushfires. As I reflected on that occasion, this, I thought, was an admirable demonstration of the commitment that people, regardless of their country of origin, having settled in Australia, would make.

More recently, I had the opportunity to attend another function. This time, it was in the electorate of Mitchell but organised by a
The constituent, Mr Abbas Aly, is a significant businessman in the Norwest Business Park, running a firm called Triforce. He was the inspiration for holding this function, which, along with Hornsby Shire Council, which became the recipient of the funds, served to ensure that the victims of floods in Queensland would benefit. This function was supported by the community of the Imam Hasan Centre at Annangrove, who, having previously supported the Pakistan flood appeal, thought they should do more for those in our own community. One hundred per cent of the funds, over $52,000, went to the Queensland flood appeal via the Hornsby Mayor’s Flood Appeal, which was a very significant occasion.

The Imam Hasan Centre in Annangrove, a suburb in my electorate, was established only fairly recently, on 16 October 2004, coinciding with the first night of Ramadan. Even though it had a fairly rocky initial path, the comments I have received suggest that it has settled well into our community. It participates in the broader community and holds regular interfaith meetings with other religious organisations. The centre was named after the first grandson of the Holy Prophet, the Prophet Muhammad. Imam Hasan was an advocate for peace, and it is said that an example of his character can be seen in his saying:

The most preferable adornment is graceful manners and height of intelligence is associating with people amicably.

The community in my electorate represents the religious diversity of Australia, something of which one can be very proud. In our community there are people of many different religions, cultures and races, who come together and support each other in a very positive way. I commend Abbas Aly and the community of the Imam Hasan mosque for their support for the people of Queensland in the horrific floods that they experienced. I am sure that, as many more people see examples of this sort of commitment to our broader community, it will make it much easier for us to be a harmonious society. In the context of Harmony Day, which we celebrated this week, I am pleased to have been able to bring these matters to the attention of the House.

Newcastle Electorate: Economy

Ms GRIERSON (Newcastle) (10.24 pm)—At the risk of sounding like a broken record, I rise to update the House on the path to prosperity followed by my electorate of Newcastle and the lessons to be drawn from that. The recent reinvention of Newcastle’s image from industrial heartland to international tourist icon should be well known. For many years, the Steel City of Newcastle was synonymous with industry, pollution and coal. But, in recent years, this image has been turned on its head. Newcastle is now just as proudly known for its lifestyle, surf and creativity. This was most recently celebrated when Lonely Planet nominated Newcastle as one of the top nine destinations to visit in the world in 2011.

There is another, parallel, story for which all Novocastrians should feel justly proud, and that is the economic transformation of Newcastle over the last 15 years—from a heavy industrial, one-company town to a leading centre for innovation, productivity and prosperity. This shift was recently chronicled by the Hunter Valley Research Foundation. The foundation’s director of research, Andrew Searles, noted that in the 1970s Newcastle’s economy was dominated by large-scale manufacturing industries employing generally low-skilled workers, but the reforms of the Hawke-Keating government in the eighties and nineties had a profound impact on the region. The most immediate impact was on jobs.
The early days of these reforms caused some pain for the region. At the height of the recession in the mid-1990s, unemployment in the region peaked at just under 17 per cent, with around 41,200 people out of work. These were hard times indeed for Newcastle. But the Hawke-Keating agenda of investment in productivity, infrastructure and skills proved to be of long-lasting benefit to our city. Amidst the economic gloom of those times, the seeds of renewal were sown, with new investment in high-technology areas such as medicine, education and engineering. In the decade to follow, this translated into more diverse, higher skilled jobs for Newcastle workers. According to the foundation, in the mid-1990s the proportion of people in the region employed in the knowledge based sector was roughly equal to the number employed in the goods-producing sector. But, by the end of 2010, knowledge based employment had increased, and the number employed in that sector was around 66 per cent higher than in the goods-producing sector.

This path to prosperity, as I said, was not always smooth. As in the rest of the world, the 2008 GFC threatened to derail confidence in our economic future. With vivid memories of the entrenched unemployment of the 1990s, a return to recession would have been devastating for the working people of Newcastle. Fortunately, the decisive action of the federal Labor government averted this threat and saved countless workers from the despair of unemployment.

As the foundation has noted, Labor’s rapidly deployed stimulus program mitigated the impact of the GFC and helped lay the groundwork for a quick recovery. Consequently, Newcastle is now blessed with enviable rates of economic growth and near full employment. To paraphrase the foundation again, in the last decade around 88,000 new jobs were created in the Hunter region and the number of people out of work fell by 11,000.

Last Wednesday, I visited the latest example of Newcastle’s economic boom, the site of the new WesTrac facility in Tomago. Once complete, this facility will serve as WesTrac’s New South Wales-ACT operational headquarters and will cater for approximately 400 staff and apprentices. The project is another sign of confidence in Newcastle’s future. I congratulate WesTrac and its supporting consortium for their tireless work in bringing this project to fruition.

The lessons from Newcastle’s experience are clear. They are the importance of federal leadership in driving economic reform and delivering prosperity to ordinary Australians, of investing in skills and research to improve productivity and encourage innovation and of continued reform to unlock infrastructure bottlenecks and promote diversification. Fortunately, federal Labor continues to lead the way in advancing national prosperity. The National Ports Strategy, the National Land Freight Strategy and the aviation white paper will help to frame the infrastructure upon which Newcastle’s future prosperity depends. Minister Albanese’s high-speed rail feasibility study is taking us one step closer to a high-speed rail network for the east coast. The ARTC’s coal chain upgrade and the $1.5 billion invested in the Hunter Expressway will make a tangible difference to vital transport links. The NBN’s system of fibre to every door will encourage the continued diversification of Newcastle’s economy. Importantly, our commitment to place a price on carbon will encourage Newcastle’s smart transition to a less carbon-intensive economy.

A vocal minority in my electorate would argue that Labor seats like Newcastle would receive a better deal if they were to become marginal or Independent seats. That is just
not true. Since the election of the federal Labor government in 2007, over $1.656 billion has been spent in my electorate. For me it is clear that only federal Labor governments, past and present, have demonstrated the capacity to deliver the national economic agenda upon which our prosperity in Newcastle will always depend.

The SPEAKER—Order! It being 10.30 pm, the debate is interrupted.

House adjourned at 10.30 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 to amend the Aviation Transport Security Act 2004, and for related purposes.

Mr McClelland to present a Bill for an Act to amend laws relating to intelligence, and for other purposes.

Ms Plibersek to present a Bill for an Act to amend the Child Support (Registration and Collection) Act 1988, and for related purposes.

Mr Brendan O’Connor to present a Bill for an Act to amend the law relating to customs, and for related purposes.

Mr Brendan O’Connor to present a Bill for an Act to amend various Acts relating to the enforcement of the criminal law and proceeds of crime, and for related purposes.

Ms Kate Ellis to present a Bill for an Act to amend the law relating to occupational health, safety, rehabilitation and compensation, and for related purposes.

Ms Kate Ellis to present a Bill for an Act to amend the Social Security (Administration) Act 1999, and for related purposes.

Ms King to present a Bill for an Act to amend the Therapeutic Goods Act 1989, and for related purposes.

Ms Macklin to present a Bill for an Act to amend the law relating to family assistance, child support and social security, and for related 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 21 March 2011, namely: installation of ‘The Prime Ministers’ artwork.

Mr Gray to present a Bill for an Act to amend the Inspector-General of Intelligence and Security Act 1986, and for related purposes.

Mr Gray to present a Bill for an Act to make various amendments of the statute law of the Commonwealth, to repeal certain Acts and provisions of Acts, and for related purposes.

Ms Kate Ellis to present a Bill for an Act to amend the law relating to occupational health, safety, rehabilitation and compensation, and for related purposes.

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Mr Gray to present a Bill for an Act to make various amendments of the statute law of the Commonwealth, to repeal certain Acts and provisions of Acts, and for related purposes.

Mr Crean to move:

That, in accordance with the provisions of the Parliament Act 1974, the House approves the following proposal for works in the Parliamentary Zone which was presented to the House on 21 March 2011, namely: installation of ‘The Prime Ministers’ artwork.

Mr Gray to present a Bill for an Act to amend the Inspector-General of Intelligence and Security Act 1986, and for related purposes.

Mr Gray to present a Bill for an Act to make various amendments of the statute law of the Commonwealth, to repeal certain Acts and provisions of Acts, and for related purposes.
fit-out of new leased premises for the Australian Taxation Office in Albury, NSW.

Mr Gray to 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: Facilities for the introduction into service of Land 121 vehicles at RAAF Base Amberley and Damascus Barracks, Meandah, Queensland and Gaza Ridge Barracks, Victoria.

Mr Pyne to move:
That this House:
(1) notes that the Government has:
   (a) admitted there is a problem with the criteria for independent youth allowance for inner regional students;
   (b) committed to bringing forward its review of the matter with the broad purpose of finding a permanent solution to address the disadvantages that currently exist for rural and regional students in qualifying for financial assistance; and
   (c) indicated it will remove the difference between the inner regional areas and the other regional zones for the eligibility criteria for independent youth allowance; and
(2) calls on the Government to bring forward its timetable for resolving the matter, and in particular ensure that:
   (a) the review is completed and funds to pay for the measure are secured by 1 July 2011;
   (b) the current eligibility criteria for independent youth allowance for persons whose homes are located in Outer Regional Australia, Remote Australia, and Very Remote Australia according to the Remoteness Structure defined in subsection 1067A(10F) of the Social Security Act 1991 also apply to those with homes in Inner Regional Australia from 1 July 2011; and
   (c) all students who had a gap year in 2010 (ie, 2009 Year 12 school leavers) and who meet the relevant criteria qualify for the payment.

Mrs Markus to move:
That this House:
(1) notes that in the 2010 Federal Election, the Coalition, Australian Labor Party and Australian Greens committed to establishing the Greater Western Sydney Corridor but the Australian Government has failed to act to protect Cumberland Plain Woodland and endangered flora and fauna species; and
(2) calls on the Australian Government to implement the Coalition’s policy to protect Western Sydney’s Cumberland Plain Woodland and endangered flora and fauna species, and:
   (a) establish the Greater Western Sydney Conservation Corridor linking nature reserves and identified priority lands within the Greater Western Sydney Region, as an environmental legacy for future generations;
   (b) establish a joint State-Federal Consultative Committee to consider information with regard to the establishment of the Greater Western Sydney Conservation Corridor;
   (c) consult and work with the NSW Government on strategies to acquire identified ‘priority conservation sites’ for the Conservation Corridor, utilising funds held within the NSW Growth Centres Conservation Fund for that purpose;
   (d) identify private land that links areas of the proposed Corridor and work towards a mutually beneficial outcome with private land holders; and
   (e) consult with the NSW Government on the feasibility of a comprehensive audit of the Greater Western Sydney bushland region to identify conservation values that will include listings of threatened and or endangered species.
Mr Laurie Ferguson to move:
That this House:
(1) notes:
   (a) there has been a long running armed conflict in the Philippines;
   (b) both the new President Benigno Aquino III and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines have expressed the desire to resume the peace negotiations between the two parties which began in 1992 and were suspended in 2005; and
   (c) the Royal Norwegian Government is the third party facilitator of these peace negotiations and it is actively supporting the resumption of the peace negotiations; and
(2) welcomes the re-commencement of the formal peace negotiations between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines from February 15-21 this year; and
(3) encourages both parties in their efforts to resolve the conflict, and expresses a sincere wish for their success.

Ms Parke to move:
That this House:
(1) notes that:
   (a) Australia's oceans are the most diverse on earth but less than 1 per cent of the South-West, North-West, North, Coral Sea and East marine regions are currently protected;
   (b) the Australian coastal lifestyles and our coastal economies are dependent on the good health of our oceans;
   (c) evidence from marine sanctuaries around the world, including in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the United States, has shown that fish populations and fish size dramatically increase inside sanctuaries and in the nearby fished areas;
   (d) the marine and environmental science is clear, and in 2008, 900 scientists from the Australian Marine Scientists Association reached a consensus that the creation of networks of large marine sanctuaries will:
      (i) protect ocean life, including threatened species and critical habitats;
      (ii) recover the abundance of ocean life within and beyond sanctuary boundaries, fostering more and bigger fish;
      (iii) increase the resilience of ocean life to climate change; and
      (iv) underpin the future of commercial and recreational fisheries and the sustainability of coastal economies; and
   (e) through international agreement under the Convention on Biological Diversity, Australia has committed to establishing networks of marine reserves in its oceans by the end of 2012;
(2) welcomes the fact that:
   (a) during 2011 the Australian Government will be finalising marine bioregional marine plans for the South-West, North-West, North and East marine regions (including the Coral Sea) in keeping with the commitment to a national marine conservation scheme first agreed to at the Council of Australian Governments in 1998;
   (b) each marine bioregional plan will include a proposed network of Commonwealth marine reserves that will include sanctuary zones; and
   (c) 2011 is the year of delivery for the world-class protection of the world’s richest marine environments; and
(3) calls upon the Australian Government to further consider:
   (a) establishing networks of large marine sanctuaries in each of the marine regions currently under investigation in the marine bioregional planning process; and
   (b) providing sufficient funding for the transition of commercial fishing activities displaced by the establishment of marine sanctuaries.
Mr Bandt to move:

That standing orders 1, 47, 78 and 91 be amended, as follows:

(1) Maximum speaking times

After ‘Suspension of standing or other orders without notice’, add ‘; if not moved during Question Time’;

(47) Motions for suspension of orders

After paragraph (d), add:

‘(e) If a suspension motion is moved during Question Time, the question must be put immediately and decided without amendment or debate.’

(78) Matters not open to debate

After paragraph (m), add:

‘(n) motions for suspension of orders, if the motion is moved during Question Time (standing order 47).’

(97) Daily Question Time

After paragraph (b), add:

‘(c) A Minister may not ask that further questions be placed on the Notice Paper until twenty questions have been asked and answered, or until 3.30 pm, whichever is earlier.’
The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper) took the chair at 4 pm.

STANDING ORDER 66A

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper) (4.00 pm)—Before I call for members’ statements, I would like to take this opportunity to remind honourable members of standing order 66A, which allows interventions during the speeches of other members to ask questions. This procedure is only permitted in the Main Committee. It was designed to make this chamber less formal and more interactive, in keeping with the spirit of those who thought the Main Committee was a good idea.

Interventions are permitted on most speeches—for example, the speeches on the second readings of bills or on any motion such as one to take note or a private member’s motion. So, clearly, it gives members a real opportunity to cross-examine others on the other side of the chamber if the person making the speech is in fact prepared to accept the intervention. However, interventions are not permitted on the speech of a minister moving the second reading of a bill or summing up the debate. They are also not permitted during the shorter contributions such as consideration in detail of a bill, members’ statements or the adjournment debate.

I have been somewhat disappointed, both before and since I was elected as Deputy Speaker, that this procedure has not been used more often. I think it is a golden opportunity for us in the Main Committee, and I would encourage honourable members to take advantage of the standing orders in this respect.

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

Bonner Electorate: Disabilities Roundtable

Mr VASTA (Bonner) (4.02 pm)—I rise today to speak on behalf of people from my electorate of Bonner who have a disability and also those who provide unwavering support to and care for people with disabilities. The Bonner community had the opportunity to meet with the shadow minister for disabilities, carers and the voluntary sector, Senator Mitch Fifield. I invited Senator Fifield to Bonner so that those in my community who have a disability, or their carers, had a forum to exchange information, learn from one another’s experience, voice their concerns and pass on information directly to me as well as Senator Fifield.

With the support and assistance of Terry Forster, Principal of Mount Gravatt Special School, I hosted a roundtable discussion in the school hall. Both Senator Fifield and I were delighted with the number of people who attended, and it was certainly a great opportunity for me to hear the diversity of issues, particularly those relating to Centrelink processing and payments. A common theme for a number of people was the lack of training of Centrelink staff in relation to advising of all the options available to people with disabilities and their carers.

In addition, we heard about the frustration of those people who are faced with a continual renewal of their status as someone who has been diagnosed with a permanent disability. Rightly, they expressed to me the reality that, if someone is diagnosed as having a permanent disability, this diagnosis will not change as time goes on. The constant need to have continual medical confirmation of the permanence of their disability is frustrating.
Not surprisingly, there was much discussion about the draft national disability insurance scheme being considered by the Productivity Commission. The coalition are encouraged by the first draft of the Productivity Commission’s model for a national disability insurance scheme and we will continue to monitor developments by the Productivity Commission and work to ensure that the government responds generously to the final report due in July 2011.

The coalition is committed to better outcomes for Australians with a disability. The system is broken and needs to be fixed. Again, I would like to thank Terry Forster for his tireless work. I also thank all those people who work and took the time to attend this roundtable and make me and Senator Fifield aware of their concerns. My sincere thanks also go to Senator Fifield. I look forward to maintaining this conversation with my community and working closely with Senator Fifield going forward.

Ms VAMVAKINOU (Calwell) (4.05 pm)—I would like to bring to the attention of the House two very important events that took place in my electorate of Calwell last week. The first was the launch of the MoneySmart financial website. The second was the release of a consumer rights fact sheet which has been produced in 29 different languages. Both launches were held at the Hume Global Learning Centre, which is appropriate in itself considering the launches, like the centre itself, are part of a pioneering vision to change how residents approach and manage their daily lives and aspirations.

The MoneySmart website was launched by Assistant Treasurer Bill Shorten, the member for Maribyrnong, and developed by the Australian Securities and Investments Commission. The website is aimed at helping residents control their spending and sharing information about different financial options. It contains 26 calculators and tools, including specially designed mobile phone applications to help residents, especially the younger people in my electorate, find the answers to questions they may have about money—whether about their first mobile phone contract, starting a family or saving for their retirement.

Members of the Broadmeadows Historical Society were among the first consumers to test-drive the website and were very impressed. Elayne Whatman from the society said that it was easy to navigate and that she and her husband Alan had managed to put together their household budget in little over 10 minutes. Elayne is quoted as saying, ‘If I can do it then anyone can; it is thumbs up from me.’ The website is the first part of the national financial literacy strategy and an important step in the first stage of the federal government’s new banking competition public awareness campaign. I am pleased to say that the website’s tools are also available in different languages, which brings me now to the importance of the launch of the translated versions of the ‘Your shopping rights’ fact sheet.

The fact sheet was launched last week in my electorate by Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer, the Hon. David Bradbury. Its purpose is to help people from non-English-speaking backgrounds understand their rights as consumers. The idea is to help consumers—whether they speak English, Mandarin, Spanish or Croatian—with practical information about their rights and to help them know where to go if they have questions of concern.

Under the Australian Consumer Law which began on 1 January 2011, consumers have clear rights that are now applied consistently around the country. The law guarantees quality...
of goods and services no matter whether the product was purchased at home, interstate or online. Bearing in mind that I have one of the most culturally and linguistically diverse constituencies in the country, I am very pleased that my constituents now have at their service this wonderful fact sheet. (Time expired)

Longman Electorate: Carers

WYATT ROY (Longman) (4.07 pm)—On Thursday last week I had the privilege of spending some time with some of the most selfless people in my local community—a large number of carers. These carers organised respite care and made other arrangements so that they could share their stories with me, and I am very grateful for that. I thank everyone who attended and revealed their concerns to me.

The stories I heard served as a timely reminder to me that the work carers do is, in many cases, forgotten, undervalued and taken for granted. As a society, we take for granted that people are going to care selflessly for those they love. Carers provide countless hours of unpaid work—work that would otherwise place a significant burden on government. Carers need a hand up, not a handout, and they deserve a fair go.

One of my constituents, Renee, shared a moving personal experience with me. In a previous state election campaign, the state Labor government promised to build the Caboolture Health Hub, a local facility that would house children’s therapy services. True to form, the Labor Party broke yet another election commitment. The Caboolture Health Hub has to date failed to materialise and children’s therapy services have been moved to North Lakes, over an hour’s trip on public transport. For people like Renee, this means that it is almost impossible for her son to get the care he needs. This is an often difficult process for parents of disabled children. This again reflects the Labor Party’s inability to provide local services in my community. There are many, many more stories I could share, but I know my time is limited.

There is a common theme that emerged from my conversations with carers. Services available to them are fragmented and uncoordinated. Many carers are unaware of the full range of services that they are able to access. In many cases, bureaucracy is making the lives of these families harder, not easier. There is uncertainty and stress surrounding changes to funding models, and families are uncertain and nervous about what this is going to mean for them and their loved ones.

There was not one request I heard that was unreasonable. The carers in my community are asking for a hand up, not a hand out. They are asking for coordinated and appropriately targeted assistance to make their lives a little bit easier. This is the job of government. It is the job of the government to look after the most vulnerable members of our community and to support those who care for them. As is the case with most of us, these people want to contribute to their community in a meaningful and dignified way. The message that I am hearing loud and clear is that they are simply not receiving the support that they need. There must be a commonsense approach and a focus on this vital sector.

Dobell Electorate: Carbon Pricing

Mr CRAIG THOMSON (Dobell) (4.10 pm)—I rise to talk about the need to have a price on carbon and how it relates to my electorate. The beautiful electorate of Dobell is one of the prettiest places in Australia. Unfortunately, the price of such beauty is that it is a very fragile environment. We have a big lake in the middle of my electorate, some beautiful mountains on
the other side and a pristine coastline. But unfortunately along the east coast of Australia, which includes my electorate, we are seeing the effects of climate change on communities. We have a number of houses that have had their backyards washed away into the ocean. We now have regular flooding around the beautiful Tuggerah Lakes. What people in my electorate are saying is that we need to do something to make sure that we look after our environment and that we need to make sure that polluters pay a price so that we keep our area sustainable for the future. In my electorate, there is an area on the lakes that has power plants. I know about the direct effects that big industry can have on the environment. This is not just me saying this; this is the message that I am getting loud and clear from my electorate.

Recently, there was an article in the Central Coast Express Advocate about the Central Coast Environment Network. The chairman of that network, John Asquith, when he was asked about the federal government’s proposed price of carbon, said it was long overdue. He went on to say:

This is something that was one of the big issues back in the 1990s and it has taken us two decades to get to here because it just kept getting pushed back.

He understands, and the Australian population understand, that we need to have a price on carbon to make sure that we move forward to protect our environment for the future.

It was not just John Asquith who pointed out that this was an issue in the 1990s. The member for Flinders in the 1990s famously wrote his thesis about the need for a price on carbon. Even those on the other side know that this is something that has had a long genesis. It is something that needs to be done. It is something that is going to make our country better and help us meet the challenges of the future. It is also going to make sure that we give an environment to our kids that they truly deserve.

Wannon Electorate: Chalambar Golf Club

Mr TEHAN (Wannon) (4.13 pm)—I rise today to talk about a fantastic golf club in my electorate, the Ararat golf club or the Chalambar Golf Club. I was there on Saturday as a guest of the club to open six new fairways that the club has put in. This means that the whole course has been re-laid and is ready to host some of the best golf that you will see in regional and rural areas. As a matter of fact, the course is one of the great country courses. The view from what they call ‘Coronary Hill’ across the region is spectacular. I ask everyone here in this place to do themselves a favour and go and play there, because you will not find a better venue to play golf at. I would like to thank the president of the club, Frank Vernon. It was fantastic to have a round of golf with a president. It is the first time that I have ever played golf with a president and I thoroughly enjoyed it. I also played with the team captain of the club, Bruce. Their camaraderie as we played a round was absolutely fantastic.

I would also like to express my appreciation to all the members of the club whose volunteer work has led to great improvement of the greens. Volunteerism and community commitment are the hallmark of regional and country areas. We can see this personified in what they have done at the Ararat golf club.

I had a terrific evening there afterwards. They had great entertainment, with a magician. There was a good turnout of club members and the local community. It was a fantastic night. As I was departing, I was fortunate to bump into the winning lawn bowls pennant team from the club. Included in that winning pennant team was the Australian champion, Grant Seeary.
Grant will be heading off to Hong Kong later this year to represent Australia in lawn bowls, having won the Australian title in Launceston earlier in the year. The pennant team from the club was in full voice celebrating their victory that day of the pennant title. I congratulate them. There are excellent bowling greens also at the club, so it is a great venue not only for golfers but also for lawn bowlers. It is there because of the local community, the work that they do in volunteering and in giving their time, their effort and their money to make the club a fantastic institution. I thank them again for their time.

Chifley Electorate: International Women’s Day

Mr HUSIC (Chifley) (4.16 pm)—On 8 March I was able to host a special breakfast for International Women’s Day. It is the first time I have been able to host such a breakfast and it is something I would like to host annually. More than 50 women from across the Chifley electorate attended, representing a broad cross-section of the community. There were people there from schools, charities, sporting organisations, cultural communities, business and government. It was special to be hosting the breakfast on the occasion of the centenary of International Women’s Day.

While it was nice to be able to provide a platform to bring women leaders together to network and share their time, I was also keen to bring some focus to the theme of this year’s International Women’s Day, which is, ‘Equal access to education, training and science and technology: pathway to decent work for women.’ We were joined by Susan Hartigan, Director of TAFE Western Sydney Institute, and Councillor Alison McLaren, President of the Western Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils, who were keynote speakers on the day. As an aside, we were able to host this breakfast at TAFE’s Green Skills Hub at Nirimba campus, an initiative supported by the federal government. Both Susan and Alison were able to provide reflections on the changing participation of women in the workforce and their past experiences of community attitudes, which had seen doors to educational opportunities closed to them.

There were two other special elements to this year’s breakfast. The first was that the breakfast was able to put a spotlight on the work of an important community group providing vital support to women in Chifley, Rosie’s Place. Rosie’s Place is a community based counselling service for women, children, young people and family members who experience domestic and sexual violence. The service was founded in 1983, originally to increase community awareness about the prevalence of child sexual abuse and to advocate for the establishment of specialist sexual abuse counselling services. On the morning we were able to raise $1,200 for Rosie’s Place. Catherine Want, the Manager of Rosie’s Place, thanked those who attended the breakfast for their generosity and said that the money raised would go to the establishment of a special sensory garden at the premises. In response to that, Susan Hartigan announced that the Western Sydney Institute of TAFE would make available students from their School of Horticulture to come out to Rosie’s Place to build the garden.

The second important element of the morning was that I was able to announce the establishment of a perpetual award named in honour of Coral McLean, who recently passed away and who provided over 100,000 hours of her own time to support people in the community. The Coral McLean Award will recognise women in leadership positions in the Chifley electorate, and I will be announcing further details about that later in the year.
Wright Electorate: MND and Me Foundation

Mr BUHCHOLZ (Wright) (4.19 pm)—Recently, I attended the launch of a new foundation in Queensland, and while that does not seem to warrant in itself an address in this House, being the nation’s parliament, this night was particularly worthy of mention. It was a night of informative overtones along with the opportunity to share insight into the lives of a particular family, who, in the face of adversity, are showing incredible courage and leadership in raising awareness of what at the outset is a terrible and debilitating disease. Initially when I was asked to attend the function and told what it was in aid of, I had no idea what the disease was and had to ask, like many Australians, ‘What is motor neuron disease?’

The foundation that was launched in Brisbane was the MND and Me Foundation. During the night I had the absolute honour of meeting for the first time a very special and loved-by-all bloke by the name of Scott Sullivan, who, in his opening remarks, said, ‘Pessimists are people who find difficulty in opportunity and optimists are people who find opportunity in difficulty’.

