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SITTING DAYS—2013

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FORTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT  
FIRST SESSION—EIGHTH PERIOD

Her Excellency Ms Quentin Bryce, Companion of the Order of Australia, Commander of the Royal Victorian Order

House of Representatives Office holders

Speaker—Ms Anna Elizabeth Burke MP
Deputy Speaker—Hon. Bruce Craig Scott MP
Second Deputy Speaker—Mr Steven Georganas MP

Members of the Speaker’s Panel—Hon. Dick Godfrey Harry Adams MP, Mr Darren Cheeseman MP, Mrs Yvette Maree D’Ath MP, Ms Sharon Joy Grierson MP,
Dr Andrew Keith Leigh MP, Ms Kirsten Fiona Livermore MP,
Mr Geoffrey Raymond Lyons MP, Mr Robert George Mitchell MP, Mr John Paul Murphy MP,
Mr Robert James Murray Oakeshott MP, Ms Deborah Mary O’Neill MP,
Ms Amanda Louise Rishworth MP, Mr Michael Stuart Symon MP,
Mr Kelvin John Thomson MP, Ms Maria Vamvakinou MP,
Mr Anthony Harold Curties Windsor 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 Janelle Anne Saffin MP and Mr Ed Husic 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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### 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

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- Clerk of the Senate—R Laing
- Clerk of the House of Representatives—B Wright
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>Senator the Hon Stephen Conroy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on Asian Century Policy</td>
<td>The Hon Dr Craig Emerson MP</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>The Hon Mark Butler MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on Mental Health Reform</td>
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<tr>
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<td>The Hon Wayne Swan MP</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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Each box represents a portfolio. **Cabinet Ministers are shown in bold type.** As a general rule, there is one department in each portfolio. However, there is a Department of Veterans’ Affairs in the Defence portfolio. The title of a department does not necessarily reflect the title of a minister in all cases.
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<td>The Hon Teresa Gambaro MP</td>
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<td>Mr Darren Chester MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Attorney-General</strong></td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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Wednesday, 6 February 2013

The SPEAKER (Ms Anna Burke) took the chair at 9:00, made an acknowledgement of country and read prayers.

BILLS

Marine Safety (Domestic Commercial Vessel) National Law Amendment Bill 2013

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Albanese.

Second Reading

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House and Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) (09:01): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Today I introduce to the House the Marine Safety (Domestic Commercial Vessel) National Law Amendment Bill 2013, a bill to amend the Marine Safety (Domestic Commercial Vessel) National Law Act 2012 (the national law).

The Marine Safety (Domestic Commercial Vessel) National Law Act 2012, which was passed by the parliament on 23 August 2012, created a single national maritime regulator and a national safety system for domestic commercial vessels.

This will result in replacing eight existing federal, state and territory regulators with one national marine safety regulator, the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA).

AMSA, my department and maritime officials from the relevant state and territory maritime safety agencies have been working together to complete the necessary implementation work ahead of this start date.

However, a significant operational impact of the existing legislation was discovered while undertaking the implementation work.

The national law’s original policy intention, as negotiated and agreed by the Commonwealth and state and territory jurisdictions, was that AMSA, as the national regulator, will reimburse amounts collected by the states or the Northern Territory for infringement notices issued under the national law.

This is a significant revenue stream for many of the jurisdictions, allowing for the broad range of maritime safety activities undertaken by maritime regulators.

The current legislation means that the Commonwealth, rather than AMSA, will be required to receive the revenue from the infringement notices.

However, the Commonwealth has no power to reimburse the amounts to the jurisdictions because the national law does not contain an appropriations power.

I am advised that only this amendment to the national law will achieve the original policy intention and ensure that there is no unintended impact on revenues collected by the jurisdictions.

I commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned.

BUSINESS

Rearrangement

Mr CLARE (Blaxland—Minister for Home Affairs, Minister for Justice and Cabinet Secretary) (09:04): I move:

That notice No. 2, government business, be postponed until a later hour of this day.

Question agreed to.
Customs Amendment (Anti-Dumping Commission) Bill 2013

First Reading

Bill—by leave—and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Clare.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr CLARE (Blaxland—Minister for Home Affairs, Minister for Justice and Cabinet Secretary) (09:05):

I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Australia is a trading nation. Trade is the key to our success.

One of the things that can harm trade is dumping.

Dumping is cheating.

Where goods are dumped into our domestic market, it can hurt Australian industry, it can also reduce confidence in the whole trading system, and that is why it is important that you have a strong anti-dumping system that can make sure people play by the rules.

Last December the Prime Minister, the Minister for Industry and Innovation and I announced a package of measures to strengthen Australia's anti-dumping system. This $24.4 million package includes:

- establishing a new Anti-Dumping Commission to investigate anti-dumping cases;
- almost doubling the number of investigators working on anti-dumping cases—so that cases can be dealt with fairly and more expeditiously;
- reforms to make the anti-dumping system more accessible for small and medium sized businesses; and
- introducing stricter remedies against overseas producers who deliberately circumvent Australia's anti-dumping system.

This bill is the first step in the implementation of these important reforms.

Its purpose is to establish the Australian Anti-Dumping Commission.

The establishment of the Australian Anti-Dumping Commission, under legislation, is the primary recommendation of the review into Australia's anti-dumping and countervailing system led by the Hon. John Brumby, the former Premier of Victoria.

In July last year I asked Mr Brumby to provide me with advice on the best structure for administering Australia's anti-dumping system—based on consultation with Australian businesses, unions, stakeholder representative groups and experts in the anti-dumping field.

He contacted over 400 stakeholders as part of this review.

His report found that in the past 12 months the workload of the administration had almost tripled—as a result of economic conditions like the high Australian dollar, surplus product on world markets and increased competition.

Mr Brumby recommended that the government establish an anti-dumping commission—based in a major capital city—and increase the resources set aside for anti-dumping investigations.

This bill implements this important recommendation for structural reform.

It also recommended that additional resources be directed to anti-dumping investigations. That is exactly what we have done—boosting funding for anti-dumping investigations by $24.4 million over the next four years.
The additional funding means we will almost double the number of investigators working on anti-dumping cases.

The Anti-Dumping Commission will be principally located in Melbourne and it will commence its work in July this year.

The commissioner will report directly to the minister.

The commission will consist of:
- the commissioner;
- two senior executive staff, and
- other staff, including the new investigators.

The Anti-Dumping Commission will be organisationally situated within Customs and Border Protection. This means that staff assisting the commissioner will continue to be officers of Custom. However, they will report to the commissioner.

The Brumby review weighed up the costs and benefits of different organisation models for an anti-dumping commission. It found this to be the best model.

This bill also amends the Customs Act to create the commissioner's role and offer legislative guidance to the commission's work:
- the commissioner will be responsible for decision-making and other anti-dumping related functions that currently rest with the CEO of Customs and Border Protection.
- this bill confers on the commissioner all of the powers contained in Part XVB of the Customs Act, currently exercised by the CEO.
- the bill also sets out the terms and conditions of the commissioner's appointment including the term of appointment, disclosure of interests, outside employment, resignation and termination.
- the bill does not change the responsibility of the minister for anti-dumping matters.

The recruitment process for the commissioner will be merit based. Advertisements will be published in the coming weeks.

I will appoint the Commissioner, for a specified period, not exceeding five years.

The bill also amends the Customs Administration Act to:
- allow the CEO of Customs to delegate to the commissioner powers to disclose certain information to the extent those powers apply in connection with Part XVB of the Act; and
- provide that the prohibition of disclosure of certain information will also apply to the commissioner.

Over the past 18 months, the government has brought to parliament four tranches of legislation to improve the anti-dumping system. These changes included:
- introducing a new Review Officer panel to undertake merits based review of anti-dumping decisions;
- introduction of an new anti-circumvention framework;
- more closely aligning Australia's anti-dumping system with WTO obligations including by reflecting the full range of actionable subsidies;
- requiring the minister to make decisions within 30 days of receiving an investigation; and
- establishing in legislation the key stakeholder body—the International Trade Remedies Forum—to provide ongoing advice to government on future reform to the system.

These reforms represent the most extensive improvements to the anti-dumping system in a decade.
More reform is required.

In December when I announced the Anti-Dumping Commission and the extra resources for investigations I also announced we would:

- remove mandatory consideration of the lesser duty rule in complex cases;
- clarify the application of retroactive duties;
- introduce a new review mechanism to reduce the complexity of the existing review processes and make them more effective; and
- improve the infringement notice scheme to increase penalties and provide a more effective deterrent against importers making false or misleading statements in an attempt to circumvent duties.

I will introduce further legislation in the next sitting period to implement these reforms.

These reforms to the anti-dumping system are also part of the broader reforms to Customs and Border Protection that I announced late last year.

In December I announced the establishment of the Customs Reform Board made up of three distinguished Australians with expertise in law enforcement, corruption resistance and best practice business systems. The three members of the board are:

- The Honourable James Wood QC—former Royal Commissioner of the NSW Royal Commission into the NSW Police Service;
- Mr Ken Moroney AO—former Commissioner of the NSW Police Force; and
- Mr David Mortimer AO—former CEO of TNT Limited, former Deputy Chairman of Ansett, former Chairman of Australia Post and Leightons Holdings.

The board will provide advice and recommendations to reform the structure, operations and culture of Customs and Border Protection—and oversee the implementation of these reforms.

This includes improvements to its business systems, its law enforcement capabilities and its integrity systems and culture.

The board met for the first time last Friday.

The establishment of a well-resourced and effective anti-dumping commission is an important part of this reform program.

It will deliver stronger protection for Australian industry against unfair competition from overseas—and help protect Australian jobs put at risk by products being dumped into Australia.

I commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The SPEAKER (09:13): Before calling on the next speaker I recognise that we have in the gallery today former Prime Minister the Hon. Bob Hawke and with him two traditional owners of the area around which the bill is about to be referred to, Jeffrey Lee and Stewart Gangali. I welcome them to the chamber today and I thank them for making this announcement even more special.

Honourable members: Hear, hear!

BILLS

Completion of Kakadu National Park (Koongarra Project Area Repeal) Bill 2013

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Burke.
Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr BURKE (Watson—Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities) (09:14): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I will give some formal parts of my speech first and then I will speak more generally.

I rise to move the Completion of Kakadu National Park (Koongarra Project Area Repeal) Bill 2013.

Koongarra is an area of native woodland of great environmental and cultural significance, located within the boundaries but not part of Kakadu National Park.

Koongarra was previously excluded from the park because of its potential to be the site for a uranium mine as recommended by the Ranger uranium environmental inquiry.

The traditional owner, through the Northern Land Council, has clearly stated his wish that the land be included in Kakadu National Park, and as a consequence, has waived his interest in Koongarra as a mining lease.

In 1981 parliament enacted the Koongarra Project Area Act 1981 (Cth). The proclamation of the commencement of the relevant provisions of this legislation was made conditional on the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs (now the Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs) and the relevant land council (the Northern Land Council) providing consent. Such consent has never been provided and accordingly the relevant provisions of the act remain unproclaimed.

Over the years, a number of mineral lease applications relating to the Koongarra area have been made. None of these applications have been granted.

In June 2011, the UNESCO World Heritage Committee included Koongarra into the Kakadu World Heritage area.

The remaining legal steps for the inclusion of Koongarra in Kakadu are close to being finalised. Minister Macklin has provided consent under the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 (Cth) and signed a lease of Koongarra to the director of national parks. A proclamation by the Governor-General under section 350 of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (Cth) is imminent, and will include Koongarra into Kakadu National Park.

The repeal of the Koongarra Project Area Act 1981 (Cth) is part of the process necessary to prevent uranium mining and preserve Koongarra's environmental and cultural treasures forever. The 1,288 hectares of Koongarra will soon be protected by incorporating it into Kakadu National Park in accordance with the clearly expressed wishes of the traditional owner, for the benefit of all Australians.

Today, this parliament takes a step of national and international environmental significance. Kakadu is one of the most precious places on our planet and it is tremendous today to have here, on the floor of the chamber, two people who have championed the values of Kakadu for decades. I refer, of course, to former Prime Minister Bob Hawke, who joins us here on the floor of the chamber, and the traditional owner of Koongarra, Mr Jeffrey Lee. During the time of the Hawke government, Kakadu was massively expanded in stages 2 and 3. In stage 2 of the expansion of Kakadu National Park, Prime Minister Bob Hawke acted against the advice of pretty much every member of his cabinet and made a judgment call that history has shown he was absolutely on the right side of. Can anyone imagine
today what Kakadu would look like had Prime Minister Bob Hawke not put all his authority on the line and said, 'It's one of the most precious places on earth and we're going to protect it?'

Today, this legislation being introduced into the parliament allows us to complete the legacy of work that was massively advanced during the years of the Hawke Labor government. Throughout that time, when you looked at the boundary of Kakadu National Park there has always been, effectively, a hole in the heart of it. If you go to the lookout within sight of Nourlangie Rock, you are there with Lightning Dreaming, one of the most spectacular pieces of rock art in the country. You look across from that lookout that thousands of tourists visit every year. The land you are looking at is Koongarra. Can anyone imagine the implications for the integrity of Kakadu National Park if that land, which has not previously been technically part of the national park, were ever to have become a uranium mine? One person made the judgement call on whether or not that would happen.

The Djok clan has one surviving member. Usually we refer to land and we refer to 'traditional owners'. When we refer to Koongarra, there is 'a' traditional owner. His name is Jeffrey Lee and he is here with us now. Against the offers of millions of dollars which were put to him at different occasions for a mining resource of extraordinary value, Jeffrey Lee took a decision that he wanted to be able to leave the land in the state that it had been for the generations that preceded him. He wanted to be as good to his land as his ancestors had been. The judgement call was his—and it was his call which the Parliament of Australia is now acting on and which the World Heritage Committee, in 2011, acted upon.

I was minister for the environment when that world heritage application was considered, but the architecture of putting that application together and putting it forward was done under my predecessor, Peter Garrett. I am pleased that he too joins us on the floor of the chamber today because these steps belong very much to his strong environmental leadership during his time in the portfolio. One of the first things that happened when I became environment minister was a video conference with members of my department. The Director of National Parks, Mr Peter Cochrane, held up an iPad to the screen and played a video message from Jeffrey Lee, a message that had been recorded on country, asking whether he could personally go to Paris to address the World Heritage Committee on behalf of Australia and explain the importance of this land. There had never been a request that I agreed to more readily. The only delay was the one to two hours that it took for us to be able to get Jeffrey Lee near a telephone for me to be able to confirm that we wanted him there on behalf of Australia. Jeffrey travelled to Paris and the World Heritage Committee resolved that Koongarra would be added to the world heritage boundary. From that moment in 2011 the world heritage nomination of Kakadu was complete.

But there has remained a piece of legislation that contemplates uranium mining if traditional owners consent. When you consider the strength of resolve of that great Australian, Jeffrey Lee, who is here today, I think it is incumbent upon this parliament to say that there should not be a cloud over Kakadu National Park for a day longer; that we should as a parliament respect the wish of the traditional owner and resolve that the environment of Kakadu, the environment of Koongarra, will remain intact forever; that the wishes of the traditional owner, Jeffrey
Lee, will become part of the landscape of Australia forever; and that generations into the future will know that the ancestors of the Djok clan have their wishes respected forever.

In Kakadu we have one of the most precious places on earth. This bill helps us to complete Kakadu National Park, it allows this Labor government to conclude the legacy of the Hawke Labor government and it allows Australia to proudly respect the wishes of the traditional owner and say that the wishes you have for your land will be respected forever and Kakadu National Park will be complete. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned.

COMMITTEES

Human Rights Committee

Report

Mr JENKINS (Scullin) (09:23): I will take just a little indulgence to indicate that, in my time, I have not necessarily been moved as much as I have been by the second reading speech by the minister. He is to be congratulated. With former Prime Minister Hawke in the gallery, I remember the battles in trying to save Guratba—Coronation Hill—which we eventually did. To have achieved this step in expanding Kakadu in the way that it is going to be is a great credit not only to the minister but to the government. I apologise to the House for taking up its time but, after 27 years, I think sometimes things happen in this place that are special. My congratulations go to all involved, including the traditional owner. It is a pleasure to be here today on this occasion. On behalf of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights I present the committee's first report of 2013, titled Examination of legislation in accordance with the Human Rights (Parliamentary Scrutiny) Act 2011, bills introduced 19 to 29 November 2012, legislative instruments registered with the Federal Register of Legislative Instruments, 17 November 2012 to 4 January 2013.

In accordance with standing order 39(f) the report was made a parliamentary paper.

Mr JENKINS: by leave—In this first report of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights for 2013, the committee has considered 30 bills introduced during the period 19 to 29 November 2012 and 294 legislative instruments registered between 17 November 2012 and 4 January 2013. All bills were introduced with statements of compatibility. Some instruments were not accompanied by statements of compatibility and the committee proposes to write to the relevant ministers seeking advice as to the reasons for this.

The committee has decided that 14 bills require further examination and has written to the relevant ministers seeking further information. The committee deferred consideration of the Native Title Amendment Bill 2012 as it is currently the subject of inquiry by two other committees. The committee proposes to take account of evidence placed before these committees where it is relevant to the consideration of human rights concerns raised by the bill. The remaining 15 bills do not appear to raise human rights compatibility concerns. The committee has sought further information in relation to 13 legislative instruments before forming a view about their human rights compatibility. It is considering one instrument as part of a package of legislation relating to the Migration Legislation Amendment (Regional Processing and Other Measures) Act 2012.

One hundred and sixteen instruments do not appear to raise any human rights compatibility concerns but are accompanied
by statements of compatibility that do not fully meet the committee's expectations. The committee will write to the relevant ministers, in a purely advisory capacity, providing guidance on the preparation of statements of compatibility. The committee hopes that this approach will assist in the preparation of future statements. The remaining 164 instruments do not appear to raise any human rights compatibility concerns and are accompanied by statements of compatibility that the committee considers adequate. The committee has considered 11 ministerial responses to comments made in previous reports and has concluded its examination of these pieces of legislation.

I conclude by making some brief remarks regarding a common issue the committee has observed in the bills considered in this report. The committee notes that there has been a trend in recent bills towards creating standardised civil penalty regimes. This is given its clearest effect in the model provisions contained in the Regulatory Powers (Standard Provisions) Bill 2012, which the committee considered in its sixth report of 2012. Four bills considered by the committee in this report contain provisions of this nature and provide an opportunity to reflect on the effect of the Regulatory Powers (Standard Provisions) Bill 2012. These are the Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals Legislation Amendment Bill 2012, the Biosecurity Bill 2012, the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Amendment (Compliance Measures) Bill 2012 and the Superannuation Legislation Amendment (Reducing Illegal Early Release and Other Measures) Bill 2012.

The committee considers that civil penalty regimes raise concerns because there is a tendency for the consideration of the impact of such bills on human rights to focus on the description of the offences as civil penalties. However, as the committee remarked in its fifth report of 2012, it is possible for a civil penalty regime to constitute a criminal charge. The committee noted that the approach under international and comparative human rights law has been to look at the substance and the effect of proceedings, not just their label. The committee notes that, in determining the question of whether an offence is a criminal offence, international jurisprudence has identified that the following factors are to be taken into account: the classification of the act in domestic law, the nature of the offence, the purpose of the penalty and the nature and severity of the penalty.

The committee is concerned that where the effect of such provisions has not been adequately considered there is a risk that the provisions will not have been tested against the criminal proceedings rights in article 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. This in turn can give rise to issues regarding the standard of proof for such offences and the potential for double jeopardy, where a person may be subject to two penalties in relation to the same conduct.

I draw the attention of the House to the committee's comments in relation to the civil penalties provided for in these four bills. I recommend the report to the House.

**BILLS**

**International Fund for Agricultural Development Amendment Bill 2012**

Second Reading

Debate resumed on the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Ms MARINO (Forrest—Opposition Whip) (09:30): I want to continue my remarks on the International Fund for Agricultural Development and to refer to the comments of Labor members who spoke previously in this debate. They made some significant comments about Australian
farmers in particular and the contribution that they make and will continue to make to international food security. I find this really quite contradictory. When you look at the Labor government's record with agriculture, there was no agricultural policy at the last election. You would have thought that, for Australian farmers to be able to continue to provide expertise and knowledge to the international community, at least the Labor government would have had a comprehensive agricultural policy at the last election.

But the Labor government, in its lack of wisdom, has cut funding to agriculture to the tune of at least $1.7 billion, from $3.8 billion, since 2007. One of the things I referred to when I first started speaking on this bill was the fact that Labor abolished Land and Water Australia, one of the key agencies that was in place to manage and research issues in relation to the simple aspects of land and water management. Of course, that is where part of the research comes from, and where the work comes from, to pass on to international communities in relation to food security. Yet $63 million was cut out of this CSIRO research, as well as $12 million from rural research and development corporations.

So it is simply contradictory to hear Labor speakers talking about the wonderful contribution that Australian farmers can and will make to international food security efforts. Where is the government on this issue? These are contradictory statements. In fact, the 2011-12 budget cut $32.8 million from the department's already strained resources, with a further $33.4 million cut from cooperative research centres, or CRCs. That simply means that fewer agricultural CRCs are funded each year. Where is the research for the future going to come from that the previous speakers have said is so important to the international community, to entities like IFAD and others, to assist with managing the challenge of global food security issues?

I challenge the members who have already spoken on this, and the members to come, on the Labor side to actually detail the ongoing support for research and development in Australian agriculture and the farmers' efforts. They are among the best in the world; there is no question. Our farmers are widely respected, but, again, this requires continuing research and development funding that is matched by industry, particularly, to enable this to happen. But we have seen nothing but cuts. So I was really confounded when I read and listened to the comments made by members on the opposite side. When we look at biosecurity, another key area, we see that millions of dollars have been cut from biosecurity.

I am a member of the Standing Committee on Climate Change, Environment and the Arts, which has been conducting an inquiry into biodiversity. I say to the government that, frequently, those who submitted to the inquiry said, 'What a massive loss that Land and Water Australia has been.' In any efforts to assist Australian farmers in managing the challenges that this country presents—and our farmers are still some of the most efficient and most productive in the world—and in our efforts through this bill, our contribution is our expertise to agencies and other countries in dealing with global food security, a problem that will get worse. We are expecting our farmers to produce more efficiently from less water, less land and less fertiliser. These are the sorts of demands that are made, and yet the Labor government is cutting the budget for these particular research efforts. So the comments that have been made by others to this debate are contradictory. I say in relation to this bill: it certainly does not provide the assurance that
the Australian public demands for the expenditure of $126 million.

Mr STEPHEN JONES (Throsby) (09:36): The purpose of this bill is to enable Australia to accede to the international agreement establishing an International Fund for Agricultural Development. You could be forgiven for thinking its purpose was something else after hearing the last part of the member for Forrest's contribution. It is an important piece of legislation because it enables Australia once again to participate in this important international body for agricultural development.

Since it was created in 1977, IFAD has focused exclusively on rural poverty eradication and working with poor rural populations in developing countries to eliminate poverty, hunger and malnutrition; to raise productivity and income; and to improve the quality of their lives. There have been some problems with the fund; there is no doubt about that. It is why Australia has in the past withdrawn from the fund. But those issues have been the subject of a review, and I am pleased to see that the issues that have been identified by Australia and other countries are being dealt with. IFAD itself has recently undertaken some major internal reform, making it now a highly regarded development partner by donor countries around the world and by developing countries in which it works. It is now timely that Australia renews its membership of IFAD, and the legislation before the House will give effect to that.

In 2001, AusAID was commissioned to conduct a review of IFAD, finding that IFAD had implemented significant reforms and was now considered by donors in developing countries to be an increasingly effective and results focused value-for-money partner. The review recognised IFAD's clear mandate to reduce rural poverty and hunger through working with smallhold farmers, who are disproportionately represented amongst the poor, vulnerable and food insecure.

IFAD projects currently work with around 36 million poor men and women, supporting them to become more food secure through increasing productivity and access to markets, including through microfinance and business development. Renewing our membership of IFAD is clearly in Australia's national interest. It will allow Australia to expand existing support for food security and help the world's most vulnerable to fight hunger.

IFAD's senior management values Australia's unique technical expertise in tropical and dryland farming—a point that was made by previous speakers in this debate—and in fisheries, biosecurity and quarantine management. We are considered to have attractive policy and expertise in these areas, which is something that we can share with developing countries, particularly developing countries within our region. Membership of IFAD will also allow Australia to draw on that organisation's considerable experience to strengthen Australia's own approach to food security and rural development in our aid program.

Our priorities for engaging with IFAD are: improving food security, raising incomes and strengthening the resilience of smallholder producers in priority countries for Australia, particularly countries within our region; continued commitment to reform to improve governance and management of the organisation; and ensuring disability inclusiveness and gender equality across all of IFAD's programs. Investment in IFAD, importantly, will not detract from existing support for food security programs. Financial contributions to IFAD will be decided
through the Australian government's annual budget process.

Any discussion about foreign aid draws conjecture. It always draws, as any member in this place would be able to testify, people who would say, 'Why not deal with problems in our own backyard first?' It is true that we have problems in this country to confront—
problems with poverty; problems with homelessness; and problems with improving our education and health systems, particularly in rural and remote Australia. These are all priorities of this Labor government.

But it is important to note that poverty in Australia, as important and as much of a priority as it must be, means something very different from poverty in poor and developing countries. Poverty in those countries means living on less than $1.20 a day, as 1.4 billion people around the world do. Poverty in those countries means dying of preventable diseases like diphtheria, diarrhoea, pneumonia and hepatitis, as around 22,000 children do each and every day. That is what poverty means in those countries.

Australians, I know, are not indifferent to the plight of people in crisis and in poverty around the world. When confronted with the stark reality of this poverty, Australians lean upon the better nature within them and want to do something to help. I know that in my own electorate over 14,000 people make an individual donation to a non-government charity organisation dealing with overseas aid each and every year. I represent an electorate which is not the big end of town, but 14,000 people, themselves earning modest incomes, take it upon themselves to make a regular contribution each year to help those who are less fortunate than themselves. These people would never consider themselves to be fortunate. In addition to
it gives us an instruction that we have an obligation as people living in a relatively wealthy country to do our bit to ensure that we are assisting those people who are less fortunate than us. Whether or not you take—as I do—the view that we should be involved in foreign assistance because it is the right thing to do, you can certainly argue, and accept, that it is in our national interest.

Eighteen of our 20 closest neighbours are poor or developing countries. Those countries have some of the highest rates of poverty, malnutrition and illiteracy of any countries around the world. And we all know that poverty and ignorance breed instability. When there is instability in a country, it rarely confines itself to the borders of that one country. We are often called in to deal with issues in our region that have poverty and lack of education as their root causes. It would be far better if those issues were dealt with at their root causes—if we sent nurses and teachers rather than soldiers, police and tanks into those regions. It would be far better and far cheaper for us to be attacking those issues at their root causes.

It is not only in our interest in terms of security. If we are engaged in assisting these countries to develop, of course, it creates new markets for our goods. In our own lifetimes, we can think of countries which, in our own imaginations, we have moved from feeling sorry for to feeling envious of. As young children at school we were taught, once upon a time, how poor certain countries were and how we should feel sorry for them because they were not as lucky as us. In what has been dubbed this 'Asian century', we are now looking with some envy upon the quality of life that those countries have, or that they might look forward to. That is because they have developed. We now look upon these countries not as destinations for our foreign aid but as destinations for our goods and services, and as valuable trading partners. That is clearly an instance where it is in our national interest to ensure that we are doing our bit to lift those countries out of poverty and assist them with development.

I often receive correspondence in my electorate about the aid that we are providing to Indonesia for the building of schools and for assistance in teacher training. Around 2,000 schools are going to be built and teachers are going to be trained in Indonesia as a result of direct foreign aid to that country. I am asked—and it is quite right that constituents ask this of their elected MP—why we are sending money to Indonesia when we have difficulties in our own schooling system. The answer is really quite simple: the alternative to schools in that region are run by radical Islamists—the same sorts of people who, when they fall into the wrong sort of instruction, create very real national security risks for us. So it is in our interest to provide alternative educational pathways for people in those countries as well. Of course it comes as a cost: around the equivalent of a cup of coffee per Australian per week. That is what it costs us. The benefit of the aid is enormous. A cup of coffee per week—in my electorate that is a little more than three dollars at the moment—is the cost of an immunisation which saves a life in a developing country. It costs about $3 for an immunisation and it costs about $2.50 for a birthing kit—and that $2.50 is the single source of the halving of maternal mortality rates in many developing countries within our region.

Often we are confronted with people saying: 'What does it matter? The problem is so enormous, our contributions are so small they hardly make a difference.' We know that they do make a difference. More than 14,000 lives are saved each day because of the efforts of Australians individually and collectively through their governments making a contribution through our foreign
aid and assistance. We are making a difference over time. Between 1990 and 2005, we have seen a reduction in the number of people who are living below the poverty line, despite the increase in world population. In 1990, 1.8 billion people were living below the poverty line; in 2005, 1.4 billion people were living below the poverty line. So we are making a difference, despite the enormity of the challenge. We as members in this place have a responsibility to lead the debate and to lead it in the right direction.

I repeat once again the comment that I have made to many constituents: it is a lot cheaper to send nurses, teachers, books and medicines than it is to send soldiers, guns and tanks. I commend the legislation to the House.

Debate interrupted.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Oakeshott) (09:51): Before calling the member for Wannon, I welcome to the gallery many members of Reconciliation Australia and representatives from Australia’s Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal populations. Welcome to the gallery for the Prime Minister’s upcoming speech, and I am sure you will enjoy the member for Wannon on the International Fund for Agricultural Development Amendment Bill 2012.

BILLS

International Fund for Agricultural Development Amendment Bill 2012

Second Reading

Debate resumed on the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr TEHAN (Wannon) (09:51): I welcome everyone in the gallery and I wish you all the best in your endeavours. I think you were here for a dinner last night, and now we will hear from the Prime Minister. I hope that you have had a very worthwhile trip and that you have been made to feel very much welcome.

This is an important bill and it is an important debate that we need to have in this chamber because, at its heart, we are talking about $120 million of taxpayers’ money. That is Australians’ money that is earned through hard work. That is $120 million that we as lawmakers need to ensure is spent in the best way possible, and that is the debate that we are having in this chamber today.

I congratulate the member for Throsby for bringing up the parable about the help that is given by a stranger to someone who is lying destitute and robbed on a road. I think all of us in this place recognise that there is a place for us as a nation to take steps to make sure that other citizens of the world are given a hand and are helped, especially those in desperate need. Both sides of parliament are committed to ensuring that that happens. It is why we have, on the whole, a very bipartisan approach to our aid budget and how it should be spent. My understanding is that that bipartisan approach went as far as both sides supporting our withdrawing from the International Fund for Agricultural Development in 2004. There were very good reasons we did this; it was not a decision that was taken lightly. Withdrawing from a United Nations fund is not an easy process, but the reasons we did it are as follows: the fund’s limited relevance to the Australian aid program’s priority countries in South-East Asia and the Pacific, lack of comparative advantage and focus, the fact that other organisations are more strongly involved in rural development in our region, and shortcomings in management and failure to respond to concerns that the Australian government raised with senior management of IFAD—the International Fund for
Agricultural Development—regarding how well our money was being spent.

The decision to withdraw was supported by the then Deputy Director General of AusAID in evidence that he gave to the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties. According to the committee’s report, AusAID had had concerns regarding IFAD’s performance in relation to the Australian aid program and its priorities for a substantial period of time. A recent review of the International Fund for Agricultural Development and of Australia’s engagement with it backed this assessment, stating that in 2004 these were clearly valid and important enough reasons for Australia to take the significant and protracted step of withdrawing from a UN organisation.

If we are to reinvest money with this organisation, having taken the steps that we did, it is beholden on us to ensure that this organisation has reformed its ways and will use the $120 million of taxpayers’ money that will be put into this program in a way which will enhance our near region and those priority countries that we want to benefit from our aid budget, and that the money will be spent in the most efficient way to enhance the long-term sustainable development of those countries, particularly in agriculture. On this side of the House, we do not think that the necessary reforms and the necessary steps have been put in place to ensure that that will happen.

This is not a discussion about whether we should help our neighbours or not; this is about whether we are helping them in the right way, whether that $120 million will be used in the most effective and efficient way. It is a significant amount of money. This $120 million will be going back to this UN organisation at a time when the Australian government has cut its research and development budget for our agricultural producers. If we are going to be sending this money we have to ensure that it is used appropriately, because our agricultural producers are suffering cuts to their own research and development budgets. Therefore, at the very minimum, we have to ensure that if we are still going to be generous in the aid we provide to our near neighbours that aid is spent appropriately. Are we certain that this is the case? Sadly, no we are not.

At a public hearing on the bill on 20 October 2012, AusAID officials were unable to assure members of the committee that IFAD has addressed all these issues. I will quote from that hearing so that we have it very clear on the record that there are still doubts about this UN organisation’s ability to use this money wisely. To an AusAID official, Ms Bryant, Mr Ruddock said:

Do you believe all of those concerns have now been addressed—

the concerns that led to us withdrawing from this organisation. Ms Bryant said:

I believe that the concerns have been well documented …

Mr Ruddock asked if she could quantify that all the concerns have been met. Ms Bryant said:

No. I am not sure how you would like me to quantify it. In terms of a list and a tick box, no, I cannot do that.

This comes when we have seen evidence of the mismanagement and the auditing issues around how this UN organisation spends money. Questions have been raised since 2004.

Is this the right way for us to be spending taxpayers’ money? There are other ways that we can use this $120 million. There is no reason we cannot use direct aid programs to do this job. Australia has expertise in this area. We are world leaders, especially when it comes to dryland farming in agriculture but also when it comes to tropical farming.
These skills can be utilised. We do not have to outsource every part of our aid budget to the United Nations. The more distant an organisation is from a country, the greater the chance that you will not see every dollar being utilised as it should be utilised.

I want to point to the IFAD 2011 annual report on investigation and anticorruption activities. Twenty-five allegations were made against external parties. Of these:

…13 related to IFAD staff members, and three involved both staff members and external parties

…The staff misconduct cases involved harassment, breach of confidentiality, recruitment irregularities and conflicts of interest, while the external cases involved collusion in procurement activities and other fraud on the part of companies and project staff.

The part that really concerns me is that the external cases involved collusion in procurement activities and other fraud on the part of companies and project staff. These are serious allegations, especially when it comes to collusion in procurement activities, because that is one of the fundamental roles of any aid organisation in making sure that the money it has and is putting towards aid projects is spent appropriately. So, if there is collusion in procurement activities, we should not be giving over $120 million to this organisation.

Let us just put that $120 million in perspective. The US government last year provided $80 million to IFAD. On a per-head-of-population basis, on a GDP basis or whichever way you want to look at it, we are giving a substantial sum of money to this organisation. These issues were raised once again when this legislation went before the committee. Mr Ruddock asked, ‘Have there been any allegations of corruption within the fund?’ The AusAID official replied:

Not that we are aware of. We understand that there are reporting mechanisms for corruption, but we are not aware of any making it to the executive council discussions. I think the report that we have commissioned, the 2011 report, looked at that issue and also did not identify any allegations of corruption. I am using the word ‘allegations’ here; there were certainly no cases.

That might have been before the IFAD 2011 annual report on investigation and anticorruption activities was released because, quite clearly, as the organisation's own report shows, 25 allegations were made, of which 13 related to IFAD, and they are significant allegations.

So I call on the government to re-examine its approach to IFAD and its approach to how it will spend this $120 million of taxpayers' money. The cost of repairing all of the dodgy pink batts that were put into people's roofs was $120 million—a significant sum of money. We have already seen waste occur due to government incompetence and mismanagement of this amount of money and, sadly, even greater amounts in the last five years. But we do not want to continue to see it continue to happen. We have to ensure that we learn the lessons of the past and that the taxpayers' money is spent correctly, appropriately and in the most efficient way possible. That is as important for the aid budget as it is for any other part of government spending.

In conclusion, this debate is not about the allocation of money to our aid budget. This debate is ensuring that the taxpayers' money is well spent, and in this case it is $120 million of taxpayers' money—a significant amount. We should not be giving this money to this UN organisation until it gets its act in order or until it realises that we withdrew our funding from it in 2004 for very serious reasons. It was not a decision that was taken lightly. Therefore, we will not commit money back to this organisation until we are absolutely, 100 per cent guaranteed that that money will be used as it should be to benefit
those countries that those dollars are going to.

Mr ZAPPIA (Makin) (10:06): I take the opportunity to speak to the International Fund for Agricultural Development Amendment Bill 2012. This bill seeks to recommit Australia to the International Fund for Agricultural Development with a financial commitment of $126 million over the next four years. Australia was a founding member of this fund when it was first established in 1977. It was established in response to the 1974 World Food Conference, but then Australia withdrew in 2007 as a result of concerns relating to financial management and the effectiveness of the program. We have heard quite a bit about that from members opposite. I will come to that withdrawal in a moment.

IFAD originally focused on Africa. I understand that today, it still conducts much of its work in Africa. I understand that it has now also spread to other parts of the world. In Africa, where the fund was originally intended to focus, my understanding is that about 70 per cent of the population—around 280 million people—in the areas where this fund is intended to assist live on something like $1.25 a day and most of them rely on agriculture for their existence. I suspect that across the world there are about a billion people that also live on about $1.25 a day and also rely on agriculture for their existence. Investing or providing assistance to those countries to enable them to produce their own food would seem to me to be an important area of international aid.

Members opposite have raised concerns with regard to this bill on what I would suggest are three areas. I have heard members opposite say that, at a time when we are finding it difficult to balance our own budget here in Australia, we should perhaps cut overseas aid funding. I have also heard that, if we are to continue with overseas aid funding, we should perhaps look at different areas of priority. Thirdly, I have heard members raise concerns with regard to the mismanagement and effectiveness of the program.

I will take the last point first. I understand that there were some recent discussions and advice sought in respect of the ongoing concerns. Quite rightly, some of that has been aired in this chamber. But I do not have the information and advice that obviously the minister does and therefore I am not in a position to make a judgement as to whether we ought to recommit to this fund or not. I rely on the advice of the minister on that and I would expect the minister would not be proposing that these funds be allocated if the minister was not satisfied that the concerns that had previously been raised and that led to the withdrawal of Australia from this fund had been resolved. I suspect also that the minister would not be recommending that these funds be allocated if he was not confident that there are adequate protocols in place to ensure that the funds, once allocated, would reach their intended destination and be used in a manner for which they are intended. So I put that to one side and put my trust in the minister with respect to that.

On the question of us having to balance our own budget and therefore perhaps make cuts to our foreign aid expenditure, I disagree with those who raise that proposition. As I said in my opening remarks, the ability of many people in developing countries to produce their own food is fundamentally important and essential to their existence. When you consider that the production of food in those countries is under threat from a whole range of things then it is more important than ever before for international aid to be provided for food production in those countries. We are seeing in this country right now the devastation
being caused by floods, fires and at other
times cyclones and other extreme weather
events. Whenever that occurs it totally
interrupts our food production capacity and we
see the immediate results to us. This is in a
country that, in comparison with most of the
developing countries, would be considered to
be well off, yet we are impacted terribly by
those events.

Imagine when those events happen in
developing countries where what little food
they can grow is essential to their life. The
reality is that, as a result of climate change
that we are seeing around the world, those
developing countries are equally being
affected by extreme weather events. We have
had reports and presentations to this House
to clearly demonstrate how climate change
will impact on developing countries most of
all. So if we can assist them not only to
produce their food better under the current
conditions but also to cope with those
extreme weather events when they occur, we
are going to be doing those people a very
valuable service.

The issue of climate change is only one of
the matters of concern to me with respect to
the importance of this support. As I said just
a moment ago, the issue of climate change
will affect those developing countries even
more so than it does in Australia. There are
also other very good reasons it is important
that we continue the funding to enable those
countries to produce their food. We know
that in a world where the population is
growing, most of the growth is occurring in
those developing countries. Therefore, if
they are having trouble already in meeting
their food needs, those problems are only
going to become worse in the years to come.
Again, enabling them to do more with what
they have is going to be absolutely vital to
their future wellbeing.

There are other critical reasons that
investing and assisting developing countries
with their food production is very important
for the rest of the world. As we know, poor
nutrition is linked to health outcomes and
health costs for those people. Investing in
food production reduces downstream health
costs. We also know that some of the food
production methods used in developing
countries are the cause of some of those poor
health outcomes because in many of those
countries they continue to use chemicals that
we in Australia stopped using a long time
ago. Yet, without the assistance of other
countries, those practices will only continue
and, again, if we can assist them in changing
their practices, in implementing better
farming methods, we will be able not only to
assist them to produce their food but also to
assist them in achieving the better health
outcomes that we would all want for them
and for ourselves.

I have spoken firsthand with people who
have worked in some of these countries and
worked in food production in them, and I
have heard the stories of some of the
chemicals that they continue to use. Those
sorts of practices have to stop and, again,
will only stop when international aid gives
these countries the support that they need so
that they can switch to better methods.

There are other concerns which arise in
my mind with respect to the support that we
provide to developing countries and the
benefits that will come from countries being
able to provide their own food. I want to turn
to one matter, and perhaps I will finish on
this: with many countries, one of our greatest
concerns is the human rights abuses that
occur within those countries. Human rights
abuses inevitably arise when people are
struggling. When people are struggling, it
leads not only to poverty but also to
corruption, conflict and violence. In many of
these countries, where extreme poverty
occurs we then see more exploitation, more refugees, more corruption, more human trafficking and more sexual exploitation—all because people are so desperate that they have to turn to other sources and other ways of making a living.

So this is not just an issue about whether we provide financial aid to developing countries; it is an issue that we take on when trying to take a stand against the violation of human rights in many of those countries. Only late last year I had a briefing from some of the Congolese people in my community in Adelaide, who talked to me and showed me films and recounted real stories of some of the impacts of violation of human rights that occurs when extreme poverty sets in.

For all these reasons, providing financial aid to developing countries to assist them with their food production is a measure that this parliament should embrace and this country should support. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Closing the Gap

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (10:18): by leave—On behalf of the nation, I present the fifth annual Closing the Gap statement. I am here today because the Indigenous and non-Indigenous people of this country have decided to walk the path of reconciliation together. Because the workers of Wave Hill said no and the voters of 1967 said yes. Because in a proud Labor tradition, Gough Whitlam poured the soil and Bob Hawke handed Uluru back. Because Paul Keating inscribed native title in our laws and Kevin Rudd said our nation was sorry. Because this government intends that our Constitution must speak for all Australians and the gap that separates our opportunities and living standards must be closed.

Closing the Gap is a plan of unprecedented scale and ambition, a plan not only to uplift the lives of Indigenous Australians but to do so in a shared endeavour of partnership and respect. That high level of ambition commits us to two decades of annual reckoning until we bridge the gulf that stands between us. Few if any of the men and women who sit in this parliament today will still be here when a future Prime Minister delivers the final Closing the Gap statement in 2031. A short walk to this despatch box that we hope will mark the end of a monumental journey. Wherever we are on that day, the people of this land will want to hear one thing. That we have, at last, accorded Indigenous Australians the health care, education, job opportunities and community services they deserve. Above all, the opportunity unknown to many Indigenous people today—the chance to grow old. These goals require us to raise our eyes and lift our expectations—to invest, plan and think for the future. It is the work of an entire generation and work that has begun with us. So I account to the parliament and people of Australia today.

This is the fifth such statement since the task began in 2008. Already we know that some targets, like life expectancy, will be enormously challenging to meet, even with almost two decades still to run. On others, progress has been encouragingly swift. Across the board, our sources of data and information are stronger than ever before. The report I make today is especially significant because this year, the very first of the target deadlines established five years ago falls due.

In 2008 we pledged to deliver access to early childhood education to all four-year-olds in remote communities within five
years. Well, the five years are up. I am proud to say we got it done. This target is on track and will be met on schedule. This means little children like Curtisha Kalinic, a preschooler at Robinson River in the Gulf Country, can now go to preschool. Her mum, Roberta, was never given the opportunity to attend school when she was a girl, let alone preschool. Think about that: an Australian woman young enough to be just now making a family of her own, a woman who, in our own lifetimes, while we did our exams and gained our qualifications, was denied the chance to go to school. Yet already Curtisha, her daughter, has completed preschool. She knows how to hold a pencil, listen to the teacher and adapt to the formal routines of the day. She is ready for school, ready for the future.

The mistakes made in one generation are being repaired in the next. The gap is being closed. So for all the challenges we will inevitably encounter between now and 2031, this is a moment to savour. Not just because we reached a target but because we showed what we can do together.

Pre-school only takes us to the schoolyard gate. We must ensure that progress flows through to the other targets relating to later schooling and employment. One of the first things we need to do is to ensure that improved access to early childhood education is accompanied by improved attendance rates at school, that the children who reach the school gate enter and stay there until education has done its transforming work.

Supporting regular school attendance will be one of the 2013 priorities of the Stronger Futures program in the Northern Territory. It will also be one of this government’s early priorities as we implement the National Plan for School Improvement, in partnership with states and territories and the non-government sector.

The National Plan for School Improvement complements Closing the Gap philosophically and practically. Both programs are about cultural change and generational change. Resourcing schools according to their need and measuring them according to their success. Thus, with reliable data, we can swiftly see what works and what does not work. With reliable data we can turn access into attendance, attendance into achievement, not just in preschools but right through the educational journey.

Encouraging progress is also being made on two other Closing the Gap targets. In 2008 the nation set itself the challenge of halving the gap in year 12 attainment by 2020. In 2006, just 47 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders aged between 20 and 24 had a year 12 or equivalent qualification. In the 2011 census that had risen to 54 per cent, a level of progress that puts us ahead of schedule to meet our Closing the Gap target. Yet, when it is compared with the 86 per cent rate in the non-Indigenous population, it is clear that substantial further improvements will be needed if our target is to be met in 2020.