Scott Sullivan, recently diagnosed with motor neurone disease, has set about raising the awareness of this debilitating and, at this stage, incurable disease, which strikes indiscriminately at those who are in the prime of their lives. His positive actions have resulted in him creating the newly formed MND and Me Foundation, of which he is one of the inaugural founding directors, along with Luke Gifford, Luke Jeffrey and Shane Williamson. I wish each of them every success in their newly distinguished and vitally important roles within this foundation. The foundation will work in conjunction with both the Queensland and Australian MND organisations. The event was patronised by 655 people at the Suncorp Stadium.

I want to share with you a story about the Sullivan family. Scott is 38 and was a fit, athletic father of two when he was diagnosed with MND in late October last year. After a battery of tests, his neurologist told him: ‘I believe you have motor neuron disease. There is no cure and your life expectancy is three to five years.’ Scott is surrounded by some wonderful support and family. Motor neurone disease affects about 1,400 Australians, about 300 of whom are from Queensland. The average life expectancy after diagnosis is 27 months. So Scott and his family have some challenges in front of them. Scott, your strength, your commitment to life and the support of your family that I witnessed was overwhelming. Your approach of ‘the glass is always half full’ is inspiring. Mate, from me to you, nothing but love and joy.

La Trobe Electorate: Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve

Ms SMYTH (La Trobe) (4.22 pm)—I am pleased to be able to update members today about matters of local and national significance in my electorate of La Trobe. Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve is home to the flora and fauna that make up three of the state of Victoria’s four state emblems: the critically endangered bird known as the Helmeted Honeyeater, the endangered Leadbeater’s possum and pink heath.

I recently had the pleasure of meeting with the President of the Friends of the Helmeted Honeyeater group, Arthur Carew, at Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve in my electorate of La Trobe. The friends group formed in May 1989 when the population of the Helmeted Honeyeater bird species reached a critically low level of 50 birds. The friends group is just one part of a team consisting of Parks Victoria rangers, a DSE field ornithologist and Healesville Sanctuary keepers, who work very closely together to improve the severely endangered
status of the bird. It really is an excellent example of the best of volunteerism in my local community.

On my recent visit, I was struck by the beauty and diversity of the birds and plants that exist within the Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve and was particularly impressed by the dedication and the detailed, painstaking work of all involved, from monitoring birds, maintaining their habitat, to educating school groups and other local and interstate visitors to the reserve about native species and, importantly, the fragile environment in which they live. This is especially the case for the unpaid volunteers, who have collectively contributed thousands of hours of their personal time to ensure the future of Victoria’s endangered species, our state emblems.

Those at Yellingbo are hoping for the creation of a state emblems park in the area to better protect the local environment and the critical habitat for at-risk species. I know this was something that the Victorian Labor government was hoping to achieve. I hope that I can also lend my voice in support of that aim and I certainly hope that the incoming government pays as much regard to these issues as its predecessor did.

From local to national issues of environmental significance, I was very pleased to attend and speak at a forum in my electorate last week hosted by St Mark’s Anglican Church, together with the Emerald For Sustainability group. The forum was titled ‘Solving the Climate Crisis’ and was focused on climate change—a significant issue in my electorate. The forum was an opportunity to discuss the science of climate change and the significant steps that need to be taken now in order to respond to the challenge of climate change. Residents of Emerald are very familiar with the effects of extreme weather events. It is an area of significant bushfire risk, and of course climate change increases the incidence of that risk. So I am very grateful to St Mark’s and the Emerald For Sustainability group for the opportunity to attend and speak at that forum. I certainly expect that this will be the first of several such forums to be held on this very topical issue in La Trobe.

Cowan Electorate: Emily Prior

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (4.25 pm)—On the morning of Sunday, 27 March the Wheelie Big Challenge will take place, which is a fundraising event for sufferers of a cerebral palsy. Tragically and unfortunately there is such a sufferer whom I have had some contact with in recent months. Emily Prior is three years old. Three years ago she and her twin sister, Reese, were born at just 29 weeks—seriously early. At birth they weighed less than 1,500 grams and they both battled to survive. When Emily was just four weeks old the doctors informed her parents that due to bleeding of the brain at the time of birth it was likely that she had cerebral palsy. Sadly, that was the case. But Emily Prior is a beautiful little three-year-old. She is impressionless despite her walker that she uses to get around. She always has a huge smile and is a bright, bubbly and vivacious young lady. At just three years old she is very, very positive. Fortunately, she has received great support from the early intervention program with the Centre for Cerebral Palsy. She is also a recipient of Botox injections which are delivered under general anaesthetic. That has enabled her to have a whole lot more freedom of movement in her legs. So she is doing pretty well.

On Sunday, I, my family and my staff that have volunteered will be at the Wheelie Big Challenge to support Emily. While we will not have a problem walking one kilometre, Emily, with an attitude that is driven, will be doing that kilometre in her walking frame. That is a
great testament to a tough and outstanding little girl. We hope that the family will reach its target of $5,000 by Sunday, which will help with research into cerebral palsy and provide assistance not only for Emily but also for others who suffer under these circumstances. As a sponsor of the Wheelie Big Challenge, I fully endorse this event. It is a great initiative. The Centre for Cerebral Palsy is doing a great work in supporting the families of sufferers of cerebral palsy. I hope that all those who can be there will be there on Sunday at Burswood.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)—I am sure all honourable members would join me in congratulating you on your support of Emily and in wishing Emily well.

AMA Tasmania

Mr SIDEBOTTOM (Braddon) (4.28 pm)—On 20 March the Australian Medical Association disappointingly put out a media release from AMA Tasmania headed ‘AMA opposes Medicare Locals’. AMA Tasmania’s criticism of Medicare Locals reflects pretty poorly on its understanding of the Gillard Labor government’s determination to introduce much needed primary healthcare reforms. For the release to suggest that Medicare Locals do not:

… adequately recognise the fundamental role of [GPs] in primary health care delivery—
or that the government did not:

… consult with the medical profession—
is indeed misinformed.

Widespread consultation has been ongoing for over 12 months. The Australian government publication Improving Primary Health Care for all Australians, which all members would have copies of, specifically states:

General practitioners will remain the centre of the primary health care system and continue to work with individual patients to determine what clinical care they require—but Medicare Locals will take responsibility for the primary health care needs of each local community.

In relation to the criticism that ‘GPs should be adequately involved in the governance of primary health care governance organisations’, the guidelines set out in the government publication Medicare Locals: Guidelines for the Establishment and Initial Operation of Medicare Locals clearly point out the expectation that governance arrangements should ‘have strong clinical leadership’.

If the AMA is calling for a continuation of the status quo in relation to primary health care, it will be disappointed. Medicare Locals will certainly recognise the central role of GPs and their strong clinical leadership, as I have just mentioned, but this will be part of local primary health care organisations working to make it easier for patients to access what they need by better linking local GPs, nursing and other professionals, hospitals and aged care, and by maintaining up-to-date local service direction. I find it revealing that the division of general practice Tasmania is vitally interested—and there have been 200 other expressions of interest from other divisions of general practice—in being considered for becoming one of the first of the 15 Medicare Locals, whereas the AMA, I believe, is happy to adopt a business-as-usual stance in relation to primary care in Tasmania. I am disappointed by the AMA and I asked them to reconsider their reference to defer the role out of the Medicare Locals.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)—Order! In accordance with standing order 193 the time for constituency statements has concluded.
Mr KEENAN (Stirling) (4.32 pm)—I rise to talk on the Combating the Financing of People Smuggling and Other Measures Bill 2011. The coalition supports the bill in principle. The purpose of the bill is to reduce the risk of money transfers by remittance dealers being used to fund organised crime, including counterterrorism, people-smuggling and other serious crimes, by introducing a more comprehensive regulatory regime for the remittance sector.

I would like to point out at the outset that the title of this bill was of some contention within the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee, which reported on the bill yesterday. The committee listed the title of the bill as one of the key concerns with this piece of legislation. In submissions to the inquiry, both the Australian Privacy Foundation and Liberty Victoria made the point that, by highlighting only one offence which may utilise the remittance sector—that is, the financing of people-smuggling—the title of this bill is uninformative and misleading and should be amended to more properly reflect the bill’s intent and content. I will explain some of these comments a little later on, but they are of course part of the government’s unrelenting spin campaign to do very little to stop the people-smuggling trade by constantly pretending to take action.

It is no secret that organised crime is about generating profit. It has been estimated that organised crime costs the Australian community approximately $10 billion to $15 billion a year. This money has to be laundered and has to resurface somewhere in the legitimate economy somehow. As confirmed by Mr David Ross, from the Australian Crime Commission, one of the primary methods that organised crime uses to get that money offshore is by using alternative remittance dealers. They present a lot of advantages over the regulated financial system—for example, banks. There is less visibility, it is easier to collude with remittance dealers and it is easier to infiltrate that particular sector than, say, the traditional banking sector. It comes as no surprise that it is particularly attractive for organised criminal syndicates to use the remittance sector to launder money. There is less risk of getting caught in doing it this way. With around 6½ thousand providers of remittance services in Australia, in terms of legislation it is essential and integral to ensure that it will be useful and effective in combating the challenges presented by organised crime.

Whilst the title of this bill is misleading, I believe it is important for us to discuss the issue of people-smuggling. Anybody who is familiar with the record of this Labor government would know full well that this is a government that is the best friend that people smugglers have ever had. When it came to office it inherited a system where we had on average three boat arrivals per year. That is one every four months. That record continued for the first year it was in office. Then in August of 2008 it made the very fateful and foolhardy decision to alter the robust system of border protection that it had inherited from the previous Howard government, a system of border protection that had largely driven people smugglers from business.
When those decisions were made that gave a green light for people-smuggling syndicates which had been very active in the past to go back into that evil and insidious trade. As a result, once that green light went up, the people-smuggling syndicates, which are very sophisticated organised crime syndicates operating out of South-East Asia, smuggled down to Australia 215 boats illegally, containing over 10,500 people. This has led to the sorts of incidents we have seen over the past week in our detention network but particularly on Christmas Island where we had the extraordinary sight of Australian Federal Police officers being forced to retake a Commonwealth facility by force because the immigration department had lost control over that immigration detention centre.

The title of this bill, although it refers specifically to people-smuggling, is really part of the government spinning the idea that they are somehow doing something about people-smuggling when this bill relates more broadly to organised crime. I will just turn to people smugglers quickly because they are people who obviously use these money-laundering techniques to generate profits by putting more and more people on each vessel. As we have seen lately, some of these vessels have been getting larger, containing more people. By putting more and more people on each vessel, they increase their profits but they also run a greater risk of a disaster occurring as we saw on Christmas Island in December last year.

The trend towards more people being put on boats has been occurring for some time. Yet, regardless of what the people smugglers do and regardless of how successful they are, the Labor government remain wedded to their policy failures. Labor’s rolling detention crisis puts at risk the lives of not just detainees but Commonwealth officers who are policing these detention centres. The incentive provided by the current immigration regime in Australia for people to come here illegally puts children at risk. The denial of humanitarian visas to thousands waiting offshore is also a moral burden that Labor must now carry for their weak decisions and failed policy.

Last week I had a meeting in my office—and I have often had meetings of this nature—with people who have immigrated to Australia under our generous humanitarian program. Many of them settle in Stirling. They now seek to have a family member who is waiting in a refugee camp, particularly in Africa—in fact, almost exclusively in Africa—brought to Australia to get the protection of the Australian government. Not always but usually the people they come to see me about are women. Very often they are women with children who are trapped in these refugee camps. They lead very difficult lives. They are in grave danger as refugees who are essentially stateless in these enormous refugee camps. There are grave dangers to their health. There are grave dangers to their physical safety. Often they come with terrible stories about their mistreatment at the hands of people in these enormous refugee camps. Quite rightly, their relatives who are in Australia are deeply worried about their welfare. When they apply to Australia for our protection, they apply for a limited number of places. They apply for one of the 13,750 places that we have in our humanitarian program. Sadly, for every person who comes here illegally, the chances of one of those people who are trapped within these terrible refugee camps in Africa of getting one of those humanitarian visas decreases markedly. That is the moral burden that the Labor Party must bear because, when people have the wherewithal to pay US$15,000 to a people smuggler and come down to Australia illegally and are granted protection by the Australian government, they take the place of somebody else who might be sitting in one of those refugee camps in Africa—often a
vulnerable woman with children. They take a place from someone who could have legitimately applied for protection from the Australian government.

Last year it was revealed that the Rudd-Gillard government were warned as early as 25 February 2008 that the decisions that I have referred to, which weaken the border and protection regime and immigration regime, carried enormous inherent risks. Advice from the Department of Immigration and Citizenship stated at the time that a range of risk management strategies had prevented significant boat arrivals in recent years. They were referring to the policies pursued by the Howard government, which did manage to successfully drive the people smugglers from business. Rather than strengthening our border protection regime in the face of these threats, the Labor government did exactly the opposite. They knowingly and wilfully dismantled a successful border protection system that had had this issue under control, and the strong working regime they inherited from the coalition has subsequently been completely destroyed. Of course the final nail has been driven into their coffin this week, when the Labor government decided that because they had lost control over the Christmas Island detention centre they could not take new arrivals to Christmas Island, as has been the custom for many years. They have now had to bring them directly to mainland Australia. Thus ends the idea of us having an immigration system with any sort of integrity.

Not only have the Labor Party invited this flood of boat arrivals to our shores; subsequently, the pressure on our detention centres both on Christmas Island and on the mainland led to what we witnessed last week. We witnessed extreme unrest at the Christmas Island detention centre in particular, with detainees lighting fires and creating a situation that forced security staff to barricade themselves into the gym for protection. The way the government reacted to this unrest I think sows the seeds for further unrest down the road, because they essentially caved in to the demands of those rioting asylum seekers. They granted them their wish and transferred many of them to the Australian mainland. They sent additional Australian Federal Police reinforcements and firefighters up to Christmas Island to back up the already substantial numbers of officers that were there. Christmas Island residents are now, rightly, fearful for their safety and they can only imagine what chaos might erupt on their island, which in the past has been quite idyllic.

Astonishingly, the immigration department and indeed the immigration minister were not able to say whether or not all the inmates have subsequently been returned to the detention centre—and in fact they wilfully misled about the fact that they have no idea. Different advice has been given by different people, but the latest advice we have, which contradicted what the immigration minister said just before question time, is that four people remain missing. So they cannot even tell the residents of Christmas Island how many people remain at large. Clearly, the residents of Christmas Island are right to be concerned about that and they are sick of their island being used and abused in this way.

On ABC radio last week a resident of Northam, which is due to host a very similar facility to Christmas Island, a facility that will hold 1,500 single men, spoke about the fears of his community in the wake of the riots on Christmas Island. Graeme said: ‘We are generally fearful for our safety. Like I said all along, I asked questions as to what procedures were in place if there was a break-out or something like that and was basically told that it wouldn’t happen, it would never happen, it can’t happen. But, as you see, it does happen.’ The fears expressed by Graeme on ABC radio are quite valid. Under Labor our immigration detention regime has
descended into absolute chaos and anarchy and we are hearing daily reports of yet another 
break-out, riot or disconcerting event. Had the Rudd-Gillard governments not dismantled the 
coalition’s border protection regime, there would not have been the chaos that we have wit-
nessed of late and the people smugglers would not have had a wonderful product to sell, 
which is permanent residence in Australia, as they do now. People smugglers are of course 
typically another money-making arm of larger organised crime syndicates.

The aim of this bill is to ensure that the people who pose an unacceptable risk by engaging 
in money laundering—that is, organised criminals, people smugglers or people who may fi-
nance terrorism—will not be allowed to provide remittance services in Australia. The bill 
seeks to reduce the risk of remittance dealers being involved in the financing of people-
smuggling, money laundering or the financing of terrorism. The bill aims to improve intelli-
gence sharing and aims to protect against criminal infiltration of this sector. It also aims to 
ensure that the Australian Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre, AUSTRAC, can crack 
down on remitters acting unlawfully.

It should also be noted that AUSTRAC is Australia’s anti-money-laundering and counter-
terrorism-financing regulator and specialist financial intelligence unit. The agency works in 
conjunction with Australian industries and businesses in their compliance with anti-money-
laundering and counter-terrorism-financing legislation.

As noted on the AUSTRAC website, money laundering can occur in various ways. One of 
the newer and more sophisticated methods is the laundering of money through bank accounts 
of unsuspecting third parties and this is known as ‘cuckoo smurfing’. That term was coined by 
international authorities after the nesting behaviour of the cuckoo bird and the tiny blue fig-
ures of a popular Belgian cartoon. Birdwatchers have long noted that bird’s practice of laying 
its eggs in the nests of other birds, which then hatch the chicks as their own. ‘Smurfing’ refers 
to a division of large sums of criminal money into smaller amounts. ‘Cuckoo smurfing’ is de-
scribed in AUSTRAC’s money-laundering methodologies report as something that begins 
when a legitimate customer deposits funds with an alternative remitter in a foreign country for 
transfer into another Australian’s bank account.

This is a legitimate activity and is often a cheaper and faster alternative than using a main-
stream bank. Unbeknown to the customer, the alternative remitter is part of a wider criminal 
syndicate involved in the laundering of illicit funds. This criminal remitter, while remaining in 
a foreign country, provides details of the transfers, including the amount of funds, to a crimi-
nal based in Australia, including the account details of the intended recipient in Australia. The 
Australian criminal deposits illicit cash profits from Australian crime syndicates into the bank 
account of the customer awaiting the overseas transfer. The cash is usually deposited in small 
amounts to avoid detection, under transaction threshold reporting requirements. After an ac-
count balance check, the customer believes that the overseas transfer has been completed as 
legitimately arranged. The Australian criminal travels overseas and accesses the legitimate 
money that was initially deposited with the alternative remitter. Now that the illicit funds have 
been successfully laundered, the criminal owes nothing but a commission to the money-
laundering syndicate for its work.

These are the sorts of things that this bill seeks to address. As mentioned earlier, the alter-
native remittance sector in Australia provides businesses and individuals with the ability to 
transfer funds overseas, often external to the formal banking sector. The system operates via
agents who enter into agreements to receive money from businesses or individuals in one
country and who pay funds to businesses or individuals overseas. The alternative remittance
sector can transfer funds relatively quickly, securely and cost effectively and is especially im-
portant in countries where established banking networks are not common. In the alternative
remittance sector, businesses vary in size and sophistication, ranging from community based
independent remittance dealers, which are sole operator businesses, to large multinational
entities that have extremely sophisticated operations. It is estimated by AUSTRAC that there
are approximately 6,500 individual providers of remittance services in Australia, the majority
of which form part of larger networks. Currently, under the Anti-Money Laundering Counter-
Terrorism Financing Act, reporting entities are required to report international funds transfer
instructions and threshold transactions over A$10,000 to AUSTRAC. In their submission to
the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee’s inquiry into the bill, the
Australian Crime Commission said that the remittance:

… sector is an intersection point where many critical threats and vulnerabilities meet: specialist money-
laundry syndicates operating as professional service providers—
weak or absent anti-money-laundering controls that enable ID crime—
poor quality reporting, including misreporting which distorts money trails; susceptibility of criminal
manipulation or infiltration; and signs of trade based money laundering and close connections to higher
risk countries or regions.

With this in mind I will now briefly turn to the amendments proposed within the bill. As noted
in the bill’s explanatory memorandum, schedule 1 amends the Anti-Money Laundering and
Counter-Terrorism Financing Act 2006 to strengthen the Commonwealth legislative frame-
work on the regulation of remittance dealers and the providers of remittance networks.
Schedule 2 amends the same act to expand a list of agencies with which AUSTRAC can share
intelligence. Schedule 3 amends the same provision in the Privacy Act to enable reporting
entities to use credit reporting data to verify the identity of their customers. Schedule 4
amends the Financial Transaction Reports Act to enable the AUSTRAC CEO to exempt a per-
son from one or more provisions of the act.

As I mentioned earlier in the speech, the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legisla-
tion Committee has had a detailed look into this bill. I want to touch on some of the com-
ments that have been made in relation to that inquiry—particularly, as you might imagine, by
the Liberal senators on that inquiry into the bill. Their report was tabled only yesterday, and
they were of the view that the title of the bill does not relate to either its content or its in-
tended purpose. While the key measure in the bill deals with enhanced regulation of the remit-
tance sector, the title of the bill focuses only on one aspect of the possible misuse of the remit-
tance sector—namely, the financing of people smuggling. The title of the bill is clearly unin-
formative and misleading and Liberal senators believe that it should be amended to reflect the
bill’s actual content and intended purpose.

The Liberal senators also recommend that the following matters be addressed: the public
release and consideration of the anti-money-laundering and counter-terrorism-financing rules,
the establishment of appropriate memoranda of understanding for the sharing of intelligence
between AUSTRAC and the new designated agencies, and a reassessment of the regulatory
burden imposed by the bill on businesses in the remittance sector and a clarification as to
whether the proposed changes create efficiencies or merely shift costs within the sector.
In conclusion there is one other issue that is worth noting. It was brought up by the ACC in their submission to the Senate inquiry. The registration of remitters should be a useful tool to increase the regulation of the remittance sector. However, a potential consequence of increased regulation may be that illegitimate remittance providers might be more covert and more into the unregulated and non-reporting environment than currently exists. This black market would need to be carefully monitored over an extended period of time to identify what, if any, emerging methodologies might be used to facilitate financial crimes, including money-laundering activities or the financing of people-smuggling and trafficking activities.

With organised criminal methodologies constantly evolving, it is imperative that our frontline agencies are adequately resourced to deal with the increased sophistication of these criminal networks. While the coalition supports this bill in principle we reserve the right to foreshadow potential amendments in the Senate. Clearly, those areas that have been highlighted by the Liberal senators on the Senate committee will be one area that we will be looking at. I condemn the government for naming this bill in such a way that it pretends to do something about the crime of people-smuggling when clearly this government has done so much to encourage the trade. We will certainly be looking at rectifying that and some of the other points that have been brought up by the Liberal senators once this bill reaches the other place.

Mr HAYES (Fowler) (4.53 pm)—I can be of a little assistance. Our guests are from Vietnam Sydney Radio and are people whom I know are very passionate about human rights issues in Vietnam.

I too join in the support of the Combating the Financing of People Smuggling and Other Measures Bill 2011, which amends the Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Terrorism Financing Act 2006. It will help reduce the alternative remittance sector being used as a means of financing people-smuggling and other areas of serious and organised crime. It will also amend the Privacy Act 1988 and make it easier for businesses, particularly financial institutions, to verify the identity of their customers electronically and, importantly, allow the Australian Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre, AUSTRAC, to share the information with other intelligence services, consistent with the current practice of the Australian Federal Police and the Australian Crime Commission.

Unfortunately, the remittance sector often plays a significant role in serious and organised crime, particularly people-smuggling, providing the funds needed to organise smuggling ventures and to support other organised criminal activities. AUSTRAC needs greater powers to identify potential sources of financial assistance to people-smuggling and other organised criminal activities. We know that the victims of people-smuggling often pay an extremely high price and that, regrettably, that price is sometimes their lives. People-smugglers who have profited from the desperation and vulnerability of others are often able to walk free with minimal punishment and with profits in hand. It is essential that we address this issue at the grassroots, that we attack the profit motive that underpins people-smuggling.

The government is committed to carrying the message that people-smugglers and traffickers will be caught, prosecuted and punished. I congratulate the Australian Federal Police for the significant role they are playing both in Australia and internationally in the detection and
disruption of people-smuggling activities. We believe in human life and we see that this
criminal activity puts people in unrealistic danger day in, day out. It is well known that peo-
ple-smuggling and people-trafficking are a well-established and lucrative business throughout
the Asia-Pacific region. Quite frankly, it is a criminal trade that rivals the smuggling of drugs
and firearms in terms of profitability. It is among the world’s most lucrative criminal activities
at the moment. I know that is a sad reflection of modern society. Many in this world do not
value human life.

Making it tougher and having more stringent requirements to register as a remittance dealer
will allow AUSTRAC a greater ability to control, refuse or cancel any remittance suspected of
assisting people-smuggling and other organised criminal activities. Streamlining the flow of
money for people-smuggling and other organised crimes will also attack the profit motive at
the grassroots level. The $2 million invested in combating people-smuggling and enhancing
border protection over the last two budgets was used to focus on prevention, stabilisation,
deterrence, detection and interception. If we ever need a reminder of how vile and ruthless
these people-smugglers are, we need only think back to the Christmas Island tragedy which
claimed 50 people, including children. It is important that we do something not only to shut
down this business but to protect people. When discussing the issue of people-smuggling one
can draw a parallel with the other heinous global crimes, as I have mentioned, of drug and
firearm smuggling.

Criminals are nothing other than nefarious businesspeople. They are attracted to their par-
ticular business by a profit motive. What we are seeking to do through this legislation is to
make it more difficult to realise a profit from the crime of either people smuggling or people
trafficking. Until the exploitation has occurred, I have to say it must be very difficult to dis-
tinguish between people-smuggling and people-trafficking cases. Internationally, about
800,000 people are trafficked each year into slavery, of whom 80 per cent are female, 50 per
cent of whom are children. What I have been able to discover through my research is that the
average cost of a human slave today is US$90. What a value to put on the life of a child.
Again, this is a very sad reflection of our world and it is why we need to work together in a
way that addresses crimes such as people trafficking and people smuggling.

It is a shocking and unacceptable fact that in this day and age around the world slavery and
servitude are still a daily reality for a number of people. According to the International Labour
Organisation, 2.45 million out of 12.3 million people are trapped into forced labour and/or
trafficked internationally. This clearly indicates the need for far more efficient monitoring and
detection of illegal transaction activities such as people trafficking and smuggling. Again, I
pay credit to the good work that I know is being done by Commissioner Tony Negus and the
Australian Federal Police. I have been able to visit a number of their facilities internationally
and have seen firsthand the level of intelligence and activity being conducted by the Austra-
lian Federal Police. It is certainly a credit to them and also a credit to our nation that that ef-
fort is being made.

Human trafficking is the third largest source of income for organised crime, only exceeded
by arms smuggling and drugs. The Minister for Justice recently indicated that non-
government organisations play a very significant role in raising awareness of human traffick-
ing, identifying cases and providing support to victims. The victims of these activities are the
ones who we must not forget.
In November last year I met with the Josephite Counter-Trafficking Project and the Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans, one of the organisations focusing on assisting victims of human trafficking. The Josephite Counter-Trafficking Project is organised by the Sisters of Saint Joseph of the Sacred Heart. This project was established in 2005 to promote in a holistic way the spiritual, physical and emotional development of people who have undergone the trauma of being trafficked into Australia. Since 2005 the sisters have developed a network, in collaboration with other religious groups, the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, the Australian Federal Police, the Red Cross, the Salvation Army and other NGOs. Sister Margaret from the project indicated to me that any response to the trafficking of persons into Australia should have at its root the human rights aspect of the approach. I seek leave to present a document on the Josephite Counter-Trafficking Project.

Leave granted.

Mr Hayes—As I previously stressed, next to assisting the victims and upholding their rights, it is essential that we work at the grassroots of this issue—that is, to attack the business nature of the crime itself. It is essential that we muster all avenues available to us to shut down these criminal operations, but to do that we must be able to detect them. One way of doing that is to give AUSTRAC the powers in this bill and particularly, in respect of remittance dealers, to be able to make a valued assessment, which is effectively criminal intelligence, of the operations that are being funded, whether those are people-smuggling operations or other organised criminal activities.

Referring again to the people who are the subjects of these people-smuggling and people-trafficking operations, I think it is only fair that we acknowledge that most of these people come from highly disadvantaged backgrounds and have suffered very desperate conditions. That is why it is very important that we as a country continue to participate in the progress of the Millennium Development Goals. We cannot let people smuggling and people trafficking deter us from our obligations as a nation that values and champions human rights protection.