Another Closing the Gap target is now also within sight. In 2008 leaders pledged to halve the gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children under five within a decade. I can report that real progress is being made and, if current trends continue, our target will be met. This is a precious human achievement. Babies will live who might have died. Infants will thrive who once would not. And the tragic reality of Indigenous children dying before their fifth birthday at twice the rate of other Australians will become a sad relic of history.
Behind these positive trends lie a lot of hard work and a lot of investment: improvements in antenatal care; access to public health services; immunisation; and neonatal intensive care. Anyone who says things cannot change: you are wrong. Anyone who says change is not a matter of extra staff or extra funding: you are wrong too. Time and effort and resources are saving lives today.

I can also report encouraging progress on another key indicator: Indigenous employment. Our pledge in 2008 was to halve the gap in employment between non-Indigenous Australians aged 15 to 64 years and Indigenous Australians. This is one of the truly vital indicators, because each job not only brings opportunity and esteem to the person who secures employment but also models habits of work and self-discipline to children, younger siblings and the wider community. So every job advances a virtuous cycle.

The 2011 census shows progress since the previous census in 2006. The number of Indigenous Australians in mainstream employment has risen from 42.4 to 44.7 per cent, a small but encouraging increase. There was a particularly striking rise in mainstream employment in the Northern Territory—from 21.3 per cent to 30.3 per cent. This reflects the progress made by Indigenous Territorians who are seizing the growing economic opportunities in their communities. Overall, Indigenous employment has been rising steadily since 1996 and the long-term trends are positive. However, with the rate of non-Indigenous employment standing at 72 per cent, it is clear that a massive and unacceptable gap remains.

Last night I attended a dinner hosted by Reconciliation Australia, along with business leaders representing organisations who have signed Reconciliation Action Plans. Around 1.7 million Australians now work for an organisation with a plan in place. This is reconciliation in action, happening every day, right across the country.

On the final of the five Closing the Gap indicators—literacy and numeracy performance—progress is more mixed. On year 3 writing, for example, 78 per cent of Indigenous children reached or exceeded the national benchmark in 2012. That is well on the way to the non-Indigenous level of 96 per cent—a gap of 18 percentage points. In year 9 writing, however, the 2012 gap is almost double that—35 percentage points.

Overall, significant disparities remain between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. Most troubling, some results such as year 3 reading actually declined in 2012 after improving between 2008 and 2011. Overall, only three out of eight indicators in reading and numeracy are tracking as expected and the other five will need considerable work. So NAPLAN will continue to challenge us with its annual output of hard, clinical data.

I cannot conceal that these literacy and numeracy results are a source of personal disappointment. Last year's optimism gives way this year to a starker realism. Yet that is how Closing the Gap will be. The setbacks that make us aim higher. The successes that make us glad we did.

In 2013, we will reach our first formal Closing the Gap target and can see two more within reach. These results show that the gap is not only closing but closeable. They are proof of what we can achieve when we work together. When we hold ourselves strictly to account. When we end decades of chronic underinvestment. When we genuinely involve Indigenous Australians in the design and delivery of programs. At the same time, I am acutely conscious that gains can be
contingent. Yesterday's breakthrough can be today's failure if we let our vigilance falter.

Progress on Closing the Gap is hard enough without taking retrograde steps and undoing the good work that has already been accomplished. This is why I am very concerned about the alcohol policies adopted by the Country Liberal Party since it came to government in the Northern Territory. I am concerned about plans touted by the Liberal National Party in Queensland to wind back restrictions in that state, too. 'Tragedy' was the word Noel Pearson used to describe the Newman government's plans. I have a real fear that the rivers of grog that wreaked such havoc among Indigenous communities are starting to flow once again.

The government will take action in response to any irresponsible policy changes that threaten to forfeit our hard-won gains. We saw the Banned Drinker Register dismantled by the Northern Territory government on 29 August last year four days after the Northern Territory election. Yet we know the register was working. According to the then Northern Territory government, after its first year of operation, alcohol related assaults dropped in Darwin, Palmerston, Alice Springs and Katherine. There were 10,000 fewer antisocial instances reported. People felt safer walking around their home towns.

Now, since it was pulled down by the Country Liberal Party in the Northern Territory, we are hearing worrying reports about the rise in admissions to the emergency department at Alice Springs Hospital due to alcohol related accidents and abuse. People are witnessing more alcohol related violence. In and around Alice Springs over the Christmas-New Year period there were at least five alcohol related deaths. Former banned drinkers are now again on the long list of alcohol related offences coming before the Alice Springs Magistrates Court each day.

Today I call on the Country Liberal Party to reinstate the Banned Drinker Register, immediately. I call on the Liberal National Party to exercise extreme caution in reviewing remote community alcohol restrictions in Queensland, too. Every Australian who puts the interests of Indigenous children first and the alcohol industry second will support this call.

Let us always remember: closing the gap is not inevitable. Keeping it closed is not inevitable either. We must guard our gains and never allow a backward step. Closing the Gap is reconciliation in the sense that when we truly embrace our shared humanity and equality, we embrace equal rights to services and support. Let us also remember that Closing the Gap is not the solution to every problem in Indigenous communities.

So many of the problems faced by Indigenous Australians since 1788 are not just issues of material deprivation. They are matters of the spirit. Matters of fundamental justice and human understanding. So as we comprehend a complex and sometimes bitter past, we must also pursue reconciliation by finding the right words to express our coexistence in this ancient land. No specific act or event will make us reconciled, but each sign and gesture plays its part in our healing and brings forward the moment of its accomplishment.

Half a century ago, this federal parliament made possible the first step in the journey we now know as reconciliation. In 1963, all Indigenous Australians were able to vote in a national election for the first time. In 2013, I hope this will also be the year in which our parliament delivers another landmark on the journey of reconciliation—an act of recognition acknowledging the unique and special place of our First Peoples.
This act will be a down payment on that great piece of unfinished national business: constitutional recognition. It is a vital opportunity for this parliament to show its commitment to recognition. It is a striking way to attune and prepare our nation for the profound decision that lies ahead.

I believe that constitutional recognition is fundamental to the process of reconciliation so that all Australians can feel pride in our Indigenous heritage and understand its centrality in our national story. Without it, that story will remain incomplete and the soul of our nation will remain unhealed.

We also know that amending the Constitution is far from easy. Just eight out of 44 attempts have enjoyed success, and only two of those eight referenda concerned social issues. The most shining example of those attempts—and the most relevant to us now—is the referendum of 1967. It was a time of healing, uniting our nation in empathy and accord as never before.

I want this constitutional amendment to be equally unifying, so I am determined that the referendum will be held only when the nation is ready. As the nation's leaders and representatives, it is our job to do all we can to bring that unifying moment closer. That is why my government is investing $10 million in a campaign, led by Reconciliation Australia, to build support for constitutional recognition. It is why there is a joint select committee to secure bipartisan consensus for the bill and on the timing and detail of constitutional reform. And it is why we are proceeding first with the 'act of recognition' this year.

As referendum day draws closer, so too may all Australians draw closer. Reconciliation is a journey, but it must also be a journey with a purpose and an end. That journey is not yet over. Yes, we are far from the days when the Aboriginal activist William Cooper sought to petition the king but the federal government of the day refused to forward the petition to London because it would serve 'no good purpose'. Now we have a good purpose, an abiding purpose. Now we share a purpose that goes to the very integrity of this nation, its founding, its history and its future.

Closing the Gap is part of that purpose since our democratic temper rejects notions of inherited privilege and equally drives us on to eradicate inherited disadvantage. Here in this country we believe everyone must get a fair go—the oldest and the newest Australians alike. In that hope, I present the fifth annual Closing the Gap statement to the parliament and the people of Australia, proud of our successes, more determined than ever to remedy our failings and cautiously optimistic for the long road ahead.

I present a copy of Closing the Gap: Prime Minister's report 2013.

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House and Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) (10:41): by leave—I move:

That so much of the standing and sessional orders be suspended as would prevent Mr Abbott (Leader of the Opposition) speaking for a period not exceeding 25 minutes.

Question agreed to.

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (10:41): What we do today is important in the life of our parliament and in the life of our nation. These Closing the Gap statements force us at the start of every parliamentary year to address the issue of Indigenous disadvantage. Former Prime Minister Paul Keating was right: as long as there is serious Indigenous disadvantage in our country, it constitutes a stain on our nation's soul. Until the first Australians can fully participate in the life of our country, we are diminished as a nation and as a people.
The Prime Minister talked about proud Labor traditions—and that is fair enough. But I do want to point out that reconciliation is also a proud coalition tradition. The 1967 referendum, such a landmark in our nation’s life, was a coalition initiative. This current project, this vital Closing the Gap project, is not a Labor project. It is not a Liberal project. If it is to succeed, it must be a national project.

It flows from that great day in our nation’s life and in our parliament’s life when the historic apology was made by the former Prime Minister, Mr Rudd, in this building just on five years ago. The former Prime Minister, Mr Rudd, made a resonant declaration on that day:

...unless the great symbolism of reconciliation is accompanied by an even greater substance, it is little more than a clanging gong.

What the former Prime Minister said was right then and is right now. It must be accompanied by even greater substance. That is what this Closing the Gap process is designed to achieve.

The Prime Minister has given us some good news today: money is being spent, construction is going ahead, staff are being deployed, we have more Indigenous year 12 graduates and infant mortality is lower. But I do welcome the Prime Minister’s frank admission that in at least some areas there has been regress as well as progress. We need this level of candour if we are to achieve genuine progress and genuine closing of the gap. How much difference are all our efforts really making to the lives of Indigenous people? Are they better housed? Are they better nourished? Are they better educated? Are they more able to participate in the life of our nation? Some are, but many are not. I share the Prime Minister’s concern about actions in the Northern Territory in respect of the Banned Drinker Register. I note that this was an initiative of the former Howard government particularly sponsored by the former minister, Mr Mal Brough, and it should be preserved.

The sad truth is that it is easy to spend money but it is hard to make a difference. That is why it is so important that we focus not just on what is happening here in this building, what is happening here in the administration, but on what is happening on the ground. The focus should not only be on what government is doing; it must also be on what people are doing in response to the initiatives of government. It does not matter what we do in this place—all our fine words, all our noble sentiments, do not matter if adults are not going to work and if children are not going to school. I remain disappointed that the statistics for school attendance and work attendance in Indigenous communities are not being published on a regular basis. We should know who is present and who is absent every day, and we should publish those percentages as a way of regularly updating ourselves on the health of civil society in these communities. This is the best test of a functioning civil society: are the adults at work, are the children at school and is the ordinary law of the land being enforced?

I know, because I have been in remote Indigenous schools in Coen and Aurukun, that the rolls are taken every morning at about 9.20 and they are taken every afternoon after lunch. The school knows who is there and who is not, the school knows what percentage of kids are there and what percentage are not. We should know too, not to stigmatise communities—that is the last thing we would want to do—but to see where progress is being made and to see where progress has yet to be made. I applaud the Prime Minister’s confirmation today that the first Closing the Gap goal, access to preschool, is being achieved. Access is important, but attendance is what really
matters. I hope that in the next Closing the Gap statement the Prime Minister of the day is able to report attendance figures for preschools, attendance figures for primary schools, attendance figures for high schools and attendance figures for the various work projects under way in all of these remote places.

Quite apart from government's efforts, there has been progress, and I welcome the Prime Minister's confirmation today that since 2006 we have seen a two percentage point increase in Indigenous employment in the mainstream. There has been a 10 per cent increase in the Northern Territory. I applaud the employers of this country for the efforts they have made in this very important field of practical reconciliation—Rio, a pioneer in this area; BHP, a pioneer in this area; Coles and Woolworths and our banks, pioneers in this area. I particularly applaud the efforts of Andrew Forrest and Warren Mundine to boost Indigenous employment. Their insight, to start with a guaranteed job rather than with a trained potential employee, has the potential to transform Indigenous employment. Perhaps, over time, it has the potential to transform employment programs more generally. That is why the coalition has committed to funding four trial sites to test how well these ideas might translate into real progress.

I applaud all the efforts that are being made by so many people to bring more Indigenous people into the heart of our national life. I welcome the presence of more Indigenous people in the Territory parliament—people like Larissa Lee, Francis Xavier Maralampuwi and the incomparable Bess Price. I believe that they will safeguard the real interests of Indigenous people in the Territory, along with people like Alison Anderson and Adam Giles.

I applaud the efforts of the Prime Minister to bring another Indigenous person into this House. I acknowledge and welcome the efforts her office and my office have made to ensure that this parliament can shortly, with I hope unanimity, pass the act of recognition that the Prime Minister referred to in her remarks. I believe it would help us immeasurably as a parliament and a nation to have more Indigenous people in this place to support the work of my friend and colleague Ken Wyatt, the member for Hasluck. I applaud the work that has been done over so many years by the people in the public gallery today—I notice Mick Gooda and Tom Calma.

There is a new spirit in this land. There is a new spirit which reaches out to embrace the Indigenous people of this country—so different from the spirit abroad when the Prime Minister and I were young. It is a tribute to so many people in this place and around our country that that is now the case. I want to particularly single out the work that has been done in Cape York by Noel Pearson, Richie Ah Mat and everyone associated with the movement there—people like Allan Creek in Coen, Derek Walpo in Aurukun and Greg McLean in Hope Vale. As many will know, and as you might recall yourself, Madam Speaker, I have tried to support Noel Pearson's work with deeds as well as with words—as a teacher's aide in Coen in 2008, as a truancy assistant in Aurukun in 2009, as a builder's labourer in Hope Vale in 2011 and last year, along with Warren Mundine and my shadow minister Senator Nigel Scullion and a team of Australia's leading business people, I participated in the Books and Mortar project to refurbish the school library in Aurukun. I should acknowledge and welcome the presence on that project of Michael Chaney from the National Bank, Nev Power from Fortescue, Gerry Harvey and Katie Page.
from Harvey Norman, David Peever from Rio, Graham Hodges from the ANZ, Richard Goyder—one of our admirals of industry—from Wesfarmers, and Elizabeth Henderson from Westpac.

A mighty transformation has taken place in that school. Thanks to better teaching methods, the progress in that school is little short of miraculous. I saw it in 2009; I saw it in 2012. The progress is simply stupendous. I have seen it; I have heard it; I can bear witness to it.

Should the coalition win government, I reiterate my undertaking to spend a week every year helping in an Indigenous community. It will be good for me. It is important that our national leaders remain grounded in the real life of our country. I think it might even be good for the public servants, who make so many of the decisions that impact on our daily lives, to see at close quarters, much closer quarters than usual, the places upon which their decisions impact.

I wish to reiterate that the test of progress here is not the laws we pass, it is not the money spend, it is not the programs we institute. It is whether the children are going to school, the adults are going to work and the communities are safe. That is the test. The real challenges that we face are not just in this building. They are in the country, the communities, the suburbs and the regions of our nation. Real change does not happen in this building, although it may start here. Real change happens in all of the places where Australians live.

In the end, for all of us, black and white, our lives should be ours to make. Noel Pearson's cry, 'our right to take responsibility', should echo around this chamber. It should always be in the forefront of our minds as we consider how best to make our country whole.

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House and Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) (10:55): I move:

That the House take note of the document.

Debate adjourned.

Reference to Federation Chamber

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House and Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) (10:55): by leave—I move:

That the order of the day be referred to the Federation Chamber for debate.

Question agreed to.

BILLS

International Fund for Agricultural Development Amendment Bill 2012

Second Reading

Debate resumed on the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Ms GAMBARO (Brisbane) (10:56):

This bill, the International Fund for Agricultural Development Amendment Bill 2012, will allow Australia to accede to the agreement establishing the International Fund for Agricultural Development under Australian law. Coalition members well understand and appreciate the need for an enhanced international response to the issue of food insecurity in developing countries. Despite the worthy objectives of IFAD, concerns remain regarding its organisational capacities. These concerns were first raised by the coalition under the Howard government in 2004. Disturbingly little has been done since that time to properly address the concerns that were raised some eight years ago. On that basis, the coalition is recommending that the bill be delayed until such time as these concerns are addressed and the impact of that reform program is commenced by IFAD's new management and is properly assessed.
In order to properly understand why the coalition is recommending that the bill be delayed, one needs to trace the chronology of IFAD's deficiencies which led to the Howard government's withdrawal of Australia from the fund. In 2004, the Howard government was concerned about the following deficiencies in the fund: the fund's limited relevance to Australia's aid program priorities, particularly in the South-East Asia and Pacific region; the lack of comparative advantage and focus, with other organisations being much more strongly involved in rural development in the region; and shortcomings in the management and failure to respond to concerns that the Australian government had raised with IFAD senior management.

The Howard government's decision to withdraw from IFAD was supported by Mr Charles Tapp, the then Deputy Director-General of AusAID, in evidence presented to the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties. The committee's report said:

AusAID has had concerns regarding IFAD's performance in relation to the Australian aid program and its priorities for a 'substantial period of time'.

Seven years later, in April 2011, a review of Australia's engagement with IFAD backed the committee's assessment, stating:

In 2004, these were clearly valid and important enough reasons for Australia to take the significant (and protracted) step of withdrawing from a UN organisation.

While coalition members note the reforms and note that they have been undertaken since Australia's withdrawal in 2004, it is really clear from the evidence presented to the committee that a lot more work needs to be done, and a lot more work is needed if the concerns of the Howard government then are to be fully addressed.

More recently, at a public hearing into the bill on 25 October 2012, AusAID officials were unable to assure members of the committee that IFAD had addressed all of the issues, and admitted that the progress that had been made could not be quantified. In March 2011, AusAID's 'Desktop Analysis of the International Fund for Agricultural Development' identified some ongoing challenges for the organisation in the areas of human resources and financial management. The analysis found:

...IFAD is benchmarked worse than peers for some aspects of financial management and administration.

The analysis also referred to the Multilateral Development Banks' Common Performance Assessment System, which is called COMPAS, 2008 report, which:

...found that IFAD had the lowest disbursement ratio and one of the less satisfactory variances between planned and actual project duration.

It is also important to note that, since Australia's withdrawal from IFAD, the number of allegations of fraud and corruption received by the IFAD Office of Audit and Oversight has increased from five in 2004 to 41 in 2011. That is hardly a good thing.

According to IFAD's 2011 Annual report on investigation and anticorruption activities, there were 25 allegations made against external parties, 13 related to IFAD staff members and three involving both staff members and external parties. These are not just trivial matters. They are internal allegations about staff misconduct cases involving harassment, breaches of confidentiality, recruitment irregularities and conflicts of interest, while the external cases involved collusion in procurement activities and other fraud on the part of companies and project staff. The ability of IFAD to investigate these allegations was not assisted by a reduction in staff numbers in its own
Office of Audit and Oversight Investigation Section. While a number of contributing factors may be behind this increase, the broad negative trend since 2004 is deeply disturbing.

But what is even more alarming than this worsening trend in IFAD is the response that AusAID made during committee hearings that it was not aware of allegations about corruption within the fund. The actual response provided by the AusAID representative, Mr Wojciechowski, is worth noting in demonstrating just how out of touch AusAID is with these very serious issues of allegations of fraud and corruption relating to the fund. In response to a question from the member for Berowra, the Hon. Philip Ruddock, as to whether there were any allegations of corruption with the fund, Mr Wojciechowski had this to say:

Not that we are aware of. We understand that there are reporting mechanisms for corruption, but we are not aware of any making it to the executive council discussions. I think the report that we have commissioned, the 2011 report, looked at that issue and also did not identify any allegations of corruption. I am using the word 'allegations' here; there were certainly no cases.

AusAID's lack of knowledge as communicated to the committee is clearly disputed by IFAD's 2011 Annual report on investigation and anticorruption activities, which stated:

The increased volume of allegations ... with reduced staffing ... led to a very high investigation caseload of 59 active cases in 2011 (compared to 49 active cases in 2010 and 33 active cases in 2009).

AusAID's lack of knowledge regarding these allegations of fraud and corruption in the management of the fund is particularly worrying given the government's very public commitment to greater transparency and greater accountability in the management of foreign aid following the Independent Review of Aid Effectiveness in April last year.

The concerns held by the coalition regarding the fund's administration were also reflected in the United Kingdom's 2011 Multilateral Aid Review, which concluded that the likelihood of positive change within IFAD was 'uncertain'. According to that assessment:

IFAD has a relatively new top management team and although commitment is clear, it is too early to judge impact.

At a public hearing into the bill on 25 October 2012, AusAID was unable to satisfactorily explain why Australia should rejoin IFAD at the present time and why we should not wait until the impact of the recent reforms is fully known.

The government has also failed to adequately explain the reasoning behind its decision to contribute $126 million over four years to support Australia's re-engagement with the fund. According to the 2012-13 budget papers, this includes a $120 million payment to IFAD in 2013-14, as 'the total replenishment commitment is expected to be made in that year'. Given the government's $120 billion black hole—growing every day—in the budget and its supposed commitment to greater accountability and transparency in the management of Australia's aid budget, it is beyond bewildering as to why this $126 million commitment has been made at all, let alone now. It is worth noting here that Australia's commitment to the fund is far larger than what was committed by larger economies in 2011. For instance, it is $49.6 million more than that of Canada, which pledged $76.8 million; $37.2 million more than that of the United Kingdom, which pledged $89.2 million; $56.4 million more than that of Germany, which pledged $70 million; and $36.4 million more than that of the United States, which pledged $90 million.
This bill was referred by the House of Representatives Selection Committee on 13 September 2012 to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade for inquiry. Specifically, the committee was asked to determine:

Whether the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) has fully addressed the concerns that were raised by the former Howard Government and which prompted Australia to withdraw from the organisation in 2004…

In a dissenting report, coalition committee members recommended that the bill be delayed until concerns legitimately raised by the Howard government some eight years ago are fully addressed.

The key question to be answered here is: why is the government so desperate to give away $126.4 million of Australian taxpayers' money, despite such obvious deficiencies in the fund's management? Is this yet another example of one of the recent secret deals done by the government to secure a Security Council seat? It is an even more cynical attempt by the government to irresponsibly shovel money out the door in a desperate attempt to meet its commitment to contribute 0.5 per cent of GNI to the foreign aid budget by 2015. We already know that this government's inspired spending of taxpayers' money in the name of foreign aid includes such notable items as $150,000 for a statue to commemorate antislavery to be built in the UN Plaza in New York. And, of course, who could ever forget the $65 million for a giant telescope project in Chile's Atacama Desert?

Madam Deputy Speaker, when you consider that this government will only allocate $134 million in direct government expenditure on agricultural programs in Australia, you have to wonder why there is such unholy haste to give Australian taxpayers' money away. But then, again, the Labor government have never had any problem with spending other people's money; it is just balancing budgets that they struggle with. This question takes on even more significance when you look at other expenditure that Australia has already committed to global food security: the $464 million four-year global food security initiative announced on 12 May 2009; the announcement in this year's budget of $101 million to the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research, ACIAR, with an additional $34.6 million to come from AusAID; and $30 million in donor commitment this year to the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research, CGIAR, network. That is almost $639 million. These expenditure commitments do not include the contributions and allocations made to the work done by the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation, CSIRO, and other centres of Australian expertise on work relating to food security, including the International Agricultural Research Centres, IARCs, which are also supported by the Australian government.

Australia is well positioned to offer support to countries suffering from systemic food security issues and it already does this in the significant number of ways that I have just described. ACIAR, in particular, does some fantastic work. I had the pleasure to work with ACIAR when I was in the Howard government. I want to commend them on the tremendous work that they do in international development assistance programs and their contribution to our aid program's objective of assisting developing countries to reduce poverty and to achieve sustainable development, particularly in the agricultural area. I want to give some brief examples of notable achievements by ACIAR: in Papua New Guinea, they provide support for women engaged in vegetable and floriculture production, including teaching business skills and supporting efforts to open
up new markets; in the Philippines, they provide support for projects improving fruit and vegetable production, supply chains and land management, increasing productivity and incomes of small-holder farmers; and, in Pakistan, improved horticulture management techniques are being introduced, helping lift crop yields and fruit quality in the Punjab region, the primary production district.

As you can see, Madam Deputy Speaker, Australia is already heavily involved in tackling the problem of global food security. What is difficult to understand is why the government is seeking to extend this commitment further through a multilateral fund with known, serious deficiencies in its governance processes—and this is the question that the we need to ask. I call on the government to support the coalition's recommendation that the bill be delayed until such time as these concerns are addressed.

(Time expired)

Mr BALDWIN (Paterson) (11:11): I rise to speak on the International Fund for Agricultural Development Amendment Bill 2012. The bill before us allows Australia to accede to the Agreement Establishing the International Fund for Agricultural Development, IFAD, under Australian law.

Australia was a founding member of IFAD in 1977 and subsequently announced its intention to withdraw in 2004 under the then Howard government. In 2004 the Howard government cited its concerns as: 'limited relevance to Australia's aid program's priority countries in South-East Asia and the Pacific'; a lack of comparative advantage and focus—other organisations are more strongly involved in rural development in our region; and shortcomings in management and a failure to respond to concerns that the Australian government raised with IFAD senior management. These were the reasons for withdrawing our support. In the 2012-13 budget, the government committed $126.4 million of Australian taxpayers' money over the forward estimates to rejoin IFAD, without fully addressing the concerns raised in 2004. This is symptomatic of the government; it is bereft of any financial accountability.

This bill was sent to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade for further consideration. The committee was asked to determine whether the International Fund for Agricultural Development has fully addressed the concerns that were raised by the former Howard government—which had prompted Australia's withdrawal from IFAD—and to consider the additional financial and human resources required by AusAID to support Australia's engagement with IFAD. It is my understanding that the number of allegations of fraud and corruption received by IFAD's Office of Audit and Oversight, AUO, had increased from five in 2004 to 41 in 2011. This is from page 6 of IFAD's 2011 Annual report on investigation and anticorruption activities.

I and all Australians have very serious concerns that the necessary changes to IFAD have not been met. I have to ask the question: why the urgent push to send money offshore when basic accountability measures have not yet been met? Whilst I support the levels of foreign aid that Australia spends, I believe that we have serious and escalating issues facing us closer to home. Our commitment to international development aid is strong and historic. Australia has always been proportionally one of the most inclusive and generous countries in the world. However, in saying this, any Australian government has the responsibility to make sure that Australia's financial contributions achieve the outcomes they were designed to achieve.

CHAMBER
My colleague John Cobb and the coalition as a whole understand the importance of food security as it pertains to Australia's, and to developing countries', future and internal food security. Food security and facilitating has always been a fundamental factor in Australia's commitment to regional and global aid. The ability for a nation to feed its people is a basic imperative and one that Australia cannot ignore. The acknowledgment of food security in countries around the world has developed into a centralised policy. Population growth, coupled with limited production and accessibility factors, has driven and will continue to drive food supply imperatives now and into the future. The demand for increased scientific developments and efficiencies in food production is not exclusive to developing nations. The reality is that, under current food production rates, global population will reach a critical mass—a tipping point where demand exceeds supply. The fact is that the ability of many nations to provide through production and acquisition will reach the critical point of unsustainability in the not too distant future.

Unfortunately we live in a world that is now predicated on the threat of terrorism, both past and into the future. We live in a world with threats to biosecurity. We live in a world with threats to food security. The fact is that, if not addressed, fundamentalism—not in the name of religion, but in the name of hunger—will have serious ramifications as nations struggle to feed their people. Many developed nations have acknowledged the importance of developing proactive food security policies.

During this debate I listened to the speech by the member for Wakefield who said:

When you go looking for corruption, you will of course get more reports of it. When you go looking for corruption, you will of course have more prosecutions. The greater the transparency you seek, the more instances you will turn up. That is true of any organisation.

I am not sure if he was referring to the current ICAC inquiry into former New South Wales Labor ministers Obeid and Macdonald or to the charges laid against the member for Dobell and his alleged misappropriation of HSU funding. But I say this to him and other members of the government benches: corruption and misappropriation of money should never be overlooked or discounted by any government. I am not surprised that it is a Labor government that is prepared to overlook the increase from five counts of fraud in 2004 to 41 in 2011 at the International Fund for Agricultural Development and to reinstate funding without accountability. I, for one, cannot on behalf of all Australians put the blinkers on and not demand accountability for Australians' hard-earned dollars.

I acknowledge that there have been reforms of the organisation since Australia's withdrawal from IFAD; however, it would appear from reports that our concerns have not been fully addressed. Australia's knowledge and expertise in the agricultural industry and in food security has from our inception been born of necessity, perseverance and survival. Necessity has now evolved in conjunction with world-leading scientific technologies. Australia, for a long time, has been at the forefront of agricultural best practice, biosecurity protocols and land and sea management.

As shadow minister for tourism and regional development I have had the privilege to visit individuals and businesses throughout rural and regional Australia. On a recent trip to Rockhampton, I visited Australian Reproductive Technologies and met with Simon Walton. Simon Walton has been investing and developing cutting-edge embryo and IVF technology. This technology is allowing for better efficiencies
and productivity outcomes in commercial animal rearing. His IVF technology is also helping farmers restock and preserve their apex breeding herds after recent cases of Bovine Johne's Disease. More recently, I believe, Simon Walton has secured a major contract with a large Chinese dairy group to increase milk production in its herds, which will benefit both China and Australia—providing greater food security for China and income for Australia.

Closer to home in my electorate in Port Stephens, Nick Arena at Tailor Made Fish Farms has developed leading-edge aquaculture technology in barramundi farming. That technology is now being exported globally, again providing sustainable food production and returning income to Australia.

It has not been easy for these companies, or others like them—investing, taking risks, researching and developing new technologies. The fact is that the government needs to recognise the expertise and wealth of generational farming knowledge that we have right here at home in Australia. The Labor Party, in this government, has a great track record! Since coming to government, this Labor government has cut $33.4 million from cooperative research centres, cut $63 million from agricultural research within CSIRO and closed agricultural research centres in Queensland, Victoria and WA. It scrapped Land and Water Australia. The list goes on and on.

The importance of regional Australia to Australia's economy in food security and export cannot be denied or overlooked. In 2009 the current Labor government made the assessment that the Howard government's withdrawal of Australia from IFAD was warranted. The report reiterated that 'challenges remain in HR and financial management.' Australia's engagement and generosity as a regional and world citizen is well and truly documented. This government's waste and lack of accountability is also well and truly documented. In making investments in developing countries, I am drawn to the adage that if you give a man a fish, you feed him for a day; if you teach a man to fish, you feed him and his village for a lifetime. We need to use our technologies to improve food security globally and, in particular, in developing nations. Australia spends $4.8 billion in foreign aid annually. However, all Australians expect and deserve the assurance that their hard-earned money is administered and utilised well. This Labor government has continually professed it supports our farmers, but all evidence is to the contrary. While the rest of the world is running toward securing food security outcomes through technology and best practice, this government seems content walking away.

As usual, Labor talk the talk but never walk the walk, unless it is a walk away from our farmers and accountability.

We need to prioritise our foreign aid and find efficiencies and synergies with other organisations and countries to help facilitate food security outcomes for our region and throughout the world. The global landscape has dramatically changed since IFAD's creation in 1977, with other countries' sovereign wealth and ability to contribute to organisations like IFAD. Australia faces our own food production challenges—droughts, floods and other natural disasters. What we do not need is government-made disasters, which this Labor government is so prone to creating, particularly for those in regional and rural Australia. Australia is a generous nation, always prepared to offer a hand up more than a handout.

It will come as no surprise that I will oppose this bill until I am convinced that
every dollar, every cent, is properly accounted for and spent where it is intended to be and that it is not lining the pockets of some corrupt individual or organisation. Again, I will oppose this bill.

Mr MORRISON (Cook) (11:23): Almost five years ago I rose in this place for the first time. In that maiden speech, I addressed the issues of international development aid and my support for it. I have remained a keen but not uncritical advocate of international development aid and an aid program that has integrity and not only focuses on meeting the most immediate humanitarian needs but builds the capacity of people to sustain themselves and their communities physically, economically—importantly—and socially.

It is one of the real privileges of all members of this House, and of the other place, that we are able to go to other countries and see the work that the Australian aid dollar is doing, and we are filled with great pride. Just last week I was in Sri Lanka and I saw the work of AusAID building homes in previously war-torn areas and met the families who were going back into those homes. I saw also the work AusAID were doing in building schools, with the opening of a school in Kilinochchi, the headquarters of the Tamil Tigers during the conflict. By the end of the war, that school had been levelled, and there were just 30 students there. On the day I visited, with the member for Curtin, we saw 2,000 students going into an Australian-built school. On that same day, we saw the work of AusAID in landmine clearing at Elephant Pass, one of the most vicious scenes of conflict, where government troops suffered heavy defeats.

In Indonesia, where I have also been, I saw the work in communities, with small villages being connected to a reliable water supply. I also saw, in Jakarta, the work that was being done to assist the Indonesian government, and more specifically the municipal authorities in Jakarta, plan for and deal with disasters.

These are all positive things and they are things that Australians can be very proud of. But we cannot be uncritical supporters of these programs, because Australians demand nothing less of us who sit in this place than that we ensure that aid dollars are spent well for the right purpose and, most importantly, get the outcomes that we all earnestly seek as global citizens.

The coalition will not be supporting the legislation which is before us, the International Fund for Agricultural Development Amendment Bill 2012, as there remain serious question marks about this fund and its organisational capacities. Concerns that initially prompted the Howard government to pull its support eight years ago have still not been addressed. This bill would allow Australia to accede to the agreement establishing the International Fund for Agricultural Development under the law. The UN agency was first set up in 1977 to fund agricultural development projects in developing countries.

There can be no doubt that food security is a significant issue. As my colleague the member for Curtin has emphasised, the coalition appreciates the need for an enhanced international response to that crisis. But we also believe that our aid program should be accountable, transparent and relevant. Australians should be able to feel confident that their money will be spent effectively and efficiently, that it will reach the people most in need and that it will make a meaningful difference on the ground, especially in our region.

We are a generous nation. I think we can be a more generous nation in the future, and
I hope for a time when that is possible, even more so today. Australians have been very supportive of international development assistance over the years, but we should not try their patience. In order to sustain that high level of consensus and community engagement, Australians need to have confidence that the funds and agencies we work with are open and accountable. Australians also need to have confidence that their government is putting its money where its mouth is, not pledging funds for foreign aid overseas then secretly using them to mop up a haemorrhaging budget blow-out caused by Labor's own border protection failures.

Our aid program should not be an exercise in jumping through arbitrary hoops. The aid budget should not be a bargaining chip to put on the table to help win a place on the United Nations Security Council or to score international political bargaining points. Nor should Australia's aid budget be used as a golden chequebook for the government to reach for whenever its failures have drained the bank account in other portfolios. Before Christmas, this Labor government was caught out, exposed playing semantics and diverting $375 million from the aid budget into paying the bill for its failed border protection policies. The Gillard government has now made itself the third-largest recipient of its own foreign aid budget—$375 million is more than Australia is spending in Afghanistan, in Sri Lanka, in Iraq, in Pakistan. We are basically robbing Peter to pay Paul—and Paul in this case is the new Minister for Immigration and Citizenship—in terms of the aid program.

Senator Bob Carr has not revealed which programs he will be stripping money out of, nor is it clear exactly which immigration outcome the money will be diverted into. In December, the member for Gorton, now the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, who has entered the revolving door of Labor ministers, policy failures and border chaos that we have seen over the last five years, said he was 'comfortable', his word, with Senator Carr's statements—and indeed, I would say, Senator Carr's deceit.

This is what he said:

... the Government's unapologetic in dedicating resources to people who might be waiting to have their claims sorted in Australia ...

The minister went on to say:

I don't see any difference in providing support for refugees in Jordan and Lebanon as I would see it from providing resources here.

He observed:

... we have a record amount of money going to foreign aid ... because we are a generous nation.

... I don't think that should prevent us from providing ... basic entitlements and resources to people seeking asylum and, indeed, having their claims determined here—

No wonder the world has formed an opinion about this government in relation to these matters. Perhaps the minister can now clarify exactly which outcome of his portfolio this money will be spent in.

I also do not accept his logic. If money is being diverted to pay for asylum seekers on bridging visas in Australia who have not had their claims determined, these people have not even yet been found to be refugees, so his use of the term 'refugees' is simply inaccurate. I hope, now that he is being briefed by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, that he can at least catch up a bit with the clear gap in his knowledge on these matters.

This is a monumental deceit, draining money from the aid budget to try to cover Labor's own cost blow-out on our borders, which is more than $6½ billion since they came to power. Statistics out this week from the department of immigration revealed that in November 2012 Australia's formal detention network had a larger population...
than ever, with more than 8,400 people. That is in the formal detention network, remembering that when the Howard government left office there were four people in detention who had arrived by boat. And that population is before you even take into account those asylum seekers released into the community under this government's policies or on a bridging visa or who have been transferred offshore.

In Australia today we estimate that about 12,000 people, maybe even more, sit in the system as a result of Labor's border protection failures. Labor's asylum budget has blown out by more than $6 billion since 2008 and now our aid budget has been sucked into the black hole of costs and chaos that Labor has brought upon itself by dismantling and refusing to restore the proven measures of the Howard government and refusing to go further to implement the measures that the coalition has continued to advocate, beyond even what was done by the Howard government.

Australians just do not trust this government, whether it comes to managing our aid budget, our borders or our economy or implementing any policy, for that matter, and is it any wonder why. Australia's aid program should focus on the outcomes on the ground and the quality of delivery, not the publicity of writing a novelty sized cheque. We should give because we are genuinely compassionate, because we are in a position where we are able to lend practical assistance to help and empower others, particularly our neighbours within the region, not because we need to tick off somebody's shopping list. It is critical that in the initiatives Australia signs up to there are inbuilt mechanisms to protect the integrity of these programs and the processes that deliver aid.

Australia was a founding member of the IFAD, but in 2004 the Howard government announced its intention to withdraw from the fund, on grounds including the program's limited relevance to our priorities in South-East Asia and the Pacific and its shortcomings in management and failure to respond to serious concerns taken up with senior management. In November 2009 the then Minister for Foreign Affairs, Stephen Smith, agreed to the assessment of IFAD's operations. As the member for Paterson just noted in his remarks, that review found in April last year that the reasons for the Howard government's withdrawal were 'clearly valid and important'. The review also warned that challenges remained in HR and financial management of the fund. In spite of those challenges, the government announced a year ago that it would sign back up, and in the 2012-13 budget Labor committed $126.4 million over four years to support that decision.

The bill before us today was referred to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade for scrutiny. While some progress has been made by IFAD, evidence presented to the committee clearly indicates that the concerns flagged by the Howard government still have not been satisfactorily addressed and, as a result, the coalition will not be supporting these measures today. The Assistant Director-General of AusAID's Food Security, Infrastructure, Mining and Trade Branch, Ms Bryant, gave evidence before the hearing and said that IFAD 'are not all the way there yet but they are making progress against a number of our concerns to the point where we are satisfied that they are on the right path'. Yet, when asked by the member for Berowra, Father of the House, if she could quantify that, Ms Bryant said: 'No. In terms of a list, no, I cannot do that.'
In 2004 IFAD's Office of Audit and Oversight received five allegations of fraud and corruption. By 2011 that number had risen to 41. IFAD’s 2011 annual report on investigation and anticorruption activities noted that 25 allegations had been made against external parties, 13 had been made against IFAD staff members and that three involved both staff and external bodies. In elaborating on these allegations, the report noted that the staff misconduct cases involved harassment, breach of confidentiality, recruitment irregularities and conflicts of interest, while the external cases involved collusion and procurement activities and other fraud on the part of the companies and project staff.

Engagement with these large multilateral organisations needs to jump a high bar, I think, for the Australian public to have confidence in how the money is spent and to have confidence that it is not just going into a big black box. The support that is given for on-the-ground, locally delivered programs, where people can see the benefits and know those who are directly involved in their delivery means they are the programs that Australians themselves are putting their hands in their pockets for in increasingly large numbers, expressing their own level of commitment and generosity to the problems they see far from these shores, and they should be commended. Much is said about making poverty history, but to make poverty history you have to make it your own business first. It is not about wearing an armband and shouting into the sky; it is actually about supporting people doing things on the ground in a practical way with integrity, where you can be confident about what is being delivered. That is how you build confidence, that is how you build support and that is the sort of path I would like to see pursued.

In principle, the coalition is supportive of international efforts to improve food security for developing countries, and Australians' technical expertise in areas like tropical agriculture, biosecurity and dryland means we can make an important contribution in this area. But community consensus for international development is built upon the foundations of confidence in the use of those funds.

Decisions about how Australia spends our aid budget better matter. There are many worthy causes, but we need to make discerning decisions. These are things that must be triaged—difficult decisions, but nonetheless decisions that must be made about whom we can best support. There are areas of great need in our own region, and Australia has an important role to play here. I will conclude on those.

In the mountains of Papua New Guinea a few years ago I was with the member for Blaxland and we attended the funeral of a young man whose life was stolen by a preventable disease that should have avoided and we witnessed the inconsolable pain of a mother and a grieving community that could perhaps have been spared. That incident once again re-affirmed my commitment—and I am sure the member for Blaxland's—about the need to ensure that we do all we can to help those closest to us. We owe a great debt to the men and women of Papua New Guinea—those who carried our wounded across the Kokoda Track and in the battles of Wau and Salamaua and further north in Finschhafen and all of these places—who themselves faced execution and torture as they supported our troops and our country in our greatest area of need. We can never forget our friends in Papua New Guinea. They are loyal and solid friends of this country. Their needs are great and our support for them in this particular area, I believe, comes before all other calls on the
foreign aid purse, and certainly the calls submitted in this bill.

Mrs PRENTICE (Ryan) (11:38): I rise to speak on the International Fund for Agricultural Development Bill 2012. This bill was introduced into the House on 13 September 2012 and if passed will allow Australia to accede to the agreement establishing the International Fund for Agricultural Development, IFAD, under Australian law. There are many concerning aspects of this bill: issues which have been addressed in the report by the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, including in a dissenting report by members of the coalition. The bill comes in the context of Australia's contribution to our region and in the context that this bill was introduced just a month prior to the vote for Australia's non-permanent two-year seat on the United Nations Security Council.

First, I wish to speak broadly about Australia's commitment to the Asia-Pacific region. I have spoken many times before in this House on the significant challenges that our closest neighbours face, and Australia's very crucial role in delivering results. Eighteen of our 20 nearest neighbours are developing countries. In terms of their progress under the Millennium Development Goals, many are falling behind. Tuberculosis—a disease completely eradicated in our country—affects millions in the Asia-Pacific region, which has more than half of total global cases of tuberculosis. Other serious medical and development problems remain, including maternal and infant mortality, access to clean drinking water, violence against women and corruption.

While Australia's gross domestic product on average is $55,000 per person, in Papua New Guinea that figure stands at about $1,400—and that is only talking about the average. Figures are even lower in Solomon Islands, East Timor and several other Asia-Pacific countries. With a developed economy, Australia not only has the capacity but should also have the will to help the most disadvantaged in our region.

With respect to today's bill, there is significant background to both the International Fund for Agricultural Development, and more generally with Australia's aid contribution to areas outside our region. The fund was established in 1977 as a specialised agency of the United Nations to finance agricultural development projects in developing countries. The primary aim of the fund is to reduce rural hunger and poverty across the globe. Australia joined that effort in 1977 as a founding member in response to the food crisis of the early 1970s which affected millions across the globe. Over the course of the next 27 years until 2004, successive Australian governments contributed approximately $50.3 million to IFAD. In 2004, a rigorous analysis was undertaken by the Howard government to assess whether it was appropriate that Australia continue to be a member of the fund. The analysis was brought about as a result of significant concerns that IFAD had very low relevance to the general aims of Australia's aid program.

Broadly, AusAID's national interest analysis concluded that: IFAD's programs are not consistent with Australia's national interest in delivering a focused, coherent aid program directed to Australia's priority development partners in South-East Asia and the Pacific.

It noted specific concerns that contravened Australia's national interest, including its limited geographic relevance, a lack of comparative advantage and focus in assisting the rural poor compared to other programs and its shortcomings in management and donor relations. On the last point, the
Australian government spent a significant amount of time discussing with senior management of IFAD their role in our region. The joint standing committee in 2004 supported the decision to remove Australia from IFAD and reported on evidence that there was a lack of focus by IFAD on the Asia-Pacific region and, more importantly, any new Pacific strategy implemented would involve very small sums of money, according to one of AusAID’s deputy director-generals, Mr Charles Tapp. I note that the decision to withdraw was not taken lightly. It meant Australia would be the only country in the OECD and one of only two countries in the G20 not to be involved with IFAD. Fundamentally, the committee said that contributing to IFAD did not constitute ‘the best use of our aid dollar’.

Since that time the government, and the then Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Hon. Stephen Smith, decided to undertake an assessment of IFAD’s operations to inform a decision on Australia’s future participation. That review noted the:

… valid and important … reasons for Australia to take the significant (and protracted) step of withdrawing from a UN organisation.

In April 2011, after consultation with government and engagement in IFAD’s 34th governing council and its senior management, AusAID offered what I would call a tentative endorsement for re-engaging with IFAD—although it did note the challenges that would remain in human resources and financial management.

During the committee process coalition senators and members of the Foreign Affairs Sub-Committee provided a dissenting report, outlining the coalition’s concerns that the issues raised in 2004 had not been adequately addressed by IFAD since our departure. The report recommended:

… the Bill be delayed until the concerns of the Howard Government are fully addressed and the impact of the reform program commenced by the organisation’s new management is known and properly assessed.