In 2009, there were over 43 million people forcibly displaced worldwide, over 15 million refugees and close to one million people seeking asylum. The question is not whether we should assist; I humbly submit that the question should be: what activities do we undertake to address these issues and combat the crimes associated with people smuggling and people trafficking? It is therefore important that we put the focus on the organisers of people smuggling and their operations, and commit our energies to disrupting this criminal enterprise. Amending the Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Terrorism Financing Act 2006 will give AUSTRAC greater control in its attempts to achieve greater scrutiny of remittance dealers and offshore money transfers so as to be able to detect and share that intelligence with partner agencies, with a view to shutting down these illegal operations.

In the short time I have had available to me, I have acknowledged representatives from Vietnamese Sydney Radio. As I said at the outset, I am quite aware of how passionate they have been in championing human rights in Vietnam to date. With the assistance of Vietnamese Sydney Radio, I have been in contact with people in Vietnam, including Father Ly, who is once again being detained by the authorities. It is a reality that, in this day and age, there are still places all over the globe where people can be detained without trial—including Vietnam, where there are over 400 people currently in detention—and where people are simply denied their human rights.
Human rights are central to what we are doing with this bill with regard to people smuggling. It is not simply about trying to shut down the illicit, criminal activity involved. As I indicated, we are very much focused on the victims of people smuggling because we believe in human rights. If we believe in human rights for people in this country or when they come to this country, we too have an obligation to uphold human rights and pursue that internationally.

Mr HAWKE (Mitchell) (5.09 pm)—I want to commend the member for Fowler for his proper and valid concern for human rights and his ongoing compassion towards other human beings. It is something that we share in this place. And his remarks on slavery and all of those other worthy causes are of course welcome. In speaking on the Combating the Financing of People Smuggling and Other Measures Bill 2011, however, I think the member for Fowler is also courageous—courageous in standing up to his party’s machine and speaking out about the problems that we face in Australia today because of the upsurge in people-smuggling and the failed policies of the Gillard and Rudd Labor governments. We see here there are only three brave members from the Labor Party prepared to speak out on this bill—just three brave people coming forward to say that they believe that not enough is being done to combat people-smuggling in Australia today. The coalition has four times the speakers here today, coming forward to highlight what we see as a very serious problem for Australia’s future—in the context of riots in detention centres and an overburdened system—where people-smuggling is rampant and a lot of money is being made by people-smugglers. That is of course why we have this bill and its provisions in front of us today. So I do commend those three brave Labor Party souls. And I know the member for Dobell is going to come forward and strongly condemn people-smuggling and the government’s performance in this regard. I look forward to his remarks on how we are going to do better as a government and as a country.

I had the opportunity to meet with an Israeli prosecutor some months ago who has spent her time prosecuting terror groups and those institutions that finance them—banks, and anybody who holds money for groups that are responsible for terror activities around the world. She has had some success in many jurisdictions, notably the United States, including prosecuting North Korea and other different institutions and countries, for helping to finance activities related to terrorism. She has done that through seeking damages, by suing on behalf of victims of terror activities. This is a worthy instrument in terms of the purposes of this bill—that we should seek to hinder and hamper the operations of people-smugglers by restricting the ability of them transfer funds and to house funds and to use money in what is an illegal activity. So I want to commend her efforts in fighting terrorism.

The intention of this bill is a worthy one. It is sad that we have so much people-smuggling today that we have to introduce a bill like this, because this does affect a legitimate sector of the economy—the alternative remittance sector, which is a legitimate business with people conducting legitimate activity. One of the things I never enjoy in this place is our rush to regulate whole sectors of the economy in order to deal with very specific and defined problems and some people who are causing trouble. It places a burden on all of the rest of the sector. And that, again, is the undesirable element of this legislation that we are considering today.

With a more comprehensive regulatory regime for the remittance sector, the remittance sector are being made to pay because of an increase in criminal activity in relation to people-smuggling. An increase in criminal activity, which we would argue is a result of failed policy
at a governmental level leading to a marketplace for people-smugglers and an increase in people-smuggling, has now placed a burden on the legitimate operators and the people in the sector who are conducting legitimate economic activity.

We know that the alternative remittance sector is entirely legitimate. It provides businesses and individuals in Australia with the ability to transfer funds overseas outside the formal banking sector. There is nothing wrong with that. We do not have to mandate that they go through banks or particular financial institutions, considering the diversity and enormity of the global economy today. The remittance sector can transfer funds quickly, securely, cost-effectively and is invaluable in countries where established banking networks are not commonplace or sophisticated. So this is an important sector of our economy that plays an important role in the international transfer of funds, something that is particularly important to a country like Australia, which relies heavily on foreign investment and the transfer of financial capital in and out of our financial markets on a daily basis. So it is an unwelcome development that we must over-regulate this sector because of criminal activity that we are not dealing with sufficiently as a nation. I want to reject Labor’s approach in handling people-smuggling, in handling border protection in general, which has led us to the point where we have this problem today.

There are of course other activities that are not related to people-smuggling that are impacted by this bill. In those intentions, it is a worthy act of the government and this bill in acting to deal with the practice of what is commonly referred to as ‘cuckoo smurfing’. I have not heard many members talk about cuckoo smurfing here today, but it is an interesting area—something I had the opportunity to read about and learn a little bit about. It is effectively money laundering. The term originates from a cuckoo bird, which lays its eggs in the nests of other birds.

The cuckoo smurfing technique involves a legitimate financial transaction occurring in one direction and an illegitimate flow in the other direction—this is criminal activity, in other words. These smurfs involved in this activity are engaged in an insidious crime using genuine recipients of their money. When you think of the smurfs, you think of the cartoon show. I used to watch it when I was growing up—the member for Ryan agrees with me there—with Papa Smurf and all of their related activities. But these smurfs are not nice characters, unlike most of the smurfs in the cartoon. In fact, there are master smurfs that spend all their time engaged in this process making a lot of money. It has been estimated that crime in Australia generates up to $6.3 billion a year, which is a lot of money. Money laundering activity in cuckoo smuggling is worth up to five per cent of global gross domestic product, which is $56 billion here, an amazing amount of money when you think about it.

What is being discussed here in relation to increasing the regulation provisions are worthy objectives, particularly the legislative framework on the regulation of remittance dealers and of the providers of remittance networks—that is, not just the dealers but those who house many dealers and provide networks for them—is a worthy objective in dealing with money laundering. We must have those frameworks in place to ensure that the law is adequate in emerging areas of the global economy. This is an emerging area of the global economy where the use of alternative networks for the transfer of funds is becoming increasingly more common. Therefore the law needs to be adequate in order to deal with them.
The term cuckoo smurfing is interesting. But when you look at the way that this money and these transfers work, for this bill to be entitled Combating the Financing of People Smuggling and Other Measures Bill, I am sure this is not the only mechanism that is used by people smugglers to conduct their insidious trade. Perhaps a more comprehensive suite of measures directed at people-smuggling would be better brought to this place. Of course, we know there is a lack of will in dealing with people-smuggling at the moment because of the associated problems with border protection, the failures and the government policy—and that is a sad thing.

It is the case that financial institutions that engage or house money for criminal organisations or outfits should understand they may be held liable for the actions, outcomes and consequences of housing or transferring that money. That is the exact principle that the Israelis are following up in relation to terrorism right now, and it is working. Damages are being awarded by courts internationally in relation to the consequences of financial institutions housing money for criminal activity.

In relation to people-smuggling, I would say to those financial institutions that may or may not know or have done their due diligence in understanding that if they are housing money for people smugglers or transferring funds for people smugglers they may be held liable down the track for the victims of the very sad situations we see when boats are sunk or when people lose their lives or when family members come forward to sue those institutions. As tragic as those events are, that is the system of law we all uphold—that is, people do have the right to come forward and hold everybody in the chain of what led to those events accountable, including financial institutions. There is no separation in law of the responsibility where events in criminal activity have occurred when these institutions have been involved.

While the government is keen to dress this up as a ‘very tough on people-smuggling’ measure, and indeed it will have some impact, the coalition does have some concerns in relation to some provisions that are being proposed here today. The coalition does support the bill in principle, and I have made it clear why that is. We have always had a good record on border protection. We have taken measures that needed to be taken in a timely fashion to ensure we did not get to this point where we are in effect penalising a whole industry for the operation of one criminal sector of that industry, and that is what we are doing here today. No member of this place should enjoy the fact that we are doing it, even though we have to do something to crack down on this insidious trade.

There has been an inquiry in the Senate, and we are foreshadowing amendments to this bill. I support many of the potential considerations the Senate is raising on this matter, including a legitimate concern with privacy relating to the increased ability of agencies to share information. The government reports that this bill is enhancing information sharing to ensure that government agencies work together in a coordinated way. However, there are some concerns that are valid when you think about the agencies that are involved. AUSTRAC can share financial intelligence with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Defence Imagery and Geospatial Organisation, the Defence Intelligence Organisation, the Defence Signals Directorate and the Office of National Assessments under the provisions of this legislation. When looking at all of those providers we mentioned—I think it is up to 2,500 or maybe more, I might have the figure wrong; many thousands of those providers—when you are
thinking about the impact upon that sector, then there is an argument to be had here and we have foreshadowed potential amendments to this legislation.

While we do in principle support this legislation it is unfortunate that it has come to this. If this is the government’s sole response to the very tragic situations that we have seen, which have been some years in the making in relation to the protection of Australia’s borders and the dramatic increase in people-smuggling activity we have seen in recent years, this will not be sufficient. This legislation will address only a very small symptom of a broader problem and not address its fundamental causes or roots.

No member of this place and no member of our community out there listening or that hears about this particular legislation, which has such a tough-looking bill title, should believe that this is going to solve what is becoming a rapidly growing problem for Australia today. It is not. The lack of interest shown by Labor members in speaking on this bill highlights that. Some will come out and say that we are very tough on border protection. Kevin Rudd had a view under his government that we were tough but compassionate at the same time. Members opposite are agreeing with me. But we have seen what tough and compassionate means. Who are we tough to and who are we compassionate to? When we are using tear gas and firing rubber bullets in detention centres I am getting very confused about who we are being tough to and who we are being sympathetic to when people-smuggling is flourishing and this insidious trade is increasing. It is confusing, and out there today in the world we are seeing the effects of this policy confusion. This bill is a response to this inherent policy confusion and failure from a Labor government that is desperately seeking some answer to a crisis of its own making.

Mr CRAIG THOMSON (Dobell) (5.23 pm)—I rise to support the Combating the Financing of People Smuggling and Other Measures Bill 2011. It is interesting following the member for Mitchell because you would have thought with his opening remarks that it was in fact a coalition bill, but it is a government bill. That clearly needs to be pointed out. The government is proud of the work we are doing in relation to disrupting people-smuggling and border protection generally. These issues are complex and sophisticated and they require complex and sophisticated measures. This is not an area where a cheap slogan can be thrown out there and it will solve the issues and the problems throughout the globe. We have issues in relation to the movement of people throughout the world. The problems are starting at source countries where particular circumstances mean that people are desperate to try to improve their lives and move from those countries to safer places such as Australia, Canada, the United States and different countries in Europe. It is happening throughout the world that, where there are severe disruptions and threats to people’s lives, they try to find a better place to move. That is the first area that is the cause of people moving.

The second area that we need to be concentrating on is our laws and the efforts we make to disrupt people-smuggling through those transitional countries along the way where people are moving from their original source country looking for asylum in safer places. This bill goes to that question in relation to looking to disrupt the financing of people-smuggling. The bill seeks to reduce the risk of the alternative remittance sector being used to finance people-smuggling and other serious and organised crime by introducing a more comprehensive anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing regulatory regime for the alternative remittance sector.
The Privacy Act 1988 is being amended to introduce measures that will allow the electronic verification of data, making it easier for people to open bank accounts online or use online payment systems. It will also allow the Australian Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre—AUSTRAC—to share information with more intelligence agencies, consistent with the practices of the Australian Federal Police and the Australian Crime Commission. Further, it will replicate the exemption provisions in the AML/CTF Act in the Financial Transactions Report Act 1988.

This government is committed to combating people-smuggling and strengthening Australia’s border security. We want a framework of countries to work together to break the business model of people smugglers. Talks are progressing with our regional partners. This government is working hard to make lasting improvements to the region’s response to irregular migration and to undermine the people-smuggling trade in our region. We know that these smugglers prey on people in very difficult circumstances, which is why we are trying to break their business model with tough people-smuggling laws and by removing the incentive for onward travel.

Looking at the action that this government has taken, in the last two budgets the government has invested almost $2 billion on a whole-of-government strategy to combat people-smuggling and enhance border protection. The strategy is focused on prevention, stabilisation, deterrence, detection and interception. The government takes any suspected cases of people-smuggling very seriously. That is why we acted to strengthen Australia’s people-smuggling laws in May 2010, introducing tougher penalties and extending mandatory minimum penalties for people involved in people-smuggling offences. Law enforcement authorities have identified international cash transfer services provided by alternative remittance dealers as a key method used to pay people smugglers.

The bill introduces measures to strengthen the existing anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing regulation of the alternative remittance sector and forms part of the government’s broader prevention and detection strategy for combating people-smuggling announced in April last year. The remittance reforms will reduce the risks of criminal infiltration and abuse of the remittance sector by giving AUSTRAC greater knowledge of, and control over, those operating in the sector.

AUSTRAC works collaboratively with Australian industries and businesses in their compliance with anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing legislation. As Australia’s financial intelligence unit, AUSTRAC contributes to investigative and law enforcement work to combat financial crime and prosecute criminals in Australia and overseas. The reforms will provide AUSTRAC with more effective enforcement powers by expanding their ability to issue infringement notices and breaches of the AML/CTF Act. This will ensure that AUSTRAC can take proportionate enforcement action in a timely manner and will act as a deterrent for non-compliance. They will also shift the compliance burden away from small business agents who make up the vast majority of the remittance sector and on to the large remittance network providers, for example, Western Union. This reflects the existing structure and practices of the sector.

The bill will enable AUSTRAC to share financial intelligence more broadly with the Australian intelligence community to ensure a more holistic approach to Australia’s national intelligence effort on national security and organised crime issues. The government’s December
2008 National Security Statement recognised the growing threats of these transnational activities to Australia’s national security and identified the need for improved coordination amongst Commonwealth agencies, including enforcement, regulatory and intelligence agencies, in response. The current arrangements do not allow for the contribution that financial intelligence could make to the analysis of national security issues, particularly organised crime, terrorism and the like.

Adding DFAT as a designated agency is important given their role in combating terrorism financing and administering Australia’s UN sanctions regime. The measures in the bill build on the steps already taken by the government to enhance information sharing amongst agencies, such as the new Criminal Intelligence Fusion Centre in the Australian Crime Commission, which was launched in July 2010 to generate and share information and intelligence on organised crime. Financial intelligence plays a strong role in the enforcement and regulatory responses to criminal and terrorist threats. There is considerable potential for financial intelligence to inform reporting and assessment on national security issues. This bill will enhance information sharing with intelligence agencies to ensure that the government agencies work together in a coordinated way to counter threats to Australia’s national security.

The verification of identity measures implement one of the recommendations made by the Australian Law Reform Commission in 2008 and will make it easier for consumers to access designated services online. Banks and other businesses that are subject to the AML/CTF legislation are presently required ‘to know their customer’; that is, they have to confirm the identity of anyone who wants to open a bank account, transfer money or provide a variety of other financial services. Businesses can presently verify the identity of their customers using document or electronic-based means, or a combination of the two. The electronic sources available for businesses to verify their customers’ identity are limited. As a result, the success rate for checking identity online remains low which impacts on business. Where a bank is unable to confirm identity electronically, consumers who want to open a bank account online—for example, ING who only operate online—need to go into an Australia Post outlet to have their identity verified in person. This is costly for business and an inconvenience for consumers, which inevitably leads to consumers being attracted to the larger banks with traditional branch structures. This change will open up another electronic data source, credit reporting information, to improve the success rates for electronic verification of identity checks.

A number of privacy provisions have been implemented to balance the expanded use of credit reporting data. For example, customers must consent to their personal information being disclosed to a credit reporting agency for the purposes of verification and alternative verification options must be provided to the customer. A credit reporting agency can only provide an overall assessment of the extent of the match between the personal information provided to it and what it holds on file, it cannot disclose information that is held on a credit reporting file. Reporting entities and credit reporting agencies must retain records for seven years and then delete them, and enable individual’s access to such records. The unauthorised access of verification information, obtaining access to verification information by false pretences and unauthorised use or disclosure of verification information are offences which carry a penalty of 300 penalty units, which is currently $33,000. The measures will decrease compliance costs for businesses and increase competition between online businesses and those businesses that have traditional branch structures.
This bill is designed primarily to help stem the flow of money for people-smuggling ventures as well as other serious crimes. People smugglers need money to launch their dangerous ventures. The Gillard government is committed to stopping them from getting the funds they require to ply their illegal trade. Law enforcement agencies are concerned about the role the remittance sector can inadvertently play in facilitating people-smuggling. We are dedicated to doing all that we can to help our law enforcers to stop this terrible trade in human life. To this end, the Combating the Financing of People Smuggling and Other Measures Bill introduces amendments to the Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Terrorism Financing Act 2006 to strengthen the regulation of the remittance sector. These measures will help limit the risk of remittance dealers facilitating people-smuggling, as well as money laundering, terrorism financing and other serious crimes.

This bill complements laws introduced last year that mean people who provide material support to people smugglers now face up to 10 years jail and fines of up to $110,000. A lot of rhetoric has gone on both in this place and outside of this place on the effects of people-smuggling and on how strong and tough people are in combating these issues. This government has taken a systematic approach to making sure that we do everything we possibly can to stop people-smuggling, to stop them putting vulnerable people’s lives at risk. This piece of legislation is but one part of that important approach and is important legislation. I commend the bill to the House.

Mrs MOYLAN (Pearce) (5.35 pm)—The Combating the Financing of People Smuggling and Other Measures Bill 2011 does make sound amendments to the Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Terrorism Financing Act 2006 and the Financial Transaction Reports Act 1998 by strengthening the regulatory framework for remittance dealers, especially by giving AUSTRAC, the Australian Transactions Reports and Analysis Centre, greater scope to refuse or apply sanctions to the registration of people and businesses providing remittance services. However, the name of this bill is somewhat confusing, given that it does little to actually combat the financing of people smuggling. Under the Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Terrorism Financing Act and the Financial Transaction Reports Act, reporting entities such as financial institutions and bodies dealing with monetary transactions are required to report all international funds transfer instructions, any transactions over $10,000 in physical currency and any suspicious transactions regardless of amount or destination. This information is collected and analysed by AUSTRAC, playing a key role in stopping transnational crime and money laundering activities.

Of these reporting entities, those falling under the alternative remittance sector are recognised as high risk for money laundering and criminal financing. These are usually non-bank entities that specialise in international money transfers or small to medium businesses that provide the service alongside other, unrelated services. The vulnerability of the alternative remittance sector is evidenced by the growing trend in criminal money laundering of cuckoo smurfing. The unusual name is a reference to the cuckoo bird’s habit of laying its eggs in another bird’s nest which then hatches the eggs as their own; and ‘smurfing’ refers to the division of large sums of money into smaller amounts. AUSTRAC’s typologies report of 2008 describes the process in four steps. In the first step, a legitimate customer outside of Australia deposits funds with an alternative remittance dealer to be transferred into an Australian bank account. The second step is that, unknown to the customer, the remittance dealer is part of a
criminal syndicate; the remittance dealer provides details of the intended transfer, including the amount and the receiver’s bank details, to a remittance dealer in Australia also working for the criminal syndicate. The actual transfer of funds does not take place. In the third step, the criminal remittance dealer in Australia deposits dirty money from the proceeds of crime into an innocent Australian receiver’s bank account. As both the amount and the transfer details match with what was legitimately arranged, the receiver believes the overseas transfer has occurred. Finally, in the fourth step, the clean money, retained by the criminal remittance dealer overseas, is passed on to the criminal syndicate. The process is repeated numerous times until all the illicit funds are laundered into clean overseas currency. In one case documented by the Queensland Crime and Misconduct Commission reported in the *Australian* on 21 January 2010, $1.7 million in drug money was deposited into the unwitting recipient’s Australian based bank account over a six-week period, through 61 separate cash deposits ranging from $3,500 to $150,000.

Cuckoo smurfing relies on remittance dealers engaging in illegal activity. Members of organised crime syndicates may become remittance dealers or may coerce previously legitimate dealers to engage in laundering. Unfortunately, even where remittance dealers are known to have or are suspected of having links to organised crime syndicates, the Chief Executive Officer of AUSTRAC currently does not have the discretion to refuse an application to become a remittance dealer due to the unsuitability of the applicant. Section 76 of the Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Terrorism Financing Act states that, if a person makes a written application to the AUSTRAC chief executive officer for their details to be entered on the register of providers of designated remittance services, and the person’s name is not already on the register, then the AUSTRAC chief executive officer must enter the person’s details.

The result of this inflexibility, stated in the explanatory memorandum to this bill at page 7: … means that criminals are able to legally operate as an alternative remittance dealer. Schedule 1 of this bill introduces measures to remedy this anomaly. These include requiring a person seeking registration to provide information which will assist the CEO of AUSTRAC to determine that person’s suitability; allowing the CEO of AUSTRAC to refuse, suspend, cancel or impose conditions on the registration of a provider of remittance services; and introducing enforcement measures, including penalty provisions and infringements, to assist in regulating the sector.

Whilst being welcome changes—as some of my colleagues have said, we welcome these changes—these measures are targeted towards remittance agents who knowingly deal with funds in a criminal manner, such as in cuckoo-smurfing money-laundering systems. Cuckoo smurfing is described by AUSTRAC as a ‘sophisticated money-laundering technique’, with all examples outlined in AUSTRAC’s case study reports and the media involving only the laundering of funds from illegal drugs.

How this measure in this bill will disrupt payments to people smugglers is somewhat unclear. This point is reaffirmed by Western Union’s submission to AUSTRAC on 9 December 2010 regarding this bill. The submission states at paragraph 6.1:

Western Union does not refute that money remittance services may have been used in order to fund people smuggling activities. But we submit that the reference to “people smuggling” in the title of this Bill is fundamentally misleading. More to the point, the Bill is concerned with improving the efficiency of regulation of the money remittance sector. No aspect of the Bill relates directly to people smuggling.
Even the Minister for Home Affairs’s own media release on 9 February this year speaks of ‘the role the remittance sector can inadvertently play in facilitating people smuggling’. As I have described, the measures in this bill target remittance agents who knowingly deal with funds in a criminal manner, not those who inadvertently or unknowingly transfer money which ends up in the hands of people smugglers.

On 13 April 2010 the *Daily Telegraph* reported on the people-smuggling trade in an article titled ‘Dreams die in a Palace of Lies’. The article makes sobering reading. It says:

… for anyone who has ever wondered how people can pay exorbitant travel fees—

and I mean people-smuggling fees—

the answer is that many do not pay upfront … the agent pays for the journey … [the travellers]—

the asylum seekers—

must pay that money back.

This is not just something that happens to asylum seekers; there is also prostitution and other criminal activities that this applies to. But for those who pay smugglers upfront offshore, this legislation will have no effect. For those transferring money from within Australia, establishing whether payments are to smugglers can be difficult. Money can be legitimately sent to family, friends or relatives overseas, who can then pass on the funds to smugglers. Alternatively, amounts under $10,000 can be withdrawn in Australia without the need for them to be reported and physically passed to agents in Australia who then on-send the money.

At this point I wish to impress that people who are paying off their debt are victims of this pernicious people-smuggling trade. In fleeing desperate circumstances, they utilise desperate measures. Smugglers threaten their lives or the lives of their family members to ensure that the debt is paid. The *Daily Telegraph* article quotes their source as saying:

… if they run away, maybe it’s ‘bang’—

they are shot—

maybe their family members in their own country will suffer.

We often hear a lot of talk about how these people can afford to come to Australia, but I can assure you, Mr Deputy Speaker, that often the cost they pay is the ultimate cost, the life of themselves or their family when that money is not paid back.

Whilst the initial transaction destination outside of Australia can be traced, the flow of money from then on is much more difficult to ascertain. Throughout South-East Asia and the Middle East the informal system of hawala is used to transfer money. Upon receipt of money, hawala brokers, or hawaladars, call other brokers and give instructions on how or to whom money is to be paid, with a promise that the debt will be settled at a later date. No formal transaction takes place and no records are kept of individual transactions except for a running tally of the amount owed by one broker to another.

In some countries hawaladars are required to be licensed but no records are kept of transactions; in other countries the system is unregulated or exists illegally, although tolerated to some extent by local authorities. Tracing proceeds to final recipients, the organised crime figures who profit from this trade, is therefore almost impossible.

Combating the finance of people-smuggling therefore requires great emphasis on regional cooperation through bilateral agreements and multilateral organisations such as the Asian De-
development Bank, which has been assisting countries in the region to formulate regulatory frameworks for all types of money transfers, including hawala. Through improved regulatory systems and financial intelligence cooperation, funds can be tracked to their destination recipient. Complementing this investigative ability, however, must be effective laws prohibiting not only people-smuggling but also the possession and receipt of funds gained through people-smuggling. Such laws are in their infancy in our region. Malaysia and Indonesia only last year committed to introduce laws outlawing people-smuggling. Australia must work cooperatively to ensure that such laws are maintained and continually strengthened as needed.

Criminalising money laundering is not an end in itself. The Australian government simply must work with regional counterparts to investigate effectively and prosecute people-smuggling rings and to investigate the criminal elements within Australia who stand over the victims of this trade. Australia must do more to reduce the demand for such services, working at the other end of this. That can be done by working with UNHCR to establish proper processing points in the region.

I have spoken in the House previously about practical measures that we can take to avoid the terrible tragedies and the spectacles that we have witnessed: last year, the drowning of many people in the boat that crashed at Christmas Island and, recently, the overcrowding of Christmas Island together with the use of teargas and plastic bullets, which, it seems to me, is totally unacceptable. We have to work at the other end of this, but we must do so in accordance with our responsibilities under the refugee convention, in a manner that demonstrates our social and moral obligations to people fleeing for their lives from places where terrible violence has been inflicted upon them.

While this bill is supported—I have heard a number of my colleagues speak on it today—it will not do a great deal to stop people-smuggling, because combating people-smuggling is a complex task. It requires effective international cooperation, rigorous investigation and targeted measures. While I welcome the provisions in this bill, as I am sure all in this House do, to stop money laundering—hopefully it will take some steps towards stopping money laundering—I have to say that the name of this bill belies the true effectiveness that these measures will have.

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (5.49 pm)—The Combating the Financing of People Smuggling and Other Measures Bill 2011 is part of the government’s commitment to tackling the financing of people smuggling and terrorism. Over the last two budget cycles, the government has invested almost $2 billion to fund a strategy to combat people smuggling and to enhance border protection. This bill presents measures to enhance the current provisions relating to money laundering and counter-terrorism financing in the alternative remittance sector. It also introduces measures to enhance the sharing of information between the Australian intelligence community and the Australian Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre or AUSTRAC.

People and businesses wanting to transfer funds can make these transfers in a number of ways. In our community and Western society, in general this is most commonly achieved through banks and other conventional financial institutions. However, money can also be transferred through so-called remittance services. Originating in South-East Asia and India, users of these systems transfer funds through the use of agents. These agents enter into an
agreement with each other to receive money from overseas, typically from foreign workers, and pay that money to a nominated relative or friend.