The coalition raised two very significant issues during that committee process: firstly, IFAD’s ongoing issues with increasing corruption investigations into its programs; and, secondly, the fact that Australia will be contributing record highs in terms of appropriations to the fund.

Firstly, since our departure, the allegations of fraud and corruption received by IFAD’s Office of Audit and Oversight increased from five in 2004 to 41 in 2011—25 allegations were made against external parties, 13 related to IFAD’s own staff members and three involved both staff members and external organisations. I am very concerned that some of these staff misconduct cases, according to IFAD’s 2011 Annual report on investigation and anticorruption activities, involved ‘harassment, recruitment irregularities, and conflicts of interest, while the external cases involved collusion in procurement activities and other fraud’. At the same time, the number of staff in the Office of Oversight and Audit has been reduced, further hampering their ability to adequately address charges of corruption. When my colleague the member for Berowra asked AusAID officials about allegations of corruption within the fund, they responded that AusAID was not aware of any allegations. This certainly raises concerns with the coalition, given IFAD’s own admissions, about the ongoing ability of AusAID in collaboration with IFAD to ensure that the fund is managed in an open and transparent manner.

Secondly, the decisions behind the recommended size of Australia’s proposed contribution to the fund over the next years have not been adequately explained. As I
have noted, the Australian federal government contributed $50.3 million over 27 years to IFAD. According to the 2012-13 budget papers, there will be $126.4 million over four years to 'support Australia's re-engagement with the Fund.' I do appreciate that any withdrawal and subsequent re-engagement with a United Nations body would require transitional funds to support that move; however, I am not sure why this 'replenishment' is considerably more than the contribution of any other member. Canada has pledged $76.8 million; the United Kingdom, $82.9 million; Germany, $70 million; and the United States of America has pledged $90 million. The coalition's dissenting report notes that the government must explain why, based on these figures, it will contribute more than the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and Germany. This is particularly important, given Australia's long-held concerns about the fund. It must demonstrate that the government's significant financial commitment is based on a careful analysis of Australia's national interest and not motivated by its need to reach its spending targets for overseas development assistance.

On that last point, this bill was introduced just one month prior to the United Nations vote on whether Australia would become a temporary member of the Security Council for two years. The coalition still has concerns that the government has not come to this decision on the merits of the case but rather has taken an opportunistic and easy way to distribute money to help win a place on the United Nations Security Council. If the government proposed to spend this money to attract some of Africa's 54 votes in that successful United Nations vote then it should own up and say so. However, ultimately, in light of our commitment to our nearest neighbours, we should not be giving them the benefit of the doubt when concerns still exist about IFAD's operations. Continuing to be a participating member with IFAD was not in Australia's national interest in 2004 and our stance on that remains today. As such, I do not support this bill in its current form.

Mr JOHN COBB (Calare) (11:49): I rise to speak on the International Fund for Agricultural Development Amendment Bill 2012. The bill is intended to allow Australia to accede to agreement establishing the International Fund for Agricultural Development under Australian law. The International Fund for Agricultural Development is a specialised agency of the UN. It was established in 1977 to finance agricultural development projects in developing countries. We were a founding member of IFAD; however, in 2004 the Howard government announced its intention to withdraw from the fund, citing its limited relevance to the Australian aid program's priority countries, quite obviously those in South-East Asia and the Pacific. There was a lack of comparative advantage and focus, because it was evident that other organisations were more strongly involved in rural development in our part of the world, and there were shortcomings in management response to concerns that the Australian government raised with IFAD senior management.

The issue of relevance to our region is enormous. There are countries that we need to work with us in development—our biggest and nearest neighbour and others. IFAD was shown then, and I believe it is still the case, to be not adequately equipped—certainly not at this point of time. An assessment by the current government in November 2009 confirmed that the Howard government had valid reasons for Australia to withdraw from the UN organisation. While the review was supportive of Australia's re-engagement with the fund, it noted that challenges remained in...
HR and financial management. It also stated that, if Australia were to re-join IFAD as a contributing member, the Australian Government must:

…ensure it provides the financial and human resources required to support the level of engagement it seeks

This bill was sent to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade for further consideration, and it was clear that the issues raised by the former Howard government had not been fully addressed. As a result, the coalition, in a dissenting report, recommended:

…the Bill be delayed until the concerns of the Howard Government are fully addressed and the impact of the reform program commenced by the organisation's new management is known and properly assessed.

This issue goes to the heart of this government's attitude to spending. They say they are economic conservatives but the reality is that they seem prepared to take a chance on taxpayer money, when we do not believe we should. Labor's lack of due diligence on this is reminiscent of other programs, such as the oft mentioned pink batts and school halls debacles.

As the shadow agriculture minister I am very disappointed that my portfolio has been plundered while there has been so much wasteful spending. I am certainly disappointed that, despite the tearing down of the agriculture budget, the Gillard government, whose budget is bleeding one billion dollars every month or two, at least, in interest alone, has a net debt of over $150 billion. That is a $220 billion turnaround from the $70 billion that was left in the bank by our previous government.

In agriculture, since 2007, the budget has been reduced by $2 billion to a miserable $1.7 billion, although it is a very important sector of the Australian economy. If we drill down further we see that of that $1.7 billion, over $700 million is funded directly by industry—it is not government or taxpayer money; it is industry money from levies or cost recovery and around $250 million matching R&D contributions by the taxpayer under legislation. It is a fact that of that $1.7 billion only $134 million in the current budget is actually for programs to support agriculture. That is only $134 million for a vital industry—the agriculture industry—which was, for many years, the only large industry we had. There was $134 million to support agriculture and $126 million for others to decide about—not us by passing this bill—spending, and probably not in a relevant situation for Australia. Only $134 million is currently being spent to set Australian agriculture up for the future and provide a robust future to underpin not just our food security but our markets.

Let me say that I have been in agriculture for my whole life—and that is a while now—and I have never heard farmers talk about it being tougher to make a quid. I am not talking about them whinging about drought or anything like that. Good farmers I have known my whole life talk today about just how tough it is to make a quid, as do those in the retail industry, tourism, small businesses and large businesses right around our country.

Since coming to government Labor has cut $33 million from the agriculture department's already strained operating resources. It has taken about the same amount from the co-operative research centres—the CRCs—so that fewer CRCs are funded each year. As most CRCs are agriculturally based there will be less funding for agriculture there. Labor also cut $63 million from agricultural research in CSIRO within its first six or seven months of government and closed agricultural research
sites in Queensland, Victoria and Western Australia.

They scrapped Land and Water Australia, which was also an R&D organisation. They also most definitely planned to cut R&D funding by 50 per cent and had a productivity report to support that. However, industry woke up to what they were going to do. We woke up to what they were going to do, and I am happy to say that we were, in the end, able to shame them out of that.

However, billions of dollars has been brought forward to fund more waterbuybacks, guaranteeing many communities along the Murray-Darling system will go from a climatic drought straight into a Labordrought. Very little money has been spent on water infrastructure, either in the system or on farm. The suspension of live exports to even those Indonesian abattoirs practising good animal welfare standards has certainly put at risk, as we have seen in the last 12 months, a $1 billion industry and set back animal welfare. Labor have weakened industry confidence and threatened jobs. They have also sent a very clear signal to our trading partners around the globe that, under this government, sovereign risk has become an issue.

Furthermore, while Australian industries are struggling with the high Australian dollar—it has certainly caught up with us in recent times—this government continues to make it more difficult with the carbon tax, with more cost-shifting to industry and increasing costs from excessive and growing regulation. I draw this comparison. Labor are looking to hand $126 million to an organisation which has shown bad reporting, bad HR and a poor ability to convince us why they are doing it, and which is not in our own region, yet Labor have cut the 40 per cent rebate for export certification.

The government has further underresourced biosecurity, with Myrtle rust endemic and the Asian bee not eradicable. And there have been a raft of other issues to do with our quarantine and our biosecurity which have become very apparent over the past four or five years. And the government is now moving to remove mandated levels of inspections—not for efficiency but so that they can shift the cost from the government onto industry. We have already seen 97 staff moved from airport biosecurity, which is funded by government, to cargo quarantine, which is funded by industry. What a backhanded way of putting the cost, which government has traditionally financed, onto industry, without saying a word about it.

We now have the new legislation for the chemical regulator before us, which ignores stakeholder concerns that increased regulation will increase the cost of chemical registration by one-third, or around $8 million, and will add another layer of bureaucracy and red tape. This is despite the Minister for Finance and Deregulation, Penny Wong, listing agvet chemical reform in the 2012 update of the Australian government deregulation agenda as a key to reducing regulatory compliance costs for businesses and to improve their competitiveness, when in fact we know that this is a sop for the Greens who want to mandate—and make it harder to register, to re-register or to continue—the use of chemicals which are not harmful.

The reform process was supposed to address two key areas, but by adding a seven- to 15-year automatic review it is increasing the cost to industry and increasing the difficulty of producing what Australia needs—the best and the most food in the world. It means agvet chemical companies cannot recover the costs of extensive registration and re-registration processes, and many cheaper, safer chemicals will simply
be unavailable to Australian farmers, not because they are unsafe but because Labor has made them too expensive.

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry has a mere $134 million in funding for programs to support the development of one of the nation's greatest industries, agriculture, yet the government proposes tossing $126 million, nearly as much as the entire Australian agriculture budget, towards a fund from which the country withdrew just a few years ago because of very significant problems, and our research clearly shows that these issues have not been addressed.

How much does the government spend on foreign aid? I believe it is $4.8 billion; I am not absolutely clear whether the $126 million is part of the budget or extra. We do not seem to be being told that—it would be nice to hear it. If it is part of the current aid budget, it would clearly mean the government has made a commitment to increase the aid budget by so much that it does not know what to do with all the money, even though it concedes there are serious issues with this program. If it is extra money and Labor cannot fund the NDIS and all the other big-tickets items it has mortgaged our grandchildren to pay for in the future, then why?

We need to be able to control where our money goes. We need to know that it is being spent in our region. As I said earlier, there are countries large and small in our part of the world which we should be targeting with agricultural aid, countries with which we have real reasons to repair or improve relations. I do not support the International Fund for Agricultural Development Amendment Bill 2012 for the very good reason that I do not believe it is in this nation's interests. I ask the parliament to reject it.

Mr RAMSEY (Grey) (12:03): The International Fund for Agricultural Development, IFAD, was first established in 1977 and Australia was one of the founding nations. Before we withdrew from IFAD in 2004, we had contributed more than $50 billion. IFAD was founded to help the rural poor overcome poverty. That is a very important role. Indeed, it is impossible for countries of the Third World to pull themselves up into the First World unless, of course, agriculture pays the primary bills in those economies. In poor farming families, the ability to fund children's education is normally generated by whatever agricultural assets the families have. So this role is important and Australia should be involved with agricultural development in nations within our sphere of influence.

After 27 years of involvement, in 2004 Australia pulled out of IFAD primarily for three reasons—the lack of activity in our area of interest, other organisations doing a far better job than IFAD and, most importantly, the culture of sloppy management and wastefulness permeating IFAD. So in Australia the Howard government decided that it was no longer good use of taxpayers' money to be investing in this organisation and that the resources could be better used in other places in our foreign aid budget.

I support foreign aid and I support the aim to increase the quantity of foreign aid that Australia provides. At times you, Mr Deputy Speaker Leigh, would have to field arguments within your electorate from people who believe that charity begins at home and that we should be concentrating on issues in Australia before we concentrate on issues overseas. I argue with this point of view. I think there are very good reasons for Australia to continue to have a strong foreign aid budget. For instance, look at countries in our sphere of influence, like Indonesia, the
world's most populous Muslim nation, right on our doorstep, our second closest neighbour, with 160 million people and, most importantly from our point of view, a developing democracy. There are very good reasons to ensure that modern Indonesia is a success, and our role there is important.

It is very important that we continue to involve ourselves with our closest neighbour, Papua New Guinea. We have a long-term moral commitment to PNG. It is in our interests to see a stable democracy continue there and that any altercations which may happen on their shores do not bleed into Australia.

We have also had involvement with a country a little bit further away—Sri Lanka. Along with Indonesia, it is at the moment the biggest source of asylum seekers coming to Australia. So it is in Australia's interests to be involved and spend some dollars in these countries to try to make them better places so people do not wish to leave. Foreign aid is primarily about helping people, but it is also about promoting Australia's interests. Peaceful, prosperous nations in the Asia-Pacific region are definitely in Australia's interests.

Just for the record, of those three countries I mentioned, Indonesia is the biggest recipient of foreign aid at $578 million, PNG receives $491 million, and Sri Lanka—I think, a little surprisingly—receives $47 million, not a huge sum in this context. That makes a total not just in those three countries but in the East Asia-Pacific region, that direct area of influence for Australia, of $2.49 billion, or roughly half of the total foreign aid budget. It brings into question what we are doing with the other half, because I am not a great supporter, for instance, of Australia being heavily involved in Africa. I think there are other nations that have primary responsibility for Africa, particularly in Europe. We do not see the Europeans being heavily involved in the Asia-Pacific region. Africa is on their doorstep, so we should be concentrating on those countries that have a direct influence on us.

I have been fortunate enough in the last year or two to have visited Sri Lanka and a number of aid projects that Australia is involved with there. I saw some schools we have erected, most notably a two- and three-storey brand new school for 1,400 students for $750,000. That would not have gone far in the BER project, I might point out—not far at all. But it was good enough to house—

Mr Hartshuyker: A library, I think.

Mr RAMSEY: Barely half a library—more likely a COLA, if you cast your mind back. I was witness to the mine-clearing operation which is so important to northern Sri Lanka. I might point out that Minelab, a company based in Adelaide, is actually the supplier of the best equipment in the world in this case. There was a housing project where we were restoring houses that had been lying derelict for 10 years or more. And importantly there was a project helping farmers re-establish themselves back on their land. We were providing one dairy cow and dairy shelter. That does not sound much in Australia, but it was making an enormous difference there. It was the ability for a Sri Lankan farmer to feed and start to educate their children.

In Indonesia I was able to visit an earthquake zone where Australia had been involved in restoring or implementing clean water supplies, building schools, once again, and a housing project teaching local tradesmen how to build housing which will not fall over in the next earthquake, because they are naturally drawn to the cheapest form of construction.
They are important projects, but the important difference between those projects and IFAD is that they are projects over which we have control. We have control over where they are and what country they are in, and we have control over project management. Should we reinvest in IFAD we will give up our control. We will cede it to someone else, and the record is not great.

One of the reasons we withdrew from our commitment to IFAD in 2004, along with that specific nature I have already covered, was the shortcomings in management and the failure to respond to concerns raised by the Australian government with IFAD. Basically, as I said in my opening remarks, there was sloppy management and waste. So, if we rejoin and resume our funding commitment to IFAD, we would want a cast-iron guarantee that we are not wasting our money.

I cannot stress enough how committed we on this side of the chamber in the coalition are to stopping government waste and making sure the taxpayers get value for their dollars. The government has had a very poor record in this area. I mentioned a few programs, but there was also pink batts, Green Loans and $900 cheques. One of the latest was the nationwide survey and consultation period over how we should celebrate 100 years of Anzac tradition. What a glorious waste of money. I am aware of gatherings that had been organised at huge cost to the taxpayer that two people rolled up to. Australians know how to celebrate Anzac Day. We should know that as a matter of instinct.

To come back to IFAD, in 2011 the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade revisited the decision of 2004 and found that it was justified. In fact, the desktop analysis by the Multilateral Development Banks' Common Performance Assessment System in 2008 found that IFAD had one of the lowest disbursement ratios and one of the least satisfactory variances between planned and actual project duration. If we are to rejoin this program, we would want to know that is no longer the case. I have not seen anything in the government's assessment and argument for rejoining this organisation telling us they could guarantee that is no longer the case. In fact, the Office of Audit and Oversight of IFAD had an increase in allegations of fraud and corruption from five to 41 cases in the years from 2004 to 2011. That is quite a cause for concern, yet still the government wishes to rejoin. In 2011, IFAD's annual report said reduced staffing had led to a very high investigation case load due to the 59 active cases compared with 49 in 2010 and 33 in 2009. Those statistics are going the wrong way.

Now the government plans to give $126 million to IFAD—$120 million, interestingly, in the first year, 2013-14. It is worthwhile comparing that with what some other nations around the world are giving to IFAD in 2013-14. Canada, a very comparable nation, is committed to providing $76 million, New Zealand is committed to zero, the UK is committed to $83 million, Germany is committed to $70 million and the US is committed to $90 million. It would seem that Australia is intent on leading the pack and the government has discovered a great enthusiasm for investing in agriculture. My good friend the shadow minister for agriculture, the member for Calare, highlighted some of these concerns.

The government speaks publicly of the global food challenge, of innovation, of Australia's role and of the importance of the farmer. Those types of statements would justify a commitment to agriculture and may well justify Australia's interest in being re-involved with IFAD, but actions speak much
louder than words. Here in Australia the cuts to agriculture have been deep. The member for Calare mentioned these figures just moments ago, but in 2007 the budget for agriculture was $3.8 billion and in 2012 it is $1.7 billion—and much of that money is provided by industry levies. It seems that the government does not actually believe its own rhetoric.

Late last year in this place I spoke about Australia's commitment to agricultural research. Australia has one of the lowest levels of government support for agriculture in the world. The US, for instance, spends over $20 billion a year on agricultural support, while Europe spends more than 50 billion euros a year. I am not one who would argue that we should be returning to the days of subsidies and support for agriculture—I think we have gone past that point, and Australian farmers know that, and our economy is ill-structured to afford such expensive support. But as a person who has farmed for most of my life and been involved in agricultural research I continually insist that we provide the tools to our coming generation of farmers to equip them to compete in this increasingly competitive world. The most important tools we can give them are modern methods of growing better, higher quality crops, with more niche marketing, and doing that at a lower cost. That needs significant research.

We have a proud history of leading the world in agricultural research—dryland agricultural research, at least—but so many of our research institutions are staffed by people who are the product of the 1970s and 1980s. There has been a long and steady decline in the number of people committing to study in agricultural fields. We need some help out there. When the government withdraws from funding organisations like CSIRO Land and Water, it adds to the problems of Australian agriculture. While the government is now talking about giving to an international organisation money to spend as they wish anywhere in the world with no control from us, it is withdrawing help for Australian agriculture to be the best it can and to provide important food sources not only for Australia but for the world.

Mr McCormack (Riverina) (12:18): It is indeed a pleasure to follow the member for Grey, who, as he said, has farmed for most of his life. He has perhaps forgotten more about farming than most of those on the other side will ever know—

Mr Ramsey: I haven't forgotten anything!

Mr McCormack: Perhaps he has forgotten some of those little things that did not need remembering. My point is that the member for Grey has a wealth of knowledge about farming and he represents a huge area of South Australia, the electorate of Grey—an area vital to Australia's food production, to Australia's agriculture and to Australia's export industries. Too often, we in this place forget how vital agriculture still is to Australia's exports. Often we get so caught up with the mining boom and the wealth mining creates that we forget about that important sector that made this nation great—agriculture. I speak to farmers in my own electorate on a daily basis—farmers such as Ian 'Jock' Munro at Rankins Springs, John Bonetti at Griffith, Barney Hyams at Batlow, John Dennis from Collingullie, John Minogue at Barmedman; I could go on—

Mr Lyons: Go on, name them all.

Mr McCormack: I could mention Mark Hoskinson, I could mention Anthony Quinn and I could mention so many more but I do want to get onto the important aspects of this debate. These people bemoan the woeful record that Labor has on agriculture and they bemoan the fact that so much money is not being spent on vital...
components of the farming industry to bring it back to where it was, even to the days of the Howard government when so much more emphasis was placed on that vital sector.

The debate on the International Fund for Agricultural Development Amendment Bill 2012 is an important debate to be having in the first sitting week of 2013. The bill will allow Australia to countenance the agreement establishing the International Fund for Agricultural Development under Australian law. The International Fund for Agricultural Development is a specially tasked agency of the United Nations—it was established in 1977 to fund agricultural development projects in developing countries. Australia was a member of IFAD at its inception. In 2004 the then Howard Liberal-Anderson Nationals government announced its intention to pull out of the fund. There were several compelling reasons for doing this. The coalition government at the time cited:

- the Fund's limited relevance to the Australian aid program's priority countries in South-East Asia and the Pacific;
- lack of comparative advantage and focus—other organisations are more strongly involved in rural development in our region; and
- shortcomings in management and failure to respond to concerns that the Australian Government raised with IFAD senior management.

Withdrawing from a UN sponsored organisation, as the member for Wannon pointed out earlier today, is not a decision taken lightly and it is not an easy process.

In November 2009, the then Labor Minister for Foreign Affairs, Stephen Smith, agreed to undertake an assessment of IFAD's operations to gauge Australia's future involvement. Released in April 2011, the review of Australia's engagement with IFAD stated:

In 2004 these were clearly valid and important enough reasons for Australia to take the significant (and protracted) step of withdrawing from a UN organisation.

While the review is understanding of Australia's re-engagement with the fund, it noted, significantly, that challenges remain in human resources and financial management. It further stated:

If Australia were to rejoin IFAD as a contributing member, the Australian Government ... need to ensure it provides the financial and human resources required to support the level of engagement it seeks.

Australia is the only Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development country and one of only two G20 countries which is not a member of IFAD. Twelve months ago, the government announced Australia's intention to rejoin IFAD. In the 2012-13 budget the Australian government committed $126.4 million over four years to enable Australia to rejoin IFAD. Funding for this measure will be offset from the provision for expanded aid funding held in the contingency reserve.

In June 2012, the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties recommended that binding treaty action be taken to enable Australia to rejoin the International Fund for Agricultural Development. No dissenting report was recorded. In September 2012, the bill was considered by shadow cabinet, which agreed to the recommendation that it be referred to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade for more detailed consideration. Chiefly, the committee was asked to determine whether the International Fund for Agricultural Development had fully addressed the concerns raised by the former Howard-Anderson government which prompted Australia to withdraw from the organisation in 2004, and consider the additional financial
and human resources required by AusAID to support Australia's participation in IFAD.

While modification of the organisation has been made since Australia's withdrawal, it is apparent from evidence presented to the committee that the concerns of the former Howard-Anderson government have not yet been fully addressed. In a dissenting report, coalition committee members recommended that the bill be held over, delayed, until such time as the issues the Howard-Anderson government put forward are fully addressed and the impact of the restructure started by the organisation's new management is known and properly assessed. Unless this is done we cannot and will not support this bill. Labor's lack of due diligence on this and on so many issues has been a millstone around the neck of national progress, particularly in the area of agriculture.

As we just heard from the shadow agriculture minister, he is extremely disappointed that his portfolio has been plundered—his word—while there has been so much wasteful spending by Labor. He is right to point out that the agriculture budget has been pared back by the Gillard government, which has overseen a net debt of more than $150 billion. That is a $220 billion turnaround from the $70 billion left in the bank by the Howard government. It is shameful that spending on agriculture has been reduced from $3.8 billion in 2007 to a paltry $1.7 billion this financial year. Looking more closely at agriculture funding, you find that, of the $1.7 billion, more than $700 million is funded directly by industry through levies or cost recovery; there is around $250 million matching research and development contributions by government under legislation; and, remarkably, there is just $134 million in the current budget year for programs to support agriculture. For an industry which made this nation great and largely made this country what it is today, that is appallingly woeful.

More priority and Commonwealth money are required to ensure these industries remain not just viable but booming. Into the future, food availability and food security will be the greatest challenge of our times, irrespective of what anyone's beliefs are on the climate debate. The global population, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region, is set to explode and with it the demand for food. In the next 50 years, according to a landmark 2009 speech made by the head of Australia's national science agency, the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation, Megan Clark, people will consume more food than we have in all of human history.

Virtually all future population growth will be in developing countries, and the poorest of these countries will see the greatest percentage increase. As defined by the United Nations, the 48 countries most affected have especially low incomes, high economic vulnerability and poor economic development indicators such as low life expectancy at birth, very low per capita income and low levels of education. It is in Australia's interests, as the member for Grey quite correctly pointed out, to help them meet the challenges that they are facing, certainly in food availability and food security, and making sure that our taxpayers' money is well spent—every single dollar of it. Certainly, the millions of dollars that are going to be expended if we rejoin IFAD—the $126 million over the next four years—has to be well spent.

Notably, since coming to government, Labor has cut $32.8 million from the agriculture department's already strained operating resources and $33.4 million from cooperative research centres so that fewer CRCs are funded each year. As most of the
CRCs are agriculturally based, this means less funding for agriculture. Labor has also cut $63 million from agriculture research within the CSIRO and closed CSIRO agriculture research sites in Queensland, Victoria and Western Australia. Labor scrapped Land and Water Australia, and also planned to cut R&D funding and had a productivity report to support that. However, the coalition’s ongoing commitment to increase agriculture R&D shamed the government out of it.

Meanwhile, billions of dollars have been brought forward to fund more water buybacks. For every $5 spent on water buybacks, only $1 went back into water-saving infrastructure, guaranteeing many communities will go from a climatic drought straight into a Labor-made drought. Very little money has been spent on water infrastructure either in system or on farm. Labor’s suspension of live exports to even Indonesian abattoirs practising good animal welfare standards put at risk a $1 billion industry and set back animal welfare, weakened industry confidence and threatened jobs. It had that much of a flow-on effect that it even threatened jobs in the Riverina. It also sent a clear signal around the world that Australia, under Labor, is a sovereign risk and cannot be trusted, according to many. Now, Labor has elevated one of those most vocal in the anti-live-animal export debate, the member for Wills, to the position of Parliamentary Secretary for Trade. The irony of that has not been lost on Australian farmers, particularly Australian beef producers.

Furthermore, while Australian industries are struggling with the high Australian dollar, this government continues to make it more difficult with its insidious carbon tax, with more costs shifting to industry and increasing costs from effective regulation—I should say ‘excessive regulation’; there is not too much effective regulation under the Labor government. Labor has cut the 40 per cent rebate for export certification, making exports unviable for many visiting exporters and prohibitive for new or emerging industries. The government has underresourced Biosecurity Australia, with myrtle rust endemic and the Asian honey bee not eradicated—two clear examples which are having and will continue to have a profound negative impact on Australian industries and our biodiversity. Now the government is moving to remove mandated levels of inspections, not for efficiency but so it can shift costs onto industry. We have already seen 97 staff move from airport biosecurity funded by the Commonwealth to cargo quarantine funded by industry.

Then we have the new legislation for the chemical regulator. This new legislation has ignored stakeholder concerns and will hugely increase regulation, increase the cost of chemical registration by one-third, or around $8 million, and add another layer of red tape—red tape and green tape which we are bogged down by and mired under and which we do not need. The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry has a mere $134 million in government funding for programs to support the development of this great nation’s agricultural industries. As the member for Calare, the shadow minister for agriculture and food security, the member for Grey and, I am sure, the member for Cowper would agree—and, behind me, I am sure the members for Kennedy and New England would also agree—our farmers are the best in the world. They use world’s best practice. They are producing more and more with less and less. They use less land and less water and yet they continue to be resilient. They need our help. They need this government’s protection and they need to be preserved and protected at all costs.
How much does this government spend on foreign aid? It is $4.8 billion. That is a lot of money. All of our electorate offices get asked: why are we spending so much on foreign aid? But foreign aid is important, as the coalition readily agrees. We do need to help these developing countries with food security to get them to a state where they can beat poverty and hunger.

Only last Thursday, I attended in Wagga a mayoral afternoon tea with Wagga Wagga's mayor, Councillor Rod Kendall, to acknowledge the Charles Sturt University AusAID scholars. In all, six students are taking advantage of Commonwealth scholarships as people who will make a difference to their own countries from experiences gained here. I acknowledge the role that Labor is playing in that by funding that very important program. CSU staff members tell me they are learning plenty from these students in return. At this afternoon tea, I met Sarah Jamal; CSU Head of Campus Adrian Lindner, who was glowing in his praise for it; Nimal Mohamed; CSU learning skills adviser in English language Robert Lewis; and Bui Ngoc Nguyen from Vietnam, who is studying sustainable agriculture. Sarah and Nimal are from the Maldives and are studying rehabilitation science. It is an important program that the Commonwealth is funding to assist these students to go back to their own countries and help people there.

However, this bill needs to be rejected. It is not supported by the coalition and I certainly do not support it as the member for Riverina.

Mr KATTER (Kennedy) (12:34): It is really very difficult for the Parliament of Australia to say that we should find $126 million to help people in these countries. This is no doubt that there are farming families going hungry in Australia now. These are people who scrimp and save and work themselves to the bone and try to pull back on any expenditure that they can. You have a situation in Australia in which these people are very oppressed by the forces acting upon them. I have not seen recent figures, but two or three years after the dairy deregulation there was a farmer committing suicide every four days in Australia. These are people in really desperate straits. You say that people in these other countries are in desperate straits—I cannot imagine being in more desperate straits than those that lead you to commit suicide.

The song chosen to commemorate 200 years of Australian settlement was written by Graeme Connors. Graeme is very famous for his song *Let the Canefields Burn*, which has these lyrics:

> Let the politicians and the bankers in the city
> look up
> In wonder at the glow in the sky.
> Let the canefield burn, let me feel no pain
> When I drown my soul in whisky, and dance
> in the flames.

That occurred on a cane farm south of Brisbane. A person drove his car into the middle of the cane fields and set them alight. It also occurred on a station property south of Charters Towers, my home town these days. The banks were foreclosing. The farmer said, 'You'll never take this farm off my family.' He prevented that by setting the house alight and burning himself to death. These are terrible things.

When the Prime Minister came to North Queensland after Cyclone Yasi, I stole 15 minutes of her time to take her out to a family grave in Tully. The entire family is buried there because they were blown to smithereens. A relative of the family is a very close confederate of mine and I know the story well. The banks were foreclosing again. These two little children and their mother and father were blown to pieces. And we are talking about sending $126 million
overseas. How can we do that when these things are taking place in our own country?

We had a debt summit. I thank the Treasurer very much for the debt summit—actually, we cannot really thank him until we get something out of the debt summit, but it was good of him to hold it. The debt summit was called because the debt of farmers has risen over the last four or five years from $700,000 to $1.1 million. That was last year. The figure for this year is $1.4 million. That is the average debt per farm in Queensland. The average value of farm in Queensland would be around about that same figure. That would mean that the average farmer in Queensland is technically bankrupt. And yet we can find $126 million to send overseas. Are their circumstances worse than ours?

I cannot go overseas and change the way that government operates there or stop the hatred or tribal feuds that lead to people killing each other in these countries instead of spending the money where it should be spent. I cannot help them. But I most certainly could use that $126 million to help our own people here in Australia. Let me switch from qualitative commentary to a quantitative comment. The dairy farmers in Victoria are setting the woods on fire. There were 21,000 dairy farmers in Australia before the then Victorian Premier, Mr Kennett, started with his deregulation. It rather amazes me, actually, because some of the dairy farmers down there say, 'If only we can get rid of Julia Gillard.' I say, 'Hold on a minute. You were deregulated under a Liberal state government.' They say, 'No, it was the federal government.' The federal government was the Liberal government of John Howard. The deregulation in Victoria took place under a Liberal state government and a Liberal federal government. I don't know how you can contort yourself into blaming the Labor Party! No wonder they tried to keep me out of the dairy pavilion at the cattle show! They were going to get the police to prevent me from going in there! I said that I welcomed it as I had not had publicity for a good week, so go right ahead!

But it was right for them to try to do that—these fanatical, obsessive, rusted-on supporters of the LNP. They must ask themselves what they have got for 12 years of loyalty to the federal Liberal Party. Just ask yourself what you got. What did they do for you? Although I do not think that would be a question anyone would pose. They would say: what did you do to us, not for us?

We have gone from 21,000 dairy farmers to under 6,000 dairy farmers in Australia. In my own area we have gone from 240 to 42. I was on the telephone to the editor of the Gympie paper last week and he informed me that they had about 150, and he would now be flat out naming 10 there. When I went to Mildura, I drove through kilometre after kilometre of oranges just falling on the ground rotting, and vineyards rotting. I addressed a meeting of about 150 that night and it seemed to me that about one in 10 farms had closed down. One of the people who is in charge of things there got up and said, 'No, it is closer to one in five in the Mildura area that have closed down.' Think of the human heartbreak that would be behind those rotting fields.

Let me again quantify this. And for those who think I am exaggerating, you can check the figures yourself. Cattle numbers are down 23 per cent. Sheep numbers are down by over 60 per cent. Sugar is down 17 per cent. The dairy herd is down by over 31 per cent. Those are your four major agricultural industries in Australia. Every single one of them has fallen straight through the floor. In pork, some seven or eight years ago we became a net importer. We cannot produce enough pork to feed Australia and now we have to import from overseas, because our
pork producers have all gone broke. Five years ago we became a net importer of fruit and vegetables. Imagine that a country like Australia now cannot feed itself with fruit and vegetables. With seafood, we were a fairly big exporter up until three years ago. Last year we imported 72 per cent of our seafood from overseas. The citrus and grape industries are almost completely wrecked and destroyed.

This has not been done continuously by penguins from Antarctica! The people who sit in this room are responsible. If you track back every one of those decisions, they were made by people in this room and in similar rooms in New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland et cetera. Their decisions are responsible for this. They tell us about wonderful free trade. I wish they would tell us of some other countries where there is wonderful free trade, because the average subsidy levels are 41 per cent. Don't give $126 million to people overseas, because the good book says to take the splinter out of your own eye before you start trying to take the splinter out of somebody else's eye. If your own rural industries are falling to pieces and dying, particularly when it is your fault that it is occurring, then I think the last thing in the world that you should be sitting here talking about is sending money to farmers overseas. Why wouldn't you give it to your own farmers?

The previous speaker spoke about the terrible Labor government. Well, we just had a Liberal government installed in Queensland and in one year we have three laboratories for testing for disease, and Johne's disease has closed down quarantine and closed off operations in between one-fifth and one-tenth of all of the station properties in North Queensland. Yet, are they opening the laboratories so that they can test faster and overcome the problem quicker? No. They are closing two of the three laboratories. They are closing the one in North Queensland, where most of the problems are. They are closing the one in Toowoomba, which is in the heart of agricultural country. But they are keeping open the one in the middle of Brisbane—there is a lot of agriculture in Brisbane! We are now going to take the disease, the microbes, off an aeroplane and straight through the centre of Brisbane. That is what the government has done.

We had 15 vets employed by the state government—an absolute disgrace to the ALP government, which slaughtered agriculture in the state. But this mob have already cut it to 7½ vets. The number of vets will be cut clean in half. This is at a time when we have Johne's disease running rampant in the state.

The financial counsellors, of which there were pretty close to 20, have been reduced to zero. As to the pest and weed research station, the prickly acacia has now taken over an area the size of Tasmania and, on present projections, it will be an area the size of Victoria pretty shortly. It has destroyed what were, on the map, described as the best natural grasslands in Australia; it is now a prickly-tree infested area. And I am not talking about a small area; I am talking about an area bigger than Tasmania—seven million hectares, so far. But at the speed at which it is travelling, within five years it will be the size of Victoria.

Has the government addressed this problem? No. The only mechanism for combating it, the pest and weed research station for Queensland, has been half closed. Half of its entire staff have been sacked. So the Queensland Liberal government has gone through agriculture with a winnowing scythe, and if anyone thinks a change of government is going to help agriculture, well, I wish them well in trying to convince
the people of Australia in agriculture that that is the case! And if our party is going like a bushfire in Victoria, who can blame the poor people down there for looking for people who are concerned about them?

Tell me of a single speaker in the LNP in this parliament who has said a word against his own government. I was in this place as a National Party member for six years, and I had plenty to say about what my own government was doing that was disastrously wrong, and I belonged to a party with, I think, 17 members in the House of Representatives—a party that has virtually nobody here now. The ones from Queensland belong to the LNP of Queensland, which is an affiliate of the Liberal Party. I do not know what they are doing in here calling themselves the National Party because they are members of the Liberal Party. So it is a party that really does not exist much. There is a little bit in New South Wales and nothing left in Victoria. The recent polls there indicated they were on 2½ per cent; our party was on 4½ per cent, and we had only existed there for nine weeks.

If you cannot fight for your people then what the hell are you taking your $200,000 a year for? You might say, 'Oh, we fight behind closed doors.' I was behind those closed doors; there wasn't too much fighting going on, I can assure you! In fairness to my colleagues of those years, most of those who left had just lost heart to such an extent that they just did not want to fight anymore; they just laid down and died, and the electorate took them away. A lot of my colleagues simply resigned from this place or, like me, left the party. The honourable member for New England is here because he said that if a certain person ran then he would run; well, that was two seats gone, because I left and became an Independent, and then he ran and they had lost a second seat. I do not know how many other seats in Australia they have lost. But if you betray the people and the ideals on which you were founded—and the Country Party was founded to deliver a single-desk seller in the grains industry—(Time expired)

Mr WINDSOR (New England) (12:49): It is always a privilege to follow the member for Kennedy and, if I could, before getting into the substance of the legislation, which I will be supporting, I would just like to make some comments in terms of some of the things that the member for Kennedy said. He and I would probably disagree on the need for foreign aid and the need for some funding to go towards some of the poorer countries in the world. I think there are greater objectives to be achieved by having a more peaceful world. Obviously, when people are hungry or see others with a lot while they have very little, it leads to a whole range of political conflicts. People in various countries can construe the politics of the day—whether it be through religion, tribal backgrounds or sheer envy—to drive a whole range of political agendas. So I think there is a broader area in the world that we really need to participate in. We have some amazing technologies in agriculture that can make a very constructive contribution.

The member for Kennedy made some very important points about the country representation in this building and about how many people feel disenfranchised by the political process because they happen to live in the country. There are different numbers about, but there are probably less than 100,000 real farmers left in Australia. There are a number out there who actually participate in agriculture or own some sort of land but derive income from other areas. A lot of the people that the member for Kennedy is talking about are those real farmers that face a somewhat artificial domestic cost structure and believe that they
are facing an artificial international environment in the markets they face. There is a degree of truth in that.

He also spoke about the issues of political representation and talked about how he left the National Party. I will always remember that before I had even met the member for Kennedy I heard him on the airwaves berating the National Party. I was in the state parliament at that particular time, so I came down to see him and we had a meeting. I will never forget—I hope that you are listening, Bob—the meeting we had in his office, where he ordered two steaks and two Cokes. The irrigation that he gave the steaks with salt was something to behold: the steak became white, and then he irrigated it again. Some years later I think he had a four-way bypass! It was an extraordinary first meeting, and I have loved the man ever since. We disagree on things, but one thing that I have never disagreed with Bob Katter on is that he, probably out of all of us, has the most passionate regard for the people that he represents. Occasionally, that runs in a different direction to many of us who live in the building, but I think that all of us have regard for that part of the member for Kennedy’s representations. I think it is very obvious in his seat that the people appreciate that as well.

One thing that I think the broader political climate probably needs to pick up on is that country people have tended to think that, because they only make up 30 per cent of the population, they have to operate under the dictates of the majority parties, which are made up of the other 70 per cent from the cities. But when you look back through political history—and in the context of this particular parliament, where some people see it as odd that country members have some degree of say because there is the balance-of-power situation—there has not been a parliament since Federation where a country member of parliament has not held the balance of power. People say, ‘Why haven’t they done more?’ The answer to that is the democratic processes of the major political parties, which are dominated by the city interests. You can see the focus on Western Sydney now in terms of the outcome of the next election—not western New South Wales but Western Sydney. There has not been a parliament since Federation where a country member of parliament has not held the balance of power. They have been subsumed into those major parties. And, as Mr Katter said, the Liberal-National Party is a branch of the Liberal Party now. So there is this submerging of the country vote, with the National Party in particular, but the country Labor members have also merged into the city based majority parties. And the democratic process takes its course. Issues would be raised, and the member for Kennedy no doubt did raise issues in his particular caucus. And there is the weight of numbers, dominated by city interests and a view to Western Sydney, Western Melbourne and Western Brisbane for the next election. They would vote that down, so the democratic process takes its place.

I think country people fall into that trap. And I hope one of the legacies of this particular parliament—and I think this is where the member for Kennedy is coming from as well—is that they become more strategic in the way they vote; 30 per cent is not a majority and never will be, and neither is the seven per cent or something like that that the Greens get, but you can see the impact that they have had, as have the Democrats in the past, in influencing policy, not necessarily in favour of country people.

But there are opportunities there, and strategies there, for country people to express themselves in a much more strategic fashion than they have in the past. The member for Kennedy and I probably do not totally agree...
on the vehicle for achieving that, but the objective is one of better representations by country members for country people, rather than being consumed by the promise of a white car by a city based majority party, irrespective of whether that is Labor or Liberal.

I am in support of this legislation and have been campaigning for quite some years in relation to IFAD—since 2004, when the changes were made. There are a few people I would like to address in relation to that. A colleague of mine, who I actually went through university with—Andrew Macpherson—and his wife, Judi, have been very involved in providing international aid and Australian agricultural technology in various parts of the world but particularly in Africa. I congratulate Andy and his wife for the work they have done, not only in terms of food production but also in the education of African children. And some issues in relation to overseas children, which I have attempted to address, have been raised from time to time.

I mention those two people because they represent a large body of people out there: Australians who were educated in Australia, have grown up in a dry land environment and have enormous technological advantages over most of the rest of the world in delivering those services to dry land environments. The Europeans have not lived in that world and the Americans have not lived in that world, but Australians have. And the development of some of the farming, cropping and grazing technologies are things that we can be very proud of in Australia. And there have been enormous successes in parts of Africa. I was involved some years back with the Botswana government in the extension of no-till farming into those areas, where the soils can hold quite massive amounts of subsoil moisture. The increase in yield obtained from those technologies is quite something to behold.

So, if we are going to help people who are hungry or who will be hungry into the future, we have to assist in providing the technology. Otherwise, the results could come upon us. We have a relatively small population, with a large population next door. Say Indonesia becomes a hungry nation in 50 years time and is unable to feed itself adequately. We all know what hunger does to the human psyche.

I would just like to give an example of the magnitude of the issue. We are all hearing that the world is going to need to be fed, that the population is increasing at a rapid rate and so on. I am a farmer, and my family are farmers and very proud of it. Some people would suggest that Australia has this great role to play in feeding the rest of the world. Australia is a very dry environment. We all know that. Australia is not blessed with the best soils. That is why I and others keep talking about where the best soils are and how we should implement risk-aversion policies around some of the extractive activities associated with those soils, because where they are is generally where the water is. We have to make sure that we preserve those as much as possible. But, if you look at our place in the world, there is a misconception out there, even within the farming community from time to time. We have a role in world trade in the grain markets even though we grow relatively little grain—20 or 30 million tonnes—can be significant in terms of the global balance from time to time.

If you look at other countries that have similar soils to our better soils, one example is the Sudan. I recognise that there are a whole range of issues there, with south and north Sudan and tribal and political strife.
There are thousands of years of background there. The cow is a precious resource there. But, if you look at the boreal dynamics of the Sudan, for instance, they have six times the area of land that we have. They have good soil. They have six times the area of arable land that we have in total, and it is all good soil. Even though it is relatively dry in terms of rainfall, with the technologies that are available now there is plenty of moisture there to generate enormous food production. That one area of land could produce six times what we produce. If you asked most people in the street, they would probably say, 'They need help because they are starving from time to time.' Technology can improve that situation. IFAD has in the past been able to do that—2004 was a hiccup. We are back on deck now.

The beauty of IFAD, particularly in dry environments, although they also do a lot of work in other environments, is that they deliver expertise that has been proven here. The member for Kennedy hinted at this as well. It is a little bit political. Our population—and there is probably a total of one electorate of real farmers left in this country—has very little regard for what farmers do. That is one of the reasons that many people are looking at other parts of the world where there is concern around food production and those activities. A lot of other countries know what starvation is like. The Europeans know—they have developed quite insane policies in some senses, but they have developed those policies because of their history of food shortage. We are not and will never be in a circumstance in which we run out of food. That is one of the reasons why our farmers are taken for granted. We need the rest of the world more than the rest of the world needs us.

We overproduce in Australia and so about 70 or 80 per cent of what we produce has to be exported to some other country. That means we face the vagaries of the marketplace, and a large part of that market does not have the wealth to meet our cost structures. There are a whole range of issues there—including, obviously, the value of the dollar—and then there is the mining sector. The impact that has is quite significant as well.

I support the legislation. In conclusion, I want to thank Brooke Silvers, who did a lot of work on this as an intern working for me only a few months back last year. The parliamentary secretary spent some time with her as well. I thank her for the work that she did. I also thank Bob Carr—the Minister for Foreign Affairs has played a valuable role. But I particularly thank Andy and Judi Macpherson for bringing this to my attention many years ago and for the contribution they have made to IFAD and agriculture globally.

**Dr STONE** (Murray) (13:04): The debate on the International Fund for Agricultural Development Amendment Bill 2012 should be straightforward. It should be one of those no-brainers where we will gladly agree yes, let us put some of our aid funding back into the agricultural development fund. Most caring Australians would hope to see faith in the performance of the fund restored to the point where we could recommit funds to some of the world's poorest countries so they can move towards self-sufficiency, food self-sufficiency in particular.

It has been nearly 10 years since we withdrew Australian aid dollars from the International Fund for Agriculture. We quite sensibly had a good hard look at whether progress had been made over those 10 years in a number of committee hearings recently. We wanted to see progress with accountability and real evidence of value for Australian taxpayer funds. In particular, in 2004, the Howard government found that the fund had limited relevance to the Australian
aid program's priority countries in South-east Asia and in the Pacific. It also found that there was a lack of comparative advantage and focus and that other organisations were more strongly involved in rural development in our region, so we withdrew the funding in 2004.

The recent coalition members' minority report to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade stated that while there has been some progress and improvement in the management of this fund, it still does not deliver best value for some of our aid money at this time. We recommended that the bill be delayed until the concerns of the Howard government are fully addressed and the impact of the reform program commenced by the organisation's new management is better-known and properly assessed. We think that is only sensible and we know that there are other very significant and worthy projects in line for our aid funding, and we need to make sure that funds to this particular agricultural development enterprise really are best value for money.

Over the last few years, as part of my parliamentary duties, I have travelled to a number of African and Asian countries that are recipients of Australian aid in the form of cash for food and cash for infrastructure or for the delivery of projects that aim to build human capacity or to strengthen these countries' chances of feeding themselves. We have, of course, a particular skill and advantage in transferring best agricultural practice in both irrigation and dryland farming and it is very important that we pass that information on to countries that can then have a better chance of surviving floods, famine and drought. I have gone with delegations of parliamentarians to these countries with the key object of evaluating the efficacy of our foreign aid on the ground.

Per capita, Australia is a generous donor, but I have seen again and again that our contributions are invisible in the countries that are the beneficiaries of our support. Presumably, to save administration and oversight costs to our country, we are often content to make a contribution via a larger multinational agency like Save the Children or the WHO. We go off in partnership with other nations' aid providers. When this happens we can quickly lose the capacity to direct funds to projects in the places where we are most concerned—for example, in our neighbouring regions. We are also, as I said before, often invisible. It is quite amusing sometimes to see the sticky label put on the pump, the groundwater bore or the major piece of spinning or weaving infrastructure that we have donated. We see that sticker peeling off as we try to photograph it—it having just been placed on that piece of equipment that morning as our vehicle arrives. We, of course, also lose the opportunity to closely monitor or quality control the outcomes of our aid when we are not the direct administrators of the donation itself. I think we need to be much more hands-on in our approach to decisions about exactly where our funds should go, who in fact delivers the training or the building of the infrastructure, and who in fact makes sure the cash we donate goes to proper food supplies and that food is properly delivered.

Over the time I have been observing, and as the member for Murray, I now have a fundamentally different attitude to how we should deliver food aid in crises like famines, floods and droughts. Sadly, we are seeing more of those emergencies, particularly in African countries and also in other parts of the world where there has been strife, such as in Syria where there are so many people now in refugee camps who are literally starving. We typically offer cash and we are generous. For example, we have just
given $10 million to the Mali conflict—$5 million for particular aid and another $5 million for special support to try and make peace. We are a generous nation. But, when it comes to food aid, I think there is a better way to do it than cash for food—cash which is spent by someone else in some other place and that, we hope, eventually ends up as food in the hungry mouths. New Zealand does it more cleverly; the USA does it more cleverly. What they do is send food. They do not send cash which disappears into corrupt pockets. They do not send cash which may be spent on something else besides food. Take New Zealand: they have magnificent dairy production—as we do in Australia—so Fonterra, the major dairy manufacturing cooperative in that country, is charged by their government to make very healthy, nutritious milk powder biscuits. These are virtually compressed milk powder and they form a very delicious and nutritious product to be sent into countries where they can be eaten by adults and children. They can also be put into liquids to help make a milk-type drink. So you have employment in New Zealand, you have a use of their dairy production, which is in a state of oversupply from time to time—an oversupply of product that cannot be sent off to their markets. It is an all-round win-win scenario.

As I speak, there are about 1,500 tonnes of apricots about to rot on the ground in the Goulburn Valley. Just yesterday I spoke to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Senator Bob Carr, and I said to him, 'Why can't we have that product—not just the apricots but also the thousands of tonnes of unwanted pears, peaches and manufactured tomato products—actually sent to those countries as our aid donation rather than sending cash?' As I said before, when you look at what actual volume and quality of product finally gets to the starving and needy families, there is a significant difference between what is sent and what arrives on the ground in the form of real food. In the United States they send food aid all the time, depending on what the needs are of the country in distress but also depending on what they have available in their own country, which of course supports their own farm sector. Shock horror that we should support our farm sector in this country! I know it is anathema to many in this place, particularly on the other side, because that sounds like perhaps, heaven forbid, a subsidy. No, no, no! We can do special support measures for the automotive industry, and we all hear about that regularly. We can do special deals to make sure Virgin Airlines gets itself up and away as an international carrier between here and the United States. But, when it comes to looking at something sensible which is a win-win outcome for our agricultural food producers, the manufacturing sector and those who need food aid around the globe, it too often comes down to saying something like, 'That's a bit of a bother.' If we took all of the product currently being rejected by Coca-Cola Amatil in the SPC Ardmona food factory in Shepparton and if we as a government paid for that to be manufactured and sent as food aid directly into those camps in Turkey, Syria, Jordan and the other places that we currently have refugees fleeing to from conflict, wouldn't that be a better outcome? Wouldn't that be a much more sensible way to go instead of having good food rot on the ground in Australia while cash is sent from the taxpayers of Australia where we really do not see dollar-for-dollar food outcomes in the places where it is needed?

I am very pleased that Senator Carr, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, was quite sympathetic to what I was putting to him yesterday and is going to explore the possibilities. I just think that, again and again in Australia, all we tend to do is take the easy
way out. We just say that we will send a cheque in the mail; we will send it via some other agency, whether it is a very reputable United Nations agency of long standing or not. We tend to do that and say the job has been done. I am saying that with our aid in the future we need a much more hands-on approach. We need to be better assured that Australian providers of information and education have the best chance of providing those capacity-building services in those other countries rather than see our foreign aid being spent, very regularly, on other countries' service providers.

Take for example the $285 million in aid given to China last year for education and training. Perhaps it would have been smarter for us, instead of doing that, to have those funds spent in scholarships or support for Chinese students to come to Australia. Perhaps, instead of calling it 'aid', we could make it a part of our intereducational exchange. Calling it 'aid' seems to me rather remarkable when China is amongst the top five economies of the world.

We make a very substantial per capita contribution to foreign aid. I think we should be proud of that. However, I think we can do it much better than the way we currently spend our foreign aid budget. It is not just a problem for this government. I think that for a very long time we have failed to see how we could make our aid also work for us, for some of the most needy in our nation—for example, our impoverished farmers, many of whom, as I speak, are wondering if they can feed their own families. If we could have a better system in Australia of using our own magnificent food production as our foreign food aid and if we could take a more hands-on approach to quality control, including better badging or identification of our aid in these countries, our own taxpayers could be assured of where their hard-earned dollars have gone. If we can make sure that our aid money is always spent in our own places of priority, then we will be much better off as a nation.

That is why we as a coalition have troubles with this particular bill. We do not think that the International Fund for Agricultural Development, as yet, has got itself to a state where it can be seen to be fully accountable, where it is the best value for money or where its money is best spent in our interests—which, in our case, is amongst our nearest neighbours. For those reasons, I feel that we should delay the contribution from Australia to the re-funding of this agricultural development enterprise until it has had a longer period of time to become more effective.

Certainly, when it comes to agricultural support for needy nations, Australia has so much to give. Not only do we have expertise in dryland production—we are one of the world's most efficient producers of low-rainfall cereals; that is indisputable—but also we often fail to peddle the fact that we are one of the world's greatest and most efficient irrigators. I was in one of our African recipient nations recently. They were very grateful for our helping them to increase their goat herding and therefore their milk and meat production from goats in desert type environments. That was very commendable work that we were doing. At the same time, though, they wondered out loud if we could help them with building an irrigation system on their massive underdeveloped water resources, their huge lakes and waterways. It occurred to me that, if you are talking about value for dollars and, dollar by dollar, the amount of food production and security which could have come out of helping them develop irrigated agriculture compared to additional protein from a few extra goats in a desert environment, perhaps we should have been thinking more carefully about irrigation...
projects at least having the same priority as projects delivered into desert regions.

I certainly feel that Australia needs to be proud of the aid that we deliver to needy places at times of great distress or simply as ongoing aid to help other countries develop, but I think we can administer our aid much more cleverly. We could make use of our own Australian fruit, meat, vegetable and cereal overproduction or spare production in a much more sensible way—that is, in the donation of direct food aid, in some cases deliberately manufactured foods, which can then be sent directly to the places most in need. (Time expired)

Debate adjourned.

**Customs Amendment (Miscellaneous Measures) Bill 2012**

**Second Reading**

Debate resumed on the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

**Ms OWENS** (Parramatta) (13:20): The Customs Amendment (Miscellaneous Measures) Bill 2012 lives up to its name. It is an omnibus bill that contains a number of mainly technical amendments that would form part of any government's program of regulatory improvement. Because so many of us now watch reality TV, have watched Customs and the programs about Customs puppies and all sorts of things on television and have a little bit more of an idea about what happens in that sector, it is worth just running through some of those technical amendments for people's interest.

The amendments give officers the ability to question nontravellers, to restrict access for nontravellers or to remove them from certain areas when the officers of the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service are performing their function. Also, when they are dealing with aircraft and ships carrying only crew or when processing cruise ships, the bill allows Customs and Border Protection to set up permanent or temporary Customs controlled areas. It also implements a number of measures that clarify intent, remove redundant bits of legislation and reduce the compliance burden for industry.

There is one amendment which is perhaps slightly more significant, and I will concentrate a little bit on that. It is an amendment which introduces the new offence of bringing into Australia a new category of goods known as 'restricted goods'. Currently, under the Customs Act 1901, the Governor-General can prohibit the importation of goods into Australia. Goods are considered to be imported if they are landed or intended to land. When processing commercial container ships, Customs and Border Protection may detect objectionable material such as child pornography and child abuse material in the personal effects of a ship's crew. At present, that material cannot be seized unless the owner intends to import them—that is, they intend to take them to land. The goods are considered to be in transit and can only be secured by Customs and Border Protection before being returned to the owner on departure from Australia. On occasion, possession of that material may be an offence under state or territory law and may be pursued by state or territory police, but this leads to inconsistencies between regions and relies on police resources being available. So it is not particularly effective or desirable at the moment. This bill corrects that.

The bill introduces a new offence for bringing goods into Australia, as opposed to importing or intending to land the goods. This new category of goods is known as 'restricted goods'. The restricted goods category will be prescribed by regulation. Initially, it will be limited to child pornography and child abuse material, but it
sits there as a framework to be applied to any purpose related to external affairs, including giving effect to an international agreement or addressing matters of international concern. The size of the penalty, which is 1,000 penalty units, reflects the seriousness of the offence and is approximately half the penalty for importing these goods.

Industry members were given ample opportunity to provide comment on the exposure draft, which was released last year, and any impact it might have on the industry. The feedback that Customs has received from industry stakeholders such as Shipping Australia, Qantas and CAPEC is that they have no concerns with the proposed amendment.

These amendments are by no means the beginning of reforms when it comes to Customs. They follow major reforms announced and implemented last year, and the first stage of these major reforms included integrity testing. The legislation passed the parliament in November to conduct targeted integrity tests on law enforcement officers suspected of corruption. These are covert operations designed to test if someone is corrupt. They also introduce drug and alcohol testing. The CEO of Customs and Border Protection now has the power to authorise random drug and alcohol testing of all staff. There is also the power to terminate officers for serious misconduct. The legislation introduced mandatory requirements to support measures to deal with serious misconduct. The legislation introduced mandatory reporting requirements whereby Customs officers are required to report any misconduct or corruption activity. Importantly, it also included the expansion of the corruption watchdog.

The government expanded the number of agencies that are overseen by the Australian Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity, which currently include the Australian Federal Police, the Australian Crime Commission, the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service, and deals with corruption issues from the former National Crime Authority. The government doubled the funding for oversight of Customs and Border Protection. All these incredibly important reforms were announced and implemented last year. And it does not end there.

In the last two days, there have been some significant improvements to the protection of our borders. In fact, just this morning the Minister for Home Affairs and Minister for Justice, Jason Clare, introduced legislation to establish the Anti-Dumping Commission. Those of us on this side of the House are well aware of the concerns in the community and particularly the business community about dumping. Last year, the government commissioned a review into Australia’s antidumping and countervailing system, which was led by John Brumby, the former Premier of Victoria. The report found, significantly, that in the last 12 months the workload of the administration had almost tripled and that this was a result of economic conditions like the high Australian dollar, surplus product on world markets and increased competition. So the problem of dumping has been increasing over the last year.

The review led by John Brumby found as its primary recommendation the establishment of an antidumping commission. That legislation was introduced this morning. The review also recommended an increase in the resources set aside for antidumping investigations. In December last year, the Gillard government delivered on that recommendation and announced a package of measures to strengthen Australia’s antidumping system, including an extra $24.4 million for antidumping
investigations. That new funding effectively doubles the number of investigators working on antidumping matters. This is a substantial improvement and demonstrates once again this government’s ongoing commitment to strengthening our border protection.

Yesterday, there was yet more legislation introduced to improve our border protection. This legislation relates to the trafficking of firearms. For people in my electorate of Parramatta, where shootings, particularly in Merrylands and Guildford, are quite a common occurrence unfortunately, this legislation may be of particular interest. Yesterday, the House of Representatives passed legislation to create a new aggravated offence for trafficking firearms that carries a maximum penalty of life imprisonment. The legislation also strengthens laws that target the unexplained wealth of criminals. This is important in its own right, but in relation to Customs itself the recommendations also include the establishment of a firearms intelligence and targeting team inside Customs and the embedding of Customs and Border Protection officers in relevant organised crime gangs or firearm squads in states and territories. I know from discussions with my local area command that there is a need for greater cooperation and sharing of information across states and between federal and state authorities, and to have access to those state and federal authorities embedded in them so that it is very easily available.

These are incredibly important reforms and they build on work that has been done over a substantial period of time. The key to seizing drugs and guns at the border is intelligence, and over the last few years the government has implemented a focus on intelligence and targeting the right cargo. It is not just about scanning a piece of cargo. We cannot scan them all, not by any means. It is about identifying which are the most likely to contain illegal contraband. As a result of that approach, the seizures have doubled. I repeat: the seizures of drugs and other contraband in air cargo has doubled.

In 2007, Customs detected 870 parcels containing drugs or other contraband, and last financial year they detected over 1,800. Put quite simply, this is because law enforcement agencies are using the technology of X-rays, but this is backed up well and truly by intelligence to direct those X-rays at the right cargo. These are incredibly important reforms. Eighty-five per cent of the guns and gun parts seized at the border are from intelligence from state, federal and overseas law enforcement before the cargo even arrives in Australia. I commend this bill to the House. It is an important omnibus bill, an important part of the process of improving regulation. It contains one significant amendment that improves the ability for customs and border protection authorities to deal with the bringing in to Australia and Australian waters of child pornography. It builds on a substantial track record of improving our border protection through the operation of Customs.

Mr KEENAN (Stirling) (13:30): This bill makes a number of amendments to the Customs Act 1901 that relate to the import of restricted goods, customs controlled areas, cargo reporting and importing vessels, among other measures. Most of them are relatively technical, although there is a new offence that has been created through this act. I first want to put this bill in some context in relation to the way the government has treated the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service since the government changed in 2007. It is a sad fact that with Customs we have an agency that is being asked to bear the brunt of two very significant failures of the Labor government: firstly, the failure to protect our borders and,
secondly, the failure to run fiscal policy properly and the astonishing waste of money that we have seen under this government since they came to office in 2007.

On border protection, I think 2012 was definitely the year when things went completely and utterly off the rails. That was the year the Labor Party embraced many different policies for their border protection regime, none of which have worked and all of which have resulted in further failure. In 2012, we saw 274 boats arrive illegally in Australia. They carried a record 17,270 people, which was more people in that one year—2012—than arrived under the whole term of the Howard government. That is the equivalent of 47 people a day arriving illegally on Labor's watch. I will put that into some context by mentioning other advanced democracies and the way they have responded to these issues. When 10 Chinese asylum seekers arrived in Darwin in March last year on their way to New Zealand to claim asylum, the response of the New Zealand government was to create a temporary protection visa category similar to what we previously had in this country before it was abolished by the Labor Party when they came to office. So we had a boat that did not even arrive in New Zealand—just the intent to get to New Zealand was enough to make the Key government change policy. The Harper government in Canada made similar changes to stop the flow of illegal boats arriving on their shores. The catalyst for that was the arrival of one boat containing asylum seekers from Sri Lanka that had come an enormous way, from Sri Lanka through to British Columbia. That boat—

Mr Sidebottom: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order about relevance. I am sorry to interrupt the debate, but this is not very relevant to the legislation and I ask the shadow minister to direct his comments to the legislation.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott): I thank the member for Braddon for his intervention. I know it is a Customs Amendment (Miscellaneous Measures) Bill. I am sure the member for Stirling is aware of that and I ask him to make sure his remarks are relevant to the bill before the chamber.

Mr KEENAN: I think that for a bill which deals with Customs it makes perfect sense to provide a little bit of context regarding the way Customs has been treated by the Labor Party. The examples I am giving are of the two ways Customs has suffered very significantly for the Labor Party's failures. Those two failures are the border protection failure and the failure to manage our budget. Customs has borne the brunt of those two. I was talking about the way Canada responded to just one boat of illegal arrivals within its waters. When that boat arrived, it went off like a bomb within Canadian policy circles. I know this because I visited Canada a few years ago. They certainly took that arrival as a catalyst to change their policies. After that event they said that you could not apply for permanent residency status in Canada for up to five years, regardless of whether your refugee application was accepted or not. This contrasts with the situation we have in this country, where Labor has essentially granted permanent visas to the vast majority of people who have arrived illegally in our waters. Considering that comparable countries such as New Zealand and Canada have managed to implement sensible policies to curb similar problems, it is astonishing that this Labor government—

Mr Stephen Jones: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order regarding relevance. To be relevant to the legislation you would have to do more than say the word 'Customs',
you would have to direct your comments to the bill before the House. Mr Deputy Speaker, quite simply, the member is defying your ruling.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I thank the member for Throsby. I have had an opportunity to read the explanatory memorandum, the minister's speech and the second reading speech. It does talk about controlled areas as an important part of customs border control mechanisms at airports and ports in the second reading speech.

**Mr KEENAN:** The point I am making—and I appreciate that the House has given me some latitude to do so—is that Customs has suffered significantly because of the failures of this government to protect our borders and their failure to control the budget. The reason I am making these points is that it has affected the ability of Customs to do the job that the Australian people expect of it, and that is to protect us from contraband, such as weapons and drugs, flying into our country. The fact that they have been so diverted by the crisis that has been created—a self-induced crisis caused by this government—on our borders is hindering their ability to do that. That is the reason I was highlighting the fact that we have had over 32,000 people arrive here illegally under Labor's watch. This happened as a direct result of the policy changes that they have pursued since coming to office, changes which unwound the successful border protection regime they inherited from the Howard government.

As I have said, this is detracting from the ability of Customs to do the job we expect of them. Also detracting from the ability of Customs to do the job is the fact that they have borne the brunt of Labor's budget cuts. Those cuts have been made not because of the difficult fiscal circumstances the government has found itself in—because we have never had so much revenue—but because the government needs to make up for the fact that so much money has been wasted by the Labor Party since it came to office.

It is law and order agencies such as Customs, the Australian Federal Police and the Australian Crime Commission that have been forced to cut their staff and cut their budgets because of that wasted money. In the case of Customs, 750 staff have been cut from the agency since the Labor Party came to office, and that has significantly weakened it. It has allowed organised criminal syndicates to penetrate it. We have seen examples of that at Sydney Airport recently.

Two very broad areas that have suffered because of these Customs cuts are the ability of Customs to inspect cargo when it comes into Australia and the ability of Customs to screen passengers when they arrive in our country. These are two areas of Customs that have been hit very significantly by the Labor Party's budget cuts—cuts, I remind you, that never would have needed to happen except that the Labor Party cannot manage Australia's finances and have wasted literally billions of dollars since they came to office. The capacity of Customs has been reduced because of that inability of Labor.

Labor, when they came to office, astonishingly cut the budget that Customs has for cargo inspections by $58.1 million. That occurred in the 2008-09 budget. The ability of Customs to screen cargo has not recovered since. Under the Howard government, 60 per cent of air cargo was inspected when it came into Australia. Under this government, less than 10 per cent of air cargo is inspected when it arrives in our country. Less than five per cent of sea cargo is inspected.

**Mr Lyons:** More than you did!
Mr KEENAN: There was an interjection from one of the members saying, 'More than you did when you were in government.' He clearly was not listening. I will repeat that: 60 per cent of cargo was inspected when it arrived at our airports under the Howard government and less than 10 per cent is now inspected when it arrives in Australia—because of the savage cuts that have been made to Customs by the Labor Party. This means that criminals have a better chance of bringing in drugs, guns and other things that we do not want to see enter our country.

These cuts have happened in a climate where the volume of cargo entering Australia has increased significantly. This sort of failure is evident when we see crimes being committed such as the one that was uncovered at the Sylvania Waters post office by the New South Wales Police Force—not by federal law enforcement authorities—when 220 Glock pistols were imported from Germany. As the New South Wales Premier pointed out yesterday, the New South Wales police were the agency that exposed these embarrassing gaps as a result of the cuts that have been made by the Labor Party. He said:

… we have a federal government that seems to look the other way with the illegal importation of guns into this country.

At a time when we see escalating gun violence throughout the community, the Labor Party has been slashing funding and personnel from the very agencies that we expect to help protect Australians from being the victim of such crime. If an agency is not funded properly and not staffed properly then it is left vulnerable to penetration by criminal syndicates. As I said, we have seen that in the extensive revelations of corruption at Sydney Airport.

These are some of the failures that have led the Australian people to rightly conclude that Labor cannot be trusted to protect our borders. If they cannot stop the boats then they certainly cannot stop the guns or the drugs or the other things that we want to see kept from our communities and kept off our streets.

Further to the budgetary cuts that I outlined for cargo inspection, Labor has cut staff and budget from passenger facilitation. This means that Customs has been hit with a $34 million cut to its passenger facilitation program. Labor has axed a further $10.4 million from the program at a time when passenger numbers are expected to increase from approximately 32 million to 38 million over just four years. This significant hit that Customs has taken has led to a reduction of 70 staff across the primary lines at our eight major international airports in the past financial year alone. This further funding cut will only serve to make waiting times at our major airports worse, and of course it makes it more difficult for Customs to intercept the people whom it should be intercepting before they leave our airports and go into the community.

The Australian Airports Association wrote, in their Customs and border protection discussion paper 2011, that Labor's cuts have resulted in an increase of up to 24 minutes for inbound processing at Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne and Perth at peak times. Estimates by Customs show that international visitors to Australia will increase by more than 150 per cent and international departures will increase by more than 500 per cent over the next two decades, yet Customs staff and resources have not been increased in line with these passenger numbers. Indeed, as I have outlined, they have actually been cut. This puts further pressure on Customs and is causing frustration for the travelling public.

I wanted to outline those very significant challenges that have been faced by Customs, not by the circumstances they find
themselves in but by the deliberate policies that have been pursued by the Labor Party since they have come to office. We welcome this bill. It generally just enhances the administration of Customs by making amendments to the Customs Act 1901, but it also brings in a new offence—that of bringing into Australia a new category of goods known as restricted goods. These goods will be proscribed by regulation and will be prohibited imports. According to the bill's explanatory memorandum, initially this new category will be limited to child pornography and child abuse material, but in future this could be extended to give effect to international agreements or to address matters of international concern.

It is important to note that there is a caveat within the legislation that goods of this type can be imported into Australia with the written permission of the minister if they are to be used for law enforcement purposes. An example of that would be child abuse material contained on a computer overseas; if the Australian Federal Police would like to import that hard drive then the minister can rightly give them permission to do so for it to be used in prosecutions of the person who had committed that offence.

The bill also makes a series of technical amendments that enhance the ability of Customs to do its job, and those amendments are welcomed by the opposition. Sadly, over their term in office, the federal Labor Party have demonstrated that they cannot manage the budget, and Customs have been a significant victim of that. It is unfortunate that the hardworking men and women of Customs and Border Protection, Australia's premier border protection agency, have been on the chopping block at budget time—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott): Order! It being 1.45 pm, the debate is interrupted in accordance with standing order 43. The debate may be resumed at a later hour and the honourable member for Stirling will have leave to continue his remarks.

**STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS**

**Australia Day Awards**

Ms O'DWYER (Higgins) (13:45): Twice a year, we as a nation get to officially honour those that have made a significant contribution to our community, a contribution that simply cannot go unnoticed. Every Australia Day we stand and applaud those that have received the nation's highest honours, and this year is no exception. From contributions to community, business and the arts to health, research and sport, each and every person who received an award this year deserves our utmost gratitude and respect.

Again, the people in my electorate of Higgins have done our nation proud, with many worthy recipients. I could speak about their many multiple accomplishments but will limit myself in this short period of time to reading their names: Mr Malcolm Baxter, OAM; Mrs Nellie Bresciani, OAM; Professor William Cartwright, AM; Mr John Davies, OAM; Professor Stephen Davis, AM; Mr Graeme Fair, AM; Mr Bruce Griffiths, OAM; Professor Robert Iansek, OAM; Mrs Natalie Miller, AO; Mrs Rosalie Silverstein, OAM; Mr Graham Smorgon, AM; and Mr Derek Young, AM. All of the awards are a testament to the achievement, sacrifice, hard work and perseverance that these men and women have gone through in order to achieve and accomplish, and I congratulate each and every one of them.

Yet there are many more who quietly volunteer in our communities and they do not get acknowledged or thanked. We thank them here today, as we should. *(Time expired)*
Richmond Electorate: Coal Seam Gas Mining

Mrs ELLIOT (Richmond) (13:46): I rise today to note my community's opposition to coal seam gas mining on the North Coast of New South Wales. I would like to state in this House that our community's view is extremely clear. We want coal seam gas mining stopped on the North Coast. The concerns are not only, of course, the environmental impacts upon our region but also the health impacts. There is no doubt that this is a major issue right across the North Coast. I note that my colleague the member for Page has brought this issue up on many occasions. We are very united in our fight against the New South Wales Liberal-National government in stopping coal seam gas mining on the North Coast.

As I have been saying repeatedly of late, I am calling upon those state National Party members—the member for Lismore, the member for Tweed and the member for Ballina—to actually start doing their job and go and see Premier Barry O'Farrell and tell him that the people of the North Coast do not want coal seam gas mining. The fact is that the state government regulates and licences coal seam gas mining, and they can stop it; they can do that. I will certainly join with the community and keep working very closely with everyone in keeping the pressure on our state MPs and also on the New South Wales Liberal-National government to finally take some action. All we have seen from those state MPs on the North Coast is absolute silence and total inaction. Well, they had better start listening and they had better start going to see Premier Barry O'Farrell, because the people of the North Coast have spoken very loudly and clearly. I stand with them in calling for a ban on coal seam gas mining on the New South Wales North Coast.

Western Sydney: Air Quality Monitoring

Mr CRAIG KELLY (Hughes) (13:48): Late last year a local constituent, Mr Paul Van Den Bos, drew to my attention a serious concern relating to air quality monitoring in south-west Sydney. The New South Wales annual compliance report for the National Environment Protection Measure for Ambient Air Quality reveals that the Liverpool air quality monitoring station has been noncompliant since at least 2006. This seven-year non-compliance period casts doubt over the accuracy of the air quality records which this federal government relies upon to justify subjecting the residents of Wattle Grove, Moorebank and surrounding suburbs to a giant intermodal freight terminal.

In addition to failing to keep monitoring stations compliant, the previous state Labor government actually decommissioned a further seven air quality monitoring stations in the Sydney Basin during their term in office. A New South Wales upper house inquiry in 2006 described these closures as 'unacceptable'. The residents of south-west Sydney are entitled to clean air and they are entitled to be sure that that air is being accurately monitored. This neglect of Western Sydney residents by the former state Labor government is a disgrace, especially when air pollution is a bigger killer than our roads, costing up to $6 billion in health effects in Sydney alone.

I am pleased to report to the House that, following the intervention by me and my state Liberal colleague Melanie Gibbons, within a matter of weeks the new Liberal state government had undertaken the necessary steps to ensure the Liverpool air quality monitoring station now meets the required standards.
Mr Hayes (Fowler) (13:50): On the weekend I had the opportunity to attend the graduation ceremony organised by the Chaldean Australian Academic Society. The event celebrated great achievement by the members of the local Chaldean community who completed their HSC or tertiary education. I am always proud to say that I represent the most multicultural electorate in this country. I am proud to represent people who have come from all corners of the world, many from very tough environments. Many Assyrian and Chaldean communities are indeed among those who have faced and continue to face some of the toughest challenges. Thankfully many were able to come to Australia to start a new life and provide better opportunities for themselves and their families.

Education is one of the main tools necessary to succeed, and many migrant communities have made full use of the opportunity to gain education in Australia and positively contribute to their new homeland. The Chaldean Australian Academic Society and the wider Chaldean community today certainly make a very positive and productive contribution to our vibrant community. The efforts of this society, led by founder Adris Frety and current president Bassam Frety, are an important part of this contribution.

I would like to express my warmest congratulations to all the graduates and wish them all the best for their future study and work in Australia. I look forward to their great contribution in Australian society.

Victoria: Health System

Mr Tudge (Aston) (13:51): I rise to condemn in the strongest possible terms the federal government's cut of $107 million to the Victorian health system. In my own electorate of Aston, local residents will suffer because, as a result of these cuts, Eastern Health has been forced to announce that they will reduce services at Wantirna Health and the Angliss Hospital. Eastern Health has had a cut of $8.4 million to its budget announced suddenly, out of the blue, by this government, which means Wantirna Health will have to immediately close five palliative care beds. The Angliss Hospital just down the road in the electorate of La Trobe will also have to close five surgical beds immediately. Also affected will be community and mental health programs such as the crisis assessment team which services my electorate and other areas. We of course know that they have also cut funding to the Royal Children's Hospital and to the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, causing beds to close there also. These are premier institutions, not only in Victoria but worldwide. I find it astounding that the government can spend $110 million on carbon tax promotion but at the same time has to cut $107 million from vital services in our community. The government has its priorities entirely wrong here and it is starting to hurt residents of Victoria.

Hamilton, Mr David

Mr Stephen Jones (Throsby) (13:53): I am very pleased that Labor legend and former Prime Minister Bob Hawke is here in the chamber today, as I rise to pay tribute to Mr David Hamilton, a Labor legend from my electorate of Throsby, who sadly passed away last month after a long battle with leukaemia. Dave was a steelworker, a passionate trade unionist, a steadfast party member and a loyal and supportive friend to us all. If ever there were a man who embodied the true spirit of Labor in the Illawarra, it was Dave.

One of nine kids born in Westrigg in Scotland in 1945, David learned the ropes of
the steel industry very early. He juggled his formative years between working at BHP and playing the ‘beautiful game’ of football, or, as we uncultured Aussies refer to it, soccer. I am told by his brother Alex that he left his home in Scotland and migrated south to England to play semiprofessionally for a few years down there before migrating to Australia in the 1960s.

It was after his arrival that David attended his first ALP branch meeting in Warrawong Community Hall, and he was a Labor man from that day on. David is remembered by all those who knew him as always fighting for the underdog. It was this passion for the core Labor values of equality and a fair go which sparked his interest in unionism at an early age. He became delegate for the then union known as FIMEE, representing his fellow steelworkers before rising to the role of New South Wales secretary. He will be remembered and loved by his family. (Time expired)

Denison Electorate: Infrastructure

Mr WILKIE (Denison) (13:54): Denison is long and narrow. Its spine is the railway line which has been there many decades but which is soon to fall derelict when the Hobart Rail Yards close and the few freight trains still using the line terminate before the electorate. On the face of it, the new transport hub north of Hobart, which makes the closure of the suburban line possible, should be a good thing, but the reality is that it is not, if only because the freight will now be loaded onto trucks that will add greatly to the congestion on the Brooker Highway. Even more alarming is that the line will quickly deteriorate and the corridor soon disappear, even though it is the obvious route for a light rail system that would take the pressure off the road network, kickstart an urban renewal and connect the communities and facilities along the length of the electorate in a clean and affordable manner.

This project was one of 20 priorities I took to Julia Gillard and Tony Abbott after the 2010 election. They know it is important and I call on them to commit to the project if they win the election. If the government wants to announce funding sooner to help them win my seat, that would be well and good, just so long as we get the job done.

Ovarian Cancer Month

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (13:55): Today we are wearing two ribbons to mark the start of ovarian cancer month. Throughout February Ovarian Cancer Australia is inviting the community to host an Afternoon Teal to improve the understanding of the signs and symptoms of ovarian cancer, as well as raising vital funds for research and support. As the ACT Ovarian Cancer Australia ambassador I am proud to be involved in this issue. I also acknowledge the support of the member for Higgins, who is also an ovarian cancer ambassador.

Tragically almost 1,300 women are diagnosed with ovarian cancer each year, so, as part of this awareness month, we are urging all women to learn the four key symptoms of ovarian cancer. These are: abdominal pain or pelvic pain, increased abdominal size or persistent bloating, the need to urinate often or urgently and feeling full after eating a small amount. Contrary to popular belief there is no detection test for ovarian cancer—the pap smear does not detect ovarian cancer.

I encourage Australians to get involved and help raise vital funds and awareness about this issue, and they can do this by buying a teal ribbon, by hosting an Afternoon Teal or making a donation. Donations over $2 are tax deductible.
Geale, Mr Daniel

Mr MATHESON (Macarthur) (13:57): I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate a superstar from my electorate who is a true gentleman both in and out of the sporting arena. Daniel Geale, a proud resident of Macarthur, is the world middleweight boxing champion. He defeated Anthony Mundine in the IBF middleweight title fight at the Sydney Entertainment Centre last Wednesday. Geale dominated the 12-round match, bringing the title home to Tasmania.

The whole Macarthur community was behind him—be it in our local pubs and clubs or at home watching on television. Danny lives in Harrington Park with his lovely wife, Sheena, and their children—Bailey, Ariyelle and Lilyarna. He trains at the Grange Old School Boxing Gym in Smeaton Grange where he also mentors lots of local amateur boxers each week.

Before the fight, I was very proud to chat with Daniel at the Camden Australia Day celebrations, where he was presented the keys to the town. It is the first time anyone has been presented with such an honour and Daniel is a very worthy recipient. He is a true gentleman who values good sportsmanship and loves fighting for his community and his country. Daniel also supports a lot of local charities and sets a great example for all the young people in Macarthur.

Despite the hype surrounding the fight, Daniel refused to miss his daughter Lilyarna's first day of kindergarten the next morning. Fantastic! He said he loved being there for his kids and wouldn't miss it for the world. Daniel is not only a true sporting champion, but a nice guy and a loving dad who doesn't let fame or success go to his head and always puts his family first. Today I would simply like to bring to the attention of the House this fantastic achievement by a fine young man. Macarthur is very proud of you, Daniel, and we know you will continue to make us proud for many years to come. You are an absolute champion, mate. Good on you. You are the world's best.

Petition: Middle East

Mr PERRETT (Moreton) (13:58): I rise to present a petition that went through the Petitions Committee on 28 November.

The petition read as follows—

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

This petition is from persons residing mainly in the Federal Electorates of Moreton and Rankin, and surrounding areas.

Draws to the attention of the House: That Palestinians are a stateless people who have suffered under the shadow of Israeli occupation for far too long. They want freedom, justice, equality and the right to self-determination.

Palestinians have tried peace talks for decades while watching more of their land being occupied and taken over by Israel and its illegal settlements. Two years ago peace talks stopped as the Palestinian Authority said it couldn't negotiate while Palestinian land and resources continued to be annexed.

When the Palestinian Authority stands alone to face the political and military strength of Israel it knows it cannot negotiate a just solution. This is why the Palestinian Authority is asking the international community to support a just solution by asking the UN General Assembly to recognise Palestine as a non-member State.

We therefore ask the House to: Support the Palestinians when they ask the UN General Assembly to give it recognition as a non-member State. This support is through Australia joining the majority of the international community by voting YES to the UN Resolution.

Further: If the House is serious about its commitment to a lasting two-state solution and therefore advancing peace in the Middle East and beyond, then it must support Palestine's bid for a place and a voice at the international table.
from 1,270 citizens
Petition received.

Mr PERRETT: I had intended to present this petition in the last week of parliament, but, due to the fact that there was a fair bit of legislation banking up, I did not get a chance to present it. I gave the members of my electorate of Moreton and also many people in Rankin the assurance that I would present the petition. Even though history has moved on a little bit, in terms of what this petition is calling for—the vote in the UN to recognise the Palestinian authority—I intend keeping true to my word to the people of Moreton and Rankin by presenting this petition. The chief petitioner is David Forde, and, as I said, it is drawing the attention of the House to the call for Australia to recognise that Palestinians are a stateless people who have suffered a lot over the last 40, 50 or 60 years. We are calling for the vote, which has occurred to be—

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

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Economy

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (14:00): My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to the fact that the government's total call on taxpayers, including tax borrowings and dividends, for the 2011-12 year, was 25.7 per cent of GDP—higher than for any year of the Howard government. Why does the Prime Minister insist that the government is not collecting enough revenue when it is collecting more than $70 billion extra in taxes this year and spending almost $100 billion more than in the last year of the Howard government?

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:00): In the form of the question the Leader of the Opposition once again verifies—in case there was any doubt—that he doesn't know anything about economics and he doesn't know anything about the government's budget. He is following the shadow Treasurer into error here. It was the shadow Treasurer who first started trying to retail these figures, where he put together apples and oranges and pretended they were the same thing. It is nonsense when it comes out of the mouth of the shadow Treasurer and it is nonsense when it comes out of the mouth of the Leader of the Opposition.

I would refer the Leader of the Opposition to the fact that, as a percentage of GDP, tax is lower under this government than it was under the Howard government—that is a fact. Of course we know that the Leader of the Opposition does not to like to confront facts which do not reinforce his prejudices—but that is a fact.

I would also remind the Leader of the Opposition of another fact he frequently chooses to forget. The world has confronted the biggest economic crisis since the Great Depression. That is a fact. It cannot be denied—

Opposition members interjecting—

Ms GILLARD: No point screeching and carrying on about it: that is a fact. And there are millions and millions of working people around the world who are now in the despair of unemployment because that financial crisis happened and because it had consequences in the real economy, the global economy and the economies of nations.

That means that our nation, at a time of global financial crisis—and think about those words carefully: global financial crisis—had to confront a few choices. First and foremost, what was going to happen, and what did happen because of the global financial crisis, was that there was going to be a huge hit to government revenues. The Leader of the
Opposition likes to forget that. And, indeed, revenues have not recovered in the way the Treasury predicted. The Leader of the Opposition likes to forget that. That fact of course was always going to put pressure on the budget; it was always going to cause a deficit to arise. The Leader of the Opposition should have the honesty to acknowledge that.

And then this government took the responsible position of putting jobs, opportunity and growth first; of making sure that a couple of hundred thousand Australians could stay in employment. I respect that the Leader of the Opposition made the opposite choice. He would have preferred to have seen those Australians unemployed. We did not; we supported their jobs and we are proud that we did. The Leader of the Opposition has to get out of economics kindy class and start dealing with the facts. (Time expired)

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (14:03): Madam Speaker, I have a supplementary question for the Prime Minister. Does the Prime Minister seriously maintain that government borrowings are not ultimately a call on the taxpayer?

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:04): The problems with the pre-drafted supplementary are that you don't listen to the answer, you don't try to think about the answer, you don't respond to the answer and you don't process the economic conclusions yourself—you have to go with the precooked script.

The Leader of the Opposition needs to answer this question: what does he say his strategy would have been at the time of the global financial crisis? We know he voted against jobs. What does he say the consequences would have been—

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: Order! The Prime Minister will return to the question.

Ms GILLARD: for the government's budget if he had been Prime Minister and voted against jobs. The consequences of course would have been that we would have seen the hit to revenues from the global financial crisis, we would have seen the problem with revenue recovery that we are seeing now, we would have seen more Australians unemployment and we would have seen lower growth—

The SPEAKER: Order! The Prime Minister will return to the question.

Ms GILLARD: This is centrally on the question. The Leader of the Opposition tries to create this fantasy land to pretend that the global financial crisis and its consequences for the government's budget did not happen. It is a furphy. It is the sort of thing one would only put forward if one had no understanding of or capacity to deal with the facts and no interest in economics—and, unfortunately, that is the Leader of the Opposition.

Indigenous Affairs

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (14:05): My question is to the Prime Minister. How is the government closing the gap on Indigenous disadvantage and working in partnership with Indigenous communities to tackle the scourge of alcohol?

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:07): I thank the member for his question. And I thank him, too, for his real interest in issues of reconciliation and advancement of Indigenous Australians in his own electorate. I have witnessed that with my own eyes.

Today I was very pleased to be able to present to the parliament the fifth annual Closing the Gap statement. It is a very clear-eyed and factual account of where our nation is in trying to attain our Closing the Gap targets to make a real difference to the lives of Indigenous Australians, to make a real
difference to things like life expectancy, educational attainment, employment and health—things we know will make a long-term difference to closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia.

As a government we are 100 per cent committed to closing that gap but we are not romantic or starry-eyed about how difficult this is. It requires deep thinking, it requires consistent effort, it requires hard work and it requires partnerships around the country with state and territory governments, with Indigenous Australians, with their leadership and with communities around that nation. It requires that kind of effort to make a difference.

But we can say to ourselves that a difference is being made. And I was very pleased to be able to report to the parliament that we have, on schedule, hit the first of the Closing the Gap targets, and that is to make sure that children in remote Australia—Indigenous children—get the benefit of preschool. And I was able to tell the parliament about a young girl called Curtisha who is now getting the benefit of preschool when her mother did not even get the opportunity to go to school. That is a change across a generation—a mother who missed out on school, a daughter getting to go to preschool and therefore being ready for school.

But I also had to report to the parliament my very grave concerns that the policies of the Country Liberal Party in the Northern Territory are putting the alcohol industry first and Indigenous kids second. I have called on them to reinstate the banned drinkers list because we know that that was working. I want to confirm to the parliament today that Minister Macklin has written to Chief Minister Mills under powers granted to her by the Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Act to stop the reintroduction of alcohol to Indigenous communities without the approval of the minister.

We need to stop the rivers of grog. We need to stop this going backwards in the Northern Territory. We need to sound the words of caution to Queensland and we need to maintain our focus on closing the gap.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The SPEAKER (14:09): Just before I call the member for North Sydney I would like to recognise in the chamber today the former Prime Minister, the Hon. Robert Hawke. That does sound very odd! Bob Hawke is with us this afternoon and we would like to welcome him to the gallery.

Honourable members: Hear, hear!

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Budget

Mr HOCKEY (North Sydney) (14:09): I join with you, Madam Speaker, in welcoming my constituent and the last Labor Prime Minister to deliver a surplus. Well done!

Honourable members interjecting—

Mr HOCKEY: Come back!

Honourable members interjecting—

Mr HOCKEY: My question is to this Prime Minister. I refer to the Prime Minister’s statement yesterday that the amount of government revenue is ‘far lower than expected by Treasury’. Given that revenue this year is $37 billion larger than last year, and given that tax revenue is $18 billion higher than Treasury forecast in the darkest days of the GFC, how can the Prime Minister honestly claim that her surplus promise is broken because the government is not collecting enough tax off Australians?
Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:10): Let me explain this to the shadow Treasurer so that he can follow it. First and foremost, to the shadow Treasurer, let me explain to him: (1) as a percentage of GDP this is a far lower taxing government than the government he served in as the Work Choices minister; and (2) of course in my statement I was referring to the revenue write-downs against Treasury predictions. I refer him to the Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook. He may not have obtained a copy. He may not have read it but I suggest that he does.

I am referring him to the revenue write-downs made transparent at that time by Treasury in its forecasts and referred to publicly by the Treasurer, Wayne Swan. I also refer him to the undeniable fact that as a percentage of GDP, per unit of GDP, revenue to government is at its lowest percentage now since the early 1990s and that recovery of revenue is happening more slowly than Treasury predicted. These are facts.

I take it from this line of questioning that the opposition believes itself to be in a position to say that had it governed during the days of the global financial crisis it could have produced a surplus budget every year, notwithstanding the global financial crisis, notwithstanding what was happening in the global economy, notwithstanding the hit to revenues that flowed and the hit to revenues we are continuing to see flow.

Well, if the shadow Treasurer and the Leader of the Opposition truly think that that is the position they would have found themselves in if they were in government, and given that that is all dealing with past figures, there is no reason at all why tomorrow they could not walk into this parliament and table what they would have done in that budget situation to show surpluses across those financial years. Every fact, every figure is at their disposal. Let's not have the spin, the hysteria and the questions. Just come in tomorrow and table the document. And if they do not do that then let's not hear any of this nonsense ever again.

Mr HOCKEY (North Sydney) (14:12): I have a supplementary question for the Prime Minister. In this 2009 budget paper it says, 'Expected revenue in 2012-13 is $321 billion.' This year it is projected to be $339 billion. Prime Minister, do you believe that Australians are not paying enough tax?

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:13): I remind the shadow Treasurer that it is 2013. So I am not sure why he is wandering around with 2009 figures. Maybe it is time to catch up. It is 2013 and apparently he last thought about these issues in 2009. Well, there are a few years of work to catch up on. That is the kind of performance we see only too often from the shadow Treasurer. Actually thinking deeply about policy, actually producing figures and costings, actually pointing to savings is apparently beyond him. So I say to the shadow Treasurer: it is not 2009; it is 2013. Get yourself the most recent information. And I say to the shadow Treasurer, too—

Mr Pyne: On a point of order, Madam Speaker: the Prime Minister could at least try and answer the question as to whether she believes Australians are paying too much tax or not enough tax.