By way of example, I cite an Australian Institute of Criminology case study. In the case study, person A in Australia wants to transfer $1,000 to person B in India. Person A pays the alternative remittance provider in Australia and is given a code or number to relay to person B in India. The Australian alternative remittance provider instructs a counterpart in India to pay the $1,000 to person B upon receipt of the number or code. The funds are paid in India to person B, although money has not left Australia. Now the provider in Australia owes the provider in India a debt to be paid at a later date.

This is seen as ideal for these people as it can occur without the use of modern or established banks or electronic funds transfers, which in many cases do not exist in these regions. These dealers sometimes operate within large networks and this has been called alternative remittance, underground or parallel banking. It is legal in many countries. However, it has been found that this system could be used to fund criminal activity and terrorism. Certainly there is evidence to suggest that in the Australian context this service has been used to pay for the services of people smugglers. There is also evidence to suggest that it is also used to fund or launder funds from other serious crimes.

In recognition of this, currently all alternative remittance providers are required to apply to become registered with AUSTRAC before they can provide services. Failure to do so carries up to two years in prison, a $55,000 fine or both. There are some limitations to this current arrangement. Firstly, as registration is automatic upon application, there is no provision to deny a person registration, to cancel their registration or to impose conditions. Secondly, there are only limited sanctions available to AUSTRAC to take action against those providers who breach their obligations under the law.

This bill goes some way towards addressing these issues. It expands the provisions for those who need to be registered—from individual providers to those businesses that operate as providers of remittance networks. It also requires that providers of remittance networks, their affiliates and individual providers must re-apply every three years for registration. It further requires those individuals to provide information relevant to their suitability. The bill also gives the CEO of AUSTRAC the ability to obtain information from other persons for the determination of suitability. The bill further allows the CEO of AUSTRAC to refuse, suspend or cancel the registration of a provider or impose conditions on them.

Beyond the enhanced regulation of alternative remittance providers, this bill will also allow AUSTRAC to share information with the Australian intelligence community. This is part of the government’s plan to ensure a holistic approach to Australia’s national intelligence effort so that we can come down hard on organised crime and protect our national security. For example, adding the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade as a designated agency recognises the important work it does in combating the financing of terrorism and in monitoring the various UN sanction regimes.

As it stands, financial intelligence is not recognised in the current arrangements, despite the important role it plays in the enforcement of laws and regulations and in the prevention of terrorism. Deep Throat said in All the President’s Men, which I saw recently, and swooned again over Robert Redford, to ‘follow the money’.

MAIN COMMITTEE
Mr Robert—Swooned?
Ms BRODTMANN—Swooned. He is my favourite. This bill strengthens our ability to do this.

People smugglers are individuals who seek to make a quick buck out of the suffering of some of the most vulnerable people in the world. Targeting the ability of these individuals to make money out of their illicit trade and attacking the systems used to handle payment will make it more difficult for them to do business. Every time we make it harder for people smugglers to do business, we force them to analysis why they engage in the business in the first place.

Aside from strengthening the government’s response to people-smuggling and terrorism, this bill will also make it easier for consumers to access certain services online. Currently, banks and other businesses must know their customers—that is, they have to confirm the identity of anyone who wants to open a bank account and transfer money, among other things. Currently this is done using hard-copy documents, which sounds very old-fashioned. There is only limited availability for the use of electronic sources for identity checking. As a result, the take-up of electronic verification has been low. This has been costly for business and inconvenient for customers and consumers. This bill proposes to change that and open up another source of electronic verification—credit reporting information. This will improve the take-up rate and success of electronic identification.

Importantly, the government has introduced a number of privacy protections in recognition of the potential for harm that could arise from this electronic process of doing business. First, consumers must consent to have their personal information disclosed for the purposes of verification. Alternative options must be presented. Second, a credit reporting agency can only provide an overall assessment of the extent of the match between personal information and what it holds on file. It cannot disclose any further information. Reporting entities and credit-reporting agencies must retain records for seven years and provide access by those individuals to those records.

Finally, on the unauthorised access of verification information, obtaining access to verification information by false pretences or the unauthorised use of disclosure will carry a penalty, which at present is $33,000. This change will make it easier for consumers to access financial services, it will decrease the compliance cost of business and it will open up competition in the sector, particularly between online and traditional branch structures.

This is a comprehensive bill that covers a range of areas. I have just touched on a few of them. Most importantly, it strengthens provisions around the transfer of moneys through alternative remittance providers. It will make it more difficult for these services to be used for criminal ends and forms a core part of the government’s approach to combating people-smuggling, terrorism and organised crime. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr ROBERT (Fadden) (5.58 pm)—I rise to add some comments on the Combating the Financing of People Smuggling and Other Measures Bill 2011. The coalition supports the bill in principle. The purpose of the bill is to reduce the risk of money transfers by remittance dealers being used to fund ostensibly organised crime, including terrorism, some people-smuggling ventures and other serious crimes, by introducing a comprehensive regulatory regime for the remittance sector. I would like to point out from the outset that, when this bill
was considered by the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee, there was significant disquiet, including about the fact that the title of the bill was misleading in the fact that this bill is not primarily about combating the financing of people smugglers; it is about combating the financing of those who will seek to use it for illicit crime. People-smuggling is one of a long list of those criminal activities.

The aim of the bill is to ensure that those people who pose an unacceptable risk of money laundering, terrorism or indeed people-smuggling will not be allowed to easily use remittance services in the community. It seeks to reduce the risk that remittance dealers will be involved in these types of nefarious activities. It aims to improve intelligence sharing to protect against criminal infiltration of the sector and to ensure that the Australian Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre, or AUSTRAC, can deal with remitters who tend to act unlawfully.

But it also needs to be added from the outset that this will impose a heavier regulatory burden on the alternative remittance sector. It certainly raises a range of privacy concerns arising from the enhanced information sharing and the use of credit reporting data that this bill brings to the fore. The point should also be made that this is just one more level of regulation and encroachment upon legitimate businesses and the daily lives of Australians. I always hark back to Kevin 07, who stood there in 2007 and said, ‘For every one regulation we will introduce, we will take one away.’ By mid-2010 I think some 15,000 had been added and 46 had been taken away. I guess that is one more hollow, broken promise to add to the huge number already on the public record.

However, the bill has an interesting name, and it is the name we should look at: Combating the Financing of People Smuggling and Other Measures Bill. So let us look at the issue of people smuggling and let us understand why the government has chosen a misleading title for the bill. The answer is quite simple. As early as 25 February 2008 the Rudd government was warned that there would be significant risks with the decision to weaken the border protection and immigration regime. Come August 2008 the very effective Howard government regime was torn down and a new one was put in place. It is easy to see metrically, empirically, in a statement of fact, that the now Gillard Labor government, following on from the Rudd Labor government, has comprehensively and utterly failed to manage our borders. It has lost complete and utter control of the asylum seeker policy. Since it wound back the coalition’s highly successful policies in that fateful month of August 2008, to date more than 200 boats have arrived unlawfully, including three this week alone. Over 10,000 irregular maritime arrivals have come to our shores. This of course includes the ill-fated SIEV36, which was deliberately set alight, killing four people, putting lives of defence personnel at risk as they sought to save those who were in the water. And there was the tragedy of SIEV221, which crashed against the rocks of Christmas Island, killing around 50 people. The images that ensued were devastating.

As a direct consequence of these changes, as a direct consequence of these failures in policy, we have seen the three boats a year under the Howard regime become three boats a week—fact, without contention. The push factors have not changed, as every UNHCR report has shown. The number of people seeking asylum around the world has not changed significantly. Push factors have not changed, but the pull factors have changed substantially. As a direct consequence of what Labor has done, our detention network is now strained beyond even the widest capacity. We are seeing violent riots on Christmas Island and the mainland.
When the coalition left office, there were four people who had arrived illegally by boat and were in detention—not 400, not 4,000, just four. Today what is the number? It is not 400; it is not even 4,000—it is 6,300, including a hundred children. Today we learnt in parliament that the people responsible for SIEV36—which was deliberately set alight, and four people were killed because of that—have been given permanent protection visas. Apparently seeking to sink the boat, causing the loss of four lives and endangering our military Defence Force, does not run foul of the character test. The question is, does it run foul of the pub test? Ask the average Australian whether people seeking asylum who deliberately set their boat on fire, leading to the death of four people and substantially putting in harm’s way everyone else on the boat, including our Defence Force personnel, are of a fit and proper character to come into this country. The Labor Party says yes. That is absolutely and utterly outrageous.

If we just look to the budget since Labor came to power, there is a total blow-out of over a billion dollars in running costs alone. The member for Canberra spoke before about the government committing $2 billion to deal with the issue. They are committing $2 billion to deal with the mistake and the litany of errors that they have caused. And after this $2 billion, after the deaths of so many people, after the riots and the fires and the damage and the disputes, the boats keep coming. Nothing is stopping them from coming. Of the more than 10,000 irregular maritime arrivals, about 160 have been returned to their countries of origin. We know, as a statement of fact from the UNHCR, that if you are seeking asylum out of Afghanistan you have a one in 10 chance of actually getting asylum in a second or third country. But if you jump on a boat, if you pay a people smuggler to come to Australia, you have a 97 per cent chance after appeal of coming to the country. Now, I ask you: if a people smuggler comes to you in Afghanistan and says, ‘If you take a bus through Pakistan, jump on a plane and come across to Jakarta, Jogjakarta and down to the coast, pay us $20,000 and wait your turn, and you are prepared for six months incarceration, you have a 97 per cent chance of getting here’? Surprise, surprise! The boats keep coming. And what is disturbing is that that is not fanciful, it is statements of fact.

What is equally vexing is that the impact of this failed policy has seen a reduction in humanitarian visas granted to offshore applicants. Under the humanitarian program, 13,500 people will come in. It was 6,000 under the previous Labor administration. The Howard government increased it to 12,000; this government, to 13,500. We are the most generous nation on earth per capita in receiving people on humanitarian visas, and that is something we as a nation should be extremely proud of. We are a generous and compassionate nation. But every one person that comes by boat—and let me be very clear: every one person that pays a people smuggler to jump the queue—means one person in a desperate situation offshore, in a desperate refugee camp, does not have the opportunity for their humanitarian visa to be processed. Humanitarian visas go through, we cap it at 13½ thousand, and if that number is full you wait till next year, and the next year, and the next year. And as our humanitarian visa program is filled more and more by those coming illegally on boats, those desperately needing asylum do not get it.

That is the irony and the perversity of what Labor—the so-called party for the working man, the dispossessed and those seeking assistance—have put in place. Indeed, in 2009-10 there were just 3,233 offshore humanitarian visas granted, compared to a peak of over 6,700 in 2005-06. The number of humanitarian visas being granted has halved under Labor—fact—
because Labor will not control the borders and prefer a largely middle-class refugee seeker who is prepared to pay for a better set of economics to flee to the country. And rather than deal with the core problem of watering down our border protection regime, they seek to put forward bills that are certainly looking at combating the financing of criminal syndicates but call the financing of people smuggling as part of their spin to try and deal with it. Two days ago we saw in question time that, rather than deal with the problem, the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Minister Bowen, has just added six more spin-doctors, at $600,000, to the department to deal with the problem and to spin it so it sounds like Labor is indeed doing something. Despite leading Australians to believe that there would be no expansion of our onshore detention prior to the last election, another 4,900 beds have been added to the detention network onshore since the election, costing more than $400 million.

Let me be clear: the coalition supports an immigration and humanitarian program that is non-discriminatory, and believes that our processes for selecting those who come to Australia should be open and transparent. We will continue to honour our international obligations in relation to those seeking asylum. But we will not support processes that create a bias in favour of illegal maritime arrivals or illegal arrivals, full stop. We will not support a program or a process that provides people smugglers with a product that they sell to encourage people to get on a boat. And be under no doubt: if you have a 97 per cent chance of coming to this country, that is a product, it is saleable, and it is effectively being sold on the market today.

The coalition will not need misleading titles of bills to deal with the asylum seeker process. Indeed, the Prime Minister, if she were genuine about dealing with this, could spend 10 minutes and pick up the phone to the President of Nauru, rather than worrying about trying to spin the issue of a never-never solution on East Timor. That is never going to occur. That is never going to take place.

Mr Slipper—Why doesn’t the Prime Minister ring the President of Nauru?

Mr ROBERT—A remarkable question!

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr S Sidebottom)—I would ignore that, if he wants to speak next!

Mr ROBERT—Why doesn’t the Prime Minister call the President of Nauru? The coalition will. The coalition will pick up the phone and speak to the President of Nauru. We will introduce third-country processing of all illegal boat arrivals on Nauru. We will do that once elected. We will reintroduce temporary protection visas for illegal entrants and apply mutual obligation to payment of benefits. We will presume against refugee status for those who are believed to have deliberately discarded their identity documentation. We will return failed asylum seekers to their country of origin. We will restore the single case officer appeal process for asylum. We will provide priority processing for offshore asylum applicants over illegal arrivals. We will restore the requirement for onshore asylum applications to be made within 45 days of arrival. We will introduce mandatory minimum sentences for people-smuggling crimes and longer sentences for aggravated offences. We will introduce a full private sponsorship program for offshore asylum applications, and we will oppose the introduction of complementary protection, which widens the grounds for asylum seekers to make successful onshore claims.
All of this, as coalition policy, has been succinctly explained, presented and presided over by the member for Cook, Scott Morrison, many times. This has been out in the public domain as the coalition’s policy. It is clear. It is concise. There is no ambiguity as to what the coalition will do to stop illegal people-smuggling. We will take the product away. We will not rely on bills that simply try to spin a title, no matter how effective the bill may be—as indeed this one, agreed in principle, is in dealing with the financing of those who would seek to gain, with criminal intent, an advantage from the use of remittances and the moving of money. We will take real, tangible action. And I guarantee you, Mr Deputy Speaker: we will stop the boats.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Thank you for that guarantee.

Mr SLIPPER (Fisher) (6.13 pm)—Every week, I get a list of concerns that constituents have when they phone my Fisher electorate office, situated on the Sunshine Coast. And every week the issue of unauthorised arrivals, illegal arrivals, and illegal immigration—people smuggling—is one of the top-order issues of concern for residents of my part of the Sunshine Coast. And I suspect, Mr Deputy Speaker, that in your own electorate office you would also get phone calls from many people who are concerned over the failure of the government’s policies in relation to border protection.

The member for Fadden, in his contribution, pointed out that it would be advantageous if the government were to lift the telephone and call the President of Nauru. The facilities, I gather, are already on that island, in that country. They have been paid for by the Australian taxpayer and it is simply a question of unlocking the gate and putting illegal arrivals into immigration detention in Nauru.

I do not know why the Prime Minister and the government have invested—and, in my view, forfeited—so much public regard in pursuit of what is an unrealistic option: that is, to establish immigration detention facilities in Timor-Leste. No-one in East Timor has given the slightest indication that he or she is in favour of that country being an immigration detention centre for Australia, although, given the dollars that would flow to the host country, one finds it very difficult to understand why East Timor has resisted the blandishments offered by this government. After all, East Timor does owe Australia a lot. If it were not for the Howard government, East Timor possibly would not be free today. The former Prime Minister took a very strong public stand, and Australia took a very proud and, in my view, morally correct decision when we sought to encourage the people of East Timor to have self-determination, which ultimately of course resulted in the independence of that country from the Republic of Indonesia.

So I do not really know why East Timor is showing such a lack of gratitude to Australia and in particular to the current Prime Minister. But it should be obvious to anyone that the East Timor solution is not a solution at all. It is obviously going nowhere. I do not know why the government continues to invest prestige in seeking a solution which is simply not realistic. On the other hand, Nauru is a country in the Pacific not far from Australia which is prepared to host an immigration detention centre. That centre has already been constructed. It probably could be open next week if the government approached the government of Nauru, and yet I suspect that there has been an element of bloody-mindedness. The government refused initially to consider Nauru, and now it would be perceived as being too much of a backdown were the Nauru option to be once again looked at as realistic by the government.
I believe that the Australian people are running out of patience with the situation where the government has created an open-door policy. The government has turned the seas around Australia into a superhighway. What the government has done, whether the government intended to do this or not, is to put out a welcome mat for people smugglers and unauthorised arrivals. Frankly, if the views of the people of the Sunshine Coast are in any way, shape or form typical of the views of the people elsewhere in the country, overwhelmingly the people of Australia feel that the government has let the country down, has taken its eye off the need to have border protection and has encouraged people smuggling. While the Combating the Financing of People Smuggling and Other Measures Bill 2011 has laudable aims, it simply does not address the major problem, and that is that, when Australia is perceived as being a soft touch, obviously the immigration scams will continue and the people smugglers will have something to sell.

When the former immigration minister, the member for Berowra—who has just entered the chamber—was a senior minister in the former government, the boats were stopped. We sent a very strong message to the world that people smugglers were out of business. People knew that there was no point in bringing unauthorised arrivals to Australia, because we simply were not prepared as a nation to tolerate it. The former government said, ‘We will determine who crosses our borders,’ and the former government did that. My view is that the former government at the time was completely in sync with the views of the Australian people. It is my submission to you, Mr Deputy Speaker Sidebottom, as a discerning person, that the views of the people of Australia have not changed. The people of Australia have had a gutful of the fact that we are now seen as being an easy touch, a soft target, and consequently the people smugglers are able to carry out their evil business. As we all know, far too many people have lost their lives through the activities of people smugglers. People smuggling is inhumane and unscrupulous, and we as a nation should do all that we can to stop it.

The Liberal-National opposition is certainly supportive of the intent of this bill. We are against people smuggling and we oppose the abhorrent practice of immoral and greedy people smugglers preying on the desperation of others and demanding from them massive amounts of money to provide risky passage to what they are promised will be a better life. A few years ago I decided, given all the publicity in relation to immigration detention, that I would visit the Woomera detention centre and the Baxter detention centre, both of which were situated in South Australia. The day before I was to visit the centre I drove out to the Woomera detention centre. I must confess that they were a little bit suspicious of this person driving a vehicle around the boundaries of the immigration centre. When they asked me what I was there for, they were quite happy when I told them that I was there by appointment to visit the centre the following day. I must say that, despite what people said about the allegedly inhumane treatment of people at Woomera, I personally was impressed with the approach of the people who were in charge of that facility. I spoke to a woman who held a senior role there and I noticed that the glass on the door of her office was broken. She told me that a detainee had sought to attack her with a piece of four-by-two, and consequently people in the centre were clearly very wary and being very careful.

At the Baxter detention centre I spoke to a person who was of a faith I had not heard of before. That faith was the Sabaeans Mandaeans—

Mr Ruddock—Followers of John the Baptist.
Mr SLIPPER—Followers of John the Baptist. Apparently it is necessary for their religion for them to be positioned close to water. The Iranian regime is quite brutal towards these people. I sat down and spoke to a lady, and what she had done was to travel from Iran to Jordan. In Jordan she bought passage from someone and paid some $20,000 for the air tickets from Jordan to Jakarta. When she got to Jakarta she and her family made their way overland to a people-smuggling port where they bought passage to Australia. She felt indignant that she was locked up in the Baxter detention centre because she felt that she had entered into a commercial transaction to provide a new life for her and her family in Australia. I found her quite a delightful person and I must say that my heart went out to their family circumstances. But clearly she and her family had paid what they saw was commercial passage to people smugglers. I do not ultimately know what happened to that family, but the reality is that if the government is prepared to put out a welcome mat to people smugglers then more and more people will be prepared to enter into what they consider to be commercial transactions. As we all know and from what we have seen, the conditions on these boats are life-threatening. They endanger life, and the result is that people have lost their lives and more people will lose their lives because of the inappropriate approach we currently have towards people smuggling.

The government today in question time failed to answer the question on whether people who were found responsible for endeavouring to sink a boat were successful in obtaining visas and entry to Australia. I can only suggest that in fact some of those people must have gained visas to remain in Australia because otherwise the question would not have been asked. I am waiting with interest to hear what the Prime Minister has to say to the parliament when she comes back, having researched that particular situation.

The other concern that constituents in the electorate of Fisher have is the possibility that people who have been rioting on Christmas Island have been endangering the lives of people who are either employed by or contracted to the Commonwealth and destroying property of the Australian taxpayer and yet there is a very real possibility that some of those people might be given permanent residence in Australia or a visa which could lead to permanent residence. A former minister for immigration—not the gentleman in the chamber today; it was Chris Hurford—told me that more than a million people knock on the door of Australia every year to come to join—

Mr Ruddock—I think it is probably higher than that now.

Mr SLIPPER—Well, it is probably higher now but in those days it was a million people. So Australia can afford to pick and choose. I do not really think that our system should allow people who would seek to sink a ship and cause people’s deaths, or people who are prepared to riot and endanger life and property, should be eligible for consideration as possible migrants to Australia.

The government has been soft on border protection, but it is not too late for the government to ring the President of Nauru and say, ‘We would like to access the facilities paid for by the Australian taxpayer and open an immigration detention centre on Nauru.’ Nauru is a country which does have certain economic challenges and I am sure that Nauru would benefit from the inflow of funds which would occur were the Nauru solution to return to operation. It was very successful when the former government used Nauru. Nauru is a friendly nation not far from Australia.
But it is very important that we send a powerful message to people smugglers and to unauthorised arrivals that they are not welcome in Australia. As a country we should do whatever we can do to stamp out this evil trade, to prevent people from having their lives placed at risk and, of course, to stop people jumping the queue.

Apart from Canada, Australia has the most generous humanitarian refugee program anywhere in the world—and when I say ‘apart from Canada’, I think that is on a per capita basis. The problem is that the government, when it allows people to come in via the back door, is reducing the opportunities for people who legitimately apply to be received on a humanitarian basis in this country. The reports have shown that some 135 boats arrived in 2010 with a total of 6,889 passengers and crew. So far, 2011 has seen five boats with 326 passengers. This compares with just 32 boats in the entire period from 2002-03 to 2007-08 under the previous Liberal-National government.

The Combating the Financing of People Smuggling and Other Measures Bill 2011 certainly has laudable aims, and the opposition does not oppose it. But, at this late hour, the opposition does plead that the Prime Minister should pick up the telephone, ring the President of Nauru, and solve this problem once and for all. Until we send a powerful message to people smugglers that Australia is closed to their evil trade, the boats will continue to come, the misery will flow and people’s lives will continue to be lost.

Ms Marino (Forrest) (6.28 pm)—The Combating the Financing of People Smuggling and Other Measures Bill 2011 relates more to other serious transnational crimes than it does to the people smuggling contained in its title. When I read through the bill, this fact was confirmed by the number of times I read the words ‘people smuggling’.

I would have to say that there is very serious concern in the community about the riots on Christmas Island. It is resonating right throughout the community. When I was out over the weekend, at the Harvey Harvest Festival, people were literally rushing up to me, and that was the one thing they wanted to talk about. They take it very seriously. They are seriously angry about the riots. They are also concerned about what will happen as a result of those riots and about whether those people will be allowed to stay in this country and whether they actually should have the right to do so.

I am very well aware that the Howard government had a very strong, unequivocal stance on border protection, and that strong, unequivocal stance gave a very clear message to people smugglers. That was the intent of that particular legislation. There is no doubt that that strong stance in protecting our borders and our national interest came in for much criticism, mainly from the Labor Party and social commentators at the time. The tough stance was, however, very necessary because people smugglers were becoming increasingly active and increasingly wealthy, and more and more people were putting their lives at risk as a result of that. As a result of the numbers of suspected illegal entry vessels that were arriving with increasing regularity—it was just a fact of life—in 2001, when the Howard government took its strong stance, when John Howard made his now famous statement, people smugglers had successfully completed 43 incursions into Australian waters. However, in 2002 they made just one. In fact, over the remaining years of the Liberal-led government, 25 boats entered Australia illegally. That is an average of just over three a year from 2002 to 2008.

But it all changed dramatically in 2008, when the newly elected Labor government threw open Australia’s doors to people smugglers, seriously increasing their wealth at the same time.
This also placed thousands and thousands of people at risk—as we have seen by the thousands who have arrived in Australia—in leaky and unseaworthy boats. And we have recently seen the tragic outcome at Christmas Island. In 2009, people smugglers reached Australia 61 times, and in 2010 they earned their illegal, very lucrative income through at least 135 successful incursions. That is over 200 in total.

It is this background of Labor’s border security policy failures that is supposedly the genesis of this bill, which the government today seek to use to paper over some of the cracks of their policy. Well, it will not work. There was an effective and solid border security policy. There is now a Labor papier-mâché version, to which this bill merely seeks to add a little more paper and flour.

I went up to Darwin to have a firsthand look at Operation Resolute and the enormous job that our Navy and Air Force in particular are undertaking. It is a very serious job, and it is constant. They do an enormous service in the way that they carry out their duties. But what concerned me was the fact that, when they do pick up a SIEV, it takes four days to take those asylum seekers from Ashmore Reef to Christmas Island, and often they have to be accommodated on a vessel that is not built for that purpose. You see these service men and women having to spend hours and hours taking guard duty on these boats until the time they are given orders as to what to do next. They are very trying circumstances and they do put their lives at risk.

As I said, other serious transnational crimes will be a major target of changes in this bill, as opposed to people smuggling. The government is attempting to do this through a bill which will require greater scrutiny of third-party money transfers internationally and will make the results of this scrutiny available to a wider range of Australian security organisations. It is meant to enhance the identification of the senders and recipients of moneys sent across international borders.

The measures in this bill may well aid in the identification of money used for drug smuggling, arms smuggling, people smuggling, international terrorism or a range of other serious criminal activities, but the government should not be calling this a people-smuggling bill; it should be calling it a control of remittance services bill. This bill is supposed to improve the monitoring of those who act as a third party in sending money around the world, including those who do so to fund illegal activities. One of those activities is people smuggling, but there are many other activities that will be caught. In fact, apart from the title, as I said, the term ‘people smuggling’ only appears three times, in schedule 1. In each of these three short references, the bill determines that the Australian Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre must have regard to whether a person would be a risk of engaging in money laundering, financing of terrorism or people smuggling when registering them or cancelling their registration on the new or old register to provide remittance services—and that is it. Just those three short references are the entire link to people smuggling in a bill of 53 pages, apart from the title.

The point that needs to be made is that the measures in this bill impose substantially increased regulatory burdens on the alternative remittance sector, and I do know that privacy concerns have been raised as a result of the enhanced information-sharing provisions and credit-reporting data. Whilst I understand that Australian law enforcement agencies are rightly focused on the role the sector may inadvertently play in facilitating payments for people...
smuggling, I note the provisions for a more comprehensive registration scheme and the provision of tiered penalties. I am, however, concerned about the additional regulatory and compliance effects on what are legitimate business activities. There are over 6,500 remittance dealers operating in Australia, conducting legitimate business, but I do understand that cybercrime is also a serious and growing transnational security issue. The NBN and its proposed 100 megabits per second will facilitate crime at a speed and frequency we have never experienced before.

Another part of the bill which requires further examination is that which directs credit-reporting agencies and reporting entities to retain information relating to verification requests for seven years. This may well enhance the transparency of the verification process; however, it is the broader issue of how and where this information is stored that I am concerned about—who has access to it and how this access is audited and monitored. That must be addressed given the capacity of local and transnational hackers. It is just a fact of life now.

I note the expanded list of designated agencies that can access AUSTRAC information. Again, how the volume of shared information is stored, accessed and protected needs to be defined. It is only common sense that, the more agencies have access to information, the more opportunities exist for that information to be passed on or accessed. I therefore support a comprehensive examination by the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee; however, the provisions contained in this bill should not be considered in any way as a solution to the Labor government’s soft and very risky approach to border protection.

Mr RUDDOCK (Berowra) (6.37 pm)—The Combating the Financing of People Smuggling and Other Measures Bill 2011 may assist in combating the financing of people smuggling, but it will not deal with people smuggling. This is not a comprehensive approach to dealing with the enormous problem that we as a nation now face.