Ms GILLARD: I was just coming to the question of tax. I am very pleased that this government has turned in a performance of less tax as a percentage of GDP than the Howard government did. Yes, the Howard government was high taxing—yes, it was. Yes, the shadow Treasurer was part of that high-taxing government and at the same time was ripping people's wages to shreds through
Work Choices. That is the legacy of the shadow Treasurer and the Leader of the Opposition. Fortunately, between a new workplace relations system of decency and fairness and a lower taxation system as a percentage of GDP, we have done better for families around the nation and I am proud that we have.

Indigenous Affairs

Ms ROWLAND (Greenway) (14:15): My question is to the Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. Will the minister outline to the House the progress made in efforts to close the gap on Indigenous disadvantage?

Ms MACKLIN (Jagajaga—Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Minister for Disability Reform) (14:22): I would say at the outset how wonderful it is today to see so many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people around the corridors of Parliament House, so many people joining in the Reconciliation Australia showcase in the Great Hall. If anyone here has not been in to meet with some of the companies and organisations represented there today, they should do so.

I thank the member for Greenway for her question and acknowledge her commitment, along with the government's, to make sure that we do everything possible to close the gap, because it is unacceptable that, in Australia today, we still have such a life expectancy gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. It is unacceptable that we see Indigenous children being born today still not having the same expectation of the long and healthy life of other children. It is something that this government has been determined to change. We know that that change does not come easily. As the Prime Minister has said, sometimes you can face setbacks but they require all of us together to be determined to make sure that we continue to progress towards our goals and not to let any of our progress be eroded.

Our approach has enabled us to have very clear targets and goals with a timeline attached to them, with very clear investments attached to those timelines and a determination to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to make sure we achieve our goals. As the Prime Minister outlined in her statement to the parliament today, we have met our first target—to make sure that all those little kids in remote Australia have the chance to go to preschool, like children in other parts of Australia; to make sure that a child born today is not going to die before they turn five; to make sure they get antenatal care and early childhood care; and to make sure that their mums and dads get the parenting help they need. We also can see from the report tabled today that we are on track to meet our targets with year 12 attainment, which is so important if we are to make sure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people get the jobs they need so that they can look after their families. We know we have an enormous amount to do. We will do it with clear and strong hearts—(Time expired)

Budget

Mr HOCKEY (North Sydney) (14:22): My question is to the Treasurer. I refer the Treasurer to this taxpayer-funded newsletter distributed in his electorate, which states, 'We have delivered a surplus, on time, as promised.' Given there is only one Labor man in this chamber who could boast of having delivered a surplus, will the Treasurer now write to his constituents and apologise for lying to them?

The SPEAKER: The last part of the question is obviously out of order.
Mr SWAN (Lilley—Deputy Prime Minister and Treasurer) (14:22): This government makes absolutely no apology for putting Australian jobs and Australian growth first—absolutely no apology. It is what drove us through the global financial crisis to support employment; it is what drove us through the global financial crisis to support small business. As a consequence, the Australian economy is now 13 per cent larger than it was at the end of 2007. What we have here is a Liberal Party that is constantly at war with the facts.

Mr Hockey: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order as to relevance. The question was directly related to taxpayers’ money being spent on boasting about having delivered a surplus.

The SPEAKER: The member for North Sydney will resume his seat. The Treasurer has the call and will refer to the question before the chair.

Mr SWAN: At the end of last year there was an extreme bout of volatility in the global economy not dissimilar to what we had coped with some years before. The consequence of that was a very substantial revenue write-down. So I said to the Australian people that it was unlikely we would return to surplus in 2012-13, notwithstanding the fact that there is still a very strong fiscal consolidation going on in our balance. We are doing that because we put jobs and growth first. The proposition being put by those opposite is very simple. They are saying they would have cut government spending early this year in the face of the global volatility, thereby reducing growth and causing higher unemployment.

The proposition at the heart of all of the questions asked here today and put forward by the Leader of the Opposition is this: they would have cut $160 billion worth of revenue write-downs from the Australian budget over the last five years—and I can tell you what the consequence of that would have been. That would have been a sledgehammer to the Australian economy and would have resulted in massive unemployment. It also would have resulted in higher deficits and higher debt. They want to have a debate about deficit and debt in this country. We are the party of growth and jobs; they are the party which will take a sledgehammer to the economy. We are seeing the leading edge of that now in the $70 billion crater in their budget bottom line—

The SPEAKER: The Treasurer will refer to the question.

Mr SWAN: and the commitment by the Leader of the Opposition to abolish the Schoolkids Bonus and to take that money away from the Australian people.

Mr Hockey: I am seeking to table the Treasurer's newsletter to his constituents.

The SPEAKER: Is leave granted?

Mr Albanese: No. I refer to yesterday's comments.

Leave not granted.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The SPEAKER (14:22): I would like to welcome into the House today the Hon. Gary Johns, a former member for Petrie. I would also like to welcome people who are participating in the Heywire Regional Youth Summit. We hope that you enjoy your experience of question time.

Honourable members: Hear, hear!

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Fishing Industry

Mr WILKIE (Denison) (14:23): My question is to the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities. Minister, as you know, AFMA is now considering an application
from Seafish Tasmania to operate the supertrawler as a mother ship, supplied by a fleet of smaller vessels. As this is just a cynical attempt to circumvent the ban placed on the vessel last year, do you commit to honour the spirit of the ban, as well as the letter, and to stop this madness now?

Mr BURKE (Watson—Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities) (14:23): I thank the member for Denison for the question. Members would be aware that we had a fairly intense debate towards the end of last year with respect to the impact that the supertrawler may well have. This government unapologetically takes great care and great caution in protecting our oceans. The issues that we were dealing with, a few months ago now, went very much to the heart of what would be the impact of localised depletion.

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: Order! There should be some respect shown to allow the Independent member who asked the question to actually hear the answer to the question he has put. The minister will now be heard in silence.

Mr BURKE: Thanks, Speaker. The issue of localised depletion has an impact on species that I am responsible for under national environmental law. There are other issues that ran around the campaign. People would discuss the size of the net and things like that. But, ultimately, localised depletion and the impact on predatory species was at the core of that.

Seafish Tasmania, as well as going to AFMA, have written to me giving an indication of this mother ship proposal that they have in place. On the face of it, many of the environmental issues that we were dealing with a few months ago still arise in this new proposal. What I have asked my department to do is to prepare fresh advice on the two legal questions that they will have to answer. The first question is: is it a new fishing activity? The second question is: is there uncertainty as to the environmental impact?

I will receive that advice from the department and I will make a call on that. But I have written today to the company and made clear to them that, depending on that advice, which I will not prejudge, I absolutely reserve the right to make further declarations in respect of any different ideas or uses for the vessel that come up. The tests will be the same as they were last time—is it a new activity and is there environmental uncertainty? If those tests are met then a new declaration will go ahead and that will mean that we have a situation where activities of that nature are illegal while the scientific work is carried out.

Indigenous Health

Mr HUSIC (Chifley—Government Whip) (14:26): My question is to the Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Minister for Defence Science and Personnel and Minister for Indigenous Health. I would like to ask the minister how the government is working to address the impact of alcohol on Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory?

Mr SNOWDON (Lingiari—Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Minister for Defence Science and Personnel, Minister for Indigenous Health and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on the Centenary of ANZAC) (14:26): I thank the member for Chifley for his question. I also thank the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition for their speeches this morning on the Closing the Gap campaign and its targets. I also thank Minister Macklin for her response earlier on Closing the Gap. I come at this from a different perspective from many in this place. I have now lived in Alice
Springs for 30 years and in the Northern Territory for 35 years. I have seen firsthand the impact that alcohol abuse has on my community and the people within that community. A significant proportion of the population living in that community and around Central Australia—and indeed, across the Northern Territory—are Aboriginal people for whom alcohol is a problem.

On 1 July 2011, when the former Henderson government introduced the Banned Drinkers Register, it was to much acclaim across the Territory. Indeed, there was strong support for it. What we discovered over a very short space of time, within three months, was that the alcohol related assaults across the Northern Territory were down 15 per cent. In Darwin and Palmerston alone they were down 20 per cent. We had 10,000 fewer antisocial behaviour incidents reported across the Northern Territory. So there was a significant impact on the Northern Territory community. We need to understand, from a public health perspective, how important the control of alcohol consumption is and how its abuse hurts not only individuals but families. We have seen only recently work on foetal alcohol syndrome across Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory and Western Australia. We know what the impact is.

What the Northern Territory government has done since its election, as the result of an election campaign policy, is remove the Banned Drinkers Register. We have seen an immediate spike in drunkenness around Alice Springs. We have seen hordes of people lining up at bottlos and grog shops. It seems to me that a responsible person—and I note that the Leader of the Opposition very responsibly supported the Prime Minister's view and our view—would say that the Northern Territory government should reinstate the Banned Drinkers Register as a matter of urgency. Responsible people would say that it should be done, but unfortunately the Northern Territory government is acting irresponsibly, irrationally and against the best interests of the Northern Territory community. The best thing the Northern Territory government could do is recant on its decision to remove the Banned Drinkers Register and take other steps, in conjunction with us, to address alcohol abuse in the Northern Territory through the alcohol management plans and other measures which Minister Macklin has put in place.

Budget

Mr TONY SMITH (Casey) (14:29): My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to these taxpayer funded newsletters from nine of her Labor colleagues, including the Assistant Treasurer, the Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and the Minister for Resources and Energy, which claim that Labor 'delivered a surplus on time, as promised'. Were her colleagues referring to the last time Labor delivered a surplus, in 1989-90? If not, will the Prime Minister demand that her colleagues write to their constituents and correct this obvious falsehood?

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:30): I thank the member for Casey for his question. On the government's budget and putting a priority on jobs and growth and supporting working Australians, I refer him to my earlier answers in question time today. On the question of providing information to the Australian community, the member might like to explain whether the Leader of the Opposition and the opposition generally will be issuing an apology for putting out a document that has stamped on it 'costed, fully budgeted' when there are no costings, no budget and no savings.
Mr Tony Smith: Madam Speaker, I seek to table nine documents—taxpayer funded newsletters from the member for Reid; the Minister for Employment Participation and Minister for Early Childhood and Childcare; the Minister for Resources and Energy; the member for Wakefield; the member for Corio; the member for Watson; Senator Glenn Sterle; the member for Corangamite; and the Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs—all promising—

The SPEAKER: The member for Casey will resume his seat. Is leave granted?

Mr Albanese: In the words of the Leader of the Opposition, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no and no.

Economy

Mr CHEESEMAN (Corangamite) (14:32): My question is to the Treasurer. Will the Treasurer update the House on our nation's resilient economic fundamentals? How does our economy's strength help deliver the reforms we need to secure Australia's future jobs and prosperity?

Mr SWAN (Lilley—Deputy Prime Minister and Treasurer) (14:32): I thank the member for Corangamite for his question. Our economy is now 13 per cent larger than it was at the end of 2007. That has outstripped almost every other advanced economy in the world. Also, we have contained inflation at 2.2 per cent, well within the Reserve Bank's target band; we have low unemployment, with a five in front of it, whereas around the world double-digit numbers are very common; we have a low cash rate of three per cent—far lower than at any time under the previous government; and of course we have a triple-A credit rating. We have a triple-A credit rating because that reflects the assessment of the global community of our strong public finances and our low debt.

We have heard some reflections on these strong fundamentals in question time today. Those opposite do not accept these facts; they are in complete denial of these facts, showing that they are unqualified to run a $1.5 trillion economy. They have now joined the cranks and crazies of the US Tea Party in their critique of the Australian economy and in their denial of these basic facts about the strength of the Australian economy. This government will get on with the big reforms that will keep us growing. In our bones, in our DNA, are jobs and growth. The enduring mission of the Labor Party, as it was the enduring mission of Bob Hawke when he was in government, is to put in place the very big reforms that strengthen our economy for the future. All of that is challenged now by the cranks and crazies of the Liberal Party in Australia. The proposition they have put to the House today is a simple one—that in the face of the global financial crisis they would have cut spending by $160 billion. That would have been the revenue write-down we were coping with. That would have absolutely tanked the Australian economy and we would not be here today saying our economy is 13 per cent larger if those people opposite had been in charge of this economy over the past five years. The behaviour in the House today demonstrates how unqualified they are, how they lack the judgement, how they lack the temperament, to run a $1.5 trillion economy, with this silly critique that has at its heart the philosophy of the Tea Party in the US, which wants to take an axe to the social safety net and a sledgehammer to our economy. The precedent is in Queensland. That is what they are following—the approach of Campbell Newman. They have a Commission of Audit; they want to hide their big cuts to public expenditure in health and education because they do not understand the importance of jobs and growth.
**Budget**

Mr ROBB (Goldstein) (14:35): My question is to the Treasurer. I refer the Treasurer to the fact that Germany, Switzerland, Norway, Korea and Chile are all reporting budget surpluses. Why have they been able to achieve budget surpluses when they face the same international economic environment as Australia, while this government has failed, despite enjoying the highest terms of trade in 150 years and inheriting from the Howard government no debt, money in the bank and a budget surplus? *(Time expired)*

Mr SWAN (Lilley—Deputy Prime Minister and Treasurer) (14:36): The member for Goldstein is at war with the facts yet again. I make this point: we have a triple-A credit rating, and that is not delivered to many countries in the global economy. We have received that rating from the three major global rating agencies, and we have a stable outlook. The claim from over there is that we have always had it, but we have not. This is a reflection of the underlying strength of our economy. But, sadly, they are so unqualified to run an economy that they come in here day in, day out and they go out into the community and talk down our economy—they talk down the resilience of the Australian economy, they distort the facts. It is sad that this is what has happened to the once great Liberal Party of Australia, populated now by the cranks and crazies of the Liberal Party who do not accept the basic facts of modern economic life.

I was asked before about the surplus. I said last year, straight out, that because of revenue write-downs it was unlikely we would come to surplus in 2012-13. I do want to make this point, and I want to make it clearly: when the facts change, so do responsible governments. The stakes are really high, because when conditions in the international economy change the livelihoods of millions of Australian workers are on the line. What they want is a government that has the competence to make the judgements for jobs and growth. This government has got the competence to make the judgements for jobs and growth and you have proven during the last five years that you do not have that competence. You do not have that understanding. You do not have the knowledge of our economy and you do not know what you are doing, because the figures you have put forward today about tax levels are just wrong.

Mr Pyne: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. We all understand that the Treasurer is under pressure, but he should not be referring to us by our names, but through the names of our seats.

The SPEAKER: The Manager of Opposition Business is correct. The Treasurer has the call and will refer to individuals by their appropriate titles.

Mr SWAN: I think it is very important that we have a debate about economic policy based on the facts, and the facts are these: expenditure as a percentage of GDP is the lowest it has been in almost 30 years. The fact is that tax to GDP is quite low at the moment, far lower than it was under them—the highest taxing government in Australian history. Now, Sloppy Joe over there has made up this new figure claiming that the—

The SPEAKER: The Treasurer will not use that term. He will refer to people appropriately.

Mr SWAN: Well, he cannot go round just joining figures together and amalgamating concepts.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Manager of Opposition Business has taken a point of order.
Mr Pyne: Madam Speaker, I raise a point of order on him using the correct titles rather than a point of order on relevance.

The SPEAKER: That is what I was getting to. The Manager of Opposition Business has the call.

Mr Pyne: Madam Speaker, the Treasurer is nearing hysteria, but he is also abusing the order you made before for him to use our correct titles. I would ask you to order him to desist or sit him down so he can take a rest.

The SPEAKER: The Manager of Opposition Business did not take the hint that I was saying he had already taken a point of order that was not on relevance and that the use of points of order is not to be abused. The Treasurer has the call.

Mr SWAN: The fact is that those opposite, because they have got a $70 billion crater, have in store for the Australian people huge cuts, a sledgehammer to the economy, a $70 billion crater, that is going to cost jobs, cost growth and push up debt.

National Broadband Network

Ms SAFFIN (Page—Government Whip) (14:40): My question is to the Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government and Minister for the Arts. Will the minister please update the House on how the government is delivering on its plan for a world-class broadband service in regional Australia and what other policies are there for broadband and what would be their impact?

Honourable members interjecting—

Mr Briggs interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government and Minister for the Arts has the call; the member for Fadden does not. The member for Mayo is warned.

Mr CREAN (Hotham—Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government and Minister for the Arts) (14:40): I thank the member for Page for her question, and I know how strongly she has advocated the importance of this infrastructure need in her community. We understand one of the most important infrastructure spends this nation can make is connecting the nation through fast-speed broadband. We have had the policies in place to do it and it is rolling out in a significant way. Nowhere is this more important than in our regions. I must say, in all of the times that I go to our regions, I never get the debate there as to whether we need to spend this money. All I get is, 'When is it going to be rolled out?' and 'How fast is it going to be?' So, despite the negativism that is constantly being run on the other side, the regions are not buying it because they want the broadband and they want our policy because they know it will improve their community.

For the member for Page's benefit as well as for all members of the House, I can announce that we have made a significant improvement to the speed of service in the regions. NBN's fixed wireless and long-term satellite services will be upgraded to provide broadband speeds of 25 megs download and five megs upload. This is a doubling and a quadrupling respectively of what had previously been announced so all services that are provided through that will have a significant improvement. If anyone doubts the significance of this, they should go to the regions and see how they are being serviced by these services now. There are the e-health options in places like Narrabri, which I visited, the e-education and e-health at the St Giles facility in Tasmania and the e-commerce facilities at Glen Innes in the New England electorate, where a photo business has relocated only because broadband is available.
We get that and we understand why it is important to invest, but that is not what comes from the other side of this chamber. We have had a carping opposition and disunity, and they cannot even get their act together in terms of what the policy will be.

Honourable members interjecting—

Mr Dutton interjecting—

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Dickson is warned.

Mr CREAN: Well may they laugh, Madam Speaker, but the regions understand the importance of this. The opposition have fought us every inch of the way when it comes to rolling out this service. They have sought to oppose us at every instant in this parliament. They have tried to block every piece of legislation. The difference between us and them is more than chalk and cheese. It is about kilobytes versus gigabytes. For those in the industry that understand it, they know that fully well and they will vote accordingly. **(Time expired)**

Budget

Ms O'DWYER (Higgins) (14:44): I refer my question to the Treasurer. Treasurer, I refer you to the Australian Labor Party tweet of 8 May 2012 that displays a poster and states: 'Good morning, Australia.'

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Higgins will stop using her prop.

Ms O'DWYER: Are you ready to be the first of the major advanced economies to go back to surplus? Given that the government has abandoned its commitment to produce a surplus this year, can the Treasurer tell the House what the deficit will be?

Mr SWAN (Lilley—Deputy Prime Minister and Treasurer) (14:44): I—

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: Order! A question has been asked. I had assumed that individuals did want to hear the answer—including the Deputy Leader of the Opposition.

Mr SWAN: Thank you, Speaker. I made the point before that, when the facts change, so do the actions of responsible governments. The lives of many people depend upon the decisions that we take in this parliament. I know that those opposite like to pretend that the global financial crisis never happened, that there was not extreme volatility in the global economy at the end of last year. They like to pretend that Europe did not go into recession last year, that there was not sluggish growth in the US, that there was not a question mark over China. They like to pretend that commodity prices did not crash 38 per cent between May and September. They just want to whitewash all of those basic facts away.

Ms O'Dwyer: Madam Speaker, I raise a point of order on relevance. I asked the Treasurer what the deficit will be.

The SPEAKER: There was a great deal of preamble in the question. The Treasurer has the call.

Mr SWAN: We will always take the balanced decision to support jobs and growth, and that is what I talked about—at the end of last year, the impact on our budget of extreme global volatility and the fact that we lost in four months all of the revenue we had previously written down for 12 months. I went out and I said that, as a result of that, it would be unlikely that we would come to surplus. I also made the point very strongly that we are keeping in place a very substantial fiscal consolidation because we think that good, strict fiscal policy is the foundation of jobs and growth—and, by the way, also of healthy public finances, because you have to have good growth to have healthy public finances.

Of course, I know that notion of economics is rejected by those opposite, who
are at war, really, with 21st-century economics, do not accept that and now are putting a proposition to the Australian people that over the last five years we should have cut expenditure by $160 billion over and above the structural saves that we made in the budget. If they had had their way, during the global financial crisis Australia would have gone into recession, and much more deeply so, because apparently their view is now that there needed to be an extra $160 billion worth of cuts to make up for the revenue write-downs. That would have pushed unemployment through the roof and tens of thousands of small businesses into bankruptcy. That is where their policy position is leading.

We as a government have always taken the tough decisions. We have been prepared to move when conditions have changed. We did that during 2008 and 2009 and put in place one of the most effective responses to the global financial crisis of any country in the developed world. The consequence of that today is an unemployment rate with a five in front of it. You look around the world, you look at other developed economies, and you see tens of millions of people unemployed, whole communities shattered. Here in Australia, yes, we do still live with the consequences of the global financial crisis, we live with the aftershocks, but we have the best set of fundamentals in the developed world and we are proud of it.

Superannuation

Ms O’NEILL (Robertson) (14:48): My question is to the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation. Will the minister outline for the House the importance of the government’s superannuation policies for ordinary working people? Is the minister aware of other policies on superannuation, and what would their impact be?

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation and Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations) (14:48): It is great to have in this chamber today former Prime Minister Hawke, because he knows, just like everyone on the Labor side, that the only time superannuation ever gets lifted in this country is when Labor is in government. He knows how hard it was for the unions and the government to go to an accord to lift super from zero to three per cent. We saw Prime Minister Keating lift super from three to nine per cent across the following years, and he has also seen, under Prime Minister Gillard, superannuation lifted from nine to 12 per cent. We are the champions of superannuation in this House. We invented compulsory universal superannuation so that people do not retire poor. It is in the Labor DNA, and those opposite know it. And, whenever we try and improve superannuation, there is one thing you can always count on, as surely as night follows day: those representatives of vested interest, those opposite, always vote against it. Shame on them.

What we have already done since 1 July last year, for 3.6 million Australians who earn less than $37,000 a year, is abolish the 15 per cent tax on superannuation that they paid. We abolished it—a tax cut for 3.6 million people who earn less than $37,000, the people who work part time, the working mums. So you can imagine my surprise at the National Press Club last week, when the opposition had a chance to rescue themselves from their fiscal stupidity of proposing to introduce a new tax on 3.6 million working Australians. Given the right choice or the wrong choice, that mob opposite never miss an opportunity to miss an opportunity in superannuation.
On *Q&A* on Monday night, I thought they might bring in super rescue agent Christopher Pyne, the member for Sturt, to rescue them. David Bradbury skewered him. David Bradbury said:
The policy that Tony Abbott confirmed at the National Press Club about the low income superannuation contribution.

Christopher Pyne, in an act of confusion so consistent with Christopher Pyne, said, 'We haven't announced that.'

The **SPEAKER:** The minister will refer to members correctly.

**Mr SHORTEN:** Well, the opposition has announced it. Why don't you take a leaf out of Christopher Pyne's book and drop a tax on 3.6 million people? Take some advice from Christopher for once.

The **SPEAKER:** The minister should refer to individuals by their correct titles.

**National Broadband Network**

**Mr TURNBULL** (Wentworth) (14:52): My question is to the Prime Minister. I remind her that on 18 January Telstra warned the ACCC that NBN's pricing plans will 'translate into higher retail price increases for end users'. On the same day, Optus told the ACCC that the cost of using Labor's NBN will soar by 58 per cent over the next decade if current usage trends continue. Does the Prime Minister stand by her claim of 20 December 2010 that the NBN will result in 'wholesale prices coming down over time in real and in nominal terms'?

**Ms GILLARD** (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:52): I thank the member for Wentworth for his question, and I particularly thank him for it on a day when we are in a position to announce faster broadband for regional and remote Australia. I would remind the member for Wentworth that, as we roll out the National Broadband Network, we are delivering on our commitment of uniform national wholesale pricing for broadband services. The member for Wentworth should acknowledge that this means that people around the country—regional Queensland, to take one good example—will pay the same for NBN services as people in Sydney, Melbourne or Brisbane. What this of course—

**Mr Turnbull:** Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I have asked a very straightforward question about retail prices for the NBN, and the Prime Minister is not answering it; she is avoiding it.

The **SPEAKER:** The member for Wentworth will resume his seat. The Prime Minister has the call.

**Ms GILLARD:** I was addressing the question of pricing on the NBN and pointing out to the member for Wentworth the uniform national wholesale pricing that we are committed to delivering. Then, off this platform, of course, retail providers can compete and, as the member for Wentworth well knows, there are very competitively priced packages available to people in areas where we have rolled out the National Broadband Network. The member for Wentworth, in terms of this debate, really needs to explain to Australian consumers and people who have got the NBN or who are anxiously awaiting the delivery of the NBN what the alternative to the National Broadband Network is from the point of view of the opposition. As I understand it, they have announced 22 failed broadband plans and are now committed to ripping up services and prejudicing the ability of Australians and the Australian economy to get the jobs and opportunities of the future. So I say to the member for Wentworth: the National Broadband Network will continue to roll out with the wholesale pricing commitment that we have given and with the
retail competitiveness that we are already seeing.

**Carbon Pricing**

Mr SYMON (Deakin) (14:55): My question is to the Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency and Minister for Industry and Innovation. Will the minister update the House on the first six months of the carbon price coming into effect? How did this compare with earlier predictions? And, Minister, what does this say about the need for the facts on climate change and carbon pricing?

Mr COMBET (Charlton—Minister for Industry and Innovation and Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency) (14:55): I thank the member for Deakin for the question, because carbon pricing has now been in place, as he indicated, for just over six months, and it is an immensely important reform that has been made. It is economically responsible, it is environmentally effective and it is socially fair and equitable—and the facts on that are becoming perfectly evident. What is also becoming perfectly evident is the extent of the mendacity in the campaign that has been run by the coalition against carbon pricing. It has been one of the most deceitful campaigns we have ever seen, and it has demonstrated with absolute clarity that the Leader of the Opposition cannot be trusted. Every statement he made in relation to this important reform has been demonstrated to be false.

The opposition leader forecast unimaginable price increases, yet the CPI rose just 0.2 per cent in the December quarter. The annualised rate is just 2.2 per cent—at the bottom of the RBA parameters. The Leader of the Opposition also forecast the loss of hundreds of thousands of jobs, yet unemployment stands at 5.4 per cent and over 29,000 jobs have been created since the introduction of carbon pricing. He said the carbon price would be a wrecking ball through the economy—a wrecking ball—yet Australia's annual economic growth rate, the rate of growth in GDP, is around three per cent. In the United Kingdom it is zero. In the US it is a bit under 1½ per cent. In Australia it is three per cent. We have introduced this reform that the opposition leader forecast would destroy the economy. He said that the carbon price would not work; it would not reduce emissions. Yet, now, after its first six months in operation, emissions in the National Electricity Market actually fell by 8.6 per cent—a reduction of 7½ million tonnes in pollution. There is more renewable energy being sold into the market and there is greater investment in renewable energy.

There are a host of other statements, false, that have been made by the Leader of the Opposition on this issue, all of which demonstrate that he cannot be trusted. In fact, he has run the most negative, vicious, aggressive and destructive campaign for two years but he now claims to be Mr Positive—actually a sensitive guy, very sensitive, with a positive plan for the future. No amount of meaningless platitudes about non-existent positive plans can disguise the fact, and no image makeovers can disguise the fact, that the Leader of the Opposition cannot be trusted.

**Superannuation**

Mr TRUSS (Wide Bay—Leader of The Nationals) (14:58): My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to the 2007 commitment by the former Prime Minister, the member for Griffith, 'There will be no change to the superannuation laws, not one jot, not one tiddler.' Will the Prime Minister recommit the Labor Party to making no more detrimental, unexpected changes to superannuation taxes?
Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:59): I thank the Leader of the National Party for his question. I am very glad that we have moved to change superannuation so that 3.6 million Australians will have an ability to be up to $500 better off. I am very concerned. I presume the Leader of the National Party supports the Leader of the Opposition's plan to take those benefits away from 3.6 million low-income Australians, that he supports the Leader of the Opposition's plan to hit the retirement savings of people who earn less than $37,000 a year. So, when we are talking about superannuation changes, let us be very clear. Who has a plan for cuts that would hit millions of Australians? Who has a plan for the cruelest of cuts that would hit Australians on the lowest incomes? Who has a plan to cut the superannuation of women who work part time? The Leader of the Opposition. I am very glad that the Leader of the National Party has raised this question because it enables me to alert the Australian community to the danger to the superannuation of low-income earners posed by the Leader of the Opposition.

As the Leader of the National Party would well know, Labor is the party that brought compulsory superannuation to this country. It was fought every step of the way with a fear campaign in which people were told the Australian economy would be destroyed. It reminds you of some more recent fear campaigns we have seen from the opposition. Universal superannuation was fought, and described as a con job, by this Leader of the Opposition. We are the political party that delivered it. We are proud of it. We are the political party that is increasing it and we are the political party determined to benefit low-income earners, whilst the Leader of the National Party and the Leader of the Opposition are there trying to take benefits away. I would also remind the Leader of the National Party that if he were paying any attention to the economic debate in this country, he would know we addressed questions of superannuation, including superannuation withdrawals, when we released the tax review in May 2010. I refer him to the media release which accompanied that report and said the government reaffirms that it will never remove tax-free superannuation payments for the over-60s. I refer him to that statement and I would ask him to please say to the Leader of the Opposition: 'Don't hurt 3.6 million Australians. Don't hurt the lowest income Australians in our country. Do not hurt these men and women.'

Anti-Dumping Commission

Mr Stephen Jones (Throsby) (15:02): My question is to the Minister for Home Affairs, Minister for Justice and Cabinet Secretary. Will the minister update the House on the progress in implementing the government's plan to strengthen Australia's antidumping regime and support our workers and manufacturers?

Mr Clare (Blaxland—Minister for Home Affairs, Minister for Justice and Cabinet Secretary) (15:02): I thank the member for Throsby for his question. I know he has a very keen interest in this area. Australia is a great trading nation. Boosting trade is critical to our success. One of the things that can threaten that is dumping. Dumping is cheating, pure and simple. It is where goods are imported at less than their real cost. That can cost Australians their jobs. It can hurt Australian industry and it can undermine the confidence that we all have in free trade. That is why it is important that we have a strong independent umpire with the powers and the resources needed to make sure that people play by the rules. That is why today I have introduced legislation to establish the Australian Anti-Dumping Commission.
Commission. In the last couple of years we have seen that the workload of our anti-dumping investigators has tripled. This has been driven by a weak global economy, the strong Australian dollar, and the presence of a lot of commodities out there looking for a market. The advice that I have from my department is that this is expected to continue.

Last year I asked John Brumby, the former Premier of Victoria, to provide me with advice on the best structure for Australia's antidumping administration. He provided me with a number of recommendations. We have committed to implement all of them. The two major recommendations that he made were the establishment of this commission and the allocation of additional resources for these investigators. We will do this. We will allocate an additional $24 million over four years, which will mean that we will almost double the number of antidumping investigators. This has been backed by business and it has been backed by unions. Innes Willcox of the Australian Industry Group said of these reforms to the system that they:

…will strengthen its effectiveness, improve its administration and make anti-dumping procedures more accessible for all affected businesses.

They are important reforms, but more work is needed. In the next session I will introduce legislation to impose higher duties when rules are broken, increased infringement notice penalties and make it easier for antidumping duty to be applied retrospectively. These will, of course, comply with our WTO obligations. The purpose of all of this is to make sure that people play by the rules. To do that you need a strong, independent umpire with the powers and resources they need. That is what we are doing. The Australian Anti-Dumping Commission will help support Australian jobs, support Australian workers and help Australian industry. That is what this government is all about.

**Economy**

Mr HOCKEY (North Sydney) (15:05): My question is to the Treasurer. I refer to his statement earlier in question time:

I think is very important that we have a debate about economic policy based on the facts, and the facts are these: expenditure as a percentage of GDP is the lowest it has been in almost 30 years. Given that his own latest published budget figures state that on six occasions in the last 30 years, expenditure as a percentage of GDP has been less than what it is this year, how can we have a serious debate about the facts when the Treasurer himself does not get the most basic facts right?

Mr SWAN (Lilley—Deputy Prime Minister and Treasurer) (15:06): I know the shadow Treasurer is highly embarrassed by the fact that he was part of what is the highest-taxing government in Australian history and that now, comparatively, our levels of expenditure as a percentage of GDP are quite low. That is the point that I made. We have put in place very strict expenditure control in the most difficult of circumstances. When you were in government you went on a spending spree—you pushed the expenditure ratio through the roof and you also pushed the tax-to-GDP ratio through the roof. What was the outcome of that? Ten interest rate rises in a row.

So we are happy to have a debate about growth and jobs, about who has got the policy framework to support employment, because there are millions of Australians depending on the judgements that are made in this House.

Mr Hockey: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The Treasurer got his facts...
wrong against his own published document. Will the Treasurer please explain what facts he wants us to deal with—the ones he has made up or the ones that are true?

The SPEAKER: The member for North Sydney will resume his seat. I am assuming his point of order was on relevance. It was hard to actually ascertain it.

Mr SWAN: Those opposite have a $70 billion crater in their budget bottom line, and the first group that is going to pay for that is parents and schools, because those opposite are going to abolish the Schoolkids Bonus. Then they are going to get rid of the tripling of the tax-free threshold. Then they are going to move on and rip away superannuation benefits for low-paid workers. I think all Australians can see that there is an agenda on that side of the House to take the axe to the social safety net and a sledgehammer to our economy. On this side of the House, we stand for growth and jobs and a sensible and balanced economic policy that brings prosperity to all Australians. On that side of the House, they stand for a savage attack on the living standards of low- and middle-income earners in this community. That is what is going to play out as we go through this year and there is a straight comparison between the success of this government in managing the economy and the incompetence on the other side of the House.

Asylum Seekers

Mr LAURIE FERGUSON (Werriwa) (15:08): My question is to the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship. Will the minister update the House on progress in implementing the recommendations of the Expert Panel on Asylum Seekers?

Mr BRENDAN O’CONNOR (Gorton—Minister for Immigration and Citizenship) (15:09): I thank the member for Werriwa for his question and his long interest in these matters. Border protection, asylum seekers and these issues can be challenging for any government. These issues for any government, in any community, can be fraught. Failing to heed expert advice can potentially be fatal. I need no convincing of the importance of listening to expert advice, after being Minister for Home Affairs for 2½ years. On one particularly memorable occasion for me, on 15 December 2010, I arrived on Christmas Island only hours after one of the most tragic maritime disasters in recent times, where 50 people—men, women and children—perished when a vessel foundered on the rocks on Christmas Island. Forty-one people were rescued, 40 of whom were plucked from the sea by very brave and courageous naval and Customs personnel. On that day, if I had had any doubt at all before, I knew it was critical that this country found the most effective means to deter vessels from coming to our shores in this manner. That underlined to me the need to bring about changes to ensure the most comprehensive approach we could possibly take and to heed the advice of our agencies and others to ensure that we did not see further lives lost.

We commissioned experts, three very eminent Australians: Michael L'Estrange, extraordinary public servant, former Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, former High Commissioner to the United Kingdom; Paris Aristotle, with more than 20 years experience in dealing with refugee settlement and these complex issues; and Angus Houston, former Chief of the Australian Defence Force, appointed by the Howard government and reappointed by this government to that office. Those three eminent Australians came to a position, from different perspectives, and made 22 recommendations. At the centre of those recommendations was ensuring that we did not see any further lives lost at sea.
I say to the Leader of the Opposition, who has said he wants to be positive and wants to have the coalition act as an alternative government, and has said he has consulted with experts: consider once again the 22 recommendations that have been outlined by these eminent Australians. Without his reconsidering that position, I am afraid, and this government is afraid, we will see further deaths at sea, we will see more infants carried up the shore on Christmas Island, as we saw on 15 December 2010. I implore the opposition leader to be positive and think of those children.

Ms Gillard: I ask that further questions be placed on the Notice Paper.

DOCUMENTS
Presentation

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House and Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) (15:12): Documents are presented as listed in the schedule circulated to honourable members. Details of the documents will be recorded in the Votes and Proceedings and I move:

That the House take note of the following documents:


Migration Act 1958—
Section 91Y—Protection visa processing taking more than 90 days—Report for the period 1 July to 31 October 2012.

Section 440A—Conduct of Refugee Review Tribunal (RRT) reviews not completed within 90 days—Report for the period 1 July to 31 October 2012.

Sydney Airport Demand Management Act—Quarterly report on movement cap for Sydney airport for the period 1 October to 31 December 2012.

Debate adjourned.

COMMITTEES
Selection Committee Report

The SPEAKER (15:12): I present report No. 74 of the Selection Committee, relating to the consideration of committee and delegation business and private members' business on Monday, 11 February 2013. The report will be printed in the Hansard for today, and the committee's determination will appear on tomorrow's Notice Paper. Copies of the report have been placed on the table.

The report read as follows—

Report relating to the consideration of committee and delegation business and of private Members' business

1. The committee met in private session on Tuesday, 5 February 2013.

2. The committee determined the order of precedence and times to be allotted for consideration of committee and delegation business and private Members' business on Monday, 11 February 2013, as follows:

Items for House of Representatives Chamber (10.10 am to 12 noon)

COMMITTEE AND DELEGATION BUSINESS

Presentation and statements

1 Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security:


The Committee determined that statements on the report may be made—all statements to conclude by 10.20 am.

Speech time limits—

Mr Byrne—5 minutes.

Next Member speaking—5 minutes.
2 Joint Select Committee on Constitutional Recognition of Local Government:

The Committee determined that statements on the report may be made—all statements to conclude by 10.30 am.
Speech time limits—
Ms Rowland—5 minutes.
Next Member speaking—5 minutes.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 2 x 5 mins]

3 Parliamentary Delegation:

The Committee determined that statements on the report may be made—all statements to conclude by 10.40 am.
Speech time limits—
Mr Schultz—5 minutes.
Next Member speaking—5 minutes.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 2 x 5 mins]

4 Standing Committee on Health and Ageing:

Living with the pain of adhesive arachnoiditis.
The Committee determined that statements on the report may be made—all statements to conclude by 10.50 am.
Speech time limits—
Ms Hall—5 minutes.
Next Member speaking—5 minutes.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 2 x 5 mins]

PRIVATE MEMBERS’ BUSINESS

Notices

1 MR ABBOTT: To present a Bill for an Act to amend the Fair Work (Registered Organisations) Act 2009 and for related purposes. (Fair Work (Registered Organisations) Amendment (Towards Transparency) Bill 2012). (Notice given 26 November 2012.)
Time allotted—10 minutes.
Speech time limits—
Mr Abbott—10 minutes.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 1 x 10 mins]
Presenter may speak for a period not exceeding 10 minutes—pursuant to standing order 41.

2 MR MORRISON: To present a Bill for an Act to amend the Migration Act 1958, and for related purposes. (Migration Amendment (Reinstatement of Temporary Protection Visas) Bill 2012). (Notice given 26 November 2012.)
Time allotted—10 minutes.
Speech time limits—
Mr Morrison—10 minutes.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 1 x 10 mins]
Presenter may speak for a period not exceeding 10 minutes—pursuant to standing order 41.

Time allotted—10 minutes.
Speech time limits—
Mr Bandt—10 minutes.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 1 x 10 mins]
Presenter may speak for a period not exceeding 10 minutes—pursuant to standing order 41.

4 MR KATTER: To present a Bill for an Act to impose a moratorium on aquifer drilling connected with coal seam gas extraction, and for related purposes. (Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Moratorium on Aquifer Drilling Connected with Coal Seam Gas Extraction) Bill 2013). (Notice given 5 February 2013.)
Time allotted—10 minutes.
Speech time limits—
Mr Katter—10 minutes.
5 MR KATTER: To present a Bill for an Act to provide for Australian ownership and operation in relation to certain air services, and for related purposes. (Aviation Laws Amendment (Australian Ownership and Operation) Bill 2013). (Notice given 5 February 2013.)

Time allotted—10 minutes.

Speech time limits—
Mr Katter—10 minutes.

6 MR KATTER: To present a Bill for an Act to amend the Fair Work Act 2009, and for related purposes. (Fair Work Amendment (Arbitration) Bill 2013). (Notice given 5 February 2013.)

Time allotted—10 minutes.

Speech time limits—
Mr Katter—10 minutes.

7 MR KATTER: To present a Bill for an Act to enable dairy farmers to obtain a fair price from processors for drinking milk, and for related purposes. (Dairy Industry (Drinking Milk) Bill 2013). (Notice given 5 February 2013.)

Time allotted—remaining private Members’ business time prior to 12 noon.

Speech time limits—
Mr Katter—10 minutes.

8 MR BILLSON: To move:

That this House:

(1) notes:

(a) the incidence of skin cancer in Australia is the highest in the world and is two to three times that seen in Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom; and

(b) that skin cancers account for around 80 per cent of all newly diagnosed cancers in Australia;

(2) supports policies that focus on early detection which will in turn significantly reduce the number of Australian lives lost to skin cancer every year;

(3) notes the importance of training for general practitioners to ensure that family doctors are able to recognise, diagnose and treat the various forms of precursors or early stages of skin cancer; and

(4) acknowledges the work of anti-cancer community organisations, the medical fraternity and the pharmaceutical industry in increasing awareness of skin cancer and risk prevention strategies, promoting the importance of regular skin checks and facilitating affordable access to skin checks and early stage treatments. (Notice given 29 October 2012.)

Time allotted—40 minutes.

Speech time limits—
Mr Billson—10 minutes.
Next Member speaking—10 minutes.
Other Members—5 minutes each.

Orders of the day

1 Protecting Local Jobs (Regulating Enterprise Migration Agreements) Bill 2012 (Mr Bandt): Second reading (from 18 June 2012): Time allotted—20 minutes.
Speech time limits—
   All Members—5 minutes each.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 4 x 5 mins]
The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

Notices
9 Mr NEUMANN: To move:
   That this House:
   (1) recognises that:
      (a) tobacco is still the single most preventable cause of death and disease in Australia;
      (b) there was over 19,000 tobacco related deaths in 2012 in Australia; and
      (c) the social cost of smoking is as high as $31 billion a year in Australia;
   (2) notes that mandatory plain packaging of tobacco took effect in Australia on 1 December 2012; and
   (3) calls on all Members, Senators, candidates and political parties to stop accepting donations from tobacco companies. (Notice given 5 February 2013.)

Time allotted—remaining private Members’ business time prior to 9:30 pm.
Speech time limits—
   Mr Neumann—5 minutes.  
   Other Members—5 minutes each.  

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 6 x 5 mins]
The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

Items for Federation Chamber (approx 11 am to approx 1.30 pm)
PRIVATE MEMBERS’ BUSINESS
Notices
1 MR McCORMACK: To move:
   That this House:
   (1) notes that:
      (a) 2012 marks the centenary of the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area (MIA) with the official 'Turning on the Water' taking place at the Yanco regulator on 13 July 1912;
      (b) the MIA:
         (i) was created to control and divert the flow of local river and creek systems for the purpose of food production; and
         (ii) is, today, one of the most diverse and productive regions in Australia, contributing more than $5 billion annually to the Australian economy; and
      (c) the Riverina towns of Coleambally, Leeton and Yanco, and the city of Griffith were purpose built and designed as part of the project, and are now some of the most thriving, multicultural regional communities in Australia; and
   (2) calls on Members of the House to:
      (a) acknowledge the importance of:
         (i) irrigation in underpinning national and international food security; and
         (ii) our irrigation industry in Australia fulfilling its role as the food bowl of Asia;
      (b) recognise that it is important to build our food-processing industry so that it can supply Asia's growing consumer markets, and develop the research, technologies and logistics that strengthen irrigation, grow higher-yield crops and improve safety; and
      (c) accept that irrigation communities such as those in the MIA are reliant on a Murray-Darling Basin Plan which fulfils a triple-bottom line of social, economic and environmental outcomes; and
   (3) calls on the Prime Minister to implement her commitment to 'strengthen irrigation' as stated in her speech to the Global Foundation Summit in Melbourne on 3 May 2012. (Notice given 11 October 2012.)

Time allotted—40 minutes.
   Mr McCormack—10 minutes.
   Next Member speaking—10 minutes.
   Other Members—5 minutes each.  

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 2 x 10 mins + 4 x 5 mins]
The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.
2 MR BANDT: To move:

That this House acknowledges that the current level of Newstart is too low. (Notice given 5 February 2013.)

Time allotted—30 minutes.

Mr Bandt—5 minutes.

Other Members—5 minutes each.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 6 x 5 mins]

The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

3 MR SIMPKINS: To move:

That this House:

(1) notes that:

(a) the Islamic Republic of Iran will conduct Presidential elections on June 14 (Khordad 24 on the Iranian calendar) of 2013;

(b) within Iran, political activists, journalist, and political opposition leaders are imprisoned, and often tortured, for attempting to express their freedom of speech, political and media freedom, and for attempting to hold their government accountable for its actions; and

(c) Iran continues to refuse international inspectors free and unfettered access to its nuclear program and this raises suspicions that it is seeking to develop nuclear weapons;

(2) recognises that:

(a) the upcoming Iranian elections will see Mahmoud Ahmadinejad replaced as President by another Supreme Leader endorsed candidate;

(b) political prisoners being held in violation of human rights must be released as a first step towards holding free and fair elections;

(c) Iran's potential acquisition of nuclear weapons poses a serious threat to the Middle Eastern region, and especially to Israel, and could lead to nuclear proliferation; and

(d) the Government's decision in sending two senior officials to the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in Iran in August has potentially undermined efforts to isolate the nation, with Iran's Supreme Leader viewing the participation of nations from around the world at the NAM in Iran as affirmation of sanction failure and as a level of endorsement for Iran; and

(3) calls for the:

(a) release of political prisoners in Iran in order to take a step towards the nation conducting legitimate elections, and as an attempt to begin to resolve some of Iran's human rights issues; and

(b) taking of all possible steps to increase sanctions and isolate the regime and pressure it to allow free and unfettered access to International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors. (Notice given 30 October 2012.)

Time allotted—40 minutes.

Mr Simpkins—10 minutes.

Next Member speaking—10 minutes.

Other Members—5 minutes each.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 2 x 10 mins + 4 x 5 mins]

The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

4 MS RISHWORTH: To move:

That this House:

(1) acknowledges the important work done by Mr David Gonski AC in conducting the first review into school funding and school education in almost 40 years;

(2) recognises the transformative power of education and the importance of ensuring that we have a school system that provides all Australian children with a real chance to reach their full potential;

(3) supports the principles emerging from this review which have been incorporated into the Government's National Plan for School Improvement, including the need to deliver:

(a) a fairer school funding system based on the needs of every student in every classroom;

(b) more support for schools and students who need it most;

(c) quality teaching in every classroom;

(d) more power in the hands of school principals; and

(e) more information about school performance for parents and the community; and
 recognise that the National Plan for School Improvement will build on the reforms the Government has already delivered to ensure every Australian school is a great school, including:

(a) the construction of new and upgraded facilities at around 9500 schools;
(b) delivering record funding to support students with disability; and
(c) working with States and Territories to deliver a national curriculum. (Notice given 5 February 2013.)

Time allotted—remaining private Members’ business time prior to approx 1:30 pm.

Ms Rishworth—10 minutes.

Next Member speaking—10 minutes.

Other Members—5 minutes each.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 2 x 10 mins + 4 x 5 mins]

The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

Items for Federation Chamber(approx 6.30 pm to 9 pm)

PRIVATE MEMBERS’ BUSINESS

Notices

5 MR A D H SMITH: To move:

That this House:

(1) condenms the contemptible act of attempted murder committed on 9 October 2012 by Taliban terrorists who boarded a school bus in the Pakistani town of Mingora, sought out 14 year old schoolgirl Malala Yousafzai by name and shot her point blank in the head and neck;
(2) applauds Ms Yousafzai’s advocacy on behalf of gender equality in Pakistan;
(3) expresses particular admiration for Ms Yousafzai’s public speaking debut in September 2008 when, at the tender age of 11 years, she declared in a speech to the media in Peshawar, Pakistan: ‘How dare the Taliban take away my basic right to education’;
(4) notes media reports that the Taliban have openly claimed responsibility for this despicable attack on Ms Yousafzai and have threatened to try again to assassinate her at the first available opportunity; and
(5) wishes Ms Yousafzai a speedy and complete recovery from her injuries. (Notice given 30 October 2012.)

Time allotted—40 minutes.

Mr A D H Smith—10 minutes.

Next Member speaking—10 minutes.

Other Members—5 minutes each.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 2 x 10 mins + 4 x 5 mins]

The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

6 MS O’NEILL: To move:

That this House:

(1) acknowledges the inequity that exists within our communities in the provision of services to people with disability;
(2) notes the high level of community engagement with the Every Australian Counts campaign for the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and the DisabiliTEA events held around the nation;
(3) supports the Government’s focus on improving the standard of living for people with disability and their families through the introduction of a NDIS;
(4) commends the Government for introducing the draft legislation that sets out a framework for the NDIS; and
(5) notes that the first stage rollout will benefit more than 20,000 people with disability, their families and carers in the Hunter in NSW, the Barwon area of Victoria, and South Australia, Tasmania, and the ACT. (Notice given 5 February 2013.)

Time allotted—40 minutes.

Ms O’Neill—5 minutes.

Other Members—5 minutes each.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 8 x 5 mins]

The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

7 MRS PRENTICE: To move:

That this House:

(1) notes that:
(a) Primary Language Disorder (PLD) is a lifelong disability which affects many children in Australia;

(b) families of children with PLD face great uncertainties and vagaries due to the obscure nature of PLD and therefore the difficulty of reaching a diagnosis of their child's disability;

(c) children with PLD have the best chance in life if they receive treatment for their condition as early as possible;

(d) without intervention, there are profound long term implications for affected individuals in terms of gaining an education and employment, leaving them feeling isolated and despondent and at a high risk of developing depressive and anxiety disorders; and

(e) an April 2012 report by the Australian Institute of Criminology highlights the high incidence (50 per cent) of oral language dysfunction in youth offenders;

(2) recognises that:

(a) the CHI.L.D. Association's Glenleighden School is the only school in the southern hemisphere which caters specifically to the needs of children with PLD and other language disorders;

(b) for over 30 years, this school has achieved significant results for thousands of children;

(c) the CHI.L.D. Association:

(i) through both its outreach program and direct clinical services, provides support for children with PLD and their families and schools across Queensland; and

(ii) provides quality specialised early intervention services through its clinic, but is limited to those families who can pay for services as PLD does not fulfil the criteria for funding under the Better Start for Children with Disability Initiative; and

(d) there are currently no consistent eligibility criteria across Australian States and Territories for children with PLD to access specialised educational resources; and

(3) calls on the Government to consider PLD as part of a review of the Better Start for Children with Disability Program. (Notice given 29 October 2012.)
honourable Leader of The Nationals, namely:

The adverse impact of the Government's economic policies on Australia's small business sector.

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

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

Mr TRUSS (Wide Bay—Leader of The Nationals) (15:13): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for choosing wisely on what is the most important agenda item for today. It is particularly relevant today, because we have another new Minister for Small Business. There have been four Labor government small business ministers in just 14 months: Nick Sherry, Mark Arbib, Brendan O'Connor and now Chris Bowen. This is the minister, of course, who was appointed to stop the boats. Unfortunately he was a dismal failure, with record arrivals.

Let us hope for small business's sake that he is not just as unsuccessful when it comes to reviving the fate of Australia's small businesses.

Every one of Labor's small business ministers has presided over a small business sector that has got smaller and less profitable and has employed fewer people. Small business is being crushed by Labor's burden of red tape and regulation, by its restrictive workplace laws, by the Fair Work Act, which is anything but fair to small business employers, and by high taxes and higher costs. They are squeezed on one hand by big business, like the Woolworths, Coles, Bunnings and Harvey Normans of the world, and on the other hand by the internet traders, who have much lower costs and are able to seize more and more of their market share.

The reality is that small business is struggling. Small business is battling right across the nation. As I and my colleagues have travelled around and visited flood and fire ravaged communities, we have spoken to many small businesses who need to rebuild their shop or to clear the mud out so that they can commence trading. Sadly, many of these businesses, these farmers and manufacturers, have said they do not think they have a capacity to recover. It is not that they do not have the skills; it is not that they are not good at their business; it is just that the burden of regulation, the burden of higher taxes, the lack of support from this government and the power of heavy-handed union officials have made it all not worth the trouble. They do not have the will or the enthusiasm to try to get over this crisis, because they know there will be another one ahead just around the corner as long as this government is in office.

Small business is crying out for Labor's high tax and high debt and its regulation monkey to be lifted from their backs. Labor's forgotten families and forgotten small businesses are constantly facing higher costs and higher taxes, and the government does not seem to appreciate that people in small business do not have the capacity to simply pass that on to millions of customers who are waiting at their door. They have to work very hard for their business. They cannot afford to increase their costs because there are competitors, big competitors, and people with lower costs operating from overseas in Australia who can seize market share so that small businesses become less competitive.

Small business is often referred to as the engine room of the Australian economy. Under Labor's mismanagement the engine has stalled. That is one of the factors that is bearing heavily on the enthusiasm and the optimism of Australians as they face the current economic difficulties. In small
business, job losses are mounting and job security is simply a pipedream for many employees as well as their employers. The number of job advertisements has fallen for 11 consecutive months now, 11 months in a row. The ABS retail sales figures out today show that retail sales fell again in December.

As a nation, we have stopped playing to our strengths. We have stopped looking after the engine in our economy. Labor is not prepared to back small business. Instead, they are out with their Greens and so-called Independent mates vilifying these businesses and industries that have made Australia great over a century—our miners, farmers, manufacturers, tourism operators and power generators. Small businesses are being vilified in the name of green dogma, union power and tax binges from this government. Their costs are increasing and the skids are being put under the millions of Australian jobs that they create.

The Australian Industry Group's performance of manufacturing index this month shows manufacturing in decline for the 11th straight month. This government claims it supports manufacturing, yet the industry has been in decline for 11 months in a row. At least 110,000 jobs have been lost in Australian manufacturing since 2008. Manufacturers are paying over the odds for material costs because of the high Australian dollar and they are being told to just eat the extra cost of the carbon tax. It does not matter that they have got to bear a cost that none of their competitors have to face while they are trying to stay afloat against cheaper global competition. The abattoirs are up for $250,000 or $500,000 extra on their freezer bills. There are small communities that depend on these industries. They are often the biggest employer in town, yet they are being faced with more and more tax. What about the people in the hospitality sector—those trying to serve meals out of hours or to keep a coffee shop open on the weekend—and the lack of flexibility in the so-called Fair Work Act? It is quite clear that union domination has been allowed to prevail over common sense. The union bosses would prefer people to have no pay packet at all rather than an affordable wage.

The small businesses that my colleagues and I have visited are simply dismayed and depressed. They do not know where to go. These people have taken great pride in what they do, in what they have built up for themselves, their families and their country. They take pride in their ability to employ people and to make a contribution to their local community. Yet they have been pilloried, persecuted and vilified by this government. The overriding instinct under Labor is not how they can grow and employ more people; it is how they can hit them next. How can we find another tax to impose upon these people? This is an incompetent government that does not want to understand the needs of these people or their lack of capacity to insulate themselves, or their lack of capacity to insulate themselves, from these taxes. That is the antithesis to the business culture that we want and need to cultivate in this country.

The coalition has a plan to help small business to provide more jobs, better jobs and jobs with security. Unfortunately, the Labor Party is so preoccupied with arguing about its own jobs, and particularly the Prime Minister's job, that it is not interested in what is happening to small business and the people who work to keep this economy strong. Our job in government should be to make it easier, not harder, for business to be more productive and to grow and employ more Australians.

Our priorities as a coalition will be to provide a stronger and more prosperous economy that delivers new jobs, higher
wages and better services for families. We have done it before. The Howard government created 2.4 million jobs, oversaw a 21 per cent increase in real wages and saw Australian families almost triple net household wealth. Now, in an era of dwindling job opportunities and high costs and intense insecurity, bizarrely the Prime Minister is telling Australians they do not pay enough tax. After 27 new taxes she is looking around for more ways to make industry and employers in Australia less profitable. This is the highest spending government in Australian history. This year they will receive $70 billion more than in the last budget of the Howard government. They are spending $100 billion more. Their revenue is up. The government keeps talking about decline in revenue. It may not have been as much as they predicted a few months ago, but it is still more than they had last year. Labor's problem is not a revenue problem; it is a spending problem—their complete inability to keep their expenditure under control.

Another myth that Labor likes to perpetuate is that somehow or other interest rates have been lower under its government than under the Howard government. That is simply untrue. The real average interest rates paid by homeowners and small business borrowers were lower under the coalition government than they have been under Labor. According to the Reserve Bank of Australia, average small business overdraft rates were 8.89 per cent under the coalition government, from March 1996 to November 2007, compared with 10.16 per cent under Labor between December 2007 and January 2013. Labor is simply not telling the truth when it says that interest rates are lower. Small business knows what they are paying and they are paying a lot more under Labor than they did under the previous government. Indeed, for a typical small business unsecured overdraft loan of $200,000, the difference between the coalition government and Labor has been $2,540 a year or $212 a month.

In reality this government has been a burden on small business and it has sought to make those burdens even worse. The minister challenged me to name an example of the way the government has imposed additional tax on small business. You need to go no further than the carbon tax. Any small business that has complained about the carbon tax has been vilified by the government and told they can simply pass it on to their consumers. You can simply pass it on and the people will pay. They are all getting compensation. Everybody is better off. The reality is that this is a business burden that Australians are paying and that our competitors are not—$23 per tonne penalty for carbon emissions. That goes up on 1 July and again on 1 July next year. Last week the European carbon price dropped below $3. It is down to $2 in New Zealand, but we are paying $23. Ironically, the EU price jumped up to $6 later on the news that Germany is going to open up a lot more coal fired power stations. The price of carbon went up in Europe because they are going to build more coal fired power stations. What is the logic of what this government is doing? It is simply imposing burdens on this country—the highest carbon price in the world—to make small business in Australia less able to be competitive.

When the Howard government left office the ABS estimated that 5,061,000 people were employed by Australian small business—51.3 per cent of the private sector workforce. By June 2009 the ABS reported small business job losses of more than 300,000 under Labor and a decline in the private sector workforce employed in small business to 48 per cent. The reality is that since this government came to office there
are 14,500 fewer small businesses employing Australians. This government has no interest in the plight of small business and it does not seem to be prepared to do anything to help.

On 13 January this year the current Prime Minister matched her predecessor's record of 935 days in the Lodge. Remember that she said that she had to knife the previous Prime Minister because Labor had lost its way and our country needed new direction. As Prime Minister Kevin Rudd ran up $42 billion in net debt, the current Prime Minister has taken it to $147 billion in net debt. Under the previous Prime Minister electricity went up 34 per cent, under this one an average 41 per cent. Under Kevin Rudd gas prices rose 26 per cent, under this Prime Minister 29 per cent. Kevin Rudd promised to be a fiscal conservative, but he delivered three budget deficits. The current Prime Minister, after promising more than a hundred times that this budget would be balanced, has also now abandoned that promise. She, like Kevin Rudd, will go down in history as never delivering a budget surplus.

This is the kind of government that is burdening Australian small business at the present time. Our plan to create a million new jobs starts with scrapping the carbon tax, which is a major cost on small business. We will cut red-tape burdens on small business by a billion dollars a year and we will create a no-nonsense one-stop shop for environmental approvals. These are the right priorities at the right time for Australia. We will make a difference—(Time expired)

**Mr BOWEN** (McMahon—Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Science and Research and Minister for Small Business) (15:28): I very much welcome this opportunity to debate small business policy in this House. This is my first contribution as minister for small business, and I want to say what a great honour it is to represent small business at the cabinet table. Unfortunately, we just heard the contribution from the Leader of the National Party which was dripping in negativity, in rhetoric. This year was going to be the year of the positive agenda, of the policies being rolled out; 2013 was going to be the year when we saw the alternative government put its plans forward. Day 2 is not going very well so far—more negativity, more rhetoric, not backed up by the facts.

Now the most important thing for small business is a good economy. The most important thing for small business is the economic fundamentals. When an economy goes into recession it is small business which pays the price. If we had followed the advice of those opposite and not stimulated the economy, it would have been small businesses going to the wall. We on this side of the House know that, when there is a downturn, sometimes big businesses can have enough in reserve, can make cuts and they can get through. But small business just does not have that capacity, and when there is a recession it is small business that pays the price, so keeping Australia out of recession meant that small business did not pay that price in Australia—no thanks to the opposition, who opposed the stimulus and whose policies would have seen Australia go into recession.

So we will not be lectured by this opposition when they wanted to see policies put in place that would have seen our country follow the rest of the world into recession. Ask a small business, ‘Would you prefer to be operating in the Australian economy today, or in Europe or the United States?’, and you will get a very clear answer. You will get a clear answer because of the policies this government has put in place. Our economy is growing solidly, with growth around trend at 3.1 per cent, inflation at 2.2 per cent, unemployment at 5.4 per
cent—one of the lowest unemployment rates in the industrialised world. And official interest rates are at three per cent, lower—despite the rhetoric of the Leader of the Nationals—than at any time under the Howard government.

Again, this side of the House understands that small business is usually heavily geared and that interest rates have a huge effect on their capacity to operate. But it is not just about the big picture, as important as the big picture is. The big picture of the strength of the economy is the most important thing for small business, and that is where this government has a very proud record indeed.

But it is also about policies for small businesses. I am delighted to have the opportunity in the House today to contrast those policies—the policies of the government and the policies of the opposition. Let us go first to tax. This government has lifted the tax-free threshold, which means that we have lifted many small businesses out of paying tax—those unincorporated businesses that are below the tax-free threshold. And this government has introduced the loss carry-back, which allows companies which make a profit one year and a loss the next to claim a refund on the tax paid. This is not just something that gives assistance to companies that have made a loss, which is very important; it is something which encourages companies to take risks, to innovate, to improve their productivity. It is something we are very proud of. Of the 110,000 businesses which will benefit from this initiative, most will be small businesses.

And of course we have introduced the instant asset tax write-off, which allows small business to claim a deduction for the full value of each new asset costing up to $6,500 after one year—not only a tax benefit, but a red-tape benefit. The Leader of the Nationals talked about us piling red tape on. This is an initiative which takes red tape away, because instead of depreciating something over a long period of time, it is an instant write-off. I am not sure the opposition understands that: it is an instant write-off, not only reducing the tax burden but reducing the red-tape burden.

Those are some of the positive things the government has done. But the contrast is even greater than that, because this opposition has a policy of scrapping measures that were introduced along with a carbon price and the Minerals Resource Rent Tax—like these measures. This is an opposition that will increase tax on small business by abolishing these measures. This is an opposition that will go to an election with a policy of increasing tax on small business. This is not an opposition that is in any position to lecture the government on the tax burden on small business.

The Leader of the Nationals could have taken the opportunity of using the MPI in this spirit of a positive agenda to explain to the small businesses of Australia why they will abolish the tax breaks that this government has introduced. Perhaps the shadow minister for small business would like to do it in his contribution—explain their policy to Australia's small business people: why will you abolish these tax cuts that have been introduced by this government?

Last year we all saw an extraordinary scene in this House—something I must say I never thought I would see in my time in the House of Representatives. We saw the Liberals and the Nationals walking into this House to vote against a corporate tax cut. And we saw them walk into the other place to vote with the Greens to stop that corporate tax cut! The Leader of the Nationals has the hide to lecture us about the Greens, when he voted with them to stop Australia's business, including incorporated small businesses,
getting a tax cut. The shadow minister for small business is in no position to lecture anybody in this House. Nobody on that side is in a position to lecture us about tax on small business when they have a policy of abolishing our tax breaks and opposing a reduction in the corporate tax rate. Instead, they have the hide to continue with this campaign of fear about the carbon price, which has been shown again and again to be based on falsities.

I do want to talk about some of the other key and positive initiatives that this government has introduced in relation to small business. Some would say some of these are symbolic, but I do not think they are. The fact that we have a cabinet minister representing small business is important. The last time it happened was just before John Howard took the small business portfolio out of cabinet in 2001. This Prime Minister has brought small business back into the cabinet—so, when the big decisions are being made around the cabinet table, there is somebody looking out for small business. I hope the shadow minister for small business has some confidence that he would enter cabinet in an Abbott government. I am not sure that he would, but I hope for his sake that he would—in the unfortunate event of an Abbott government. The first Small Business Commissioner was introduced by the Victorian Labor government in 2003. And this Labor government has introduced a Small Business Commissioner in 2013—an advocate for small business. We see these around the country in different states. My Queensland colleagues would be able to remind the House that we see it in many a state but certainly not in Queensland, where the Newman government abolished the Office of Small Business Commissioner. You dare say that you would be the friends of small business, when a state Liberal National Party government abolishes the advocate for small business in their first year in office.

There are other matters to be discussed in relation to small business. There is one very important one; for me, it is the kicker. It is one of the most positive small business policies that you could think of. It is called the National Broadband Network.

We all know that the Leader of the Opposition had some pretty shocking interviews on the 7.30 Report. There was the one where he said that the only things you can believe are the things he writes down. That was a good one! Then there was the one where he said that he had not read the press release from BHP about a mine closure that he had been talking about all day and he was not sure of his facts. But in the top three is that 7.30 Report interview from the election campaign, where the Leader of the Opposition said that the NBN was all about letting kids download movies more quickly, and therefore it was not a priority. In that one interview he showed that he does not understand the importance of the National Broadband Network for Australia, for our economy and for small business.

The NBN is very popular with small business because they know what the Leader of the Opposition does not: it enables them to grow their markets. You could be a small business anywhere in Australia, in any electorate in Australia, in any town, and you could have all of Australia as your market. Indeed, you could have all of the world as your market.

Mr Fitzgibbon: Macca understands this.

Mr Bowen: The member for Groom understands, but the Leader of the Opposition does not understand how important the NBN is for Australia's small businesses. An Abbott government will see the National Broadband Network stopped stone dead. It is not just me who says this.
There are small businesses around the country who have said how much they benefit from the National Broadband Network. They have said how much they appreciate the benefits brought to them by the NBN. They have said that it reduces their costs, that they have a larger market, that they are able to sell across the country. And they will be very disappointed to see the National Broadband Network stopped on the election of an Abbott government.

Honourable members know about the small businesses in their electorates. Those honourable members who have the NBN coming through their electorates will have had their chambers of commerce saying how great it is. Those honourable members who have to wait a little longer will have had their chambers of commerce saying, 'Please, can we get it quicker.' They will get it not at all under a Liberal government. Again, they have the hide to lecture us!

We have a pattern here, across all these things. It is a pattern of rhetoric about small business. The Liberal Party claim to be the friends of small business but deliver nothing for small business. They take small business for granted. And this is not just my view; it is also the view of the body which represents small business: COSBOA, the Council of Small Business of Australia. They recently put out a publication entitled COSBOA: the year 2012 and what we expect in 2013, and under sections titled '2012—the year that was' there was 'Engagement with the government', which I will come back to, and 'Engagement with the opposition'. In that section they said:

We stated our concern last year that there are still people in the Liberal Party who believe that all small businesses vote for the coalition and therefore there is no need to do anything special for the small business community. We still have that concern … It is time that the whole of the coalition came to recognise that small businesses and independent contractors are in fact a mainstay of the economy and need fairness and transparency in policy and process.

That is not a ringing endorsement. That is the small business community of Australia saying, 'We are being taken for granted by the opposition—by the alternative government.' It is the peak body of small business saying, 'We have had enough of the lip service. We have had enough of the rhetoric. We have had enough of the small talk. We want to see some action and some policies, and they have none.' And they are very concerned and they will continue to say it.

This is what they said about the government:

We have been in regular contact with the Small Business Minister … and his advisers and expect this to continue … This level of interest and dialogue is welcomed and is recognition from the government that we count as citizens of Australia. There is a bit of a different tone when they are talking about the government's approach, because COSBOA, as the peak body representing small business in Australia, has recognised the concrete measures taken by the government to help small business. We do not just talk about it. We do not just pay them lip service. We do not insult them with cheap rhetoric. We do not mislead people about vilification, as the Leader of the Nationals did at the dispatch box a few moments ago—and he could not back it up with one single fact. He could not back it up with one single example. He was strong on rhetoric as always, as is the entire opposition when it is about small business. He is happy to pay them lip service and happy to insult them but not happy to give them concrete policies.

As long as I am the Minister for Small Business serving in the cabinet and as long as the Labor Party is in office we will talk about small business. We will talk about
their importance to the economy. We will talk about them being the engine room of growth, but we will do something more than that: we will back it up with policies. We will back it up with support. We will back it up with action. We will do something for small business in this country—something the Liberal Party has not done and, under this Leader of the Opposition, continues not to do.

Mr BILLSON (Dunkley) (15:44): There must be an air of despair across small businesses in Australia. There you heard the new minister. He is the minister for tertiary education, skills, science, research and—quick, we had better bolt it on—small business. In his first address to the parliament he is saying that everything is just peachy. He is saying, 'All is peachy in the big picture, and isn't that great for small business?' And he followed that by wind and bluster—an empty vacuous contribution saying that all this government can offer is more of the same.

Minister, you might have been in the job for five minutes and your average in the last four jobs might have been a little over three months, but let me share something with you: the last thing small businesses in Australia want is more of the same. They are tired of being taken for granted. They are disillusioned by your disinterest. It is the way this Labor government talks down to the men and women who mortgage their houses and show great courage to create opportunities for themselves, for their workforce and for the communities they are a part of, and the way this government talks only to big business and big unions, in the big government way that we just heard from this new small business minister, that is causing the disillusionment. This is why there is an air of despair among small businesses—and all this new minister can say is that there will be more of the same.

That was exactly what they said at the last election.

I remember debating the then Minister for Small Business, five small business ministers ago. I remember debating him in Kevin Rudd’s electorate in Brisbane. All he could say to the assembled audience was, ‘We don’t have a new small business policy, just more of the same.’ They took no policy to the last election, were condemned by the small business community for being so disinterested in their concerns and they were treated accordingly by the Australian small business community in the way they voted at that election. Have they learnt anything from that? Absolutely not—they seem to have learnt nothing. They want to continue to demoralise the sector which, when it looks to Canberra, would like to see an ally, an advocate.

Small business hoped that at least the government might be ambivalent and not cause harm to small business, but decisions like the carbon tax have been designed to cruel small business, to punish them. They get none of the support, none of the hush money, none of the carve-outs, but they are told by this Gillard Labor government to suck it up or pass it on to their consumers, when small business know that life is not like that in the real world.

We have seen no new ideas from this government. This seems to be the pattern they will continue to follow. The small business community were hoping that the fifth small business minister in five years might show some interest in their concerns and their interests, but sadly we have seen just more of the same. In fact, the only contribution to small business success that this Gillard government has achieved is for the printing industry, as they repeatedly reprint business cards for small business ministers—four in the last 14 months! It is a
printing-led recovery. I hope a small business actually gets some of that stationery and letterhead work, because that is all Labor have done. The only consistent record we have seen from this government about small business is that they are making it smaller.

Contrast that with the positive plan that the coalition has, a plan of real solutions. Not only is small business front and centre in the thinking of the coalition but also it is the centrefold. The centrefold of Our Plan: Real Solutions for all Australians shows example after example, commitment after commitment, measure and reform after measure and reform about what we need to do to get business back into small business, to restore hope, reward and opportunity. Contrast that with what we have just heard—more of the same. 'Everything's peachy. The Gillard government's got it all sorted and aren't we good to small business.' The minister quotes one person who may have been duchesssed by an invitation to the Prime Minister's XI and they reach for that like a life raft when, everywhere else you look, every other informed, considered, rigorous commentary and assessment of the fate of small business paints a very different picture.

Let us look at it. Small business is having a tough run of it now and the government does not seem to recognise that, nor does it care. Small business confidence, business conditions, cash flow, profitability, employment: they are all in negative territory, if you look at the latest National Australia Bank quarterly small business survey. Ask CPA Australia. Small business confidence in Australia is significantly less than it is in Indonesia, in New Zealand and in Malaysia. In fact, a recent survey revealed that only six per cent of small businesses in Australia think the Gillard government is doing a decent job, so 94 per cent do not think they are doing a decent job. You can see why. Small business has been burdened with the weight of the carbon tax.

In terms of the small business contribution to employment, when the Howard government left office more than half, 51.3 per cent, of the private sector workforce was employed in small business. There were more than five million people earning a livelihood out of small business—those courageous small business men and women who create opportunities for themselves and for others. What is the record today? The Leader of the National Party presented the figures up to June 2009, but I can go further. The most recent survey shows that there are 4.8 million people employed in small business, substantially less than the more than five million who were employed when the Howard government left office, and that is after five and a bit years of this government. They boast about trend growth, they boast about population growth and they boast about the size of the economy. In that context, not only in percentage terms but in nominal terms, small business employment has decreased. Today it is 45.7 per cent of the private sector workforce. There are over 10,000 fewer employing small businesses and you see this at a time when there is seven per cent growth in the population and 19 per cent growth in GDP, yet small business continues to contract. We see record levels of insolvency, a falling off the cliff in the number of small business start-ups, and the government wants to pat themselves on their backs for their performance. With red tape there are more than 200 new or amended regulations for every one that has been repealed.

The cost of small business finance is increasing. The Labor government does not want to turn itself to the fact that the average standard variable small business loan rate under the coalition was 8.89 per cent. It is now 10.16 per cent—with the margin on top
of the cash rate that real people had to pay. No-one pays the cash rate for their finance. In terms of the spread, the real rate that they are paying above the cash rate has doubled. Where is the reward for those men and women who mortgage their houses to secure their finances? Do you see improved availability of finance? No. Do you see improved affordability? No—it has actually gone the other way.

On Labor's watch the whole banking sector has seen a further gravitation to the big banks, and non-bank and second-tier lenders, a crucial area from which small business gets its finance, have shrunk in the economy. That is why we have committed to conduct an inquiry into the competitiveness and stability of the financial services sector. There have been four ministers in this rotation and a tax office war on independent contractors; 5,800 small businesses targeted by the ATO have simply paid default tax assessments because they could not challenge or fight or afford to correct the ATO's mistakes. That is not our line; that is the inspector-general's assessment. And now there is another $390 million in a campaign where the ATO is going to go after small business.

In the MYEFO, where the government had its last look at the economy, the only mention of growth in small business and positive initiatives was what was happening in China. Instead, there was nearly $400 million allocated to go after small business in another tax office press which will give small business the burden of trying to paper over the holes in this government's woeful budget.

This is a time when small business needs to be celebrated. It needs to be respected. It needs to be recognised and acknowledged, as it was in the Leader of the Opposition's National Press Club address where he said, 'Thank you'. This was a clear recognition of the men and women of small business who take risks to create opportunities in this country. Contrast that with the Prime Minister: there was no mention whatsoever of small business in her speech. Believe me, that was recognised and acknowledged.

So where are we now? We have got Labor's recent couple of copycat, watered down policy announcements. Labor have lifted policy commitments made by the coalition, hashed their implementation and now want to pat themselves on the back for what they have done. That is what we have got. We can contrast that with the clear plan that the coalition has outlined: cut the carbon tax to give small business a chance to compete; cut the red tape; improve paid parental leave to put small employers on equal footing with the big behemoth employers and with the public sector; streamline the way in which superannuation contributions are handled; extend unfair contract protections to small business transactions; have an ombudsman with real teeth, not this shingle they have dangled around of a small business commissioner—let me correct the minister: it was in 1999 when the first Small Business Commissioner was appointed to the ACCC, and that was by Minister Reith and not as he sought to characterise it—a fair treatment of independent contractors to end this attack on self-employment that is going on under this government; a cabinet level minister; representation on key regulatory and economic bodies; a long overdue review of the competition laws, which has not been done for 22 years ago since Professor Hilmer did it. It is nothing of interest to the Labor government. They have got nothing to offer. Small businesses know the coalition is there for them. (Time expired)

Mr FITZGIBBON (Hunter—Chief Government Whip) (15:54): I congratulate
the member for Dunkley on one thing: that was the fastest speech I have ever seen delivered in this place. And why wouldn't it be? As the shadow minister for small business and as a person who is never, or very rarely, allocated a question in this place on small business matters, the member for Dunkley just assumed he would have a 15-minute speech this afternoon. He assumed that he would be leading the debate in this place on a very, very specific matter of public importance on small business. But, alas—and I feel for the member for Dunkley—this debate was led by the Leader of the Nationals. That is some sort of oxymoron or contradiction in terms—the Leader of the National Party leading a debate on an MPI.

I was intrigued that the member for Dunkley spent so much time—and he used a prop, so I hope you will excuse me for using one briefly—talking about this document: 'Our plan: real solutions for all Australians'. Maybe the reason the Leader of the National Party was given a guernsey is because his photo is on the front of that document. The member for Dunkley is missing. The opposition understood that with no member for Dunkley, the shadow minister for small business, on the front cover that they had better lead with the Leader of the National Party.

The member made a big deal about this document. This is my second prop. I will be very quick. Here is the plan: this one pager here. I will just go through it quite quickly. 'Helping small business'—there is a bit of a blurb about the importance of small business. We all agree. If there is one thing that both parties in this place seem to agree on, it is the important role that small business plays in this country. So say all of us. There is no argument there.

Then they talk about lowering taxes for small business. How are they going to do it? They are going abolish the carbon tax—surprise, surprise! They do talk about corporate tax, but there is no information and no detail about how this is going take place, be done or be funded. Remember that we have reductions in taxation, including for those in small business, linked to the carbon tax and the mining tax. Of course, they are going to get rid of all of those. It is the magic pudding again! Then they are going to reduce red tape for small business by a billion dollars. Can you imagine how the member for Dunkley or the shadow Treasurer in their offices calculated that on the computer or on the calculator, working out how they were going to reduce small business red tape and green tape by a billion dollars. I invite the opposition to allow their next speaker in this debate to explain how that has been calculated and exactly which regulation is going to be removed.

They have a crack at the tax office. That is sport for all of us, of course. The tax office were never hard on small business when they were in government—of course not! That never happened! I was the shadow Assistant Treasurer in this place and watched day by day as then Assistant Treasurers—both Mal Brough and now shadow minister Peter Dutton—walked in here correcting, day after day, tax bills they had amended and had to re-amend because of the adverse impact on small business and business more generally.

Then they are going to double the annual rate of small business growth. Sorry? They are going to double the rate of small business growth? So there are going to be four million small businesses by the end of the Abbott government's first term? I can only assume that is what that means.

They are going to review competition law. They had 11½ years in government to review
competition law and did nothing. They will do nothing if they have another opportunity in the future. Of course, there is the old chestnut—extending unfair contract protection to small business. IR is always a big feature, but what they do not do, again, is give any detail, because we know it is back to Work Choices. They will go back to Work Choices.

Mr Billson: It is not even IR, you genius!

Mr Fitzgibbon: It is IR related, Member for Dunkley, and you know what it is about. Of course, contract protections for small business is okay between small and large businesses. That is the manifesto that the member for Dunkley spent so much time focusing on.

In many ways, the more things change the more they stay the same. The conservative political party in this country spend a lot of time talking about small business outside of this place but very little time talking about it inside this place. They take it for granted. They think it is their natural constituency, but they should understand that many small businesses in this country—many that I speak to—know that their real allegiance is to the big businesses of this country. That is where they get their campaign funds and that is why, when I look at unfair contracts, competition policy and other matters, I have a bit of a laugh. They have never lifted a finger in this place through the Trade Practices Act to improve the standing and the competitiveness of small businesses against larger businesses.

I have been saying in this place for 17 years that there are only three critical things a government needs to do for small business. First, it needs to grow the economy, which this government is doing miraculously in the face of the biggest global economic downturn since the Great Depression. Second, it needs to keep the price of money, the price of borrowing, low; keep interest rates low. Interest rates in this country are at a historical low. The member for Dunkley talked about spreads, but he knows that is a matter completely outside the control of this government or any other government but rather is affected by global economic circumstances and the necessity of the banks in this country to borrow more funds onshore. The third important thing is to simply get out of the way. What hurts small business more than anything else is overregulation, and this government has a very good track record of getting out of the way of the small business community.

I spent many years in this place as the small business shadow minister, and I spent many years in this place as shadow Assistant Treasurer—a portfolio which causes one to spend a lot of time on small business issues. It is not just about the three things I mentioned; it is not just about the things we need to do and not do. It is about the things that at first blush do not appear to be related to small business—things like the National Broadband Network, which is particularly welcomed by people like me who represent rural and regional Australia because it gives small businesses in the region a competitiveness they could never have dreamed of in the absence of such technology. Of course, that is another initiative of this government that those on the other side seem determined to get rid of.

We have elevated, in the real sense, small business to the cabinet level and I am very pleased that we have a new small business minister who, like those before him, does understand small business. Minister Bowen is from Sydney's west, and that is the heartland of small business in this country. You find many traders and home marketers and people working in IT who are self-employed. Small business people and business people generally are the real
creators of wealth in this country. We are committed to ensuring they remain the real creators of wealth. From this government you will not just get the sort of rhetoric we heard from the Leader of the Nationals and the member for Dunkley and that we saw in the glossy one-pager the member for Dunkley waved around today; you will get real policy initiatives and real action—the type of action that is good for small business, which will continue to grow small businesses and will give small business the opportunity to flourish and employ Australians.

It was a little unfair for the member for Dunkley to claim that small businesses are employing fewer people. We have had a mining boom, and small businesses have found it difficult to retain staff. People are taking the opportunity to earn higher incomes in the mining and associated sectors. What is the Labor Party doing? It is attempting to spread the benefits of the boom, to level the playing field and give small businesses an opportunity to compete. Perhaps they cannot compete on the wages front, but we are investing in things that do level the playing field. Infrastructure is generally part of that. It is apparent that the member for Dunkley does not understand that. I am sure the Leader of the Nationals does not understand it, and we know, having heard them so many times, that the conservative forces in this place are long on rhetoric and very light on detail. (Time expired)

**Ms GAMBARO** (Brisbane) (16:04): I am absolutely bemused by the contribution of the member for Hunter, but I have to say one thing: he knows more about small business than some of his colleagues. His speech made it all sound so simple—grow the economy, keep interest rates low, get out of the way of small business. We have a small business shadow minister who has been working consistently over the last couple of years, travelling around the countryside. I do need to correct the member for Hunter—it is a two-page document, not a one-page document. No wonder they do not understand the numbers!

I am pleased to speak on this matter of public importance about small businesses. I have had the wonderful privilege of representing small businesses in my electorate, and I have been a small business owner-operator. There are a few such small business people on the other side of the chamber, but not too many. It is worth reminding the House how important small business is to the Australian economy. Small- to medium-sized enterprises, employing fewer than 200 people, comprise around 99 per cent of all businesses in Australia. They also employ around 65 per cent of the workforce, or about 2.8 million people. Small business is the largest employer in Australia—something that those opposite do not recognise enough.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics there are just over two million small businesses in Australia with fewer than 20 employees. Of these, 1.3 million, or 64 per cent, are non-employing firms that comprise only the owner-manager. In terms of economic contribution, Australia’s small businesses contribute around 20 per cent of GDP and 34 per cent of the value added within our private sector. Around 40 per cent are actively engaged in some form of innovation. Unlike many of our larger firms, 97 per cent of our SMEs are wholly Australian owned, and only 15 per cent have sought assistance from the government. Yet 35 per cent have reported a decrease in their profitability in recent years. In my electorate of Brisbane we have over 30,000 small businesses made up of a range of sectors including retail trade, manufacturing and accommodation.
Small business in my electorate and around the nation is really doing it tough at the moment. Unfortunately, much of the pain being felt by small business owners at the moment is due to the current policies of the Gillard government. Of course, the biggest cost pressure, the mother of all cost pressures, that has been lumped onto small business is the carbon tax. This is the tax that is adding to the cost of electricity every single moment of every single day for every single small business in Brisbane, in Queensland and all across Australia.

It is not just electricity. We have seen the cost of refrigerant gases increase by up to 300 per cent. I was at a small supermarket the other day in Ascot which will have to pay triple the amount for their coolant if there is a breakdown. This is the same story that I hear when I go around and visit businesses that rely on refrigeration and have refrigerated products. Standard economic principles dictate that the increased cost to small business will be passed on to consumers in the form of increased prices. Then we have the mining tax—

An opposition member: Is there any compensation?

Ms GAMBARO: Of course there is no compensation.

An opposition member: You are joking.

Ms GAMBARO: There is no compensation whatsoever for small business. The mining tax is the tax that does not raise any money, but there is a sweetener. It has an adverse impact on business and investor confidence. Can you explain how this works,—and I do have our shadow minister here—how you can collect a mining tax that will raise no tax but will hurt business and investment confidence? It is not just the Liberal Party and the coalition saying this. The Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Queensland recently released its pulse survey of business conditions for the December quarter of 2012. The report states:

Queensland businesses are also conscious that the state and national economies are significantly influenced by international stability and its implications for resources demand and the value of the Australian dollar. Rightly or wrongly, the Queensland business community believe that the mining tax is currently affecting forward investment strategies across the resources sector. Equally Queensland businesses have expressed frustration over increasing business operating costs, in particular, the impact on supply costs and prices from the Carbon Tax.

There is not a day in Queensland when mining companies are not letting staff go, and it is going to get worse. One of the survey respondents from Brisbane stated:

The government has displayed greed and desperation on taxing state and federal mining companies. All this has done has halted exploration growth and development of new mining ventures. Seems crazy when the mining sector is propping the rest of the economy up.

I will move onto the issue of regulation. Big business can afford to employ administrative staff to deal with pages and pages of regulations that exist in legislation, however, small businesses cannot. Since this government came to power it has introduced over 20,000 new regulations, so it was quite interesting to listen to the member for Hunter saying, 'Just get out of the way.' It has only repealed 100. We will have a one-stop shop environmental approval process. I was very privileged to see the deregulation taskforce when they came to my electorate and talked to a number of businesses. They have been travelling around the countryside. This action is despite the Rudd government committing to a one-in one-out policy when it came to power in 2007.

I want to refer to a business in my electorate called Quality Foods. This business sells food products to tuckshops in schools across Brisbane and throughout
Queensland. The business is being forced to pass on ever-increasing costs to its customers. This is resulting in schools and parents paying more for tuckshop goods. These are the practical effects of increasing costs on small business and consumers suffer. Quality Foods is lucky that they have some capacity to pass on those costs to the suffering consumers, but not every business has that option. Some businesses end up scaling back operations or closing down, causing jobs to be lost and families to be devastated.

We have the Fair Work Act which should be renamed the ‘Bible of red tape’ because the amount of regulation it imposes on small business is absolutely phenomenal. Recently a little cafe in my electorate close to my office closed down because the owners could not handle the burden of the red tape. They could not handle the increasing burdens—

An opposition member: And the green tape.

Ms GAMBARO: and the green tape— and all the other bits of tape being put on them, including their ability to stay open on the weekend. They just did not have the capacity to employ staff. So we have seen a valuable little business down the road—a wonderful little coffee and gift shop—close down.

We saw this morning ABS retail trade data for December record a seasonally adjusted 0.2 per cent fall in retail sales, the third successive monthly decline. This follows a 0.2 per cent fall in November and a 0.1 per cent fall in October. The trend data, which smooths the monthly volatility, shows that there was no growth in retail spending for the last five months of 2012. This is very concerning data. My electorate contains many retail hubs including the Queen Street Mall and the CBD. The retail sector accounts for tens of thousands of jobs around this nation. In places like Fortitude Valley, New Farm and along James Street there are a number of retail stores, cafes, coffee shops and restaurants. This is what is happening around the country: they have to bear the burden of unfair regulation—they and thousands of businesses around Australia.

I now want to turn to a local issue in my electorate that is causing much angst and inconvenience for local businesses. Australia Post has yet again decided that it is going to close another post office, this time at Albion. This is being repeated all over Australia. When we talk about increasing costs to small businesses, many small businesses around Australia will have to travel further to conduct their Australia Post business, adding, again, another impost. This government, because they are bereft of money, is closing Australia Post offices all over Australia and adding to the cost of staff being away, driving further distances and adding to their overall cost of running their small business.

I will continue to fight in this place for small business. We do have a number of plans. We have a range of plans for small business and a range of policies that will be released in the lead-up to the election. We have a very active shadow minister for small business who is working very hard to ensure that small businesses in this country have a fair go. The coalition will cut $1 billion in red tape out of the economy as part of our plan to double the rate of small business growth and to create one million new jobs over five years. We will continue to fight for small business. We will continue to make sure that they are not penalised at every turn by this Gillard government which seeks to impose unfair regulation and red tape at every single turn. (Time expired)

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (16:14): It was interesting listening to the member for
Brisbane talking about small business because—

*Mr Ewen Jones interjecting—*

**Ms BRODTMANN:** Pardon?

*Mr Ewen Jones interjecting—*

**Ms BRODTMANN:** It is interesting, particularly when a lot of the speech focused on a range of things other than small business. I thought we were here today to talk about small business.

**Ms Gambaro:** You're kidding me, aren't you? My speech was about small business.

**Ms BRODTMANN:** We are talking about small business, Member for Brisbane. Like you, I too had a small business before I entered parliament. It was one of the highlights of my life. I had 10 years of a very successful business. I know the joys of having a small business. I also know the trials and tribulations of having a small business. I know the risks involved in running a small business but also the real pleasure that you get out of having a small business, the flexibility it provides, the financial security it provides—the challenges, I admit, but also the great sense of achievement that you get from having a small business.

So it was interesting, given that the member for Brisbane actually has experience of her own small business, that a lot of her speech was focused on the carbon tax, or the carbon price, as I prefer to call it—the carbon price I thought had been put to bed, given that the sky had not fallen in, given that Whyalla is still there, given that people are getting up in the morning in Whyalla, working during the day, having a nice time on the weekends and going to bed at night. Whyalla is still there, humming along, and the sky has not fallen in. I was a bit disappointed that, given that the member for Brisbane was talking about a very significant issue—that is, small business and the support that we are providing for small business—she had to focus on the hoary chestnut of the carbon price.

I was just going through this one-page document—it is one A4 page, if you look at it this way—on what those opposite plan to do to help small business create stronger jobs growth. Apart from the wonderful photos that are in here and a lovely little dinkus here of 'costed, fully budgeted', I thought it was interesting just going through each point, because most of this is happening under a Labor government. There is a point here that says that small businesses already employ half of the workforce in Australia, and yet one of the objectives here is to achieve an annual growth rate in the numbers of small business—essentially, to achieve what we have already achieved—in terms of making half the workforce part of the private sector. Here it is: 'We want small business providing more than half the jobs in the private sector.' But, in the first paragraph, they have actually said that that is already happening.

What is also interesting about this document is the fact that those opposite want to cut red tape and they want to cut green tape. A large part of my time here in parliament has been spent speaking on regulations that are being streamlined or consolidated in the business sector. I gladly get up and speak on that type of legislation because I understand the burden that overregulation and overlegislation put on running a small business, particularly a microbusiness. So, when I look at these objectives, I just think: 'Well, that is already happening, so that box is ticked. "Half the Australian workforce" is ticked.'