The measure is supported because it may assist law enforcement in identifying those people who are in Australia who are paying moneys for people smuggling. I must say that I wanted to find out from the second reading speech what the government might know about people smuggling and the way in which the information they receive, profiling targets, might give us a guide to what is happening.

I thought it appropriate in the context of this legislation to speculate a little about what this bill is seeking to deal with. I suspect that this bill is seeking to deal with identifying not only people smugglers but those people who pay people smugglers. I ask you, Mr Deputy Speaker—and you are nodding very approvingly—who would pay a people smuggler in Australia? Is it somebody doing so out of the goodness of their heart, who thinks that they might be helping somebody abroad, or is it something more insidious?

I suspect that there is more not said in this speech that we ought to be aware of. I suspect that there are people in Australia, quite frankly, who are very much involved in paying people smugglers. And I suspect the number of people is quite significant; we would not be legislating in this way if we did not think it was a significant trade. I suspect that the only people who would be paying people smugglers from Australia would be people who have identified relatives that they would like to see come to Australia. That is what this legislation is designed to deal with. What it is telling us is something that the government does not tell us, and that is that, while there may be some people on boats seeking to come to Australia for protection,
there are many people on boats coming because they are seeking some form of family reunion which they might not otherwise be able to obtain. By using the protection method, they can make claims—whether fabricated or not—and if they get through the system, they are in the door. When you know that something like 10,000 people have come to Australia on boats recently and only 160 have been removed, you can understand why they might think that this is a reasonable prospect.

I have been talking about Australian multiculturalism and I have been very defensive of it. But I do regard it as a genuine handshake that people should make when they come to Australia, and that is that if they expect to be treated tolerantly and with understanding and their culture to be accepted, they have to be accepting of the broader Australian mores. They have to be prepared to accept that in Australia we have rules. They have to be prepared to accept the rule of law—that we have a parliamentary democracy. And one of the offences under our law is people smuggling.

I would suggest—and I would be very interested to hear how the government is going to respond to this; advisers might take note—that there are other people besides people smugglers who are committing offences when moneys are paid to bring people to Australia unlawfully. They would normally be called accessories. I suspect we are dealing with a very large pool of people who are engaged in using people smugglers, paying people smugglers to bring people to Australia who would not otherwise be entitled to come. I have often had to say to people, ‘25 per cent of Australians are overseas born.’ Think of all the uncles, nephews, nieces, cousins, brothers and sisters that we have to say no to. But there are some people who think that if you can get round the system by paying people smugglers that is in some way all right.

I have obviously had an interest in these issues over a long time, but I think it ought to be repeated again: I do not come to these issues with some malicious view about the way in which we should deal with these issues—that we should be demonising those people who seek to come, or that we should be trying to punish those people who seek to come to Australia looking for protection. I have had a longstanding interest in refugees. I have spent more time in refugee camps than perhaps any other member of the Australian parliament, all around the world. And I am very conscious that we have to look at those people who have no prospect, wherever they are, of returning home, who are in immediate danger where they are. I recognise that there are 10 million people in those circumstances who have been assessed. I recognise that many of those people who get onto boats have never been assessed before they come here—do not seek to put their claims to be judged against the others who may have greater need.

This is a problem that we are having to deal with: a situation where something like 10,000 people on more than 200 boats have now arrived unlawfully; where people have died because a vessel was set fire to, as we know from reports made by some of the people on board; where a large number of other people died on the rocks of Christmas Island; where we hear from Australian relatives ringing up to ask: ‘We think one of our relatives is on a boat and it hasn’t yet turned up; can you find out where that boat is?’ I suspect that there are, tragically, many more people who have died.

I think there are very good reasons for us to be angry that, after we had largely destroyed the people-smuggling operations, the government, who wanted to show that they could deal
with these issues ostensibly more humanely than their predecessors, took a number of decisions which have reopened this trade. Temporary protection visas: what was the argument there? They had to be abandoned because more women and children were getting on boats, yet we have over a thousand children who have still travelled on boats to Australia when we are now giving permanent protection. How disingenuous was the argument that temporary protection visas had the insidious impact of putting more children on boats, when we know that children are still getting on boats?

I read some material in one of the newspapers today which I thought was particularly germane to the issue we are discussing. This is an issue in which all of the government’s excuses have now been exposed. They have argued that Australia got more people not because of changes to government policy but because there were more push factors encouraging people to seek sanctuary and therefore we have more people getting on boats to Australia. Yet we have a story today by Lanai Vasek which really gives the lie to this excuse. It says:

Asylum applications lodged in Australia last year increased 76 per cent on 2009—

so last year they increased by 76 per cent—

despite an overall decline in claims among industrialised nations.

The latest UNHCR figures on asylum trends also reveal the number of visa claims from Afghan refugees rose 277 per cent in the first half of last year for the Australasian region while the average in 44 survey countries was a decline by 5 per cent.

So the number of Afghans coming here was up by 277 per cent, but in other industrialised countries that figure was down by five per cent. Canada, a similar country to Australia, saw a 41 per cent drop in asylum applications in the first half of last year. This is an issue in which the changes of government policy have led to more people seeking to come to Australia unauthorised by boat, exposing themselves to risk.

I look at the measures that need to be taken, and the argument is that we need to do things at a regional level. The government says, ‘Look, if we can work better with Indonesia and some of our partners in the region, maybe it will improve.’ I have to say that our alleged partners in the region do not feel like helping us, and the reason they do not feel like helping us was told to us directly by numbers of officials in that Asian way—almost inscrutable—when they said, ‘We’ll help you when you do something about the sugar.’ Not everybody understands that, but it is quite clear that they are saying: ‘You take the incentives off the table, take the sugar off the table, and maybe we will look at how we can help you. But while you’re encouraging them to come, why should we do anything about it?’ That is why the coalition policy is the only way in which you are able to deal with these issues, the only way in which you will get international cooperation and regional cooperation—when it is seen that we are prepared to play our part.

I know it is too much for the government, the way in which this speech was written to obscure what they were really saying, but all they have to do is to adopt the measures that the Howard government put in place. You will not have people on boats. You will not have deaths at sea. You may be accused of being inhumane when you reintroduce temporary protection visas, but I suspect not; when you introduce third-country processing of illegal boat arrivals on Nauru—the Pacific solution; when you turn back boats when it is safe to do so; when you presume against refugee status for those who are believed to have deliberately discarded their identity documents; when you return failed asylum seekers to their country of origin. Ten
thousand, and only 160 weren’t refugees? Is that what we’re saying? You’ve got to be kid-
ing! You can provide priority processing for offshore asylum applicants over illegal arrivals. Why wouldn’t you want to help those who are in immediate danger over those who happen to have money to pay a people smuggler? And you can increase the mandatory minimum sen-
tences for people-smuggling and deal with those who are accessories, breaching our law. None of this appears to be happening at the moment.

At a regional level, yes, you can work with your partners to combat people smuggling; you can share intelligence and put in place surveillance operations. But they will only treat you seriously when they think you treat it seriously. That is the point that needs to be made. I do not think it is any accident that it seems to take an enormous amount of time to get people-
smuggling laws through the Indonesian parliament. I would like to think it is only because they want to look at the laws very closely, but we have been talking to them about doing this for years. Why don’t they do it? I suspect the reason they do not do it is because they do not believe that we have played our part.

This legislation I think is particularly important. It can help. But I think it is more impor-
tant because it has disclosed that this government is not really serious about dealing with peo-
ple smuggling. If it was, all of the measures that we had proposed would have been pursued quickly and vigorously by the government.

Ms GAMBARO (Brisbane) (6.52 pm)—I rise to speak on the Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Terrorism Financing Act 2006 and the Financial Transaction Reports Act 1988 and the Privacy Act 1988. The purpose of this bill before us, the Combating the Financing of Peo-
ple Smuggling and Other Measures Bill 2011, is to tighten regulation over the remittance sec-
tor in Australia. It is a significant action by government to intrude or trespass upon the legiti-
mate business activity of individuals and bona fide business firms. The Australian public are rightly sceptical about such possible intrusions, and it is always preferable for a government to be organised enough to avoid this particular situation. But the Gillard government is any-
thing but organised, and we have just heard in the contribution by the member for Berowra about the disarray that has been occurring particularly with illegal boat arrivals.

The further intrusion into the freedom of remittance sector operations should not be taken lightly, but with a government that is not functioning well on any level it seems that such an intrusion is necessary. However, the coalition holds a very strong view that national security and the fight against terrorism must prevail. As such, the coalition supports in principle the Combating the Financing of People-Smuggling and Other Measures Bill 2011. The bill’s pur-
pose is to reduce the risk of money transfers by remittance dealers being used to fund people-
smuggling ventures and other serious crimes. There is one thing for sure: people smuggling and the proceeds of people smuggling are on the increase. We have had 10,000 arrivals in more than 200 boats, and the numbers are increasing. There are people offshore that are mak-
ing genuine claims. A couple of weeks ago I returned from the Thai-Burma border where 170,000 people have been in camps for periods of up to 20 years and they are making genuine claims through the UNHCR. However, we have an increase in the amount of people smug-
gling that is going on and a system at the moment that is in complete disarray.

The bill’s purpose is to reduce the risk of money transfer by remittance dealers being used to fund people-smuggling ventures and other serious crimes. It has obviously been put in place, as the previous member said, because this is on the increase. The bill’s intention is to
introduce a more comprehensive regulatory regime for the remittance sector, and whilst there has been a long-held international concern about the exploitation of the world’s financial system for criminal purposes such as money laundering, the surge in people-smuggling activities and their links with sophisticated crime networks have led to further regulation of formal and alternative financial sector activities—such as the banking and remittance sector—aimed at preventing the financing of people-smuggling and terrorist activities.

There is obviously and unfortunately a very genuine need to combat the increased activity of people smuggling—a situation that has reached absolutely unacceptable levels in recent times. The aim of this bill is to ensure that those who pose an unacceptable risk of people smuggling, money laundering or terrorism financing will not be allowed to provide remittance services in the community. The bill seeks to reduce the risk that remittance dealers will be involved in financing people smuggling, money laundering or financing terrorism.

Some notable examples of money laundering occur in various ways. One of the newer and much more sophisticated methods is laundering money through bank accounts of unsuspecting third parties. This is known as cuckoo smurfing. Using this system requires a very complex structure; initially a very innocent customer who may be in Australia or overseas, a criminal alternative remitter located overseas, an Australian criminal seeking to transfer funds overseas, an organiser or coordinator in Australia and associates of this organiser who make the third-party deposits into the Australian customer’s account. Crime gangs and groups also launder proceeds of crime by business revenue manipulation, in which illicit funds are funnelled through a firm’s otherwise legitimate accounts.

This web of activity needs detailed and comprehensive surveillance and investigation. The expense involved in such an investigation is considerable, and money-monitoring agency AUSTRAC believes that such related crime in Australia generates up to $6 billion a year—an unbelievable amount, and obviously an amount that is increasing, otherwise this government would not have the need to bring in such legislation as is before us today.

This is all the more reason for the Gillard government to ensure that the people-smuggling activity is minimised, and that that is done as soon as possible. It is only when there is a confident and successful sense of national security that concentrated efforts to end criminal and dangerous activity will prevail. This government needs to get the basics right, and it is clearly not doing that. It has failed in so many ways: it has failed to stem the tide of people smuggling that we have seen—it is only increasing—and it now needs to put in measures in order to combat the people-smuggling financial remittance. The government really needs to get its basics right; clearly, it needs to improve our national security, and the failure that it has had all along in protecting its borders.

Mr MORRISON (Cook) (6.55 pm)—The matter dealt with by the Combating the Financing of People Smuggling and Other Measures Bill 2011 is very serious, and one that is the constant focus of debate—sadly, for all the wrong reasons. Those reasons are the unparalleled failures of this government in the area of border protection—a failure to protect and to control our borders has now extended to a failure to hold control even of our immigration detention network, which is in a rolling crisis. If anybody needed to be convinced of that, and to understand just how serious this issue has become and how urgent is the action that is necessary, they only needed to see the buildings burning on Christmas Island the other evening—a situation which the Prime Minister said on the previous Sunday was under control.
I commend my colleagues on the comments they have made—the member for Brisbane and, in particular, the Father of the House, the member for Berowra, whose experience in these matters is unparalleled in this parliament, and I would suggest elsewhere as well.

Where the government does something that is positive and that assists to address this matter, I am happy to support it. Sadly, I do not have too many opportunities to do that in this parliament. Almost without exception—and I would say that this bill is an exception—every time the government have touched this area it has literally turned to mush. This has been the case whether it was their decision to dismantle the border protection regime put in place by the Howard government, literally brick by brick, that has led to more than 10,000 people turning up and over 200 boats, or whether it was their decision to implement a discriminatory asylum freeze that saw the average time in detention increase threefold and the number of people in detention double, contributing to the chronic situation we see in our detention network today, a policy that the Prime Minister said was in the national interest when she was the Deputy Prime Minister. Whether it is these issues or, more broadly, the government’s failures in the area of border protection, when they do something positive I am happy to say so, and this bill is a positive step. It is not a big step, but at least it is a positive step and it is something that we can refer to in positive terms.

In this area some 10,000 transactions have occurred in relation to these matters. There are 6½ thousand individual providers of remittance services in Australia and reporting entities are required under the Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Terrorism Financing Act to report international fund transfer instructions and threshold transactions over $10,000 to AUSTRAC. The measures that are outlined in this bill seek to provide further powers to ensure greater cooperation, intelligence sharing and the mandatory provision of information going to these transmittance agencies that are used in the informal sector of the economy, largely, and which are abused by those involved in criminal activity, especially in the area of people smuggling. This bill seeks to try to effect some positive regulation in bringing these areas under the eye of our authorities.

The coalition’s approach to dealing with these issues is based on a simple understanding that people smuggling is a business that exploits the refugee convention, of which we are one of the original signatories, and proudly so, to promote and facilitate secondary movement of people. It was recently revealed in the Senate estimates that 40 per cent of those who had come to Australia illegally by boat had spent at least 12 months in a place other than the country from which they say they were seeking asylum. So they had not come to Australia directly seeking a country of asylum. In fact many of them had spent more than a year in another country, predominantly Pakistan and Iran. And what takes place in these areas where those seeking asylum congregate is a business and that business provides a passage all the way from Pakistan and Iran through Malaysia or Indonesia and onto a boat, and on they come to Australia. That is the product they seek to sell and, as someone who was actually once involved in the tourism industry, it is not that dissimilar from the way tourism packages are sold around the world. This is an end-to-end package put forward by the smugglers that also includes finance in many cases, though it is not the sort of finance that anyone in this place or anyone in this country would like to contract with. If people think that they have got complaints with the banks, well, the banks will not turn up at your family’s doorstep if you refuse to pay the interest and deal with you violently. Those are the sorts of people we are dealing with, who are
engaged in this activity. So we understand that this is a business and we understand that to destroy this business you need to remove the incentives and the infrastructure and opportunities that exist to make this business function.

To give you an idea of how much money is at stake, it was revealed in Senate estimates that the average price paid per passage was $10,000 per person. That was to get on a boat to get to Australia. That means that the boat that recently arrived carrying 147 asylum seekers was worth just under $1.5 million to people smugglers. That was a pretty bountiful passage for the people smugglers. That boat turned up just a few days ago. So there is a lot of money involved. What the coalition’s plans and policies are designed to do is to deny the people smugglers a product to sell. The way that we have done that—and I stress that we have done it; it is not a theory; it is not just a policy; it is something that has been proven—is by denying a product by removing the certainty of the immigration outcome that is potentially on offer to people who seek to get on these boats through paying the people smuggler.

We did that through only offering temporary protection visas to those who would seek to come to Australia illegally by boat. No permanent residency was offered, unlike under this government, which provided permanent residency to the three individuals who were involved, according to the Northern Territory coroner, in what was ‘part of a plan to scuttle the boat’ that led to the deaths of five fellow passengers, injured 40 more and put Defence Force personnel at risk. Those three individuals received permanent protection visas in this country. They subsequently qualified after the suggestion by the government that this would be reviewed under the general character test—which I note is the same general character test that this government is going to apply to those who were responsible for the riots on Christmas Island. That is where the government sets the bar on these things: if you scuttle a boat and that leads to the death of five people, we will still give you a visa and we will not take it off you on the general character grounds under section 501 of the Migration Act. If that is the test that they are going to apply to those who set Christmas Island alight last week, I do not think that those people are shuddering in their boots.

This government has literally no form or backbone when it comes to dealing with the realities of what happens in this space. Whether it is the detention network or the people-smuggling business, this government just does not get it. They do not understand that it is not just the measures but the back-up and the resolve that sits behind them. That is what is important. We can have measures like the ones in this bill but, if they are not backed up with the resolve to follow through on many other measures, they will not work. They need to be backed up with the reintroduction of temporary protection visas, the resolve to turn boats back where the circumstances permit and the resolve to reintroduce third party processing—as we have proposed for Nauru. Why Nauru? Because they would agree to do it, as opposed to the farcical plan for East Timor.

I note Nauru, because the government likes to say that it was not effective. Apart from the fact that the Labor senator Peter Cook concluded that it was effective, I note the statement by Senator Evans in February 2008. When commenting on the Nauru and Manus Island experience—the Pacific solution—he said that, of the 1,637 people who were detained at Nauru and Manus Island, 1,153 or 70 per cent were ultimately resettled from those centres to Australia or other countries and, of that 1,153, around 61 per cent, 705 people, were resettled in Australia. Those are the facts. The Pacific solution created uncertainty in the minds of those people who
may have been going to pay a people smuggler about whether they were going to get what
they paid for.

When the boat may not end up in Australia and when the only opportunity that you are go-
ing to get on the other side if it all goes right is a temporary visa under which you cannot have
access to the family reunion program then you may well choose not to come. The family reuni-
on program is why we see predominantly single males sent out here. They are coming as an-
chors. They seek permanent residency so that they can make the applications for family to
join them. We see the even more abhorrent situation in which minors under the age of 18 are
sent out on the boats to act as anchors to draw other family members out. That requires a re-
response that is more than just changing legislation. There needs to be some resolve here. Scut-
tting the business is necessary. This bill tries to frustrate the channels of finance that go to
those who pay people smugglers.

The Father of the House made an excellent point in his contribution to this debate. This bill
assumes that there are people providing finance for the passages of people to come out to
Australia and that they live in Australia. This bill is designed to try to ensure that we have the
information available to enforcement authorities to find those people. What I am not con-
venced about is that this government, even if they found them, would prosecute them. It is
important, as the Father of the House said, that all people who live in Australia regardless of
their background, regardless of where they have come from, conform to the requirements of
Australian law.

I think it is very important that communities across this country work with Australian au-
thorities, whether it is with Customs and Border Protection, the Australian Federal Police or
others. If you know that a boat is leaving Indonesia then tell the Federal Police. That is your
responsibility as an Australian. That is your responsibility as someone who has residence in
this country. You should inform the Federal Police if you are aware that an illegal activity is
about to take place. That phone call may save lives. Those phone calls certainly would have
contributed to the saving of lives last December when that boat crashed against the rocks at
Christmas Island. People knew that boat was going to leave Indonesia. They had tried to talk
people out of getting on that boat but did any of them call the Federal Police to let them know
it was leaving? Was there any intelligence shared by those who knew that boat was leaving?

That goes to the heart of what this bill is about—the networks of support that exist within
this country through financing. That financing may be coming directly from the family net-
work or friends of those who are seeking to come; there may be other forms of finance which
have been provided by other lenders or others who can resource this vile business. This bill is
designed to provide intelligence to ensure that they can be tracked down and prosecuted and
they should be. I would urge those who are in those networks of support to understand that it
is the law of this country to try to stop people smuggling. It is the law of this country to have a
refugee and humanitarian program that has integrity. We have processes that we believe in
strongly because we want to make sure that those places under our program go to those who
we as a country have decided are in greatest need. We do that every year. Sadly, in recent
times that decision has been taken away from us and given to people smugglers who are de-
ciding who the thousands of people are who are now getting permanent visas, including those
who scuttled SIEV 36 and have been allowed to stay and potentially to bring other members
of their families here who have been involved in this vile business.
In the few moments I have remaining, I want to say that we also need to deny the means. That involves ensuring that we can prosecute people smugglers themselves and deny them the infrastructure in those villages throughout Indonesia, the vessels and those who might participate. To do that we need the help of our friends in Indonesia and Malaysia. As the Father of the House said, there is no great incentive for them to help us when we will not take care of business on our side of the fence. We are not taking care of business on our side of the fence and it is not surprising that they are not falling over themselves to try to help us. I seek leave to table the full suite of measures that we have announced as a coalition that are designed to nip this issue in the bud and deal with it dramatically. I seek leave to table the document as the coalition’s full policy on domestic, regional and international measures that can deal with this scourge of people smuggling.

Leave granted.

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (7.14 pm)—I certainly welcome this opportunity to speak on the Combating the Financing of People Smuggling and Other Measures Bill 2011. This bill makes certain amendments to the Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Terrorism Financing Act 2006. As we know, that was created by the Howard government. It talks to the requirement for the reporting of international funds transfers of over $10,000. So those performing remittances need to report those transactions to AUSTRAC. This was a bill for the time. There were issues regarding terrorism—as there still are today—and issues regarding criminal activity, the money-laundering problems that still exist today. So it was very much an act for the time. There is no doubt that it served its purpose. I pay tribute to Senator Ellison for the work that he did to bring that bill and then act before the parliament.

That is one thing. That is what the act at the time was designed to achieve: to make sure that those transactions that took place were properly reported and then investigated if required. That was what it was all about. On the other hand there was the issue of border control and the people smuggling that took place. To fix that problem, the government at the time decided on a different set of measures. Those measures were ultimately successful, as they reduced the boat arrivals to a mere trickle. I think there was one boat arrival in 2002, and it was pretty much along the same lines after that. So there was a law for money laundering and counterterrorism financing. And there was a policy with Nauru and temporary protection visas. That solved the other problem.

When we look at this bill—and I am holding up a copy of the minister’s second reading speech—what we see is an attempt to convert the original Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Terrorism Financing Act into something which the government is putting out there and suggesting is going to represent progress on solving the problem of people smuggling. It has already been pointed out by so many speakers before me that there is very little reference in the second reading speech—or the bill, really—with regard to people smuggling.

The problem is that the ultimate problem is not going to be solved by this sort of thing. We know how to solve the problem. Those members who were here before knew how to solve the problem. The member for Leichhardt was around when the problem was solved before, when the measures were put in place that actually stopped all the boats—or stopped all but one or two boats a year. But, unfortunately, the government cannot bring itself to put those measures back in place which would solve the problem. So we are shadow-boxing around with this bill,
where the government brings it before the parliament and supposes that this is going to be the panacea that will result in a reduction in people smuggling. But we will get to that.

This bill is about the 6½ thousand providers of remittance services. This bill is about those other organisations and bodies that might also end up providing remittance services. It is basically about more remittance providers being included under the original act and the ability for more government agencies to be informed about the remittances that take place. That is basically what this bill is all about. We know that it supposes itself to be an attempt to reduce people smuggling. That is what it supposes. I noted, when I was listening earlier this evening in my office to this debate, a number of comments that were made. I think it was the member for Canberra and the member for Dobell who waxed lyrically about the $2 billion that the government has spent on its anti-people-smuggling border control strategy.

Mrs Griggs—They are still coming!

Mr SIMPKINS—Yes, exactly right. But I would suggest that what we do not have here is a strategy. What we have is the purchase of a number of very expensive band-aids. I do not call it a strategy when you are faced, over a couple of years, with such a huge expansion of demand for beds that you have to start bringing extra money out to provide those beds—4,900 more beds since the election, $400 million—none of which was forecast in the budget. It was all a surprise, but that is no strategy. This is catching up; this is a band-aid and a very big and expensive band-aid indeed.

Clearly as the government tries to address the primary problem of stopping these boats—addressing the problem not with the means, not with the tools that have worked in the past for this country but through just shadow-boxing around, trying to achieve something without doing what needs to be done—of course what needs to be done is the reintroduction of temporary protection visas. What needs to be done is making presumptions against the refugee status if someone turns up without identity papers.

The coalition policy is well known and it has been tabled again tonight, so I am very happy about that. I recently got figures back regarding a question on notice I put to the minister for immigration. I asked how many people who came from, for instance, Pakistan in 2010 used aircraft on their way here. The result was around 2,600 of those people came from Afghanistan. Rather they said that they used aircraft. I suspect that there were probably more that used aircraft but did not say that they did. In fact, there must be a whole lot more than that who came from Afghanistan. An interesting point is that of all of those who came from Afghanistan, only about 550 or 600 people had identity papers when they got here. That is an interesting point. I am sure the member for Solomon agrees with this: there are huge numbers of people coming, thousands of people coming, and yet, despite the fact that they have travelled through places like Indonesia, through airports—Jakarta, maybe Kuala Lumpur or however—by the time they get here a mere fraction still retain their identity papers.

Mrs Griggs—Strange, isn’t it?

Mr SIMPKINS—I think it is strange indeed. Most countries have a requirement that you need a passport or some form of identity paper to progress through immigration control. But sadly, or conveniently perhaps, by the time someone gets on a boat, there must have been a bad wave or something like that because so many of their identity papers are floating around in the Timor Sea—maybe conveniently so. I really do wonder how ASIO and other agencies
identify the people who are on these boats given the fact that clearly a vast majority of them have tried to conceal their identities. Who knows how you would identify someone who has no photo identification and will tell you basically what they think is going to work. Clearly, these are the problems that need to be fixed and these are the problems that this bill is not going to address.

On the point of the bill specifically: a couple of weeks ago a constituent came to me in my office and said that she had recently been standing near one of the post offices not far from my office. This had been a couple of weeks before she saw me. She said to me that there were two people talking about how they were transferring money back to Afghanistan or Pakistan or one of those two countries; she was not clear on that. They were sending as much money as they possibly could—$3,000 or $4,000 at a time—and this had been a regular thing. This lady said to me, ‘You know what that is all about?’ I suspect that I do know what that is about. I suspect that that is, as the member for Berowra was saying earlier, about people having decided, ‘The best way to get our relatives here is not to apply through the proper channels; the best way is to send money back home so that the people smugglers can be engaged and the money paid, subverting the system.’ As the member for Berowra said, we used to call them accessories. Maybe we could even call that a conspiracy to bypass the laws of this country. So there might be some value in this bill, but I really wonder whether, for those who do send money out of Australia to help their relatives bypass the system, this bill will still do what needs to be done and whether the $3,000 to $4,000 that might go at each point will actually be addressed here. I suspect not.

I go back—and I really have taken too much time tonight on this matter—to this: the ultimate problem the government faces is that there must be a true discouragement to those who come by boat; they have got to believe that the money that they might spend in paying people smugglers would be wasted and that there would be no guarantee of coming to this country. That is done through temporary protection visas; that is done through offshore processing. It has been achieved in the past. The problem was fixed back in 2001; John Howard fixed it. People were not losing their lives out on the Timor Sea. People were not losing their lives out on the Indian Ocean if they were coming from Sri Lanka. To me, the compassion in this argument is, very clearly, in putting measures in place that are going to discourage people from risking their lives. That is a damn good way to go.

Mrs MARKUS (Macquarie) (7.26 pm)—I rise to support, in principle, the Combating the Financing of People Smuggling and Other Measures Bill 2011 and to speak on the absolutely unacceptable practice of people smuggling and how this legislation, it is hoped, will cut off the funding that allows this despicable trade to flourish. The bill we have before us has a purpose, and that is to catch, hopefully, those who are breaking the law, who conduct financial transaction services to launder illicit money—money that is then used to finance people smuggling.