Then I notice that here there is an objective of achieving an annual growth rate in the numbers of small businesses of 1.5 per cent—that is new businesses starting up, I
am assuming. I read a report that last year found that Australia's new business growth is actually among the best in the world. Australia recorded the third highest number of new ventures among the world's G8 economies. Apparently, during 2009-10, Australia's performance saw a 14.7 per cent increase in start-ups, despite many countries around the world struggling with the impact of the GFC. So that box is ticked.

So I am just going through all of this and wondering: what is actually new in this little one-page document, what has not been achieved by Labor or is not being worked on by Labor? I think we can take it for what it is: a little, nicely laid out A4 document. But that is about the bulk of it.

Labor have done extraordinary work in supporting small business since we came to power. Most importantly, we saved this country from the global financial crisis. Anyone in this room who has travelled overseas in the last five or six years would understand what the impact of not surviving the GFC actually means, not just for individuals, not just for families, not just for communities but, most importantly, for micro and small businesses.

I was in the States last year, going around talking to people and to small businesses about the impact that the GFC had on them. It was miraculous that these businesses had survived. There they were. They were doing it incredibly tough. Most of them had sales, with 70 to 80 per cent of their goods on sale at sale prices. The business on one side of them had been closed down. The business on the other side had been closed down. What really disturbed me the most and drove home how wonderful and successful Labor has been in saving Australia from the GFC was the fact that there were new businesses. Young people, mainly women, were trying to set up new businesses; they had just got their foot in the door with businesses, and then they had no business because of the GFC and they had to close it down. They had made all that investment in setting up a small business. They had stuck their neck out. They had taken risks. They had done what every entrepreneur and everyone with an enterprising spirit should do. They had tried to set up those small businesses, but because of the global financial crisis it all ended in tears and debt, and it also affected their entrepreneurial spirit and their spirit of innovation.

This is something that those opposite just do not understand, and I find it absolutely extraordinary. If they went overseas, if they bothered to look beyond their own backyard to see what is actually happening throughout the world, particularly the impact on small businesses, they would understand what fantastic work Labor has been doing in this country not just in terms of saving us from the GFC but also in terms of low unemployment and low interest rates—the fact that families with a $300,000 mortgage are now paying $5,000 less a year on their mortgage. This is incredibly positive for the economy. This is incredibly positive for small business. That $5,000 is going either into savings or back into the economy—into buying a new washing machine, buying a new refrigerator or buying new shoes for school. I find it absolutely gobsmacking that those opposite can be so blinkered in terms of not accepting how monumental it is that we have survived the GFC—and not just that we have survived it but that we are in such good shape.

The other thing that we have been doing, as well as saving this country from the GFC, is investing in skills. We know that there has been a significant underinvestment in skills, and so we have put the effort into investing in skills, particularly in apprenticeships and trades. Those opposite neglected this for the
whole time they were in government and, as a result of that, we are facing a skills shortage of monumental proportions. It is absolutely outrageous that when we came to power there were so few apprentices and there was so little investment in trades. Thanks to us, there are significant investments here—$1.56 billion over four years—to skill up our workforce. In addition, we have invested in our Australian Apprenticeships Incentives Program, which provides $483 million in support for small and medium enterprises to encourage employers to employ and train an apprentice or a trainee. This is vitally important to keeping this nation skilled; it is vitally important to ensuring that we have the trades to build this country for the future—the trades to build the roads and the bridges and all the other infrastructure for the future. This is vitally important.

Those opposite made the underinvestment over the years. Do not talk to us about how valuable small business is to you when you underinvested in skills and you underinvested in education. You also underinvested in infrastructure. Such investment now has provided thousands and thousands of construction jobs around this country. Do not talk to us about the importance of small business to you, particularly when you deny the value of this country surviving the GFC and the impact and benefit of that for small business.

Mr TUDGE (Aston) (16:24): I start my remarks today with congratulations to the Labor Party on at least being able to get two out of the three of their members who have a small business background to speak on this matter which concerns small business! So congratulations to the Labor Party, because it must have been exceptionally difficult for them to find such members. It would not have been difficult to find any former union officials, because they could have taken almost anybody to talk about union issues and union corruption, possibly, if they had wanted to. However, it must have been difficult for them to find at least two out of the three who have a small business background. So congratulations to them there! Unfortunately, the minister himself does not have such a background—but you cannot have everything!

This MPI is an important one because in some respects small business is at the heart of our economy. We often discuss in this chamber matters concerning the broader economy and larger businesses, but it is actually small businesses which are the engines of our employment. They are frequently the engines of entrepreneurship and also often the mechanism for people to be able to live their aspirations or to live out their dreams of creating something from scratch, to have a go and to make something of it.

When small businesses are doing well, we as a nation do well. We saw that under the Howard government, when over half the workforce were from the small business sector—in fact, 51.3 per cent. We saw that 36,000 new small businesses each year were starting up—26,000 each and every year under the Howard government. People were being rewarded through lower taxes for having a go and being successful. There were incentives, too, under the Howard government, such as the low-income tax offset for small microbusinesses to be able to get ahead.

Today, unfortunately, small businesses are not doing as well. Certainly, all of us on this side—and I would hope on the other side of the chamber—would know purely from speaking to small business owners in our electorates that they are doing it tough. We can see it in the shopping strips, where there are now, for the first time in a long time,
places which are empty and which have a 'for lease' sign on the front. We have not seen that for a long time.

When you look at the statistics, they also bear out what we hear anecdotally from speaking to small businesses on the ground. There are now, for example, 14,500 fewer employing small businesses than there were at the end of the Howard government. Small business bankruptcies went up by an incredible 48 per cent in the last 12 months alone. Small business start-ups—and this is also an amazing figure—fell by 95 per cent in the last 12 months alone. Bankruptcies are up by 48 per cent and start-ups have fallen by 95 per cent. It tells me that small businesses are doing it exceptionally tough at the moment. There are many factors that go into whether a small business is successful or not, but government policy settings are critical.

My problem, and the coalition's critique of this Rudd-Gillard government, is that the government has made it so much harder for small businesses to start up and to flourish. I would like to go through two, three or four issues which have made it so much harder for small businesses. Of course the carbon tax is the most obvious one—the one which we have been debating for close to two years now. It puts up electricity costs for every small business across the country by at least 10 per cent and, in many cases, by 15 or 20 per cent. The member for Canberra said that that is a thing of the past: 'Do not worry about the carbon tax; Whyalla is still on the map, so do not worry about it.' Well, I can tell you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and I can inform the government members: the carbon tax is real and it is still hurting, particularly those small business sectors that have high energy bills. That includes the manufacturing sector, which is so reliant on cheap energy. The member for Brisbane mentioned earlier in this debate that refrigerant gases have gone up 300 per cent. That is what they have to deal with. That was the first issue. And I should point out that the carbon tax is $23 per tonne at the moment, but it does not stop there. Incredibly—and members of the gallery may not know this—it goes up, or is forecast to go up, to $350 per tonne by 2050. So the carbon tax is forecast to be 15 times higher than what it is today. It goes up each and every year under this arrangement the government has put in place.

The second example of the government making it considerably harder for small business is the scrapping of the entrepreneurs tax offset. That affected 400,000 microbusinesses. Here I am talking about businesses earning $75,000 or less—they have faced a 25 per cent increase in their tax bill. This is for the microbusinesses—often mum and dad owners who are just starting up and getting going, who maybe have their business running out of their own home and who are earning less than $75,000. You would not believe it, but the Labor government, who day in, day out say they are looking after the small income person, have in this regard put up taxes by 25 per cent by scrapping the entrepreneurs tax offset.

The third issue I mention is the Fair Work Act. I have coffee shop owners in my electorate—and I am sure there are restaurateurs and coffee shop owners in every electorate across the country—who are saying now that they are no longer opening their doors on Sundays or, if they are, that they are going to do the work themselves rather than taking a day off, because they cannot afford to pay for their staff—it is just not profitable to do so. They are saying it is now more burdensome to employ people. This is another difficulty for small business they have added—a disincentive to employ people. This is another reason why it is becoming so much more difficult.
The final point I mention, among a list that I could mention in today's debate, is in relation to regulations. The member for Hunter said the government should get out of the way of small business. We concur with the sentiments the member for Hunter put forward earlier in this debate. But look at what Labor have done. They promised that, if they put one regulation in, they would take one regulation away. But do you know what they have done? For every one regulation they have taken a way, they have actually added 200 regulations. They have added 20,000 regulations overall and they have removed 100. That is their record and it cuts across all of the activities of small business. Small business owners say to me, as they would say to every member of parliament, 'We are just getting bogged down with this red tape.' It is one thing on top of another on top of another and it is really starting to affect them.

This occurs, as I said at the outset, in part because there are so few people on the Labor benches who actually have experience in small business. You just have to look at the Labor small business ministers. Two out of the last four were former union leaders. They were Mark Arbib—a very well known faceless man who was the union leader, small business person—and the most recent one, Brendan O'Connor, who was also a union leader. Thankfully, Chris Bowen was not a union leader as far as I am aware, although he did come straight from the party machine and does not have any small business experience. Craig Emerson, to his credit, was not a union leader and I do believe he had some small business background as well, but he got the axe very early on.

Ms O'Dwyer: He was an academic.

Mr TUDGE: That's right, he was an academic. If the government does need some instructions about what to do to help small business then I point them toward the coalition's 10-point plan, where we have outlined 10 simple points that would really help small businesses thrive and accelerate. I ask them to look at those points, examine them closely and implement them, because the course they are on is doing immense damage to the small business sector.

**MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS**

**International Day of Zero Tolerance to Female Genital Mutilation**

Ms PLIBERSEK (Sydney—Minister for Health) (16:35): by leave—Today marks the United Nations sponsored International Day of Zero Tolerance to Female Genital Mutilation. Today, Australia joins with the international community to raise awareness about FGM. We also restate our commitment to protect the health, dignity and rights of girls and women and end the practice of FGM in Australia and overseas. The United Nations estimates that FGM affects around 140 million women worldwide. The UN Population Fund estimates that a further three million girls, the majority under 15 years of age, are at risk each year of having FGM performed. In December, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a landmark resolution banning female genital mutilation. One hundred and ninety-four member states, including Australia, have committed to intensifying global efforts to end FGM.

As a young woman I read the autobiography of Nawal El Saadawi, an Egyptian feminist writer, activist, physician and psychiatrist, now in her eighties. At the age of six, in 1937, Nawal El Saadawi was pinned down by four women in her home in Egypt. A midwife, holding a sharpened razor blade, pulled out her clitoris and cut it off. Of this event El Saadawi has said:
Since I was a child that deep wound left in my body has never healed.

Reading her words then affected me greatly, and remembering them now makes me determined that no girl in Australia should ever experience FGM, and that we must play our role too in helping other nations abandon FGM.

FGM is common in a number of countries in Western, Eastern and North-Eastern Africa, some countries in Asia and the Middle East. The number of new arrivals to Australia from countries with a high prevalence of FGM has increased in recent decades. The good news is that change is possible: the UN Population Fund estimates that some 8,000 communities across the world have abandoned the practice of FGM.

There is no clear evidence of the number of migrant women in Australia who have experienced FGM in their country of birth. Building this evidence will be critical to government work in this area. What we do know is that there are tens of thousands of women living in Australia who were born in countries where FGM is practised and many thousands who will need specialised obstetric and gynaecological care now and in the future.

There is also no clear evidence about the extent of FGM practised in Australia—however, the Australia government's position on this is clear. FGM is illegal. On 11 December 2012 the Prime Minister and I jointly announced the Australian government's strongest possible commitment to do all we can to stop this practice being performed in Australia. It has no place in Australia, it is a violation of the human rights of girls and women, it is a crime and it will not be excused by culture.

On this day of zero tolerance, and in line with our commitment, it is important for the uncomfortable truth to be told. We know that FGM is deeply entrenched in gender inequality. The prevalence of FGM in affected communities is reflected in the status of women in social, economic and political life. That is why our efforts to improve outcomes for women and girls through support for the Millennium Development Goals are so important.

FGM involves partial or total removal of the external female genitalia. It may involve removal of the clitoris, the total or partial excision of the labia, or the stitching or narrowing of the vaginal opening. The procedure, obviously, has no health benefit for girls and women. All forms of FGM have immediate harm and serious longer term health implications—pain, infection, urinary retention, chronic pain, sexual dysfunction, psychological trauma and, very significantly, complications in childbirth. The greater the extent of FGM the more common and severe the complications. Women who have undergone FGM are significantly more likely to have deliveries complicated by caesarean section, post-partum haemorrhage and episiotomy or which require resuscitation of the newborn child. There is also a higher incidence of perinatal death.

We know this because organisations like the World Health Organization are working in communities with a high prevalence of FGM. The World Health Organization is collaborating with researchers like Professor Emily Banks—whom I see here today—an Australian epidemiologist and NHMRC senior research fellow, to build evidence and drive home the messages about harm in communities where FGM is prevalent. The United Nations resolution also calls on countries to pay special attention to supporting women and girls who have been subjected to FGM and those at risk, including refugee women and women migrants.
There is much work that is already underway in Australia. States and territories, non-government organisations, community leaders and health services are already working to end FGM and support those who are already affected. For example, there are women like Juliana Nkrumah, recognised in the Australia Day honours for her significant service to the welfare of women and refugees. Juliana has been a trailblazer in raising awareness about female genital mutilation. She has worked in affected communities to bring about change from within. And there are people like Dr Adele Murdolo and her team at the Multicultural Centre for Women's Health for whom the fight against FGM is both professional and deeply personal.

Late last year I had the privilege of visiting the Royal Women's Hospital in Victoria to meet with Marie Jones, who is coordinating a deinfibulation clinic for women affected by FGM. The clinic has a team of Family and Reproductive Rights Education Program workers who support women considering surgical reversal of FGM. These surgical procedures are available to women free, through publicly funded hospital services.

Family Planning Victoria have also been working to improve health care for women and girls affected by FGM, and have developed care plans and advice for health professionals that have led to significant improvements in service delivery.

In Family Planning New South Wales clinics, women from African, Asian and Middle Eastern countries who have experienced FGM have access to services from healthcare providers providing specialised care in a safe and sympathetic environment. Some New South Wales hospitals have done a marvellous job adapting to the needs of the women they serve.

In Tasmania, the Red Cross is successfully operating an FGM education program.

In WA, the Women's Wellness and FGM clinic is providing important services from the King Edward hospital in Perth.

Family Planning Queensland and the Multicultural Women's Health project are mobilising Queensland community leaders and employing health educators to work within communities. Unfortunately, despite increased demand on services, their funding has remained static for the last five years.

Since 1996 the South Australian Refugee Women's Health and Safety program has been working with affected communities, health professionals, child protection workers, police and education authorities in an effort to address FGM.

I would like to acknowledge the important role of the professional colleges in supporting health professionals to assist women affected by FGM. I have held discussions with several colleges in recent months about redoubling our efforts to end FGM and support women who have had the procedure. The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, the College of Nursing, the College of Midwives and the Royal Australasian College of Physicians are absolutely committed on this issue. They bring to this issue enormous professional expertise and experience.

An enforceable legal framework is absolutely critical in combating FGM. While laws concerning FGM are primarily a matter for states and territories, the federal Attorney-General is working with states and territories to identify opportunities to strengthen Australia's legal framework in relation to the practice. All states and
territories have enacted legislation making it a criminal offence to perform FGM on any person or to remove a child for the purpose of performing FGM. The maximum penalties for these offences range from seven years imprisonment to 21 years imprisonment.

But we know that there are limits to the capacity of our legal system to bring about change where cultural practices are deeply embedded in communities. Cultural and attitudinal change comes about through a far wider range of mechanisms and approaches. I am leading Australian government efforts on this front and working closely with other Commonwealth ministers, state and territory governments, non-government organisations, communities and individuals. Our efforts are focused on supporting communities to abandon the practice of FGM, while also preventing new cases, enforcing a legal framework consistent with zero tolerance and ensuring there is appropriate support available to women and girls who are affected by FGM.

In the near future the government will announce $500,000 in grants available to organisations for education and awareness activities. This will support change within communities, as we know public education and awareness are key to change.

Today I can also announce that the national summit on female genital mutilation foreshadowed by the Prime Minister in December will be held on 9 April 2013. The summit will bring together a range of health, community and legal experts to discuss ways to assist communities to abandon FGM both here and abroad.

I was speaking to Ajay Rane, a physician who is very experienced in this area. He said, and I think we all believe, that we owe it to every girl and every woman to ensure that they never experience FGM. To those who have, we owe them a responsibility to ensure that they receive appropriate care when they need it.

I ask leave of the House to move a motion to enable the member for Dickson to speak for 10 minutes.

Leave granted.

Ms PLIBERSEK: I move:

That so much of the standing and sessional orders be suspended as would prevent the member for Dickson speaking in reply to the minister's statement for a period not exceeding 10 minutes.

Question agreed to.

Mr DUTTON (Dickson) (16:45): On behalf of the coalition, I am pleased to support the minister's remarks and her announcements today and to respond on this important issue. This practice devastates the lives of millions of young girls. The health consequences are severe and the psychological trauma will burden these girls for life. It causes increased rates of infant mortality, infection and severe sexual and reproductive health complications. One hundred and forty million women worldwide are estimated to have endured this brutal practice and three million are at risk of the procedure this year alone.

The World Health Organization advises that this grotesque practice is mostly carried out on young girls sometime between infancy and age 15. In Africa, an estimated 101 million girls 10 years old and above have endured the practice. That it is evident in this country is of particular and grave concern to all Australians, with the UN reporting that a 'growing number of women and girls among immigrant communities have been subjected to or are at risk of female genital mutilation in Australia and New Zealand, as well as in countries in Europe and North America'. It must be clear that this is not an acceptable cultural practice
and that it is illegal in every jurisdiction in this country.

I would also like to acknowledge the work of individuals, including Professor Banks and all her colleagues. Thank you so much for the work you do. I acknowledge non-government organisations, health services, health professionals and relevant colleges for the work provided to girls and women affected and the great strides that have been made to generate greater awareness on this incredibly important issue. Undoubtedly, many women suffer in silence. The work of those that provide much needed support, health interventions and mental health services must be invaluable at a personal level to these women, who have suffered so much.

Reassuringly, as the minister highlighted, progress is being made, with thousands of communities across the world abandoning the practice according to the United Nations. The International Day of Zero Tolerance to Female Genital Mutilation is an important opportunity to bring attention to the devastating effect of this practice and to renew our efforts to support its elimination. The coalition today recommits to this fight.

BILLS

**International Tax Agreements Amendment Bill 2012**

Report from Federation Chamber

Bill returned from Federation Chamber without amendment; certified copy of the bill presented.

Ordered that this bill be considered immediately.

Bill agreed to.

Third Reading

**Ms MACKLIN** (Jagajaga—Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Minister for Disability Reform) (16:48): by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

**Financial Framework Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 4) 2012**

Report from Federation Chamber

Bill returned from Federation Chamber without amendment, appropriation message having been reported; certified copy of the bill presented.

Ordered that this bill be considered immediately.

Bill agreed to.

Third Reading

**Ms MACKLIN** (Jagajaga—Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Minister for Disability Reform) (16:49): by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

**Protection of Cultural Objects on Loan Bill 2012**

Report from Federation Chamber

Bill returned from Federation Chamber without amendment; certified copy of the bill presented.

Ordered that this bill be considered immediately.

Bill agreed to.

Third Reading

**Ms MACKLIN** (Jagajaga—Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Minister for Disability Reform) (16:50): by leave—I move:

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

Federal Circuit Court of Australia (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2012

Report from Federation Chamber

Bill returned from Federation Chamber with amendments; certified copy of the bill and schedule of amendments presented.
Ordered that this bill be considered immediately.

Federation Chamber's amendments—
(1) Schedule 1, page 23 (before line 18), before item 111, insert:

110A Subsection 100.1(1) of the Criminal Code (paragraph (c) of the definition of issuing court)
Omit "Federal Magistrates Court", substitute "Federal Circuit Court of Australia".
(2) Schedule 1, page 23, after proposed item 110A, insert:

110B Paragraph 105.2(1)(c) of the Criminal Code
Repeal the paragraph.
(3) Schedule 1, page 23, after proposed item 110B, insert:

110C Subsection 105.11(1) of the Criminal Code (note)
Omit "Federal Magistrates, ".
(4) Schedule 1, page 23, after proposed item 110C, insert:

110D Section 105.12 of the Criminal Code (heading)
Repeal the heading, substitute:

105.12 Judge, AAT member or retired judge may make continued preventative detention order

110E Subsection 105.12(1) of the Criminal Code (note)
Omit "Federal Magistrates, ".
(5) Schedule 1, page 23, after proposed item 110E, insert:

110F Subsection 105.18(2) of the Criminal Code
Omit ", a Federal Magistrate".
110G Subsection 105.18(2) of the Criminal Code
Omit ", Federal Magistrate".
(6) Schedule 1, page 23, after proposed item 110G, insert:

110H Subsections 105.43(4), (5) and (7) of the Criminal Code
Omit "Federal Magistrate" (wherever occurring), substitute "Judge of the Federal Circuit Court of Australia".
(7) Schedule 1, page 23, after proposed item 110H, insert:

110J Section 105.46 of the Criminal Code (heading)
Repeal the heading, substitute:

105.46 Nature of functions of Federal Circuit Court Judge

110K Section 105.46 of the Criminal Code
Omit "Federal Magistrate" (wherever occurring), substitute "Judge of the Federal Circuit Court of Australia".

110L Subsection 105.46(3) of the Criminal Code
Omit "Federal Magistrates Court", substitute "Federal Circuit Court of Australia".
(8) Schedule 1, page 23, after proposed item 110L, insert:

110M At the end of Division 106 of the Criminal Code
Add:

106.4 Saving—Federal Magistrates
(1) An appointment that is in force immediately before the commencement of this section under subsection 105.2(1) in respect of a Federal Magistrate continues in force, after that commencement, as an appointment in respect of a Judge of the Federal Circuit Court of Australia under that subsection.
(2) A consent that is in force immediately before the commencement of this section under subsection 105.2(2) in respect of a Federal Magistrate continues in force, after that
commencement, as a consent in respect of a Judge of the Federal Circuit Court of Australia.

(3) A thing done by, or in relation to, a Federal Magistrate, as an issuing authority for continued preventative detention orders, under Division 105 before the commencement of this section has effect, after that commencement, as if it had been done by, or in relation to, a Judge of the Federal Circuit Court of Australia, as an issuing authority for continued preventative detention orders, under that Division.

(9) Schedule 4, item 3, page 99 (line 20), after "108," insert "110M, ".

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr S Georganas) (16:51): The question is that the amendments be agreed to.

Question agreed to.

Bill, as amended, agreed to.

Third Reading

Ms MACKLIN (Jagajaga—Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Minister for Disability Reform) (16:52): by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

Customs Amendment (Miscellaneous Measures) Bill 2012

Second Reading

Debate resumed on the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr CLARE (Blaxland—Minister for Home Affairs, Minister for Justice and Cabinet Secretary) (16:52): This bill contains amendments that makes it an offence to bring a new class of goods, known as restricted goods, into Australia without a permit. Restricted goods will include child pornography and child abuse material. This bill gives Customs and Border Protection officers the power to seize restricted goods and prosecute the owner. This will include restricted goods in the personal effects of a ship's crew. Currently, these goods are considered to be in transit and may be secured by Customs and Border Protection before being returned to the owner on departure from Australia. These changes mean strengthening our action against these goods coming into Australia. The offence in this measure carries a maximum penalty of 1,000 penalty units, which is similar to the penalties for the unlawful importation or exportation of goods. The size of the penalty reflects the seriousness of the offence and is approximately half of the pecuniary penalty for intentionally importing child pornography, child abuse material or other Tier 2 goods.

The bill also contains a number of measures designed to clarify the intention of certain provisions making them easier to understand and providing certainty for industry. For example, the bill makes minor changes to ensure Customs and Border Protection is able to set up permanent and temporary customs controlled areas in the maritime and air environments when dealing with aircraft and ships carrying only crew and when processing cruise ships. This provision will give Customs and Border Protection flexibility and improve efficiency with customs, crew and operators. The bill makes a number of minor technical corrections, including amending valuation provisions to ensure consistency with the World Trade Organization's Customs Valuation Agreement. It also repeals a number of redundant provisions. I would like to thank industry and industry members who have provided comments on the bill during a period of consultation last year and I thank the speakers on this bill, and I commend it to the House.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.
Third Reading

Mr CLARE (Blaxland—Minister for Home Affairs, Minister for Justice and Cabinet Secretary) (16:55): by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Amendment (Compliance Measures) Bill 2012

Second Reading

Debate resumed on the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

(Quorum formed)

Mr IAN MACFARLANE (Groom) (16:59): I apologise for the inconvenience to my colleagues but I am not the fastest over 100 metres. I never was when I played football and that is why I played in the front row. The Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Amendment (Compliance Measures) Bill 2012 amends the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2006 to strengthen the offshore petroleum regulatory regime with respect to compliance, safety, integrity and environmental management objectives.

The amendments are largely in response to the report of the Montara Commission of Inquiry. As I have said previously in this House on a number of occasions, it is important that the oil and gas industry in Australia operates not only within its permits and licences but also within its social licence. This legislation is important in ensuring not only that we have the regulatory regime which provides the safety and integrity and environmental management that we need but also that we have regulations in place to ensure that the public have confidence in this industry. The Montara incident was an extraordinary incident. The industry had operated for almost 30 years without incident in Australia.

Public concern on this matter was increased by what happened in America in the Gulf of Mexico with a major blowout of the BP oil platform. So the coalition will support the government in its move to bring in easy amendments. They will clarify and strengthen the compliance monitoring, investigation and enforcement powers of the National Offshore Petroleum Safety Environmental Management Authority, NOPSEMA, and ensure that enforcement measures for contraventions of the act are appropriate in application and severity in the context of a high-hazard industry.

The Montara Commission of Inquiry recommended a series of amendments to the offshore petroleum regulatory regime. The government undertook a review of the legislation and this bill is the result of that. The amendments will see the introduction of a civil penalty regime and an increase in the current criminal penalty levels under the act. This will bring about some consistency with compliance offences in other major hazard industry legislation. These amendments ensure that penalties, including custodial penalties, for occupational health and safety offences under the act will be harmonised with the Work Health and Safety Act 2011.

Redrafting the NOPSEMA inspectorate powers will provide greater clarity and consistency between the various powers of each category of inspector and remove unnecessary procedural requirements that are likely to impede NOPSEMA's ability to effectively perform its enforcement functions. The bill also implements a decision to remove the responsible state minister for Tasmania—and I hasten to point
out that that is partly at the request of that state's jurisdiction.

This bill does not complete the process and the minister has already signalled his intention to introduce further amendments later in 2013. As I say, the coalition will support these amendments. The proposals are sensible and necessary to improve a regulatory regime that was seen to be plainly inadequate in its present form. We must ensure that this industry is able to operate not only effectively and efficiently but also with the highest degree of safety and integrity—and at the same time ensure that environmental protections are in place. It is an industry which provides a great deal of wealth to Australia and an industry which provides a great deal of employment to Australia. We must ensure that the public have confidence in it.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON (Batman—Minister for Resources and Energy and Minister for Tourism) (17:03): I thank the member for Groom for his constructive contribution on behalf of the opposition. In doing so, I indicate that the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Amendment (Compliance Measures) Bill 2012 is non-controversial. But it is an important bill. It amends the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2006 to strengthen the offshore petroleum regulatory regime, continuing the Australian government's work to implement the lessons learned following the uncontrolled release of hydrocarbons from the Montara wellhead platform in August 2009.

Recent incidents such as the tragic accident on the Stena Clyde rig in the Otway Basin located in the Bass Strait, which resulted unfortunately in the deaths of two employees during drilling operations in August last year, further emphasise the need for a strong and effective regulatory framework to promote and encourage best practice and continuous improvement in the offshore petroleum industry. The member for Groom also therefore appropriately noted that we may also be back in the foreseeable future with further amendments. It would be my desire to work with him to ensure that we seek to have them considered and passed by the current parliament prior to the September 14 election.

The amendments in this bill also help to achieve this goal by strengthening and clarifying the compliance monitoring, investigation and enforcement powers of the national offshore petroleum regulator and ensuring that enforcement measures for contraventions of the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act are appropriate in the context of a high-hazard industry.

The bill also includes important measures to enable the parties responsible for administration of the act to share regulatory information in appropriate circumstances. I remain committed, as does the member for Groom, to the continuing improvement of the offshore petroleum regulatory regime and, in line with this commitment, I also have, as I have indicated, a number of further measures currently under consideration which are being developed for progression in 2013. These include consideration of a range of further alternative compliance and enforcement tools to strengthen the ability of the regulator to enforce critical safety and environmental management requirements to help protect the Australian offshore workforce and marine environment and the introduction of the polluter pays principle into the offshore petroleum and greenhouse gas storage amendment. I commend the bill to the House.

Question agreed to.
Third Reading

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON (Batman—Minister for Resources and Energy and Minister for Tourism) (17:06): by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Recognition Bill 2012

Second Reading

Debate resumed on the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr ANDREWS (Menzies) (17:07): The coalition welcomes the introduction of this bill in the House today and notes that it represents an important step toward, rather than a substitute for, constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The introduction of the bill follows from the Leader of the Opposition's proposal that both leaders—that is, the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition—make statements to the House of Representatives affirming support for recognition in the Constitution and the commitment of both political parties to progress the matter in the next Commonwealth parliament. The government also established a parliamentary joint select committee, on the recommendation of the opposition.

In December 2010, the government announced the formation of an Expert Panel on Constitutional Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to consult throughout 2011 and deliver a report on possible options for constitutional change likely to be supported at a referendum of the Australian people.

The panel is co-chaired by Professor Patrick Dodson and Mr Mark Leibler AC, and the coalition thanks members of the panel for their work in advancing this very significant and important matter. In January 2012, the expert panel delivered a unanimous report which recommended a package of constitutional amendments it considered were capable of succeeding at a referendum. The intention of this bill now before the House is to provide a mechanism for continuing the work of that expert panel.

The preamble to this bill affirms the parliament's commitment to building the national consensus needed for the recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in our constitution and placing before the Australian people at a referendum a proposal for constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The preamble also acknowledges the good work done by the expert panel but recognises that more consultation and consensus is required for a referendum to be successful. It is important to note that this preamble does not represent a proposal for a new preamble to the Australian Constitution.

The bill provides for an act of recognition by the parliament, on behalf of the Australian people, acknowledging the unique and special place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the first inhabitants of Australia. It is chiefly a response to the expert panel and largely reflects the preambular elements of recommendation 3 arising from their report.

The intention of the bill is to build awareness and support in the wider community, as well as maintaining momentum towards a national consensus for successful constitutional change. The bill provides for a review to consider and advise a future parliament on proposals to submit to a referendum, based on the work already done by the expert panel. This review
requirement sets out a process for progressing constitutional recognition into the future.

The bill also includes a sunset provision which limits the effect of the act to two years. This provision is intended to ensure legislative recognition does not become entrenched at the expense of continued progress. The bill will not establish any new rights or duties and will not restrict the scope of future issues for debate in regards to constitutional recognition.

The coalition has a long and proud history advocating for constitutional recognition of Indigenous Australians. A coalition government was responsible for the historic 1967 referendum which gave constitutional recognition to Australia’s Indigenous peoples and removed racially discriminatory provisions from the Constitution. In the 1998 election campaign, then Prime Minister John Howard spoke in favour of a constitutional amendment that recognised the prior occupation of Australia by Indigenous people and their place in the Australian community as well as their right to preserve their distinctive identity.

A commitment to hold a referendum to achieve this was made at the 2007 election, which Labor did not match until 2010. It has been the coalition that has consistently maintained a commitment to this cause. There is now bipartisan in-principle support for constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The coalition has consistently reassured the government and the community of our support for the recognition of Australia’s Indigenous people in the Constitution and we want to ensure that it occurs in the correct way at a time when it has the best chance of being successful.

While the coalition would like to see genuine and bipartisan progress on the constitutional recognition of Indigenous Australians, little progress has been made to build the necessary community consensus given we are now less than twelve months from the next election. It is appropriate that a referendum to consider this issue is delayed until there is wide, long-lasting and bipartisan community support for constitutional recognition.

In order for any proposal for constitutional recognition to succeed, it must be able to secure bipartisan support right across this vast land. The government must recognise that an overly ambitious proposal—especially one that forms a basis for open-ended compensation applications, creates a perception of privilege or leads to legislative uncertainty—is likely to fail and set this cause back by many years.

The coalition has continually emphasised the importance of all interested parties being realistic and modest in their ambitions. In that respect, I refer in particular to the wise words of the interim report, which says at paragraph 2.39:

The committee believes that the Bill, together with the establishment of the committee itself, provides the Parliament with the political architecture necessary to build and maintain momentum toward constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The committee also notes that there are a number of processes underway to build this momentum; not all of these processes are set out in the Bill, nor is it necessarily practical or desirable to do so. Nevertheless, the committee does not underestimate the difficulty of securing the passage of appropriate amendments to the Constitution recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Only 8 out of 44 proposals to amend the Constitution have succeeded; it is 36 years since the last successful referendum. Controversial proposals are invariably foredoomed to failure. For that reason, the committee cautions that if the proposal is the victim of over-reach it will fail. While the committee does not seek to limit the scope of
public discussion, it nevertheless considers that only a relatively modest proposal is capable of engendering the bipartisan consensus which is a prerequisite to success.

We believe those are wise words of counsel and we commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned.

Reference to Federation Chamber

Mr RIPOLL (Oxley—Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer) (17:16): by leave—I move:

That the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Recognition Bill 2012 be referred to the Federation Chamber for further consideration.

Question agreed to.

Low Aromatic Fuel Bill 2012

Second Reading

Mr BANDT (Melbourne) (17:16): I present the explanatory memorandum to this bill and I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

It is my great pleasure today to introduce the Low Aromatic Fuel Bill 2012 on behalf of my party, the Greens, particularly because of all the other important issues relating to the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal people which were on the agenda earlier today.

Closing the Gap is an important initiative. It is fitting that this bill be introduced to the lower house today because this bill will contribute directly to efforts to close the gap by giving government the powers to help communities remove the final hurdles that are preventing them from eradicating petrol sniffing.

Petrol sniffing has devastating effects on individuals, families and communities. Over the long term, petrol sniffing can kill. It damages internal organs, the brain and the nervous system. Petrol sniffing does not just damage the health of the individual; it can lead to family breakdowns, domestic violence, community breakdown, increased violence and vandalism. However, the reason we need this legislation is not that the other antisniffing programs have failed but that they have been so successful and we are very close to breaking the petrol-sniffing cycle in many remote communities in Central Australia. According to the Central Australian Youth Link-Up Service:

The rollout of low-aromatic Opal Fuel has been an unprecedented Indigenous health success. Across all sites the use of the fuel has been associated with an average 70% reduction in prevalence of sniffing and in Central Australia where the rollout has been more comprehensive this reduction is thought to be 94%.

Programs like Mount Theo, which removed young people from the source of petrol by sending them to detox on country and supported that detox with connection to culture and community, have been wildly successful, but those who started those programs acknowledge that it was incredibly hard work. There is a cycle around petrol-sniffing outbreaks. They start as something one or two kids do but then it becomes a culture, drawing in more kids and ultimately impacting a whole community, causing lasting damage to the wellbeing of those communities.

The development of Opal fuel has offered a way for communities to limit access to the very source of sniffing, and to circumvent the physical and social trauma of sniffing. The development of Opal fuel has been important to shifting how communities approach petrol sniffing, but Opal itself is merely one of the tools in a broader strategy that addresses the underlying causes of petrol sniffing and includes community management plans, youth services; effective and culturally sensitive policing, treatment and rehab services, and information services. But low aromatic fuel is a key part of breaking the cycle.
One of the most important features of the rollout of the anti-petrol-sniffing strategy has been that it has allowed the community greater control over whichever substances are available in their communities. It has required consistent political commitment that ensured that Opal is available, and the continued evolution of the voluntary rollout strategy is a testament to the work my colleague Rachel Siewert has undertaken over the past seven years to ensure that this issue has a place on the national political agenda. Petrol sniffing has always been a significant issue to which she has dedicated her time since she entered federal politics. As a result, we have seen slow but consistent improvements.

If you looked at interviews with people 15 years ago, you would see that then there was little hope that it would be possible to break the cycle of sniffing in Central Australia. Greens in parliament have provided the ongoing pressure both to put the aspirations of Aboriginal communities on the agenda and to ensure that the policy response has been comprehensive and ongoing. The broadly successful voluntary strategy has seen fuel providers in the designated ‘antisniffing’ zone sign on to supply Opal in response to community pressure for change. But there are still pockets of resistance and, as a result, this progress has stalled for some communities. In fact it has been stalled since 2009 for three or four communities; so long as one or two petrol station owners hold out against stocking Opal fuel, sniffing will continue to be difficult to completely prevent.

The 2009 committee inquiry, which the Greens initiated, recommended that the antisniffing strategy could be strengthened by giving the minister the powers that are contained within this bill to mandate the use of Opal fuel in certain areas. This would give the government the power to ensure that the aspirations and the sheer hard work of communities are backed up by a process that ultimately prevents a selfish few from consistently undermining the efforts of the community as a whole. It is clear to the Greens that there are still those selfish few, and so this bill will give the minister the power to ensure that Opal fuel is mandatory in those places where the community has taken significant steps to address sniffing and has turned to the government to support their efforts.

It is most regrettable that the government, almost three years after the Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee’s report on Opal and six years after their first investigation into this issue, have not moved to fix this problem, despite the hugely damaging impact of petrol sniffing on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities, the unreasonable intransigence of a few suppliers and the fact it is well within the power of government to quickly address this issue.

I had the opportunity this morning to meet with some Aboriginal people from Tjitjikala, who are once again here in parliament to seek support for their goal of eradicating petrol sniffing. This legislation is also important to Closing the Gap because it originated not in a department or a minister’s office but from serious and sustained efforts by Aboriginal people to take ownership of the solutions and to develop locally controlled and culturally appropriate solutions. The people from Tjitjikala made it crystal clear this morning that you really do need to be able to designate whole areas as sniffable-fuel free and Opal-fuel only, because otherwise community driven solutions will not work. They told me in particular that not less than one kilometre from their community, where you can only buy Opal fuel, you are able to buy regular fuel. As a result, people from that
community or people from other communities will go to the neighbouring community, buy the fuel and then travel a kilometre down the road into their own community and start sniffing. The result, as they were explaining to me, is that someone who is sniffing petrol and walking down the main street becomes a walking advertisement and attraction. As a result, the efforts that they had taken themselves in their own community were being thwarted because someone a kilometre or so away was not prepared to assist them.

This legislation would address that problem by giving the minister the power to designate whole areas as Opal fuel areas only. These are people who have made it clear to me that petrol sniffing continues to hurt their community and that, after many years of working on strategies to resolve these issues, they expect the government to take that final step and do everything in its power to fulfil its promise to back their own considerable efforts to eradicate sniffing.

The Greens have taken that step, and I am pleased that the government has supported it. The Greens bill is aimed at preventing petrol sniffing in communities by making it an offence to supply sniffable petrol in designated areas. This bill will give the minister the power to declare areas where it will be an offence to supply non-sniffable fuel. This will mean that there is some power to tackle the recalcitrant petrol stations who, even after sustained consultation with the affected communities, refuse to stock non-sniffable fuel. This bill gives the minister the power to act on calls from specific communities that are being devastated by sniffing.

The bill contains significant requirements for consultation with affected communities as well as suppliers and state and territory governments. However, it ultimately gives the minister the power to act when all other efforts have been made. This is the support that the communities who have almost resolved petrol sniffing have asked for. With Greens in parliament, we are able to deliver the final piece of the puzzle which will empower communities to continue to work together with government on programs that give communities control over petrol sniffing.

This bill is also an example of a strong consultative process. Throughout the committee process and development of the amendments there has been consultation with stakeholders in the Northern Territory. We feel confident that they are supportive of this legislation. I know that some of those people are watching this debate and I want to acknowledge their work to get us to this very significant point.

Initiatives to close the gap require a collaboration between government and community. They require the government to supply Aboriginal people with the tools they ask for to achieve the outcomes they aspire to rather than imposing solutions upon them. This bill is a way to recognise the work being done out there in the communities to eradicate sniffing and to ensure that the work is finished. It cements our goal of giving support to communities over corporations. It is our way to show communities that their efforts to end the cycle of sniffing and the harm that sniffing causes will be reinforced. I commend the bill to the House.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr S Georganas): Is the motion seconded?

Ms O'NEILL: I second the motion and reserve my right to speak.

Mr ANDREWS (Menzies) (17:27): The Low Aromatic Fuel Bill 2012 seeks to mandate the use of low-aromatic Opal fuel in some areas to prevent petrol sniffing in Aboriginal communities. The bill seeks to
reduce the potential harm to the health of people living in Aboriginal communities from the social and health problems that come from the sniffing of petrol. The protection of the most vulnerable members of our society is a fundamental responsibility of any government. This is especially true where children in remote Aboriginal communities are severely affected by the scourge of petrol sniffing. Whenever there is a threat to children, government must be ready to intercede and to respond to those threats by stepping in, ready and willing to protect the most vulnerable and at risk in our society.

Petrol sniffing is a serious problem. When people inhale the fumes from fuel they may feel relaxed and euphoric, experiencing hallucinations, disorientation and aggression towards those around them. While the immediate effects may last a matter of hours, the long-term repercussions are much more severe. Significant damage is done to a person's vital organs—the brain, the heart, the lungs, the liver and the kidneys—and immune system. It leads to behavioural and social problems. Many who sniff fuel, unfortunately, end up on the wrong side of the law, committing acts of vandalism, violence, robbery and rape. In fact, there are no good outcomes from the sniffing of fuel.

The problem is not just limited to those people sniffing the fuel. Mothers who sniff fuel while pregnant often have children with birth defects that cause physical and intellectual disabilities. Children who have parents who sniff fuel often lead lives full of misery as their parents cannot provide financially or psychologically for their development. Children who sniff fuel will also face increased risks as their bodies develop.

The coalition believes that something has to be done to help these people, especially the children in these remote Aboriginal communities. The evidence is there. Research has shown that where Opal fuel has been introduced it has been effective in reducing the sniffing by 70 per cent on average, and, where there are no retailers selling regular unleaded petrol in an area, this has increased to an average reduction of 94 per cent.

Most Central Australian fuel retailers in areas prone to sniffing already sell Opal fuel, although there are certain retailers who have refused to stock it. Government must act in order to ensure that the considerable social cost of petrol sniffing is eradicated. But the coalition does not believe that the federal government should do this, where states and territories can be more effective in tackling the problem. The Northern Territory's Volatile Substance Abuse Prevention Act 2005, subject to a minor amendment, could be used to better tackle the problem of petrol sniffing. Under the Northern Territory act, a group of ten or more residents in a locality or community council could seek to prevent supply of a particular substance, including but not limited to petrol, in their locality. The Northern Territory Department of Health and Families would then lead a process that would consider contributions of interested parties and then develop a management plan through which it would be able to specify restrictions on supply and use of unleaded petrol, or other substances that are subject to abuse, at a particular locality.

If we were to see state and territory based legislation that was based on the Northern Territory's Volatile Substance Abuse Prevention Act 2005, we would have a more targeted, flexible and legally robust approach to the sniffing of fuel. We would also empower local communities to take action when they experience a problem, instead of having federal legislation being forced upon them from Canberra. Even the Community
Affairs Legislation Committee recommended the bill not proceed, making the following recommendations: the legislation should not rely on the corporations power; the legislation should have defined fuel differently; the ongoing coordination efforts with state and territory governments should continue in order to prevent supply issues with Opal fuel; and Opal production and distribution subsidies should be reviewed.

The Community Affairs Legislation Committee recommended that it would be best to leave the regulation of the sale of regular unleaded petrol to state and territory governments, but this advice seems to have fallen on deaf ears within the government. Time and again we have found ourselves in this situation with the current government. In the years since 2007, after the change in government, residents in the Northern Territory have been faced with many challenges in finding solutions to problems faced by their communities. The tumultuous shift in the direction of the intervention has had a detrimental effect on Territorians, particularly Indigenous Australians. Labor decided to smash the coalition's commitment to doing what was right and what was needed in the Northern Territory: that is to say, the emergency response.

The ideologically motivated pursuit demonstrated by the Labor Party in its various incarnations, firstly with the Rudd government and now the Gillard government, through its opposition to the Northern Territory intervention, caused widespread collateral damage and unwound the good work of the former coalition government. Labor is opposed to promoting measures that will actually help the people concerned.

What we have seen with this bill is a government that does not know where it is going. The government actually opposed this bill up until late last year. At first the minister described these measures as 'a legal minefield,' and questioned how they would be more effective than state and territory based measures to address the sniffing of fuel. The minister even went so far as to say: … the most effective way of dealing with petrol sniffing is working with communities from the ground up.

Unless the minister has somehow managed to redefine what he means by this, the bill will be a more top-down approach to the issue.

The coalition strongly agrees with the need to stop petrol sniffing. This is why the introduction of the Opal fuel initiative and the petrol sniffing strategy was initiated by the coalition, in 2005. Unlike the current government, the coalition included other measures to include communities in Central Australia by creating youth diversion programs as well as rehabilitation, policing, communication and education strategies. It is as a direct result of this initiative that Opal fuel is now available at 106 sites across Australia. The coalition believes this particular bill will be ineffective in addressing the issue surrounding the sniffing of fuel. It will create more problems while failing to address the social harm that communities in Central Australia face on a daily basis.