In Australia, one impact of the deregulation of the banking system has been a rise in remittance dealers who operate outside the mainstream banking system and offer alternative financial services including the transfer of money into and out of Australia on behalf of clients or who arrange for the service to be provided. People trading in this way are known by many names: remittance dealers, money remitters, money transmitters, alternative remitters. They operate on the open market and within many ethnic community groups. There are a broad
range of operators from owner-operator businesses to large, multinational entities. Transfers are commonly made electronically by phone, fax, email or SMS, or through a clearing house, and the transaction is undertaken when remittance dealers accept cash, cheques, monetary instruments or stores of value. They then pay an equivalent amount of cash or value to a beneficiary in another location. It is a legitimate and profitable business venture, and there are approximately 6,500 individual providers of remittance services in Australia.

Having said that, within the alternative financial transactions framework there are many scams and complicated, sophisticated schemes designed to avoid detection. This bill, it is hoped, will improve intelligence sharing and surveillance to capture the corrupt operators and, at the same time, protect the genuine operators by strengthening the regulation of that sector of the financial services industry. For those operators who do the right thing: you have nothing to fear. For those who are part of a money-laundering process: this bill will expand the number of agencies that monitor and report on fund transfers and it will extend the methods by which reporting data is collected and end recipients identified; you are on notice.

The Australian Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre, known as AUSTRAC, is in the portfolio of the Attorney-General. AUSTRAC is Australia’s anti-money-laundering and counter-terrorism-financing regulator and specialist financial intelligence unit and shares information with a number of other government agencies. Under the Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Terrorism Financing Act, a wide range of businesses and financial institutions that deal in cash, bullion and financial transactions must report to AUSTRAC on all transactions above $10,000. These include banks; building societies; corporations; insurance companies; security dealers, such as stockbrokers; most unit trust managers and trustees—some are exempt; travellers cheque or money order issuers; cash carriers and payroll preparation businesses; casinos; bookmakers, including totalisator agencies; bullion dealers; and, of course, some solicitors. Transactions which must be reported are currency of $10,000 or more, or foreign currency of that value; international funds transfer instructions, either into or out of Australia, of any amount; and suspicious transactions of any kind, being transactions that the dealer may reasonably suspect of being part of tax evasion or crime or that might assist in a prosecution. Even members of the public are obliged to report to AUSTRAC if they carry $10,000 or more into Australia. This is done, as we all know, on forms available from the Australian customs service at airports and seaports.

The ABC reported on 27 January this year that Australian Federal Police statistics show that 302 people have been arrested for people-smuggling offences in Australia and 104 convicted. The Australian newspaper on 7 April 2010 reported that the people-smuggling trade through Jakarta has become such a big business that spotter’s fees of up to $540 a person are being offered for getting asylum seekers onto boats headed for Australia. While in principle the coalition support this bill, we do not believe that it is all that is required to stop people smuggling. We would contest and argue that the changes in policies by the Labor government have in fact made people smuggling easier and more accessible. While the bill goes some way to strengthening the intelligence-gathering and reporting functions of the financial services community, and should in this regard be supported, in its current form it does not answer all the questions or bring all the solutions required to stop people smuggling.

The bill also imposes a heavier regulatory burden and cost on the alternative remittance sector and raises significant privacy concerns from enhanced information-sharing provisions.
and the use of credit reporting data. This will have an impact on those who are doing the right thing. I support the bill in principle but note the pending Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee inquiry into the bill, so the coalition reserves the right to make additional amendments. I commend the bill to the House, but I have to say that I hope the Labor government will be prepared to take further measures that will make a real difference to those people who are being impacted directly by people smuggling, in many instances having faced the loss of their lives.

Mr BRENDAN O’CONNOR (Gorton—Minister for Home Affairs, Minister for Justice and Minister for Privacy and Freedom of Information) (7.34 pm)—in reply—Firstly, I present a correction to the explanatory memorandum for the Combating the Financing of People Smuggling and Other Measures Bill 2011. I thank all those who have contributed to this important debate with respect to measures to regulate the remittance sector. This is a very important piece of legislation which, if enacted, will enable the financial intelligence agency of the Commonwealth, AUSTRA, to provide greater regulation of the remittance sector. It is a very important initiative that was part of a suite of measures the government announced in April last year to combat people smuggling. 

As people might recall, on 9 April we announced measures to combat people smuggling by introducing penalties of up to 10 years jail or $110,000 for people who provided material support for people smuggling. That legislation was enacted in budget week last year and complements those arrangements. This is about ensuring the remittance sector is properly regulated and providing AUSTRA with the power to terminate registration or ensure that those who are involved in the remittance sector are of good character. This is about ensuring greater accountability and transparency in this sector. For that reason, the government is seeking the support of the coalition, Independents and Greens in this matter.

I understand that comments have been made on other matters. It is true to say that if we were to strengthen the regulation of the remittance sector we would have a greater capacity to identify money laundering. The advice I have received is that money laundering is a challenge in this country as it is in countries around the world. This bill will help mitigate those threats. It is also true to say that serious and organised crime will be challenged by these regulations because the stronger the financial regulations of a given sector the greater difficulty serious and organised crime have in engaging in unlawful conduct in the sector. I believe that would be the case as a result of the initiatives enclosed within this bill.

It is unfair to categorise the bill as not directly going to the issues of people smuggling. The government believes that people smuggling is a significant problem in this country. We believe that we need to tackle it in a variety of ways. This is one of many ways the government is seeking to combat this very challenging area. We do so by engaging with law enforcement agencies in the region. We do so by working closely with our neighbours in the region, such as Indonesia and Malaysia. They dedicate resources, like we do, in order to target people smugglers. This is very important because, in the end, we are seeing people reap profits as a result of acting unlawfully, as a result of luring people onto unseaworthy vessels and taking people, in many cases, on journeys where they perish. For those reasons it seems absolutely critical that we do everything we can to reduce the likelihood of people profiting from the crimes and to reduce the likelihood of, in many cases, desperate people being encouraged to get onto such vessels. We do not want to see another disaster like that which occurred on
Christmas Island on 15 December last year, where approximately 50 people perished. We do not want to see people profiting from people-smuggling offences. This bill will assist in that regard. Therefore I reject out of hand the assertions made by the shadow minister for justice in his contribution to the debate and those on the other side who suggest that this bill is inappropriately titled. I understand some organisations raised this issue during the review of this legislation before the parliamentary committee.

But, in the context of the government announcing increased prison sentences for people who provide material support, along with a better form of regulation to the remittance sector, it is quite appropriate that this bill indicate that, along with other measures, the government is targeting people smuggling, as outlined by its title. I do not accept the proposition that it is misdescribed or that the purpose of the bill is in some way not properly reflected. For that reason I do not accept the notion that we would accede to an amendment that would change the description of the bill. The facts are that there is sufficient information for us to conclude that these measures and these forms of regulation within the remittance sector are required. I would be therefore very surprised if the coalition were not to support the substance of these provisions. I understand there have been a number of other amendments foreshadowed. In the end we will discuss these issues with the coalition and other members who may have an interest, but I believe the bill has the right balance between ensuring that the remittance sector provides greater accountability for its oversight of its clients, its customers, and at the same time provides them with sufficient security. In the end this is about not only targeting crimes but also preventing the sector’s reputation being brought into disrepute.

There was evidence to suggest that the remittance sector is not a place where people-smuggling activities occur. I would strongly oppose that position. Indeed, the parliamentary report into the matter cites a departmental officer who gave evidence on the matter. In that evidence he said:

… enforcement agencies are aware that the remittance sector is being used to finance serious criminal activity, including people smuggling …

Certainly there was evidence provided to the committee that that was the case.

The other issue I would raise is that I understand there was a report by the Australian Institute of Criminology suggesting that cash transfer services provided by remittance deals have been used to pay the organisers of people-smuggling ventures. It goes on to say, however, there were not many documented instances of this. I say to that, and I say in respect of the assertions made by the AIC, that, yes, they were right; that there was indeed evidence of people-smuggling activities when we looked closely at the remittance sector. But I also suggest that the AIC and other bodies, and, indeed, those that have contributed to the debate, should understand that the intelligence the government receives on these matters goes beyond the public comments made in respect of these matters. I want to inform the House that the government thought long and hard about taking this approach. It did so on the advice of our law enforcement and intelligence agencies, which are concerned that the remittance sector is used for improper purposes.

This legislation complements, as I said, the legislation that was enacted last year. It is an important step to ensure a greater likelihood that the remitting of money for improper purposes will be detected and people will be prosecuted as a result. This is of course going to assist us with serious and organised criminal matters—money laundering from the proceeds...
of drug trafficking, for example—but among those things the people-smuggling matter is front and centre in the government’s concerns about tackling this issue; that is, dealing with this very complex matter. I therefore suggest that those members who have suggested that there are concerns with the construction of the bill rethink their view. This has been properly considered by the parliamentary committee, and I support the majority decision of that committee. I ask the parliament to understand the importance of this legislation, ensure that it is supported and ensure that we have as robust a regime as possible in the remittance sector to prevent people smugglers profiting from that terrible crime.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Ordered that this bill be reported to the House without amendment.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Indigenous Affairs

Debate resumed from 22 February, on motion by Mr Dreyfus:

That the House take note of the following document:

Closing the Gap: Prime Minister’s Report 2011

Mr ENTSCH (Leichhardt) (7.46 pm)—I start by saying that I represent the electorate of Leichhardt, which is the home of the Torres Strait. I have 19 Islander communities—14 of them in the outer islands and a couple on the mainland on the tip of Cape York. I have 13 Aboriginal communities dotted throughout Cape York and down around the Cairns area and very large Indigenous populations in two other Cape York towns, Laura and Coen. I have spent most of my life up there. I have been involved in the cattle industry for many years. A large number of the people I went to school with were Indigenous, and in my previous life in the grazing and the crocodile industry I had a large number of Indigenous people who worked for me as well. I have seen the deterioration of their quality of life, the problems associated with Indigenous Australia and the challenges faced in trying to deal with a lot of these problems.

I listened with interest recently when I heard the minister make a statement about achievements that she believed had been made in relation to policies associated with a three-word slogan, ‘closing the gap’. I was very, very disappointed, to say the least. I find it rather distressing when ministers come into this place, put their hand on their heart and gauge their commitment to Indigenous Australians by the amount of money that they have squandered, quite often without any sense of outcomes. If they squander the money—and we are talking large amounts of money—they feel that they are doing the right thing. The reality is that they are feeding bloated bureaucracies and they are continuing to condemn Indigenous Australians to a very, very sad future. Until such time as ministers and governments start to focus on outcomes and measure those outcomes by successes of programs rather than the amount of money that they have thrown at the insatiable bureaucracies that they tend to create, I think we are going to continue to stagger along and see some very, very depressing figures in relation to any sorts of achievements in Indigenous Australia.

When we start talking about closing the gap, the first thing the minister could do is deal with the insidious suggestion of locking up the entire Cape York community with the wild rivers legislation. I was in Cape York at a time when the Indigenous community started to
fight to recover their lands. After decades of campaigning, they successfully started to recover large tracts of that land. They are now the largest single pastoral leaseholders in Cape York. I sat down and talked with Allan Creek, who got back his land near Coen, and he talked about his greatest aspiration. He said that with a bit of age he is a bit like me, a bit old and too fat to be tossing bulls anymore, but he would love to be able to sit on the top rail of his own place and watch his grandkids working their own cattle.

That is never going to happen, given the concept that is being pushed on them with wild rivers. At the end of the day, it should not be the southern based Wilderness Society which determines what people can and cannot do on their land. These people have campaigned for decades to get that country back. It may well be that the traditional owners who have got their leases may well want to have it as sit-down country. They may want to turn it into nature reserves. They may well want to do all sorts of things with it—run cattle, have agriculture or maybe even do a bit of tourism—but at the end of the day that determination should come from them. It should not be predetermined by the Wilderness Society. As Allan said, he has not got the education behind him to do comprehensive management plans. It may be another 10, 15 or 20 years before one of his grandkids has an education which gives the capacity to do that. I can tell you, many of the non-Indigenous people do not know how to do that up there; they would struggle with it.

We need to give them the time. We do not want to lock the country up so they cannot do a darn thing. It is just amazing that the government blindly follows the will of the Wilderness Society and ignores the needs and the aspirations of the Indigenous people, who are desperately wanting to make a future for themselves and demand a say in their own country. That is what will close the gap, not driving a wedge through them with the Wilderness Society.

I just put through an application to the minister which started last year—$75,000 to have three leadership programs organised by the Regional Organisation of Councils of Cape York. This is something that represents every Indigenous council in Cape York. They wanted three leadership seminars for their young people. They have already done a couple themselves and they have been an outstanding success, as reported by wonderful young Indigenous Australians like Tania Major. It was $75,000 for three of these programs over 12 months. The minister tells me she cannot afford it; she has not got the money for $75,000 for three years. They were offered $30,000 and they said: ‘Keep it. We can’t do it with $30,000. It’s just another $30,000 to be squandered.’ And, of course, it will be the blackfellas who are accused of wast- ing the money. It was an insult to them. But the minister did say to me, ‘Come back and apply again next year’, so I did. They put in another submission. They actually cut it down by $10,000. They went in for $65,000. The minister came back and said, ‘No. I’m sorry, we can’t afford it.’ But she can afford to put $213 million into chosen bureaucracies in Cape York, and between them there is not a single outcome where there is any sort of economic future or success for Cape York. It is absolutely disgusting. Sixty-five thousand dollars to the Regional Organisation of Councils of Cape York is closing the gap. It is giving them an opportunity to take control of their own future.

The state government introduced the alcohol management plan throughout Cape York. They beat their chests. They said: ‘Look at this. We’re doing this for all the blackfellas. We’ll get all the votes in metropolitan Australia’, and everybody supported it. Could you imagine
introducing total prohibition into Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra or Brisbane in relation to removing a methadone program? That is what they did up there.

There is prohibition today, in communities with huge numbers of alcoholics and no detox—and you wonder why we have a problem! First of all, they are spending huge amounts of extra money trying to buy illicit grog. When they run out of money, they start finding innovative ways of using boot polish and a whole range of other things, and we start burying them. Those who are a bit smarter end up in the towns like Cairns, Cooktown, Weipa, Mareeba and Mossman. They then become a social problem. Everybody looks at them as drunken blackfellas on the street. But they have been driven out of their own communities. There are no detox centres—there is no medical detox—and no rehabilitation centres up there. And these are the victims. But, of course, as far as the government is concerned—

Mrs Griggs—we are closing the gap.

Mr ENTSCH—we are closing the gap, because they are getting rid of all the drunks, they are putting them in the mainstream; they do not exist anymore. It is disgusting.

Years ago, I organised $1 million to put into renal units in Weipa, Bamaga and Cooktown. I fought the Labor state government; the minister did not want a bar of it because she was not consulted. Three units were built, but they decided not to put any nurses in them. So we had people with chronic diabetes being forcibly relocated into cheap motels in Cairns and living there for five, six or seven years until they carried them back in pine boxes to bury them in their communities. Those renal units are still sitting there empty. They have never been used—

Mrs Griggs—a waste.

Mr ENTSCH—it is an absolute waste—but that is closing the gap!—because they cannot afford to put a renal nurse in there to look after these people in their home communities.

I talked about $22 million to fix six communities where 40-year-old seawalls have started to deteriorate to a point where every year houses are getting washed out. There is sewage, the water systems are being contaminated and kids are getting diarrhoea, Japanese encephalitis and the like. We are faced with the challenge. If nothing is done these people will have to be forcefully removed from their communities and we will have to find somewhere else for them to live. They are not going to like that. These people are standing on the edge of Saibai and watching their cemetery washed into the sea; about a third of it has already been washed into the sea. And they still will not spend the money to fix these walls. That is not closing the gap.

Take funding for even simple programs, like the $250,000 to Apunipima Cape York Health Council. They wanted the money, and we actually committed it at the last election. This was funding to pick up people from remote communities who desperately needed help in the medical system in Cairns because the services were not available in their remote communities, provide a bus service, take them to their medical appointments and then back to the bus. It would have cost $250,000 to run this service for a year. These people have not got the money to come down; if they do get down, they spend their money on taxi fares, run out of money and cannot get back, so they end up on the streets. They cannot afford to do it. These are the sorts of things to talk about; funding Apunipima to bring these people safely to their appointments to get treated for medical conditions. Many of them will not even come out of the communities because they know they cannot get back. That is closing the gap!
We have the Bushlight program up there. I had a look at that recently. It is an absolutely sensational program, a highly successful program. It is putting in alternative power. We are talking about carbon trading and the greenhouse effect. Here we have a group, the Centre for Appropriate Technology, that has been going in and putting in hybrid green systems at remote outstations. I have 12 of them in Cape York. People are escaping from mainstream communities into these outstations so that they can have a much better quality of life—and, of course, get away from the grog, the violence and all the rest of it. They are looking to expand that program significantly. Funding that is closing the gap. But no hope—at this stage there is no commitment for that money whatsoever.

Douglas House, the Aborigines and Islanders Alcohol Relief Service in Cairns, has 20 beds. People enter voluntarily and pay for themselves to stay there for alcohol rehabilitation. The Rose Collis Haven in Mareeba has another 22 beds. They were defunded by this federal Labor government. They are sitting empty at the moment. While we have alcoholics sleeping in the streets, these purpose-built places are sitting empty. That is not closing the gap. At Rose Collis Haven a year or so ago they had just completed a 20-bed Indigenous aged-care facility—brand, spanking new and not a bed has ever been slept in. The only things living in those rooms are the spiders and cobwebs. That is not closing the gap, I have got to tell you. It is unbelievable that that type of attitude exists.

We talk about putting your hand on your heart and saying, ‘We are committed to Indigenous people,’ yet all of the initiatives put up by Indigenous people to have real impacts and make positive changes in their lives—whether it be education, health, opportunity for private enterprise, or whether it be an opportunity just to build a better community—get knocked back every time. This federal government is only interested in pouring bucketloads of money in, getting recognised for the amount of money they spend, while they are feeding self-serving bureaucracies that have absolutely no interest of making sure that the programs are economically or socially successful. I fear that the reason for this is that as these communities start to get economically or socially successful or independent, these bureaucracies would lose the opportunity for this government funding. So while they have them totally reliant, they are quite happy. While you have governments feeding the self-serving bureaucracies, they can claim that they have that commitment because they are pouring bucketloads of money into it, but at the end of the day the people out there in the communities continue to suffer and to be totally frustrated by the fact that, no matter what they put up, they are totally ignored. I think that it is an absolute tragedy, and I think this government needs to hang its head in shame and start looking seriously at making some real difference to these communities. At this stage the problem is only getting worse.

Debate (on motion by Mr Stephen Jones) adjourned.

CONDOLENCES

Japan Natural Disasters

Debate resumed from 22 March, on motion by Ms Gillard:

That the House:

(1) express its deep shock and sorrow at the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear emergency that have struck Japan;
(2) extend its profound sympathies to the many families whose loved ones have been lost in this tragedy;

(3) express its gratitude and admiration to the Australian emergency response personnel who are assisting in the recovery effort; and

(4) pledge the support of the Australian Parliament and community as Japan comes to terms with the immense nature of this disaster and the long and costly process of reconstruction that lies ahead.

Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth) (8.02 pm)—Australians watched in awe and with horror as we saw the impact of the earthquake and the tsunami in Japan.

A division having been called in the House of Representatives—

Sitting suspended from 8.03 pm to 8.15 pm

Mr TURNBULL—I was saying before the suspension that we watched with awe and horror the earthquake and the tsunami in Japan, recognising the immense power of nature, its unpredictability and its ability to vanquish all before it. But we also, as the drama unfolded, watched with awe and admiration the stoicism, the courage, the commitment, the professionalism of the Japanese people. It is a remarkable thing that while the death toll in this earthquake is currently estimated to be in the order of 18,000 people—a shockingly large number—it would have been much, much greater had it not been for the superb engineering of the Japanese nation and Japanese professionals which made so many of their buildings effectively earthquake-proof. Of course, no building can withstand a 10-metre wall of water and, as we know, it was the tsunami that has caused the greatest casualties in Japan.

So we were horrified by the power of nature; reminded again of its unpredictability, its caprice, if you like, its ability to set at naught all of the technological achievements of men and women; but then also recognised the indomitability of the human spirit and the fact that, even confronted with the sort of natural disaster that would stretch the imagination of a Hollywood director in a nightmare movie, the people of Japan were able to stand up to that and go about their business of rescuing the dead and injured with a stoicism, an equanimity, that I think few others, frankly, would be able to equal. The conduct of the Japanese people is as awe inspiring as the destructiveness of nature.

But, then, added to this natural disaster have been the problems, the accidents and the malfunctions at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant. That is a very old nuclear plant—40 years old. Its design has been criticised in years past, so we read. Nonetheless, so far it appears that the damage has been contained. There is no nation in the world and few people in the world that would have more reason to be horrified and frightened by the consequence of nuclear radiation. After all, Japan, at the close of that brutal, existential struggle in the Second World War, suffered two nuclear bombs, on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. So the Japanese people understand very well the dangers and the consequences of nuclear radiation. Notwithstanding that, they have been able to go about the business of dealing with the radiation from this damaged plant professionally and effectively. There has been a team of Japanese engineers working in and around that plant, from the outset of the disaster, in circumstances which one can only imagine would be at very grave risk to their lives. So these are truly heroic individuals. Potentially—one hopes not; one hopes that they have been well protected, but one fears—they have been sacrificing themselves in the service of their nation.

MAIN COMMITTEE
Japan is a very dear and close friend of Australia. We were of course opposed in the Second World War—a very brutal war—and the enmities and resentments of that war took a long time to heal. But I think it is fair to say that we have strong economic links with Japan. It is our second largest trading partner, it is our second largest export partner after China and it is one of the largest foreign investors in Australia—in fact, the third largest. The economic ties between Australia and Japan are extremely strong; there are few stronger. But the ties of friendship between the Australian and Japanese people are equally strong and becoming stronger all the time. Many young Australians learn Japanese; many young Japanese come to Australia. Modern telecommunications and the internet have made the culture of Japan more accessible to people in the rest of the world, something which really was not the case until fairly recently, and, of course, Western culture is very accessible and well understood by the people of Japan.

It was appropriate that the Australian parliament stood in sorrow with bowed heads expressing our condolences to the people of Japan after this terrible accident. We, as the representatives of the Australian people, shared our nation’s deep sorrow for the tragedy that was inflicted upon Japan. We recognise that when we have been beset with natural disasters Japan has always been ready to help us. Indeed, one of the cruel ironies of the circumstances of the Japanese earthquake was that a team of Japanese search-and-rescue professionals, who had gone to Christchurch to help with the rescue there, and in particular to help with the rescue of a language school where a number of young Japanese students had been killed, as they were concluding their work in Christchurch had to turn around, go back to their own country and confront an even larger and more devastating earthquake and a tsunami.

We stood with bowed heads and expressed our condolences to the Japanese people. Both the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition spoke, as they always do, very eloquently and I think fairly represented the feelings of the entire House. The Prime Minister quoted a Japanese proverb which I had not heard before but it was very appropriate. It was: fall seven times, rise up eight times. It is a traditional Japanese proverb that really expresses the resilience of the Japanese people, who face so many challenges, so many disasters, but have been able to climb out of the rubble literally and to metaphorically renew themselves and go on to greater achievements. As the Prime Minister was relating this Japanese proverb I thought that I had heard it before in another context. Then later I realised that in fact it is very similar to a proverb in our own tradition in the Bible in Proverbs 24:16 which says, ‘A just man falls seven times and rises again.’

It is rather touching, and perhaps rather insightful, that two cultures so different—the Judaeo-Christian culture, which is at the foundation of our society here in Australia; and Japan’s own culture, a very exceptional, individual culture for that nation—have, in their own traditions, proverbs that are not identical but almost identical, expressing the same thought and the same hope and confidence that the strong, the just, the true, no matter how often they are knocked down, will rise again.

I stand here today, as I know all my colleagues do, to express my very sincere condolences to the people of Japan and, indeed, the condolences I express are on behalf also of the people of my electorate.

Ms RISHWORTH (Kingston) (8.25 pm)—I rise today to support the motion outlined by the Prime Minister and to extend my sincere condolences to the Japanese people following the
devastating impact of the earthquake and tsunami on their country. I would like to offer my deepest sympathies to the many families who have lost loved ones in this tragedy. The human toll of these disasters has shocked us all, with the Japanese police reporting the death toll at 8,805, with some 12,664 people still missing.

On 11 March, the largest ever earthquake was experienced in the north-east of Japan, triggering a huge tsunami that then hit the coast. I was actually in Japan at the time with some parliamentary colleagues and, despite being about 800 kilometres away from the epicentre, we still felt the movement. That is how powerful it was. However, it was not until some time after arriving in Tokyo that evening that I came to understand the sheer extent of the disaster that had occurred and the destruction it had caused. Surreal images of walls of water smashing into coastal towns in north-eastern Japan have filled the news, along with the images of fishing trawlers and vehicles being lifted and tossed around like toys. Entire towns and communities have been left flattened.

While in Japan I came to understand that earthquakes are not a new experience for the Japanese people. Japan is positioned in the most seismically active landmass in the world, and as such it experiences tremors on a regular basis. It struck me while visiting just how prepared the country was, with high-quality building codes to ensure that buildings withstand earthquakes and with locals well drilled in what to do during a quake. However, nothing can prepare a country and nothing can prepare communities for an earthquake of this magnitude or for a wall of water surging inland destroying everything in its path.

Hours after this disaster initially devastated the northern part of the country, our delegation arrived in Tokyo. The city had been shaken and the subway closed but buildings remained intact—a testament to the measures that had already been taken by the Japanese authorities to prepare this city as much as possible for earthquakes. In the face of this widespread disaster and with the threat of aftershocks looming, the Japanese people remained calm and composed. Many Japanese people were helping others in great difficulty in Tokyo. I witnessed shops and hotels offering stranded people the use of washrooms and toilets. In addition to what I witnessed, altruism was reported widely not just in Tokyo but in the hardest hit prefectures.

The Prime Minister remarked that there is a cultural tradition in Japan of courage and honour, and from reports and footage coming out of Japan each day we see that in their time of crisis these qualities have been on display right across the country. We have seen great determination from the workers and volunteers involved in the rescue and recovery effort as they have carried out their work in such dangerous and difficult circumstances. We have seen temperatures plummet to freezing. We have seen the selfless workers who have been volunteering at the troubled Fukushima energy plant and who have risked their lives to protect others.

Japan and Australia have a deep and close friendship. We are more than just trading partners. I know that it has filled all Australians with an enormous sense of grief and disbelief to see the size of the toll. The real tragedy is the human cost, and our hearts go out to the families torn apart by this dramatic disaster. On behalf of my electorate, I would like to offer the Japanese people our deepest sympathies for all those who continue to suffer.

While there has been so much devastation, there has also been the occasional ray of hope. Yesterday we heard about a grandmother and a young man who were found after nine days under the rubble. As the Prime Minister has said, we are ready to stand shoulder to shoulder
with Japan to help. We deployed—and they have returned—an urban search-and-rescue team to help the Japanese emergency workers, as well as defence personnel and a C17 heavy lift aircraft to assist in the transport of personnel and equipment in Japan’s disaster region. In addition, the government has announced a $10 million donation to aid Japan in its recovery effort.

I know, after visiting there, that the Japanese people were very generous to Australia during our recent national disasters. In fact, we visited one prefecture that had donated a significant amount, and now it is our turn to repay that friendship. Despite many Australians having given after so many natural disasters that we have seen, I am pleased that many people in my electorate on the weekend donated through me to the Australian Red Cross Japan and Pacific disaster appeal. I thank them. I know that it will be appreciated.

In addition to the many Japanese people who have been caught up in this disaster, there have also been many Australians in Japan who have needed assistance. In addition, there have been many who have lent a helping hand to their Japanese friends. I know that many have relied on help from the Australian embassy, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank Ambassador McLean and all the Australian embassy staff for their efforts. While I was in Japan, I saw firsthand the dedication these staff had, working 24 hours around the clock to contact and assist Australians in Japan. It is a relief to hear that all Australians have now been accounted for. I would also like to personally extend my thanks to the embassy staff who took the delegation in and allowed us to stay in their homes when we had no accommodation on the night after the earthquake.

While I was in Japan I had the honour of visiting the Kobe earthquake research centre. It is a national centre as well as a local centre. At the centre, we saw images of the absolute devastation, pain and massive loss of life that occurred in the 1995 quake. But we also saw that the city was able to reconstruct. While the human toll will never be forgotten and the psychological scars are still there, we saw that, from this devastation, this city was able to rebuild and ensure that it functioned once again. It is a city that is very proud of all the effort and determination it took to rebuild. But they were able to do it.

Currently, we are seeing devastation in a number of prefectures in the north-east of Japan. The path to recovery is clearly going to be long and very difficult, but I have no doubt that these cities and towns will be able to rebuild. I am certain that the Japanese will face the path with enduring courage. Incredible stories of survival are constantly emerging and filling the Japanese people with hope. Here, on behalf of my electorate, I would like to again offer my sincere condolences to Japan and to all the Japanese people who have been affected by one of the worst natural disasters the country has ever endured. I will do whatever I can to assist them in their recovery.

Mr McCormack (Riverina) (8.33 pm)—Japanese people are proud people. They are resilient, dignified and disciplined. Their stoicism will never be more tested than in the days, weeks and months ahead. While essential services will be restored as quickly as possible and buildings, roads and other infrastructure will be reconstructed in good time, it will take many years to recover from the disaster which has unfolded and, for many, with lives lost and entire communities gone, their world will never be the same.

The recent magnitude 9.0 earthquake which struck Japan resulted in much damage. Despite many smaller aftershocks, thinking the worst was over, many people began to clean up once
the shaking had stopped. But, 15 minutes after northern Japan was hit by the earthquake, the ocean unleashed a 10-metre tsunami which swept boats, cars, buildings and tonnes of debris up to 10 kilometres inland.

Many almost could not believe what they were seeing via news footage as video showed a muddy torrent of water carrying cars and wrecked homes at high speed across farmland near the coastal city of Sendai. Ships had been flung onto a harbour wharf, where they lay helplessly on their sides; boats, cars and trucks were tossed around as if they were toys in the water; and entire towns were flattened. Thousands are dead. Many more are still missing. This is a tragedy which keeps getting worse. The threat of a disaster at the Fukushima nuclear power station still holds grave concern for people right across the globe. Yet through tragedy come small miracles which restore our belief in human nature, stories of remarkable survival, of rescue, of hope. Our thoughts are for those who have lost their friends and families.

Many Australians who reside in Japan have refused to leave. Many have stated their reason to stay is that they have a home to go to, whereas the people of Japan do not. They want to stay and help the people who have housed them so well and they want to help them get their magnificent country back to liveable conditions. Australia and Japan have a long history. We have fought against each other, yet now we fight side by side against one of the cruellest blows Mother Nature can throw at us. As the death toll will, sadly, increase in the days ahead and the heartache will continue, Australians will stand firm and do what we do best: we will be a support and we will be a great strength.

I extend the most sincere condolences of my Riverina electorate, where Japan has many friends through Charles Sturt University, through our agricultural trade and through many other endeavours and walks of life. I will finish with a Japanese proverb, ‘Kishi kaisei’, which translated literally means, ‘Wake from death and return to life’. The Japanese believe it to mean: to come out of a desperate situation and make a complete return in one sudden burst.

Mr STEPHEN JONES (Throsby) (8.36 pm)—On Friday 11 March at approximately 2.45 pm I was on a train somewhere between Kyoto and Tokyo with five of my parliamentary colleagues. We had been in Tokyo for the best part of a week as a part of the political exchange between our country and Japan. The purpose of the trip was, apart from discussing issues of mutual economic, security and cultural interests, to build political and cultural bonds between future leaders of our respective countries. We had the great benefit of meeting with a number of political, community and business leaders during the five days that we were in Tokyo.

One of the highlights of the trip was when we visited Kobe. We met with the governor of the province, who, quite ironically as it turned out, was incredibly concerned as to the fate of Australians who had suffered as a result of the floods that hit South-East Queensland, northern Victoria and northern New South Wales. So concerned were the people of his prefecture about the fate of the Australians beset by these disasters that they had donated money and assistance to the numerous international relief efforts for these causes. They felt a bond with the people who were going through that plight because when a terrible earthquake hit Kobe in 1996, killing about 6½ thousand people and laying flat most of the city, it was the people around Australia who came to the aid of the Japanese people, assisting them financially and personally with immediate disaster relief and relief towards rebuilding their country. They felt an enormous bond with the people of Australia which went beyond economic and political bonds.
As my colleague has previously said, whilst we were in Kobe we visited the earthquake memorial, where we had the ironic—with hindsight—experience of going through a re-enactment of the 1996 earthquake. We toured the research centre and had the benefit of seeing the work that the people of that town and that country had put in to ensure that their cities were future earthquake proof. Indeed, I have commented since then that, if you had to be in any city in the world when an earthquake of magnitude 9.0 on the Richter scale struck, you would want to be in Tokyo because that is a city that is designed to withstand an earthquake.

While we were at the Kobe earthquake museum we were taken through a room that had, graphically displayed on the walls, prints of tidal waves, tsunamis, that had hit the island over the last 300 years. A number of our colleagues looked up at a mark on the third floor of the building to see a 10-metre and a 12-metre mark for an earthquake driven tsunami that had hit the island in the 1700s. We found it almost impossible to believe what it would be like to see a wave of water that big bearing down upon us.

That was indeed ironic, because not 24 hours later Japan was hit by the largest earthquake that it has ever suffered, quickly followed by a 10-metre wave that hit the Tohoku region in the northern part of the island of Honshu. It has already been pointed out that that tsunami laid flat most of those coastal villages. The wave was dissipated in some parts of the region some five kilometres inland. Over 9,000 deaths have already been confirmed, but the really chilling part of the human casualty is that there are over 12½ thousand people who are still missing. It really is difficult to believe, when you are faced with that sort of magnitude of tsunami, that the majority of those people will ever be found alive.

The buildings have been damaged and destroyed, and the infrastructure is in a state of utter disrepair. The member for Wentworth has already spoken about the damage to three of the nuclear reactors. This is of critical importance not just because of the environmental impacts of radiation leakage—at this stage it appears very little. It is a concern not only because of that but because Japan relies on nuclear energy for about 30 per cent of its electricity supply, and it is that electricity which powers the manufacturing plants, the infrastructure, the public transport system and much of the industry which has made Japan an economic powerhouse of the last century and the beginning of this century. So the impact that this earthquake and the following tsunami have had on the lives of the people and the struggle that the Japanese people will have to rebuild their economy, their society and those communities cannot be underestimated.

Of course, this disaster has not hit Japan at the best time in its history. It has been struggling under a period of almost a decade of economic stagnation and significant political issues that it needs to work through which will challenge it as it attempts to get itself back on its feet. But the one thing that a number of speakers have commented on and I have directly experienced myself that gives me great hope is the resilience of the Japanese people. The word ‘stoic’ has been used numerous times in this debate by the Prime Minister and others. From day one, it really amazed me as a foreigner in their country to see the people almost immediately snap into what appeared like a well-rehearsed drill. There was horror and fear on their faces, but they were walking in single file—many, many millions of them—through the streets of Tokyo. At any one point in time there are two million people underground in Tokyo on the subway system. Those people were all forced out onto the streets at 12 o’clock and one o’clock in the morning, walking away across town to their homes or looking for a place to
sleep, but they were doing it in a very ordered, very Japanese fashion. There was none of the pushing and shoving that would normally accompany even the exit from the Melbourne Cricket Ground or the Sydney Cricket Ground, which I am more familiar with. The absence of looting and the absence of any of the antisocial behaviours that often, tragically, accompany a disaster like this leave me with nothing less than admiration for the Japanese people and absolute confidence in their capacity to pull themselves, their communities, their economy and their polity back together again.

I have already said that, if you wanted to be in any city in the world when an earthquake like this struck, you would probably want to be in Tokyo because of the design of that city. Of course, nothing that is currently known to humankind can design a city to withstand a 10-metre or in some places even a 20-metre tsunami. Japan is a country that, because of its location—it is at the edge of the Pacific plate, which moves around nine centimetres a year; they receive somewhere in the vicinity of 20 reasonable-sized earthquakes every year—knows its fair share of adversity.

There are some lessons. There were some lessons for me in what really matters when you are faced with a natural disaster such as this and you see a community pulling itself back together, dealing with the tragedy and the horror. It really struck home to me when I saw the people picking through the ruins of the towns and villages in the immediate aftermath of the tsunami. It was not their mobile phones or their flat screen televisions or their PlayStations or their computers that they were looking for; it was their loved ones. That for me is the enduring lesson that I will take away from this. It really does remind you about what matters in life.

We wish the people of Japan the very best in their efforts to pull their country and their community back together again, and I know we will stand shoulder to shoulder with them. If there is any lesson to be learned from such a terrible tragedy, it is the very human lesson about what really does matter in life.

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (8.47 pm)—I rise to offer my condolences to the people of Japan for the death, destruction and suffering that has afflicted their country. I have never been to Japan and I do not think I really know any Japanese people very well, but, when you look at the pictures and the vision that we have seen of the devastation and carnage that resulted from the tsunami that swept in after the earthquake, it is easy to feel empathy, sorrow and sadness for the loss that they have endured. A 9.0 earthquake on the Richter scale, close off the east coast of the country, on 11 March—that is, apparently, within the top five earthquakes that have been registered since seismological records began—was then followed by 10-metre waves. As the previous speaker said, it has been reported that there were 14-metre waves.

The frailty and vulnerability of human life is very clear in those circumstances. You can be as strong a swimmer as you like but, when something that big and powerful comes in, no-one is strong enough to resist that. You have to be in the right place at the right time to survive something like that. It is certainly the case that with that epicentre off the Oshika Peninsula, just 24.4 kilometres off the east coast, there was always going to be a lot of destruction.

Most of the damage was in Miyagi prefecture, in Sendai, a city of one million-plus and the capital of the prefecture. Sendai is known as the ‘City of Trees’. It is a pretty place and a well-regarded place compared to a lot of other cities. While I understand that the centre of the city itself did not do too badly—again, because Japanese building codes are quite decent in the centre of cities—the outlying areas have certainly endured massive devastation. It was re-
ported that the tsunami rolled as far inland as eight kilometres. It is not like at the beach—it is not blue waves and crystal clear water. When these waves hit, as the Indian Ocean tsunami proved, they take everything with them. Houses were turned into matchsticks; the cars and even the ships were pushed inland. It is impossible for an individual to endure unless they were just not in its path.

When people are talking about figures of 8,000 confirmed deaths and maybe as many as 20,000 deaths, it is very easy to see how you could get those sorts of numbers. In Miyagi prefecture, villages—whether it was those fishing villages or villages where the farming fields were just around them or even vegetable gardens around the houses themselves—were completely washed away. There is really nothing left in a lot of these places other than the foundations of the more sturdy houses that had been built in the area.

Looking at the photos of Sendai airport the ABC has provided—on the ABC website you can see the before and after shots of these places and how they have been devastated—next to the airport there is a small canal and you can see that on the east side of the canal there were a lot of houses. Across the bridge towards the airport you can see the refuse and the rubble of all those houses that have been pushed towards and left on the bridge while the rest of it has been washed away through the canal. The car park of the airport—a major airport—is completely covered in refuse and silt. The tarmac and the apron are covered in sand and silt. At the same time, as has been said, the power has been out.

In Arahama in Sendai, where the houses were, nothing remains but matchsticks. Farms have been reduced to soggy saltwater logged morasses. The village of Fujitsuka in Sendai, where there were houses with neat vegetable crops in the yards, was literally steamrolled by the tsunami wave. When you look at these you can see there is always going to be that vulnerability of these small villages and small farming communities. Those houses have been there for a long time. It is the way of these rural areas that they are not as well developed and not as strongly built as in the cities. A normal earthquake would shake these houses and a few things would fall and that would really be about it. But when, as we have seen, there was a magnitude 9.0 Richter scale earthquake followed by a tsunami across the low flats along the coast, it is no wonder there was great and terrible destruction. Those who were in its path had no chance whatsoever. There has been a tragic loss of life and a terrible destruction of houses.

Loss of electricity has also hampered all forms of recovery effort, but, ultimately, overall recovery over a great period of time will be hugely difficult because a whole swathe of the best farming land on the east coast within the prefecture and surrounding areas has been destroyed. It will take a long time for recovery. As we know, with a country so densely populated as Japan, farming land, food-producing land, is at a premium. You can understand that it will be an extremely hard road for Japan to recover. As has been said by a number of speakers, the economic circumstances of Japan are not as strong as they were 10 or 20 years ago. It will be a difficult road for Japan to recover.

We know the Japanese are tough people and we know that they are determined. We know that they can work hard and that they know that working hard will deliver rewards. In the fullness of time, with the right planning and the right recovery effort, Japan will rise again and the farmland in those areas can be recovered and villages can be rebuilt. Unfortunately, the loss of life cannot be replaced. It is important that on these occasions we take time to think. The Japanese people have families like us, and our children and our lives could be subjected...
to the same sort of devastation. When we think about our families we also think very carefully about what has happened in Japan. Certainly, our thoughts, our prayers and our hopes for a good recovery are with the Japanese people. We wish them well.

Ms KING (Ballarat—Parliamentary Secretary for Health and Ageing and Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure and Transport) (8.57 pm)—I would like to join with my parliamentary colleagues in adding my condolences to the people of Japan. Having visited Japan and, in particular, Miyagi prefecture, it is all but impossible to comprehend the magnitude and impact the earthquake and the tsunami have had on those communities in Japan.

I want to address the facts and figures of the devastation shortly, but all the facts and figures in the world cannot deliver the true human horror and devastation wrought by this disaster. One such story that has struck me, I think particularly as a parent, has been the circumstances of Toshihito Aisawa. This young nine-year-old boy has not seen his mother, father or grandmother since the tsunami hit. Toshihito has been continually going from refugee centre to refugee centre across his home town of Ishinomaki carrying a sign with the names of his missing family members. He places it in each of the refugee centres. It says: ‘I will come back at 11 o’clock tomorrow, so please wait. I will come back tomorrow.’ Our thoughts are certainly with Toshihito in his hopes to reunite with his family once more. His heart-wrenching story is one of many thousands that are just too grim and difficult to comprehend, but, sadly, for many children it is very real. The experiences must be harrowing. We have heard many stories of survival and heroism throughout Japan, but, unfortunately, we have also heard many stories of loss and despair. The story of poor little Toshihito is a bit of both: he is clearly a survivor, but his loss and despair must be unimaginable.

People across the world have been shocked to see the scale of the Japanese disaster. The earthquake and subsequent tsunami have resulted in the deaths of some 8,800 people, with more than 12,000 still unaccounted for and many people injured. A further half a million Japanese people are homeless. Quite simply, this has been one of the most destructive earthquakes across the globe on record. In fact, the 9.0 magnitude earthquake is the largest in Japan in the last 100 years.

With some 5,000 Australians registered as living in Japan, I know that many of our fellow country men and women were very anxious to hear from their families and friends. It was very pleasing to hear from the foreign minister that he was able to confirm this week that all Australians in Japan have been accounted for, and I certainly hope, as do many of us in this place, that no new names emerge. Given the scale of the disaster, it is truly astounding. I want to pay tribute to the DFAT Crisis Centre and embassy staff who have worked incredibly hard to find and assist all of those Australians.

The Australian government is in a position to provide support to Japan and has done so from almost immediately after the disaster. A 72-person search and rescue team, including one EMA liaison officer, although now returned, were dispatched to Japan very quickly. Nineteen Defence operational response officers and three Defence liaison officers were on site. All of Australia’s currently operational C17s are engaged in Japan providing support to the Japanese people, including two that have been tasked recently at the request of the US government to transport equipment to assist in restoring the cooling systems to the nuclear plants. As a government we have also made a donation of $10 million to support the recovery effort to the Red Cross Japan and Pacific Disaster Appeal.
The Australian government has taken the ongoing concerns of the nuclear situation in Japan very seriously. The Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency, ARPANSA, has been working literally around the clock to provide me and my parliamentary colleagues with up-to-date advice about the ongoing nuclear situation. ARPANSA has published advice on its website, which is updated literally every six hours to ensure that the Australian people both in Japan and returning have the most accurate and timely advice that is possible on the unfolding nuclear situation in Japan. ARPANSA is the federal government agency charged with responsibility for protecting the health and safety of the Australian people and the environment from the harmful effects of radiation. I suspect that before this particular event not many people knew about it or had heard of what is a very small agency sitting within the Health portfolio under my areas of responsibility. The agency has been called upon in this time of great uncertainty in Japan to provide advice on the status of the nuclear power plant as well as health and safety advice to Australians in Japan and those returning home to Australia, as well as liaising very closely with the Department of Health and Ageing on providing health advice to general practitioners here in Australia.

I want to personally thank the staff, but in particular Carl-Magnus Larsson and his team at ARPANSA, for the professionalism and commitment that they have shown during this challenging time. We have been very lucky to secure Dr Larsson from the Swedish nuclear safety agency. He is very actively engaged with the IAEA and other regulatory bodies internationally and is very well respected, so we have certainly been well served during this time by ARPANSA, the CEO and its staff. There have been unprecedented demands placed on the agency and they have consistently responded with dedication and expertise. As the Parliamentary Secretary for Health and Ageing with responsibility for ARPANSA, I thank the agency on behalf of the government for its work.

I also recognise the work of FSANZ—Food Standards Australia New Zealand—which has been providing the government with advice on food safety and continue to do so, and has been working very closely with the Chief Medical Officer, Professor Jim Bishop, and the health incident team which was established very quickly once that was requested. I pay tribute to those health team staff who have been providing the government with that advice.

The latest advice on the nuclear situation in Japan is that it is a very serious situation and the Australian government continues to monitor it. As a precautionary measure, Australians have been recommended to remain 80 kilometres away from the power station, and that is not based on the current danger but reflects the uncertainty of the situation. Australians returning from Japan are highly unlikely to have been contaminated with radiation and will not require checks for radioactivity, but certainly we understand that some may be concerned about that and we have encouraged them to visit their local GPs. Advice has been provided to GPs as to what recommendations are made. Certainly I again thank ARPANSA and the health department for working so closely on making sure that that advice was actively available.

Food Standards Australia New Zealand, the Department of Health and Ageing and ARPANSA have advised that Australians in Japan are strongly recommended to follow the protective measures recommended by the Japanese government in relation to food and water safety. FSANZ is working very closely with AQIS and the Customs and Border Protection Service to ensure a coordinated and vigilant approach to managing any potential risk to the Australian food supply chain.
As we battle to overcome natural disasters in our nation we can only begin to understand the difficult task that is being faced by the people of Japan to rebuild their homes, their schools, their hospitals and their communities—to rebuild their lives after they have lost their family, friends and colleagues. The floods in Australia, the earthquake in New Zealand and the latest devastation in Japan are a reminder of just how harsh our planet’s extreme conditions can be and how fortunate we are to live in a nation of generosity and kindness. The Australian government stands ready now and into the future to support our friends in Japan; friends like the young nine-year-old Toshihito, who I mentioned earlier. I know that all Australians will seek in whatever way they can to ease the burdens of the Japanese people as they confront the massive challenges ahead.

Mr IAN MACFARLANE (Groom) (9.05 pm)—I rise tonight to offer my condolences to the people of Japan, a country which I have been fortunate enough to visit on a number of occasions. It is a county of incredible beauty and a people who have in their own way a culture and gentleness which I admire.

Australia has been a close friend of Japan for many decades now. I know that deep in our past, and in my father’s generation, there were conflicts and a residual anger that existed between people of that generation and the Japanese people. But, fortunately, most of those differences have been resolved. In my lifetime I have only known the Japanese as people who come here as tourists, people who have welcomed me when I have travelled to their land, people who have traded and done business with us and people who have been very much a part of the development that has gone on particularly in Queensland and, in fact, right around Australia in the resources industry.

The graphic images of what happened in the Miyagi prefecture and the devastating impact of the earthquake, followed by the tsunami and the ongoing issue with the meltdown of the nuclear power station are issues which bring me great sadness. I come from a electorate and from a city that has suffered its share of natural disasters in this recent year, and the hurt and the misery that has been brought upon the people of Toowoomba and of Oakey, and out of my electorate in the Lockyer Valley, Brisbane and Ipswich, is small by comparison to the devastating impact of what we have seen on television.

I think that the most moving image that I saw, watching what I know as a beautiful and resilient, resourceful people trying to deal with this disaster, was the sight of snow falling on these people—homeless and bewildered, but still with the outlook on life that they know they are going to recover. I can think of nothing worse than to be beset by this string of natural disasters. As a friend of Japan, and as someone who, as I said, has been socially and in a business sense in close contact with them over my parliamentary career, I extend my deepest sorrow. I find it a challenge that I know they will recover from.

I say to the Japanese people that the people of Toowoomba, of the Darling Downs, of Queensland and of Australia will stand with you every step of the difficult path that I know you face on your way to recovery. I know you are a courageous people and I know you are a people who are deep in culture; but you are also a people who inevitably look to the future and to the future opportunities that you can give to your country, to your people and to your children. Australia will always look to you as a friend.

We are, of course, business partners, joint venturers in commerce and trading partners. But most of all we are friends, and we from my electorate want to make sure that that message is
reinforced at a time of incredible hardship. No-one in the electorate of Groom or in Australia can imagine the incredible adversity that the people of Japan are facing. We had a taste. We had floods and homes swept away, but they were small in number. Whilst we did have two fatalities in my electorate—and they were in tragic circumstances—no-one can imagine what it is like to have a death toll that is in all likelihood going to exceed 20,000 people, perhaps even more, and a recovery bill in the hundreds of billions of dollars. It may, in fact, take decades to reinstate the country to what it was.

I have no doubt at all that the people of Japan will rebuild their community. Like all human beings world wide, they will learn how to rebuild their community, as we will. I have no doubt that the Japanese people will see this as one of the challenges that befalls them in life. I have no doubt that as they go forward the Australian people will stand beside them.

This is a terrible time for our friends in Japan, but it is a time in which friends need to stand up and speak for them. That is why, even with the lateness of the hour, I have come to this place to make a point of expressing the deepest sympathies and condolences of the people of my electorate, of my own family and of my wife and me in particular. We have travelled to Japan and dined and lived with the hospitality of the Japanese people. I want to take this opportunity to express our very heartfelt sympathies and to say that we are thinking of you now, we will think of you next week and we will be thinking of you in a month, in a year and in five years time. We will always be there to help you.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)—I am sure that all members would associate themselves with the moving comments of the member for Groom.

Mr HAYES (Fowler) (9.12 pm)—I also take the opportunity to express my deepest condolences to the people of Japan. I do so on behalf of my family, the community where I live and all those people of this country who have been taken aback, just as I have been, by the unbelievable scenes of carnage that they have witnessed on their TV screens.

It is quite overwhelming to witness the number of natural disasters that we have seen in recent times—our own floods in Queensland, the cyclone, the earthquake in New Zealand and now the devastation in Japan. No doubt everybody in this place has felt these calamities personally through what they have witnessed on their TV screens, and we know from our own electorates that the earthquake in Japan has had a very wide impact on the psyche of the Australian people. We have witnessed a disaster of major proportions. It was something that was truly unpredictable and very much an unstoppable force of nature. I find it incredible to think of what we saw: a tsunami coming through, at some points 30 feet high, and taking out towns. Those towns are like towns we have. They have schools, preschool centres and places where people work and live. In the short space of time when there were glimpses of images on our TV screens we saw those towns devastated. We did not witness it personally, but we know the effects of what occurred.

Presently, we understand that the casualty count is somewhere in the vicinity of 15,000 and likely to rise to over 20,000. Not included in that are the incredible injuries that have occurred, both physical and psychological, and the effect that this is having on the future of mums, dads and children who all crave the same things as we do: just normal living and the wellbeing of our families. The Japanese have not experienced something of anywhere near this magnitude since the last World War. From that time we have seen a stoic people who have worked with their natural resilience and rebuilt a country and have played a significant role on
the world stage ever since—very industrious, very innovative and enterprising. They have made much of their country and their country has contributed much to the world stage socially, politically and economically.

I have always had a great appreciation for the ingenuity of the Japanese people, a people who lack natural resources, who certainly lack land space as we would understand it, and yet they have made their country strong to the point where, prior to this disaster, it was the fifth largest economy in the world. As a consequence of that, this disaster has obviously had significant impacts on their economy and also on the way they can relate to the world as such.

It seems paltry, but we have already committed and we are donating in the order of $10 million, I think it is, to help support immediate Japanese efforts in rescue and reconstruction. We have people who have been dispatched there, and rightfully so, to assist. Unfortunately, much of it is in victim recognition. As I have mentioned, we now believe there is a death toll which will be over 20,000. Something like over half a million people have been left homeless and lives have been truly devastated. Despite what we have contributed, I think it should really fall to all of us to pledge our position to the Japanese people that we will be there not only for this immediate period but to assist wherever possible in the reconstruction and the normalisation of Japan itself. As I said, the Japanese people have played such a significant part over the last 60 years on the world stage, and we have all been the beneficiaries of their energy, their enthusiasm and their ingenuity. I just hope that this again comes to the fore. These qualities will help rebuild their nation to the position of strength that it had immediately prior to this earthquake.

With all the political debate that occurs in this place and the matters of difference that we may have, where we think we are strong and accuse others of being weak, when it comes to standing in front of Mother Nature I think that shows us our vulnerabilities. I think it behoves all of us to look at the world as being not as big as we might have once thought. Whilst we are all independent people, we are all interdependent on one another. Particularly at times like this, that requires countries and people of various backgrounds to work together.

We cannot all contribute and we are not advocating that this is another means of lending assistance to another country, but I think it is important to make sure that, in the light of these events occurring on a world scale, we do hold the wellbeing of all people—and particularly in this case the people of Japan—in our prayers. They have much work to do and much recovering to do before they can start moving out of this calamity.

I conclude where I started. On behalf of my family and the people that I represent in the electorate of Fowler, I would like to express my deepest condolences to the people of Japan. Through our thoughts and prayers we will keep them in the forefront of our minds and, where we can, be of assistance now and into the future.

Mr HUNT (Flinders) (9.21 pm)—The strongest expression of common humanity which comes out of the Japanese earthquake and tsunami is that 128 nations have offered assistance to one of the wealthiest states of the modern world. One hundred and twenty-eight nations recognised the tragedy which everybody has seen and decided that we were of a common humanity. That figure alone speaks volumes for what we can be at our best as, well as acknowledging the extraordinary magnitude and scope of the tragedy which has struck our great friends in Japan. It brings to mind the words of John Donne in *Devotions* over 400 years ago:

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**MAIN COMMITTEE**
No man is an island,
Entire of itself.
Each is a piece of the ... main.
If a clod be washed away by the sea,
Europe is the less.
As well as if a promontory ... of thine own

Therefore, never seek to ask
For whom the bell tolls,
It tolls for thee.

It is not a perfect rendering, but it is a remembrance that this notion of unity within a broader concept of humanity dates back and exists and will lead forward.

What we have seen in Japan I think can be summarised into simple concepts: one is common humanity and the second is courage. The common humanity is that the world looked on, they saw the pictures, and everybody recognised the sheer weight and tragedy of what occurred with the evidence of the waves, the power of the water, the simple apocalyptic destruction which followed. No person could have hoped to survive if they had been in the path of those great waters. That is, sadly, a simple fact—with so few discoveries having been made of people living. Each one of the discoveries—the man on the roof out at sea, the grandmother and her son and the baby all found within the rubble—have brought joy and a sense of hope and a sense of humanity to the world and not just to Japan. But there are 20,000 other stories which have not ended in that positive turn of events.

We know that well over 8,000 lives have been lost so far; we fear that there are another 12,000 or more still to be determined. As with the Asian tsunami, many of the bodies will never be recovered. That is the simple truth. If we as Australians have played our part, then that is a good thing. Seventy-two Australians were sent abroad. They have searched, they have done their work, they have only uncovered bad news but they have been part of the task of people from all corners of the globe putting their shoulders to the wheel to try and find those that have been lost and those that have been injured. It is an ongoing process. The next phase will be the reconstruction of Japan. But Japan will survive. Japan will recover. I hope that Japan takes this opportunity to build a new Japan, dealing with some of the economic challenges in the form of debt and economic sclerosis which have challenged this great nation since 1990. But we are with them, as is the whole world.

The second thing I want to refer to briefly is courage. The extraordinary stoicism of the Japanese people—the dignity, the comparison with how others in different parts of the world have responded to tragedies—is manifest. The sense of getting on with the task of the recovery and getting on with helping those most in need has been a great honour to witness. In the midst of the tragedy, there has been a sense of decency, dignity, honour and courage which reminds me of the spirit of Brisbane after the floods. Both stories tell us what we can be.

The usual course of history is that, as we grow in number, our connections cease. The village generally becomes a city, but what we saw in Brisbane in the days after the floods was that the city became a village. The connections were real. You would have seen this yourself.
Mr Deputy Speaker Slipper. It is the same with Japan, but it is the globe which has become a village in light of the tsunami and the earthquake.

As the Japanese people have shown this courage, my last thought is reserved for the extraordinary workers of Fukushima nuclear plant No. 1. These workers have stood at their post in the belief that they may well be facing certain death. I hope that it does not come to that and that the radiation to which they have been exposed will prove to be less than we had expected. It appears that they are on track to beat the threat of meltdown. But they have knowingly placed their lives—in mass—en masse—in harm’s way. They have done so with the belief that they would pay the ultimate price. They may not, but they have placed themselves in harm’s way with the most significant valour imaginable. It is my hope and my firm belief that they will be successful in preventing the meltdown of the reactors. We have some cause for hope and positivity.

It is my hope and my belief that the Fukushima workers will be honoured and celebrated throughout the ages in Japan, because no civilians could have made a more dramatic, more courageous, more important contribution to the safety of the 20 million people nearby than they have done. Modern Japan has been a beacon of honour and decency. In that modern Japan, the highest recognition must go to those who have remained at their posts in Fukushima nuclear plant No. 1. I believe they will be honoured and rewarded, but above all else I believe they will be successful in protecting those 20 million people who rely upon their courage.

Ms GRIERSON (Newcastle) (9.29 pm)—I add my voice to the condolences that have been made here in this parliament to the people of Japan. It was a devastating tragedy and it does seem that it has been, for us, a summer and now an autumn and, for them, a winter and spring will going to be forever remembered. We always hope that it will be remembered for the resilience and the generosity and the spirit of people to survive and to go on and support each other.

I would like to draw attention to a matter that affected my electorate. At the time of this tragedy there were 45 young exchange students from Kesennuma—an area in Japan that was seriously affected by the tidal wave and earthquake—who were being hosted by the Hunter Christian School and the Maitland Christian School; 25 were junior high school students and 20 were senior high school students. They were due to go back last Friday, and you can understand that these young students really wanted to go home to their families. Unfortunately, they were not all able to contact their families to learn whether their families were all right and what would happen when they returned. The parents who were hosting these children and the principal of Hunter Christian School, Boyd Allen, contacted me and expressed the community’s concern. Mr Lee Fong emailed me earlier seeking my help. The key message was that, if it was in the best interests of the students and if it was the decision made by the Japanese authorities that the students should stay for a period, the community and the school were very willing to host them. They were particularly concerned because of the uncertainty facing these students.

I was then able to contact the office of the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Kevin Rudd. His actions were wonderfully helpful to us. The Japanese embassy here became involved straightaway through Minister Mori and coordinated with the consulate and consul-general in Sydney. There response was wonderful. They instantly deferred the return to Japan for 24 hours just to make sure that every student had arrangements in place. It is times like that that you know why you are a member of parliament and that you can actually manage some human
dramas and ease emotions and give some comfort. The consul-general, the Japanese embassy here and the foreign affairs minister and staff went to an extreme effort to make sure that every student would be accommodated when they returned. Most of the 45 students and three teachers returned to Tokyo to have families greet them. Those who could not be greeted by family had arrangements made with the Kesennuma education department and the local councils to make sure that every student was met.

In that frantic time—a very short window of opportunity—some people in Newcastle asked, ‘How can these children go back home?’ That is not our decision. If they were Australian children in a similar dilemma, we would want the Australian authorities to make that decision. But we had the comfort and assurance of knowing that that decision was made at the highest level, and that reassurance gave us great comfort. The consul-general has given me an undertaking that he will follow up on the post-return settling-in of those 45 students.

It was wonderful to see the networks kick in. A person teaching in Japan contacted his mother, Jenny Brannon, straightaway to send a message to one of the children who had not been able to contact her family to say that her family were okay. It was very heart-warming and good for her to know what arrangements should be made for her—that she would have to go to a certain place. It was lovely to see the internet connections of Newcastle people contacting each other all over Japan. I hope that after those young people return Facebook and social networks will help them to keep in touch with us.

It was wonderful that the Newcastle community said, ‘No matter what, those students have a place at any time in Newcastle.’ But we also hope, of course, that they are returning to a situation that is bearable and will be manageable for them and that it will allow them to enjoy their youth. It is rather hard to think of the children and young people in Japan and the burden they will carry. There is such respect for the elderly, and we have seen so many elderly people coping with the aftermath of this disaster. In Japan, you do not need aged care; elders are revered and looked after by their family.

To see stories of recovery and survival lifts the spirit. But to know that the Japanese people are dealing with a calamity from a nuclear power station is shattering for all of us. We can only hope that there will be some satisfactory resolution to these matters. It is good to see the world rally and I hope that will be carried through for a long time. Our relationship with Japan is one that we prize. Mr Deputy Speaker Slipper, you and I were there together, and their generosity and warmth in sharing with us their history, their present and their future were something that we really appreciated and respected. So I join the House in this condolence motion tonight.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)—I thank the member for Newcastle for her thoughtful contribution.

Mr TEHAN (Wannon) (9.35 pm)—I acknowledge that that was an extremely thoughtful contribution from the member for Newcastle, and very well said. I would like to express my condolences to the Japanese people as well.

I am very fortunate to have had fantastic Japanese hospitality on three separate occasions. When I was working with the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, I was fortunate enough to be a guest of the Japanese government under a program that the Japanese Prime Minister and the Australian Prime Minister had launched, a young business leaders exchange.
There were 25 young Australian businesspeople who went to Japan as guests of the Japanese government. We had two weeks in the country and we received extraordinary hospitality. We travelled widely throughout Japan and, without exception, everyone we met welcomed us and was willing to teach us about every aspect of their culture, society and economy. You could not wish for a more insightful experience than we had in undertaking such an exchange program.

I also took two trips to Japan as a trade adviser. At that time, Japan was our No. 1 trading partner, a very important economic partner to Australia. We were working closely with them in the World Trade Organisation. They hosted, very successfully, a World Trade Organisation mini-ministerial meeting in Tokyo, and once again their hospitality was extraordinary. In addition, on a separate bilateral visit, we undertook visits to Toyota and also Toshiba, where, among other things, they have a very good nuclear program where they build reactors.

Having seen that aspect of Japan gave me great confidence in recent times, knowing that, if anyone could deal with what was taking place at Fukushima, it was the Japanese, because their knowledge and the technology that goes into building their reactors is world class. I think we have seen that displayed not only in their commitment to making sure that everything is being done to avoid a complete meltdown of the facilities—and they have, hopefully, avoided that—but also in the way that the staff have been prepared to risk serious injury and even, potentially, levels of radiation that could lead to death to make sure the reactors do not melt down. I think their example is an absolute inspiration to all of us, globally.

Following the events in Japan, the death toll is around 9,000, with still another 13,000 reported missing. Sadly, those figures are a testimony to what has occurred—the sheer horror of the earthquake, and the tsunami that followed. It beggars belief that in today’s world we can see such devastation by a natural disaster, especially given that we are looking at an incredibly modern and sophisticated economy.

There are 350,000 people in shelters. The fact that so many have lost their homes and lives in this natural disaster brings up images of something you would expect to have seen in the 15th or 16th century. To have 350,000 people to house with winter lingering—and we have seen snow—is going to require incredible logistics. I do not think there is any other country in the world where you could look to a government and a people to provide such logistical support. I have no doubt that the Japanese government will do everything in their power to make sure that those 350,000 people are as comfortable as they possibly can be.

In terms of the nuclear plant, 177,000 people have been evacuated from a zone around the plant. Once again, logistically it is incredibly difficult for the Japanese government to organise, but the fact that they have done it in a way that has not led to mass panic is a credit to them and a credit to how the society operates. You only have to go and spend some time on the Japanese subway to see how efficient, organised and polite the Japanese people are. They are very fortunate given what has happened and the way it has been dealt with. It is very much the nature of the Japanese people that has led to this not being a bigger disaster than it has been. Once again, full credit goes to the Japanese people for that.

There are a total of 442,000 households without electricity. There are 1.4 million households without running water and 14,637 buildings that have been completely destroyed. That is nearly 15,000 buildings just wiped off the face of the map. It beggars belief. It is something
that you would think was a Hollywood movie rather than something we were seeing live on our TV screens.

The impact on their economy is going to be stark. The cost could range from $122 billion to $235 billion, 2.5 to four per cent of their GDP, and Japan will require huge assistance from around the globe to deal with this. It is pleasing to know that 128 countries and 33 international organisations have offered assistance as of Saturday to the Japanese government. I think that we in Australia and across the region in particular are going to have to do all we can to help the Japanese economy recover. It is an important economy for us here in Australia, but it is also an important economy for the region. We should not forget how generous the Japanese have been throughout their economic success. There is no country that has given as much in terms of aid regionally than the Japanese government, and, given their generosity, I think it is incumbent upon us here in Australia and across the region and globally to make sure that in this hour of need we return that favour to the Japanese.

I will end my condolence speech there, but I would once again say to the Japanese people and the government that our hearts are with you, our thoughts are with you, and I would hope—and I am sure that it will be the case—that our government stands ready, willing and able to help the Japanese people and the Japanese government in any way that we can.

Ms O’DWYER (Higgins) (9.44 pm)—I would just like to congratulate the member for Wannon on what was a very moving and very eloquent speech. I join with him in adding my condolences to the Japanese people for the great tragedy and great horror that have been wrought upon them.

Over the past few months we have witnessed some truly devastating events, beginning with the floods in Queensland and Victoria, Cyclone Yasi, and bushfires in Western Australia. We have seen earthquakes in Christchurch, New Zealand. But what has happened is almost unimaginable: a 9.0-magnitude earthquake, a tsunami and multiple aftershocks—aftershocks that have wrought very significant impacts not only in terms of lives that have been lost but also on the infrastructure of Japan. We know at this point in time that some of the most critical infrastructure—the energy infrastructure—is still currently under threat with the nuclear reactors in Fukushima, and our thoughts are with those workers in Fukushima who are doing all that they can to prevent even further disaster. We pay tribute to them and their courage in continuing to do the important job that they are doing and we know that they are doing it for a more important purpose.

What we have seen in Japan has been truly monumental in terms of the scale of destruction, the number of lives lost and unaccounted for and the effect on people’s lives as they prepare for the very grim task of reconstruction that will undoubtedly take many years. The total number of people unaccounted for in Japan is over 12,000. We already know that over 8,000 people have been found to be dead as a result of the devastating earthquake. We also know that the figures of the dead will probably continue to rise quite dramatically as we find what has happened to those over 12,000 people who have been unaccounted for.

Australians offer their grief and sympathy to all those who have suffered, and we hope that recovery and reconstruction will be as swift as possible. Having suffered natural disasters ourselves just recently, we have a small idea of what Japan must be facing at this time. But, as I said before, the sheer scale of the tragedy is nonetheless very difficult to comprehend.
Japan, like Australia, benefits from strong institutions and a sound system of democratic government, which will ensure that recovery will be brought about as quickly and effectively as possible. It is a nation with a strong system of international trade, high levels of savings and the ability to raise the money needed to finance reconstruction. For these reasons, Japan is in the strongest possible position to recover.

The World Bank has estimated that it will take around five years for Japan to rebuild. If this is true then we may at least remain confident that Japan will pull through this disaster and will soon return to stability. There will no doubt be widespread disruption to the Japanese economy, particularly to the electricity and transport sectors, and export trade is expected to decline dramatically. The destruction of real wealth and the precipitous drop in share values cannot be ignored. But we are already hearing some positive reports of factories preparing to reopen in coming days, such as the iconic Japanese companies Sony, Toyota and Honda. That gives us great hope.

Although any estimate of the length of recovery at this stage is uncertain, there is every reason to believe the Japanese Prime Minister, Naoto Kan, when he says there is light at the end of the tunnel. We have every reason to believe that the strength of the Japanese people and their ability to overcome setbacks will see Japan recover quickly.

Australians have great respect for the Japanese people. Although historically Australia and Japan have been divided through war, we were united again through peace and today we are united through this tragedy. We have great respect for the Japanese people for their strong social institutions, their great sense of duty and their ever-present civility and refinement. Even in the face of a disaster such as the one that has struck the main island of Japan, the people have still preserved those attributes and we have seen and heard of miracles.

We recall the story of the 80-year-old grandmother and her 16-year-old grandson being pulled from the rubble and wreckage after nine days of being buried. We have heard of great acts of altruism, of people who have not just thought of themselves in this great disaster but thought of others—finding out what has been happening to their friends, neighbours and business colleagues and ensuring that they are being cared for. We have also heard of great acts of courage, and I referred earlier to the workers at the Fukushima nuclear plant. We salute their tremendous courage in the face of great and grave danger.

The recent earthquake is Japan’s deadliest natural disaster since the Great Kanto earthquake in 1923, which killed more than 142,000. Mercifully, the death toll for the recent disaster has been less than this, yet it is no less terrible. When we think of Japan we think of its great technological and industrial prowess. But we know at the heart of it all that the human capital of Japan is its greatest strength and its strongest asset. We know that the rebuilding of Japan will occur over time. We have been struck by the grace and dignity with which the Japanese people have dealt with this disaster. Many people’s lives have been turned upside down, with the loss of their homes and loved ones. Temporary housing has been built for the hundreds of thousands who have been displaced. There is so much work to do not only in the days and weeks to come but in the months and years ahead. We know that the scars will remain, despite the rebuilding that will happen into the future. There is still much difficulty for the people of Japan to endure, and we hope that those affected may see their lives repaired as Japan begins the task of rebuilding its towns and cities.
Our prayers are with the people of Japan and with those who are mourning their loved ones and who are starting to rebuild their lives. But, before I conclude, I think it is very important to pay tribute to Australia’s response to this great tragedy. Australia, of course, has acted quickly. Japan has deployed over 100,000 Self-Defence Forces personnel to the devastated areas to help the search and rescue efforts. The Australian government has sent a 72-strong urban search and rescue team, including sniffer dogs. We have also offered field hospitals and victim identification specialists—critical personnel in what has been a terrible tragedy. We salute the work that Australians have done in this awful time and, again, I reiterate that our thoughts are with the Japanese people, and I add my condolences.

Ms O'NEILL (Robertson) (9.53 pm)—I would like to place on the record my deep sorrow and sympathies for the people of north-east Japan, who have suffered disaster on a scale that we Australians can barely begin to comprehend. At 2.46 in the afternoon, Japan time, on Friday, 11 March, when the massive earthquake struck off Japan’s north coast, I am sure that many Japanese workers and their families were looking forward to the end of their working week. What they encountered instead was later confirmed as the fourth strongest earthquake in recorded history. It was later given a reading of 9.0 on the Richter scale. As many have observed over the last few days in the aftermath of this major earthquake disaster, the quake that levelled large areas of Christchurch in February had a reading of 6.3. While the difference in scale may not seem much, it has since been pointed out in the media coverage that the Japanese quake was hundreds, if not thousands, of times more intense than the Christchurch earthquake. Whatever the intensity, the effects of both quakes were devastating.

In the case of Japan, the quake triggered a devastating tsunami that within minutes was speeding towards the north-east coast. As many other speakers have encapsulated tonight, there was no chance of escape for many in coastal communities. As a resident of a coastal area of Australia myself, I cannot help but reflect deeply on how helpless we would have been in the same circumstances. No country is as prepared for disaster as Japan. The thought and images of that unstoppable, remorseless black tide swallowing up all living things in its wake is chilling.

The toll is still growing and will be unknown for some time. Many families have been lost entirely. Others have been wrenched apart and had their lives destroyed. This is a terrible fate to befall any of our fellow human beings. So first and foremost I pay my respects to the lives lost and the lives ruined. I am proud that Australians have responded as the friends we are, and I encourage all Australians to keep up their assistance through donations to the Red Cross appeal. The Australian government is making a $10 million donation to support the recovery effort. I am proud, as I am sure all members of the House are, that in the rescue phase we were able to send our New South Wales search and rescue team of 72 officers, together with Queensland sniffer dogs and their handlers.

Japan has been there for us in our recent disasters. This is the nature of our abiding friendship. I know we have had many fundraisers of our own to attend this year, but we will attend more. There has been much reflection on the endurance and fighting spirit of the Japanese people. The Prime Minister in her condolence earlier this week spoke of a famous Japanese proverb, ‘Fall over seven times, get up eight times.’ In Japanese, I am told, it is said, ‘Nanakorobi yaoki.’ On that eighth time, I would like the Japanese people to think that the hand helping them up had an Australian face at the end of it.
While I have never been to Japan, I understand the coastline of north-east Japan is particularly beautiful. There is a group of pine-tree-clad islands off the coast of Miyagi prefecture called Matsushima. Matsushima is renowned as one of Japan’s three great panoramic views. It is a landmark that has been celebrated in Japanese literature for centuries as a place of unique scenic beauty. Japan’s most celebrated haiku poet, Matsuo Basho, travelled there in 1689 and recorded his trip in a famous travelogue, the *Narrow Road to the Far North*. This month, even the famous Matsushima was not spared damage by the tsunami. Six people are confirmed to have died there, which leads me to the haiku attributed to Basho, who was said to be—on a rare occasion—lost for words when he saw these beautiful pine-clad islands floating on the sea. His haiku was:

Matsushima—ah!
Ah—Matsushima.
Matsushima—ah.

Our prayers and hopes are with the people of north-east Japan.

Mr ALEXANDER (Bennelong) (9.59 pm)—The magnitude 8.9 Tohoku earthquake near the north-east coast of Honshu, Japan, shocked the world on 11 March this year. An event described by geologists as thrust faulting occurred near the subduction zone, which is the boundary between the Pacific and North American plates. At the particular latitude of this earthquake, the Pacific plate shifts westward towards the North American plate at approximately 83 millimetres per year, descending beneath Japan at the Japan trench as the two plates overlap. Yet, whilst this is a seemingly fractional movement of tectonic plates, we watched in horror as it led to a tsunami that devastated countless villages and left absolute destruction in its wake.

As of 12.30 this morning, Japanese authorities have listed a death toll of 8,649 people, with the sheer size of this tragedy evident in the fact that officials are now forced to bury unidentified bodies. There are still 13,261 people listed as missing, with another 2,929 reported as injured. With many coastal locations in Miyagi and Iwate prefectures still awaiting full investigation, it is envisaged that these numbers will only increase before the final death toll is known. These are massive numbers, in local terms roughly equating to the population of a city the size of Coffs Harbour.

The north-eastern coastline of Japan is particularly vulnerable to earthquakes and tsunami waves due to its proximity to the plate boundaries and the underwater coastal structures that amplify tsunami waves. Since 1973, the Japan trench has witnessed nine earthquake events of magnitude 7 or greater. The largest of these was a magnitude 7.8 earthquake in December 1994, approximately 260 kilometres north of the recent location. This one caused three fatalities and almost 700 injuries. In June 1978, a magnitude 7.7 earthquake 35 kilometres to the south-west caused 22 fatalities and over 400 injuries. There is evidence that large offshore earthquakes occurred in the same region in the years 1611, 1896 and 1933, each of which produced devastating tsunami waves that hit the Sanriku coast of north-east Japan. The magnitude 7.6 earthquake of 1896 is said to have led to a tsunami wave 38 metres high and a death toll of 27,000. The magnitude 8.6 earthquake of 2 March 1933 produced tsunami waves 29 metres high and led to more than 3,000 fatalities. We even have records of an earthquake in the year 869 which saw the entire Sendai area swept away by a massive tsunami. We are also reminded of this record of earthquakes and tsunamis in the world of art. Many would be
familiar with the classic Japanese woodblock piece entitled *The Great Wave off Kanagawa*, which dates back to the 1830s and shows a huge tsunami wave dwarfing the distant Mount Fuji.

The point of this short run through the history books is that these events, whilst devastating and tragic in so many ways, are far from new to this area or to these stoic people. The American Geological Survey has stated over the past few days:

> While the probability of future large earthquakes far from northern Honshu has not increased, neither has it decreased and large earthquakes will continue to occur just as we have observed in the past.

The global response to this catastrophe, from a policy perspective, must retain this understanding and not fall into the trap of thinking that this is a problem of our making and that we as humans have the ability to concoct a resolution. The global response at this moment must be limited to aid and assistance to the hundreds of thousands of people directly impacted by this disaster. We mourn, we grieve and we give our wholehearted support to the Japanese people. We give aid and we give assistance with the rebuilding effort.

Our diplomatic, political and trading relationships will grow stronger in the days, weeks and months to come as we share this hardship. The Japanese people, much like the victims of our own summer of natural disasters, will call on the stuff of which they are made—the stuff that has made them heroes in the face of fire. Now their heroism is demonstrated in the face of this fire.

It is outside of the living memory of all but a few Australians that our diplomatic relationship with Japan used to be somewhat different, and the Japanese soldier was feared for his tenacity and discipline. Underlying this fear was our deep respect for the Japanese willingness to offer absolute self-sacrifice in the name of their nation and Emperor. The Japanese have a history of selflessness dating back a thousand years, from stories of ritual suicide by the bushido warriors of the samurai through to the kamikaze pilots of World War II. While we are now able to look on those stories as purely historical and we can celebrate the strength of friendship between our two nations, these national characteristics have been on display through the heroic efforts of the firefighters from Tokyo’s 3rd District who have faced intense radiation levels as they have attempted to douse the reactor fires. It is these values of selflessness, this integrity, which will guide the Japanese people through this most difficult time.

It has often been said that war provides the ultimate test of the mettle of mankind. In the same way, natural disasters like this stress the necessary physical infrastructure—the transport and communication networks and the power grid. As a result of this natural disaster, the nuclear industry is now being tested like never before. The leadership they have shown on this issue, the technical and innovative genius is indicative of the role they may well play in finding real solutions to carbon pollution and global warming through the improved technologies and safer practices that will no doubt be utilised by their nuclear industry in the shadow of this tragedy. The problems that we have all witnessed at the Fukushima nuclear power plant are not something to be used as a political football but an experience to be analysed and learnt from as both process improvements and real alternatives are proposed and assessed. It would be typical of the Japanese spirit that out of the rubble of this disaster should spring forth a renewed confidence, as this difficult circumstance allows them to discover some of the answers to our global plight.
Both in politics and in sport the true champion learns from defeat and setback to return stronger and reclaim the title. The Japanese people are stoic, heroic and strong. Japan is geographically a small country that is economically a global superpower. Their greatness is coupled with the friends they have earned and relationships they have developed. In building these relationships they have displayed a character focused on hard work and an integrity in their dealings with all people that now brings the world to their door in this hour of need.

Japan has heroically risen from the ashes of war to lead the world in economic development, technological advancement and prosperity, while maintaining its unique traditions and culture. It is inappropriate at this time for some to seek to discredit, mostly through inaccuracy, the path that Japan has chosen to take in the provision of energy to its thriving industries and the world’s 10th largest population. If through this extraordinary event that Japan has recently suffered there are shortcomings discovered in their nuclear power plants, there is no question that the world will watch with great interest as the might of Japanese ingenuity is applied to this situation. The results that will surely follow will benefit the world at large in its quest to address the challenges of climate change and carbon dioxide emissions. The brainpower and national character that will rise to the surface during this tough time means all mankind will reap benefits as the use of nuclear power is made safer for all. This may be a long-term view, as there is much work to be done and many lessons to be learnt along the way, but it is a perspective that we should maintain nonetheless.

There is no doubt that the recent Japanese disaster is a tragedy of epic proportions. It is our duty to offer our support through whatever method the Japanese people require. We must also be cognisant of the proud and resilient nature of the Japanese character, and the importance of respecting their need for space during this period of national mourning. Assistance will flow, and, once this strong and gracious nation has had the time to bury its dead and to grieve, it can then assess the scope of the situation. When the time comes, the rebuilding process will begin on a large scale. It is at this time, when this disaster is no longer dominating global attention, that we must ensure we are there, standing side by side with our friend, assisting them to become an even greater nation and once again a champion on the world stage. On behalf of the people of Bennelong and as a representative of the Australian parliament I send my deepest sympathies and heartfelt condolences to the proud nation and strong people of Japan. We feel her pain. We mourn her losses. We give our respect. We offer our support. We are her neighbour and we are her friend.

Mr Buchholz (Wright) (10.11 pm)—Nine thousand deaths is a figure which is unfathomable for us as a community here in Australia, with the possibility of 20,000 deaths to come. As a member I find it hard to correlate that amount of devastation and destruction. In the seat of Wright on 10 January we experienced a wall of water—nowhere near the velocity of the tsunami that was experienced in Japan—that was 28 feet high. It came through and destroyed homes in my electorate, displaced families and people who today are still unable to return to their homes because they are either not there, they are gone, or have been condemned as a result of heavy inundation of water from flooding.

My heart goes out to the people of Japan. But if Japan has taught us anything in the past 200 years it is that it is a resilient country. To understand that, you only have to look at the quality of the Honda motors they build, which I believe are some of the best small and high-performance motors. The guys just get it when it comes to performing. Mr Deputy Speaker, I
thank you for your indulgence. My heart does go out to the Japanese. The people of Wright offer their condolences to the people of Japan. As a nation we are tired of disasters. Our hearts go out to our New Zealand cousins and, of course, our Japanese cousins. I leave the Japanese people with a quote from the Beatles’ lyrics: ‘I get by with a little help from my friends’. Japan as a nation can see Australia as a friend.

Debate (on motion by Ms Grierson) adjourned.

Main Committee adjourned at 10.14 pm