When the Greens first proposed this bill it was based on the Commonwealth's corporations power. This would have meant that any unincorporated entity would not be subject to the legislation. So what does the government do? They amend the legislation to make it more crude, ineffective and unworkable and to enhance the minister's claim of it being a legal minefield. Labor saw that this bill is fundamentally flawed and made a crude attempt to patch it up by striking out references to corporations and
replacing them with the term 'individuals'. In doing so they have given up the only constitutional head of power for the bill. Suddenly they were left with no constitutional basis to implement the legislation. So they had to dig hard and deep to find a means to this ineffective end. They invoked the race power to make this bill a special measure under section 8 of the Racial Discrimination Act.

So, Labor suddenly decided it supports this bill. It initially opposed it, strongly opposed it, and now—suddenly—supports it. And no doubt the deal has been done and the Greens are back in charge. The Greens are calling the shots—the caucus that is now clearly leaking and plotting against the Prime Minister. She has reverted to a standard operating procedure. It is all too hard to govern, so defer decision making to the Greens. The question that must now be answered is: what deal did Labor do with the Greens on this bill?

Petrol sniffing will not be stopped by this bill. Labor knows that, even if the Greens do not. That is why they have opposed it for so long, and that is what the Community Affairs Legislation Committee said in its report—a committee that, I note, is dominated by government members. The Greens even acknowledged this in their minority opinion: This bill introduced by the Australian Greens does not in itself cause anything to take place. It is enabling legislation.

Petrol sniffing is a problem that causes much misery to individuals, families and communities. It has, sadly to this day, cost lives. We believe the best way to deal with this is at a state and territory level, as observed by many others time and again.

The Senate's Community Affairs Legislation Committee also said that this is the case and recommended that this legislation not proceed. The sniffing of fuel is a problem that should be getting top priority and a first-rate response—not this ill considered, second-rate bill, with no observable benefit, that we have before this House today. This is a bill that the coalition therefore opposes. The Community Affairs Legislation Committee recommended, as I said, that this bill not proceed. This is a bill that even the Labor Party and the minister once opposed. But of course, as happens so often now, Labor has simply followed the lead of its alliance partners, the Greens.

Mr SNOWDON (Lingiari—Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Minister for Defence Science and Personnel, Minister for Indigenous Health and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on the Centenary of ANZAC) (17:38): Thank you for the contributions that have been made thus far, although I have to make some comments about the contribution of the member for Menzies—and I will, in short order. Whilst I had some affinity with some aspects of what he said, the majority of what he said was a misplaced understanding of what is happening, what has happened and what will happen. That, to me, is a bit of a worry, given that he is up here parading himself as some sort of expert in this place.

Secondly, I might just comment very briefly on his outrageous statements about the Labor Party's attitude towards the misplaced intervention by Mal Brough, when he was a minister in the previous Howard government, and the Howard government's approach to dealing with Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory, without any consultation. Just a moment ago we heard him refer to a bottom-up approach to how best to deal with issues and problems such as petrol sniffing in Aboriginal communities.

Let me tell you: there was no bottom-up approach with the intervention.
It was jackboot diplomacy from the then minister responsible, Brough, under the instructions and leadership of Prime Minister Howard and you as one of his cheerleaders. I make no apology at all for siding with the views of so many people in the Aboriginal community across the Northern Territory on their concern with the way the intervention took place and its outcome.

Neither do I make any apology for the way in which Labor has dealt with the intervention process, the emergency response after we came to government in 2007, the changes we have made, and now the Stronger Futures legislation which has been passed in this parliament—very, very different from the intervention. The intervention is dead, thank God! And I do not know one Aboriginal person in the Northern Territory who would say, ‘Bring back the intervention’, ‘Bring back Mal Brough’, or ‘Bring back that attitude of dictatorial relationships with Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory or elsewhere in Australia’, because that is what it was.

As the member for Lingiari, which of course is the place this was focused on, I know what I said in this place and outside at the time, and my attitude has not changed. Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory know what happened last time they elected a coalition government, with the intervention, and they know what to expect next if the coalition should be elected to government later this year. They know what to expect, and they would be rightly concerned about the overbearing interference and dictatorial relationships which were developed previously and which would, no doubt, be developed in the future.

But that is not the reason we are here. We are here to discuss the Low Aromatic Fuel Bill 2012. I understand the shadow minister's attitude towards the community affairs report, but I do not think he understands me—which is a bit of a problem, because I am the minister responsible. He needs to understand that I have been making efforts, for some considerable time now, to get state and territory governments to deal together with the issue of petrol sniffing and how to have a uniform approach across jurisdictions, but to no avail. Whilst he talked about Northern Territory legislation—which, I agree, has some positive elements to it—it does not extend to those matters that cross borders, and I have to say that it has not been used previously in the Northern Territory in the way in which he suggested.

I want to just give you some background as to why I think this is important. I will come to the bill itself in a moment, but, just so you know, I come to this subject with some experience. I have a publication here of which I was a co-author. It is called A Certain Heritage. It was co-authored by HC Coombs, MM Brandl and me, and it refers to a petrol sniffing program which we were part of trying to set up in 1981 in South Australia, at a place called Angatja, and this petrol sniffing program, unique in its time, was about addressing the issues to do with juveniles sniffing petrol in a place called Amata in the Pitjantjatjara lands of South Australia. I am very conversant with the impact of petrol sniffing on communities. This program was designed: to establish the principles that the care of Pitjantjatjara juveniles should be primarily a Pitjantjatjara responsibility and that programs to rehabilitate juvenile offenders should be designed and controlled by Pitjantjatjara people; to avoid offenders being sent to non-Aboriginal institutions; to develop a rehabilitation program which was based on participation in and knowledge of their traditional culture and was therefore supportive and likely to reintegrate, in this...
case, the boys into their own society; and to assist participants to acquire personal skills which would help them deal successfully with their own and the majority culture.

Things have not changed. In my experience, successful programs around petrol sniffing have the same sort of basis: local community control, local community support and local community ownership. I commend those people who have been advocating for this legislation from their communities, such as those people in the parliament today from Titjikala, which is just south of Alice Springs and in my electorate. I commend them for what they are doing.

Let me now put into focus what has been happening around low aromatic fuel. The government has subsidised low aromatic fuel since 1998, starting with the Comgas scheme, which was an initiative by the then health minister, now Leader of the Opposition, Mr Abbott. In 2004, BP began producing a low aromatic 91-octane unleaded fuel called Opal. In the next year, the government of the day introduced the petrol sniffing strategy, which covered the supply of low aromatic fuel as well as issues around justice, treatment and youth diversionary programs, which continue. In February of 2006, just 43 sites in the Northern Territory or Central Australia stocked low aromatic fuel. Today, there are 127 sites receiving low aromatic fuel across regional and remote Australia. The Labor government pledged to expand the supply and uptake of Opal fuel and we have committed $115.8 million to the rollout of low aromatic fuel over five years from 2011-12.

More than 20.8 million litres of low aromatic fuel was produced in the 2011-12 financial year. Under this government's planned expansion, that fuel will be sold at an additional 39 retail sites, including areas in Western Australia, the Top End of the Northern Territory and indeed Queensland. Importantly, it will also see the construction of bulk storage facilities to improve the continuity of supply, which will reassure retailers. Later this year Shell Australia will also begin producing its own low aromatic fuel, stocking it and transporting it to communities in the Top End, the East Kimberley, the Gulf region of Queensland and Cape York. Low aromatic fuel is a reliable and effective replacement for regular unleaded petrol. The addition of a new producer may also help to break down some of the myths around its use. These myths once abounded. They have largely been seen to be just that: myths.

We know that the rollout of low aromatic fuel to date has produced some great results that should stand alone as a reason Opal and fuels of its type are so vital in this country. I know that there has been interest shown by overseas communities in Opal fuel. I know that there have been discussions with people in Canada. In Central Australia, petrol sniffing dropped by more than 90 per cent following the introduction Opal fuel. The Menzies School of Health Research is now collecting data across 41 communities. That work will continue until 2014. After that, we will have a guide on the situation and accurate knowledge of the impact of low aromatic fuel on those communities.

We know that low aromatic fuel has a huge and positive impact on people's lives. It can mean the difference between health and sickness, education and no education, employment and unemployment and, ultimately, life and death. This bill, the Low Aromatic Fuel Bill, provides us with a good basis to build on the success of the petrol sniffing strategy initially developed by the coalition government. It will ensure the supply of low aromatic fuel to high risk locations to reduce the risk of harm when
some retailers refuse to stock it. While I appreciate the advice from the shadow minister opposite, it has been my absolute intention to try to get people to voluntarily participate in this program, but unfortunately there remain some who are intransigent, and we need to deal with that.

Technical issues in the original legislation introduced in the Senate have been addressed by this government and amendments passed by the Senate in November 2012. The government amendments passed by the Senate will require me as the minister to give consideration to whether there are adequate facilities and arrangements for the supply of low aromatic fuel to an area prior to designating a fuel control here. It will also mean that I may grant exemptions from certain offences, if necessary, because of the unavailability of low aromatic fuel in that area.

The bill’s objectives reduce the harms caused by petrol sniffing and must be strengthened. It should come as no surprise when I say that responsibility falls to the states and territories in the first instance, and we have already heard the shadow minister opposite say that that is very important. They have to accept the responsibility, and to date they have not. Their designation of a fuel control area will only occur—and I stress this—where I am satisfied that the states or territories have been derelict in their duty to their people and have failed to enact their own legislation consistent with the Low Aromatic Fuel Act.

I would have thought that that is not a bad exercise: that we give the states and territories the opportunity to act, and if they do not—if they are derelict in their duty—we will act, and I make no apology for it. We have had consultations. I have spoken to health ministers over a long period of time, but it cannot go on forever. We require collective action. Work is underway through the Standing Council on Health.

We want to see coordinated action across jurisdictions to ensure a consistent approach to controlling the use of volatile substances like petrol. The Low Aromatic Fuel Bill lets this government rule a line under this. It gives us a power and a responsibility to step in and protect the health and lives of people affected by petrol sniffing if local retailers refuse to come on board and if the state and territory governments will not act.

Lest people believe that this is something that should not attract our attention—and I know there is a lot of debate in Central Australia—let me tell you that there are areas of the Northern Territory where it is becoming endemic and indeed is prolific. There will be a meeting next week, I think, at Barunga or Beswick, south of Katherine, to discuss petrol sniffing. I had a discussion with traditional owners from Beswick only last week. They expressed their concern about the issues to do with petrol sniffing in their community. There have been large numbers of youths, particularly young boys in the first instance, who have been petrol sniffing at Yirrkala in north-east Arnhem Land.

These are issues that we must address. And if this bill helps us address them, then we need to use this bill to make sure we do so. I make no apology for having this legislation in the parliament. It is my primary desire for people to voluntarily adopt Opal when they are retailing fuel. But, in circumstances in which they continue to resist and oppose, and where we know that the sale of petrol from those retail outlets has a detrimental and potentially devastating effect on communities, then we must act. And if the Northern Territory or state governments are not prepared to act in those particular cases then at some point we may
need to make a decision, and I am committing myself to making those decisions where they are necessary.

I believe that the opposition should rethink what it is doing here, because we know what the outcome has been. We know that the state and territories need to do a lot more work in this area, and I would ask the opposition to rethink their attitude and to support this legislation.

Mr BANDT (Melbourne) (17:53): I thank the minister and shadow minister for their contribution to the debate. To summarise just very briefly, there was some talk during the debate about whether a top-down or a bottom-up approach is needed. I will say that this piece of legislation is one of the most bottom-up, community-driven pieces of legislation that has come before this House.

It is said that the state and territory laws should be sufficient. Well, we are here because, although they have been successful in part, they have not solved the whole problem. And yes, it is right that communities should be the ultimate determiners of their own fate. But, as was expressed to me very, very clearly by people from Titjikala this morning, you can have a community that amongst itself has taken some very strong steps to eradicate sniffing, and you can have, a kilometre away from that, a petrol station that will sell sniffable fuel, and that will attract people from all around—from other communities as well—to come in, get the petrol, and then potentially infect the community that has done so much good work to get the problem under control.

Communities sometimes need the assistance of this place to give effect to what they want to do, and it has been the communities that have said: we are doing everything we can to get this under control and we need a bit of help. Lest it be thought that this automatically means something for state laws. There is, as the minister said, going to be a period of time in which the states and territories can now take those final steps if they want to and fix up their laws to do what the communities have been asking for for some time. But if they do not then now there is a stick that can be applied by the minister and the minister can say: well, if you are not going to fix it yourself then we will step in and do what the community wants.

This piece of legislation has already passed the Senate because it is good legislation. I hope that it will pass this House and become law because it is good legislation. It will make a difference. It will be an instance of this place giving communities the tools and the power that they need to control their own destiny. That is why, on today of all days, we have been discussing matters vital to the future and to the health of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in this country. We can pass this legislation and empower communities to give them the power that they have been asking for. I commend the bill to the House.

The SPEAKER: The question is that the bill be now read a second time.

The House divided. [18:01]

(The Speaker—Ms Anna Burke)

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

AYES

Adams, DGH
Bandt, AP
Bowen, CE
Brodie, G
Butler, MC
Champion, ND
Clare, JD
Combet, GJ
Danby, M

Albanese, AN
Bird, SL
Bradbury, DJ
Burke, AS
Byrne, AM
Cheeseeman, DL
Collins, JM
Crean, SF
D’Ath, YM
AYES

Dreyfus, MA
Ellis, KM
Ferguson, LDT
Garrett, PR
Gibbons, SW
Gray, G
Griffin, AP
Hayes, CP
Jenkins, HA
Kelly, MJ
Leigh, AK
Lyons, GR
Marles, RD
Melham, D
Murphy, JP
Oakeshott, RJM
O'Neill, DM
Parke, M
Philpott, TJ
Rishworth, AL
Roxon, NL
Saffin, JA (teller)
Sidebottom, PS
Smith, SF
Snowdon, WE
Symon, MS
Thomson, KJ
Wilkie, AD
Zappia, A

Elliott, MJ
Emerson, CA
Ferguson, MJ
Georganas, S
Gillard, IE
Grierson, SJ
Hall, JG
Jones, SP
King, CF
Livermore, KF
McClelland, RB
Mitchell, RG
Neumann, SK
O'Connor, BPJ
Perrett, GD
Rowland, MA
Rudd, KM
Shorten, WR
Slipper, PN
Smyth, L
Swan, WM
Thomson, CR
Windor, AHC

NOES

Mirabella, S
Moylan, JE
O'Dowd, KD
Prentice, J
Ramsey, RE
Robb, AJ
Roy, WB
Schultz, AJ
Secker, PD (teller)
Smith, ADH
Southcott, AJ
Tehan, DT
Tudge, AE
Van Manen, AJ
Washer, MJ

Mirrilla, S
Moylan, JE
O'Dowd, KD
Pyne, CM
Randall, DJ
Robert, SR
Ruddock, PM
Scott, BC
Simpkins, LXL
Sonlmy, AM
Stone, SN
Turnbull, MB
Vasta, RX
Wyatt, KG

PAIRS

Fitzgibbon, JA
Bishop, JI

Question agreed to.
Bill read a second time.

Third Reading

Mr BANDT (Melbourne) (18:06): by leave—I move:
That this bill be now read a third time.
Question agreed to.
Bill read a third time.

COMMITTEES

Australian Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity Committee
Human Rights Committee
Public Accounts and Audit Committee
Regional Australia Committee
Treaties Committee

Membership

Mr BUTLER (Port Adelaide—Minister for Mental Health and Ageing, Minister for Housing and Homelessness, Minister for Social Inclusion and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on Mental Health Reform) (18:07): by leave—I move:
That:
(1) Ms Parke be discharged from the Parliamentary Joint Committee on the Australian Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity and that, in her place, Mr Cheeseman be appointed a member of the committee;

(2) Mr K. J. Thomson be discharged from the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights and that, in his place, Mr Perrett be appointed a member of the committee;

(3) Mrs D’Ath be discharged from the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit and that, in her place, Mr Neumann be appointed a member of the committee;

(4) Mr Fitzgibbon be discharged from the Standing Committee on Regional Australia and that, in his place, Mrs Elliot be appointed a member of the committee;

(5) Ms Parke and Mr K. J. Thomson be discharged from the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties and that, in their places, Mrs Elliot and Mr Symon be appointed as members of the committee.

Question agreed to.

**BILLS**

**National Disability Insurance Scheme Bill 2012**

**Second Reading**

Debate resumed on the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr ANDREWS (Menzies) (18:08): Let me state clearly and unequivocally, in the words of the Leader of the Opposition: the NDIS is an idea whose time has come. All in this chamber know that the system of support for Australians with a disability is broken. The level of support a person with a disability receives can depend on a number of factors: what state they live in, whether the disability is congenital or was acquired, and if acquired, whether it was in the workplace, in a motor vehicle accident or in some other context. Workers compensation and motor vehicle accident insurance provide coverage in some states, but if you were born with a disability or acquire a disability later in life it can be a different story—waiting lists and queues. The result is that many people with a disability are left without the assistance they need. I suspect many in this chamber, like me, know this from personal experience from their extended families.

We need a new system of support based on need rather than rationing, with the entitlement to support going to the individual. The individual needs to be at the centre and in charge, able to pick the supports, the aids, the equipment and the service providers of their choice. This is the vision of the Productivity Commission’s landmark report into the long-term care and support for people with disability. This is the vision of the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

The coalition has enthusiastically supported each milestone on the road to a National Disability Insurance Scheme. We supported the initial work by the Productivity Commission; we supported the $1 billion in the last budget; we supported the five launch sites; we supported the agreement between the Commonwealth and New South Wales for a full statewide rollout after the Hunter launch; and we support the legislation. The coalition believes an NDIS can be delivered, within the time frame recommended by the Productivity Commission, by a prudent government that manages well. Any comments that we therefore make about the NDIS are offered in a constructive spirit in an endeavour to help make the NDIS the best scheme it possibly can be. The coalition stands ready to work with the government to see an NDIS delivered as soon as possible.

But there is one quibble we have with the government, and that is when Labor members and senators say that the NDIS represents quintessentially Labor values. It
The NDIS represents Australian values: a fair go and helping those who face challenges for reasons beyond their control. No side of politics has a mortgage on these values.

The NDIS is a person-centred and self-directed funding model. It is aligned to the objectives of empowering the individual, removing government from people's lives and reducing red tape. The coalition believes that the full implementation of an NDIS would be nothing short of a new deal for people with disability and for their carers. We have to get this right.

Because the NDIS is a once-in-a-generation reform that will unfold over the life of several parliaments, it should be the property of the parliament as a whole, on behalf of the Australian people, rather than that of any particular political party. To get this right will require a very high level of consultation and attention to detail, not just now, not just in the launch sites, but from now until the full implementation of the scheme, in some years time.

The coalition has called for the establishment of a joint parliamentary committee to be chaired by both sides of politics to oversee the establishment and implementation of the NDIS. A parliamentary oversight committee would lock all parties in and provide a nonpartisan environment where issues of design and eligibility could be worked through cooperatively. My friend the member for Dawson has had a motion in the House for some time to establish this committee. Regrettably, it has not been brought forward to a vote. The coalition moved a similar motion in the Senate to establish the oversight committee, yet Labor and the Greens combined in the Senate to vote it down, so we will move another motion here in the House of Representatives.

The Leader of the Opposition reiterated this offer in his National Press Club speech last week, where he said:
The Coalition is so committed to the National Disability Insurance Scheme, for instance, that we have offered to co-chair a bipartisan parliamentary committee so that support for it does not flag across the three terms of parliament and among the nine different governments needed to make it work.

Labor like to pay lip service to wanting cross-party support for the NDIS, but when the opportunity has presented to give this real meaning, they have declined to do so. And Labor should accept our offer of a parliamentary oversight committee. The coalition intends to give the government, the Greens and the Independent members in this place an opportunity to accept our hand of cooperation by moving an amendment to this bill that will establish a non-partisan oversight committee. I appeal in particular to the Independents and the other non-government members in this place to look at the advantages of having a cooperative approach over a period of time to this important initiative.

It is also important to note that every government and every opposition in Australia supports and wants to see an NDIS in operation. That is why, at the COAG meeting before last, it was disappointing that the Prime Minister could not rise above her partisan instincts. It is to the credit of premiers Baillieu and O'Farrell that they continued to negotiate in the face of public attack and misrepresentation by the federal government and reached agreement to host the launch sites. The coalition urged the Prime Minister to adopt a more cooperative approach, as there can be no NDIS without the states. They are partners in this program, not enemies.

The fruits of a constructive approach were there to be seen when Premier O'Farrell from
New South Wales and the Prime Minister signed an intergovernmental agreement in December for a full state-wide NDIS rollout after the Hunter launch project. It is now up to the Prime Minister to continue this constructive approach in discussions with other jurisdictions to conclude further bilateral agreements. There can be no full NDIS without an intergovernmental agreement with each state and territory.

A word in defence of those states who are not hosting a launch site: the Productivity Commission never envisaged every state hosting a launch site and never saw the absence of a launch site as a bar to taking part in a full national rollout. Indeed, Premier Newman has written to the Prime Minister with a proposal for Queensland to be part of a full national rollout and Premier Barnett from Western Australia has written to the Prime Minister proposing a joint Western Australia-Commonwealth NDIS.

The coalition will continue to place this issue above politics and is prepared to work with the state and Commonwealth governments towards a better deal for people with disability. While we emphatically supported the government's commitment of $1 billion for the NDIS in the federal budget, we had some difficulty reconciling this figure with the $3.9 billion the Productivity Commission said would be necessary over the forward estimates for the first phase of the NDIS. We assume the government will account for this and make appropriate provision in the forthcoming budget.

The bill establishes the framework for the National Disability Insurance Scheme and the National Disability Insurance Scheme Launch Transition Agency. This will enable the scheme to be launched, and the agency to operate the launch, in five sites across Australia from July 2013. The first stage of the scheme will benefit more than 20,000 people with disability, their families and carers living in South Australia, the Australian Capital Territory, Tasmania, the Hunter region in New South Wales and the Barwon area in Victoria. The scheme will provide funding to individuals or organisations to help people with disability participate more fully in economic and social life through the provision of an entitlement, enabling such things as aid, equipment, supported accommodation and personal attendant care.

The mechanics of the agency will be established by way of legislative instruments called the NDIS rules. These regulations, the NDIS rules, will establish, for example, eligibility and assessment criteria. The government released a discussion paper on the rules on 1 February. It would be fair to say that this paper does not contain much information. It proposes a series of questions; it is not a draft set of rules. This is significant, as the bill itself is essentially a framework. It establishes the transition agency, the board, the CEO and a general definition of eligibility. But the guts of the scheme, the mechanics, will be established by the rules.

The bill is currently being inquired into by the Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee, which will report on 13 March this year. A recurrent theme in evidence presented by witnesses to date is that it is hard to offer advice or pose questions or plan for the launch sites in the absence of the rules. These rules need to be released quickly and well before the passage of this bill through the Australian parliament. The Prime Minister in her second reading speech indicated the government's intention to bring the final version of the bill to a vote in the budget session. Therefore, the rules need to be released soon.
On 7 December 2012, COAG released a consultation regulation impact statement as a basis for further consultation on the regulatory impacts of the NDIS. Submissions closed on 1 February. The regulation impact statement focuses particularly on market and business changes driven by the move from block funding to individual funding and regulatory changes such as quality assurance and reporting requirements. This is another important input into the design of the NDIS.

The risk, as always with this government, is in its capacity to competently implement schemes. The interaction of three components—the NDIS Bill, the NDIS rules and the operating guidelines for the NDIS Launch Transition Agency—will determine how the NDIS operates. At this point in time, developing a complete picture of how the NDIS will unfold is limited by insufficient information. The work of the Senate committee is therefore critical, and it is to be hoped that it will have the benefit of the NDIS rules and the operating guidelines for the agency before it concludes its work. In the absence of these other two elements, it is difficult to determine if further amendments to this legislation will or will not be required.

I reiterate that we want the NDIS to be a success. We want the launch sites to run smoothly. We stand ready to work with the government. The concept of a national disability insurance scheme has gained momentum over the past five years. It would be churlish not to acknowledge the role played by Minister Shorten in helping to elevate the public policy profile of disability. But the lion's share of the credit goes to people with disability, their families, their carers and the organisations that support them. They came together. They decided enough was enough. They spoke with one voice. They declared, 'We're as mad as hell and we're not going to take it anymore.' The NDIS is where it is—in this parliament, the subject of legislative proposal—because tens of thousands of people right across Australia have done the hard yards.

Acknowledgement should be made of the grassroots campaign by the sector coordinated by the Every Australian Counts organisation run by John Della Bosca and Kirsten Deane. The two main intellectual drivers of the NDIS have been John Walsh AM, a partner of PwC, and Bruce Bonyhady AM, chair of Yooralla and president of Philanthropy Australia, without whose determination, professional experience and personal knowledge this legislation would not currently be before this parliament.

I am proud to be the shadow cabinet minister responsible for this very important area. In closing, I must acknowledge the work of my friend and portfolio colleague, the shadow minister for disabilities, Senator Fifield, who has worked so tirelessly and so hard to elevate the NDIS above politics. It is just too important and I hope that the Prime Minister does the right thing and accepts our generous, open offer to establish a bipartisan committee.

In closing, it would be remiss of me not to mention the Leader of the Opposition's strong personal commitment to Australians with disability and those who care for them by dedicating $540,000 to Carers Australia raised by the 2012 1,000 kilometre Pollie Pedal charity bike ride, an event I am proud to be associated with and to participate in. Along the route we met with people with disability, with carers and with disability organisations. The next two Pollie Pedals, one starting in Adelaide and concluding in Geelong in a few months' time, will also be in partnership with and raise funds for Carers Australia.

I commend the bill to the House.
the National Disability Insurance Scheme Bill 2012. I want to commence my contribution with an account of a phone call I received from a constituent in my electorate in South Australia. This particular person—and I am sure we all get these types of phone calls and discussions with our constituents—was phoning not only on behalf of herself but also on behalf of her daughter of whom she was the principal carer. Her daughter has a physical disability and is reliant on assistance in and around the house. The daughter fell over in the shower one day and was taken by ambulance to hospital where she waited for assessment until the following day. She is incontinent, therefore, soiled the bed in which she continued to lay throughout that night. The next day she became frustrated waiting for the assessment and went to check herself out. Being incontinent, she requested a nappy, a blanket, anything she could use around herself. Before a staff person gave her something, again the same thing happened.

This lady's mother went on to say that disability agencies cannot meet this request or that request, but when push comes to shove they can meet some of the requests. Staff who visit the home to assist are not particularly well coordinated, nor is the equipment, or accessories to that equipment, that are made available. They are understaffed for tasks requiring two people, for example, and support is very, very awkward.

So what happens? This particular person's mother does what she can to help day in, day out, week in, week out, year in, year out. It is tough. It is absolutely, really, really tough, not just on this particular person with a disability, not just on her mother, but on this particular person's sister who also lives in the same house. The battles that are waged to draw in sufficient support to just get through one day for this particular person, the stress that is repeated again and again as this person strives to live her life, take their toll on all those concerned, all those around her—the person with the disability, her sister, her mother, carers, et cetera.

This is only one account of a household in my electorate of Hindmarsh. I am sure that each and every one of us has stories that they can share in this place. I am sure that there are many similar households in Adelaide, across the nation, in every state, in every city, in every town. There are hundreds of thousands of people whose lives are an exercise in endurance—enduring pain, enduring discomfort, enduring helplessness and dependency, and enduring the humiliation that comes from being unable to manage oneself or, as in the account I have just given, managing one's own bodily functions, which would be a terrible, terrible thing. There is the endurance of the disability support systems and agencies which, I am sure, do the best that they can with the available resources that they have to care for people. And there is the endurance of the absence of hope—the very different pain that comes from seeing with your own two eyes that society perhaps does not care, or that nobody cares bar a direct family member. This is an existence; it is not a life. This is an existence unbecoming of a member of our community or of our society. It is totally unsuitable for any one of us and inexcusable in its absence of both quality of life for the individual and level of care from a civilised community.

This is why we must support a complete reworking of the nature and the quantum of care that is accessed by members of our community that require it. It is right that we as a society embrace change for the good of members of our community. Our society's approach to such issues has changed radically over the years and over the decades. Without making light of it, it
reminds me—and many of you may have read this novel—of Nikolai Gogol's *Dead Souls*, in which the hero passes through a rural Russian village and hears of a person who one day, years ago, went to bed and has not got out of it since. It is a cursory curiosity noted, I suppose, with a raised eyebrow or mild amusement but forgotten in an instant within the context of the story, but it is also perhaps a sign of the debilitating and untreated illness effectively ignored by this person's community in the 1800s in rural peasant life in Russia. But here today in 21st century Australia we do more, and we are recognising that we need to do a tremendous amount more still. We should not need anecdotes like that of my constituent to spur us to action. We should not need those horror stories and shock tactics. We should be able to look and listen much more attentively than that and act before a situation becomes so bad that it causes us to cringe.

The assistance that individuals receive is one side of this greater question: what do those in need need and want? Another side is the quality of life that by far the majority of us, I believe, take for granted. Late in 2012, Minister Shorten and I visited an organisation in my electorate in which people with disabilities come together and apply themselves to gainful employment. That is Orana Inc. at Netley. It does a great job in providing sustainable work to those who are able to receive training and perform one or more of a range of duties in this particular Netley factory. I thank Nicholas Mihalaras, Orana's CEO, for introducing the minister and me to so many of its employees that day. There are several businesses in and around Adelaide's western suburbs where people with disabilities work and through which people are active and gaining a sense of accomplishment. More than that, employment also provides routine and discipline that keep us as individuals moving and growing through our lives.

It is the control of people's own lives that has been lacking in far too many people's lives in the past, right around the nation, so we have before us a bill which will establish the framework of the National Disability Insurance Scheme and support the National Disability Insurance Scheme Launch Transition Agency move towards the launch of the NDIS in five sites around Australia from July this year, 2013. The first stage of the scheme will benefit more than 20,000 people with disabilities, their families and their carers living in South Australia, Tasmania, the ACT, the Hunter in New South Wales, and the Barwon area of Victoria. The bill sets out the objects and the principles under which the National Disability Insurance Scheme will operate. This includes giving people choice and control over the care and support they receive, ensuring that it gives effect in part to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The bill sets out the process for a person becoming a participant in the scheme, how participants develop a personal goal based plan with the agency and how reasonable and necessary supports will be assured to those participants. People will be able to choose how they manage their care and support and can receive assistance from local coordinators should they wish to do so. The bill also provides that the agency will be responsible for the provision of support to people with disability, their families and their carers and may provide funding to individuals and organisations to help people participate more fully in economic and social life.

People with disabilities, their families and carers will be key beneficiaries of the NDIS, starting with the launch of the first stage in
mid-2013. In the first stage of the NDIS, the whole of the states of South Australia and Tasmania, including rural and regional areas, will be covered for young people with disabilities in the nominated age ranges.

I would just like to note, in concluding my remarks here today, that this bill reflects extensive work undertaken with the states and territories and with people with disability, their families and their carers, disability care workers, service providers and advocates on the design, funding and governance of an NDIS. The engagement process has included detailed consultation with the NDIS Advisory Group and NDIS expert groups and public engagement, which has been undertaken around the country by the National Disability and Carer Alliance. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr WYATT (Hasluck) (18:34): I rise this evening to speak on the National Disability Insurance Scheme Bill 2012. It gives me great pleasure to do so because in 1972, when I worked for the Department of Education, I was asked to become involved in the international year for those experiencing disabilities. Those 12 months gave me an incredible insight into what I did not know about the challenges that young children, and particularly their carers, face. That passion has remained, and I am glad that there are families across this nation, along with the relevant organisations, who stood up and said, 'Enough is enough.' It is about time that governments of all political persuasions agreed that the NDIS is critical. It is about ensuring that all Australians have the support that they require. It is about ensuring that all Australians have a brighter future to look forward to, and that not only encapsulates the whole concept of making decisions with respect to somebody who is a family member who may not have the capability to make their own decisions, but equally is about those who have the capacity to make their own decisions and should have the right to make choices and not have them made for them.

The coalition stands ready to work with the government to see an NDIS delivered as soon as possible. The coalition also believes that the full implementation of an NDIS would be nothing short of a new deal for people with disabilities and their carers. We have got to get this right, and no second chance should be afforded or accorded the passage of the reforms that are required. The coalition has called for the establishment of a joint parliamentary committee to be chaired by both sides of politics to oversee the establishment and implementation of the NDIS, because it is a bipartisan position that we should take forward our combined efforts to ensure that all levels and tiers of government create the best possible opportunities for families to engage with those who experience disabilities to make the choices that are pertinent to them.

A parliamentary oversight committee would lock in all parties and provide a non-partisan environment where issues of design and eligibility could be worked out and worked through cooperatively. George Christensen has had a motion in the House to
establish this committee for some time. Regrettably, it has not been brought forward for a vote. Senator Fifield moved a similar motion to establish the oversight committee, but Labor and the Greens combined in the Senate to vote it down. Yet I know that within Aboriginal affairs we have established joint parliamentary committees to ensure the passage of some key initiatives, and I do not see any dissimilarity to the need to do this in a very key and critical area. I would hope that we are not playing politics with the NDIS, that our commitment transcends that, and that the combined approach will enable a smoother and better process to occur. It is people's lives that we are talking about, and this issue is of no political advantage to either side.

This bill establishes the framework for the NDIS and the NDIS Launch Transition Agency. It provides for the establishment of a national disability insurance scheme for which many families across this nation have been waiting for some considerable time. We know that the first stage of the NDIS will benefit more than 20,000 people with a disability, their families and carers living in South Australia, the Australian Capital Territory, Tasmania, the Hunter in New South Wales and the Barwon region of Victoria.

The National Disability Insurance Scheme will provide funding to individuals and organisations to help people with disabilities participate more fully in economic and social life through an entitlement that will enable the provision of things such as aids, equipment, supported accommodation or personal attendant care. The mechanics of the agency will be established by way of legislative instruments called the NDIS Rules. These regulations and rules will establish areas such as eligibility and assessment criteria. It is important that that is established so that it gives a clear understanding to those who will access those services and to those families who are hoping and waiting for the time when the detail will become available so that they know what their future is.

When I was first elected I made a commitment, following my predecessor in the seat, to continue the dialogue with families who had children with disabilities. In that process, what I found challenging not only as a member of the Australian parliament but also as a fellow human being was the frustration experienced by those who were the recipients of services that were provided to those with disabilities. There was their inability to make the decisions and choices that they thought would be best for their child or family member. Equally, there were some frustrations about a career pathway for those who were in a position to progress in opportunities. But the bottom-line concern was: what happens to my child when I die? It is important that we transcend all of that and provide those entities of surety that will enable families to make those decisions.

The government released a discussion paper on the rules on 1 February. It would be fair to say that this paper does not contain much information. It proposes a series of questions. It is not a draft set of rules as yet. This is significant, as the bill itself is essentially a framework which establishes the transition agency, the board, the CEO and a general definition of 'eligibility'. But the guts of the scheme, the mechanics, will be established by the rules.

The Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee is currently inquiring into the bill and it will report on 13 March 2013. A recurrent theme in evidence presented to date by witnesses is that it is hard to offer advice, pose questions or plan for launch sites in the absence of the rules.
These need to be released quickly and well before the passage of the bill through the parliament.

There is bipartisan support for the NDIS, and the NDIS needs time and investment to ensure that it is effective. It is important that the NDIS is managed effectively for the benefit of the thousands of Australians who will be assisted under the scheme. Labor does not have a good track record in managing programs, and it is important that we do not get this wrong. We do not want to see the NDIS become the latest victim of waste and management issues. Already there are serious concerns that the government has not put in sufficient funds for the scheme. Although it was positive to see the government's commitment of $1 billion to the NDIS in the federal budget, this is a long way short of the $3.9 billion that the Productivity Commission said would be necessary over the forward estimates for the first phase of the NDIS. We assume that the government will account for this and make appropriate provision in the coming budget. Not only is there concern about the funding; the full detail of the NDIS rules are yet to be released. The interaction of the NDIS bill, the NDIS Rules and the operating guidelines for the NDIS Launch Transition Agency will determine how the NDIS operates.

The Prime Minister has said that the government intends to release only the final version of the bill, including the NDIS Rules, for the budget. Such a delay can only be a move to reduce transparency and accountability on the government's part. Introducing such a complicated new program, with far-reaching impacts on the community, deserves appropriate attention and scrutiny. The work of the Senate committee is critical to scrutinising this package, and it is hoped that the committee will have the benefit of the NDIS Rules and the operating guidelines for the agency before they conclude their work. In the absence of these two elements, it is difficult to determine whether this legislation will require further amendments. There can be no full NDIS without an intergovernmental agreement with each state and territory. It is imperative that the government be involved in productive discussions with all states to determine a full rollout so that all families that require the support are part of the program. It is important to realise that the Productivity Commission never envisaged every state hosting a launch site and never saw the absence of a launch site as a bar to taking part in a full national rollout. Indeed, Premier Newman has written to the Prime Minister with a proposal to be part of a full national rollout. Premier Barnett in Western Australia has written to the Prime Minister proposing a joint WA-Commonwealth NDIS.

The states have always been at the forefront of providing disability services. The coalition will continue to place this issue above politics and is prepared to work with state and Commonwealth governments towards a better deal for people with a disability. In the Hasluck electorate, as I have indicated earlier, I have a disabilities forum group of carers whose children experience varying degrees of disability and they have been providing sound and good advice that I need to take on and advocate on their behalf, not only within government but also with the agencies that support. I have a carers forum—at which there are some 60 people that I spent time with—where I heard from all of them one particular morning about the challenges and the issues that confront them. There is also the Disabilities Advisory Group.

It is important that the jurisdictions work together to provide the level of support that is needed for each of those families. One mother in particular—Shirley Fitzthum—has
provided sound advice on the challenges that she faces as a grandmother who has taken on her grandchild, who has a disability, including the challenges that she has in dealing with multiple agencies. What she is looking forward to is the NDIS providing the option for her to make choices that are real to her, that service the needs of her child. It is clear from the feedback that I have been getting in my electorate that an NDIS is an important step for Australia. Let me also say that I support the amendment proposed by my colleague the member for Menzies.

In conclusion, the coalition wants the NDIS to be a success. There is no disagreement about the need for an NDIS. We want the launch sites to run smoothly. We stand ready to work with the government at all levels to make sure that the NDIS provides the scope of service and the choices that are needed in the context of meeting the needs of people with disabilities. It should be inclusive of the families—who play a very vital and critical role—but at the same time ensure that the red tape, the barriers and the strains placed on the families can in many instances be alleviated—not fully, because that will never be achieved—to give them some comfort and ensure that they know that what they are getting is an avenue for the best possible service. I commend the government for bringing forward the legislation. I commend all of those who have been a critical part of the process and I look forward with my coalition colleagues to playing an integral role in the rollout of the NDIS and to shaping its future. This includes shaping the potential capacity of this bill to determine how money and services are provided and how the rollout will make the quality of life far better for any person in Australia experiencing a disability and give future certainty to fellow Australians.

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (18:48): I speak in support of the National Disability Insurance Scheme Bill 2012. The National Disability Insurance Scheme is a Labor initiative. It is a Labor proposal. It will be a Labor program. It will only be Labor that delivers the National Disability Insurance Scheme. I rather like the member for Hasluck. He seems like a decent bloke. I have not had a lot to do with him. He comes from the state of Western Australia, which has not signed up to the National Disability Insurance Scheme and is not part of this program. There will be 20,000 Australians covered by a National Disability Insurance Scheme in launch sites across the country, including people with a disability, their families and their carers in South Australia, Tasmania, the ACT, the Hunter in New South Wales and the Barwon area of Victoria. There are 400,000 people suffering from a disability in this country—none of those from Western Australian—who will be covered by a launch site.

Do not believe the sanctimonious unction from those opposite. They do not put a dollar on the table on this stuff. We have put $1 billion into the launch sites to get the thing underway. If you think those opposite support a National Disability Insurance Scheme, do not look at their words—look at their deeds and their actions.

I come from the state of Queensland. Campbell Newman, the Premier of Queensland, and his LNP state government promised hand on heart that they would support a National Disability Insurance Scheme before the March 2012 election. The member for Hasluck can come to Queensland and see that not one person will be covered at a launch site. Not one Queenslander will be covered, because Campbell Newman and the LNP state government in Queensland could not put a dollar towards this. They could not find $5 million each year for four years. That was equivalent to about $62.50 for every
Queenslander suffering from a disability—80,000 Queenslanders and they are not going to be covered at a launch site. He came up with a one-and-a-half page proposal for Gympie. There was no detailed proposal. To the credit of the coalition governments in New South Wales and Victoria, they came to the party. But Queensland did not. So do not come into this place from Western Australia and tell us that this is a bipartisan approach, when your government has not done it. Do not come into this place and tell Queenslanders on this side that this is a bipartisan approach. Look at what your premiers are doing in those two states. This is an important issue for people in my electorate. It is an important issue for people like Carmel and Tony James and their adolescent son Andrew, who is profoundly disabled with medical and intellectual disabilities.

Carmel wrote to me and said this:

When our Andrew entered our lives, he opened our eyes to the silent, marginalised lives that those in the disabled lead. What his living in our family has done is raise awareness of the lack of therapy support, access to appropriate preschool options, respite support, the stress of a disabled family member on families and the impact on carers of twenty-four hour care.

Carmel and Tony's experiences caring for Andrew inspired them to tackle inclusivity issues and made them fierce advocates for the National Disability Insurance Scheme. I saw Carmel in action. I heard her talk on numerous occasions, and I saw her buttonhole Bill Shorten when he was Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children's Services. I saw what she did. For about 45 minutes in Ipswich, in the CBD, she got hold of him and gave him the rounds of the kitchen on this issue and really told him what needed to be done. I pay tribute to Minister Shorten in relation to this and also to Minister Macklin and Parliamentary Secretary McLucas, who have been fierce advocates. They have all come to my seat and talked about this issue.

This is not just a social justice issue, but Campbell Newman and the LNP government in Queensland do not realise this. It is also an economic issue. It is a matter of your choices, your priorities and your values—what you are prepared to put your money towards. That shows what you really believe. If the Queensland LNP government cannot put a dollar towards this currently, what does that say about them? They will build Taj Mahals in the Brisbane CBD to house themselves, but they will not support people with a disability. Queensland is spending far less than other states in relation to this issue.

Tell that to people like Debbie Chilton, in my electorate, who is one of the local participants in the federal government's Leaders for Tomorrow program, which supports people with a disability to become leaders in business, community and government. Debbie is a true inspiration and role model. She helps people with disability, despite the fact she is profoundly disabled herself. She is a youth worker involved in community, church and cultural endeavours. She is a true inspiration.

Debbie Chilton was present at the Brassall Shopping Centre in Ipswich on the International Day of People with Disability, when I relaunched Blair Disability Links. Five hundred people came to Blair Disability Links in the Brassall Shopping Centre in Ipswich. We got 48 local organisations to participate with this booklet. This is important because those organisations want the legislation that is before the chamber now to be passed. They want it passed and they want to see real dollars and cents on the table. This is important in relation to the economic development of this country. The Productivity Commission thinks that, by
2050, with a National Disability Insurance Scheme, we will see about $32 billion extra going into the Australian economy. It is important because participation in employment for people with disability employment is far lower.

Growth in funding for people with disability under the Howard coalition government was 1.8 per cent—less than inflation—every year. Those opposite say they are very supportive of helping those with disability, but the growth in funding was 1.8 per cent on average during the entire Howard coalition government. That is how much they were caring for people with disability.

Let us have a look at the participation rate. The Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in 2009 showed that the rate of participation in employment by people with disability aged 15 to 64 was 54.3 per cent, compared to 82.8 per cent for people without disability. That participation rate had not changed one iota during the whole of the Howard coalition government. Yet those opposite come in and say how much they are supportive of the National Disability Insurance Scheme and how supportive they are of helping people with disability.

Deloitte Access Economics, in a report in 2011, talked about the economic benefits of employing more people with a disability, closing the gap in labour participation rates and helping people with disability to fulfil their potential. Deloitte Access Economics found that, if just one-third of the people who had a disability could fulfil their potential—get that job they so aspired to—it would result in a cumulative increase of $43 billion in the Australian GDP over the next decade in real dollar terms. Amongst the OECD, we rank 13th out of 19 in employment rates for people with a disability. We have got a lot of work to do, and it is not just about social justice and showing our love, care and affection and our decency and humanity towards people with a disability; it is about economics as well.

This legislation is important because it establishes the framework. It comes back to the days of the Productivity Commission inquiry report Disability care and support, back in August 2011. That was the genesis of it. I was pleased to see the Prime Minister, after that report, in November 2011, reaffirm the federal Labor government's commitment to a National Disability Insurance Scheme. She said then:

The decision I announced in August—referring to Labor's commitment—is not just a preliminary hint or an aspiration.

It is the green light for a National Disability Insurance Scheme in this country.

The time for words is over. The time for action is come. We will get this thing done.

I am pleased that locally we are seeing that, with local organisation Gitana Consulting and Training Services receiving $57,455 for support the National Disability Insurance Scheme. Kathy Rees of Gitana Consulting and Training Services, whom I have met, received that funding under the federal Labor government's $10 million Practical Design Fund, which identifies and supports innovative projects that help people with disability, their families and carers and the national disability sector transition to an NDIS. She talked about the programs to assist in that regard. This will be a consumer driven program. It will also be important because it assists with the business arrangements, paperwork and computer programming that are so important for people in the National Disability Insurance Scheme to get the benefits they deserve and the assistance they require.
On this point, I want to pay tribute also to Peter and Linda Tully, who are local champions and advocates in my electorate for a National Disability Insurance Scheme. They have attended various fora I have put on with Minister Macklin and Parliamentary Secretary Jan McLucas. They and Fran Vicary, of Queenslanders with Disability Network, have also been tremendous supporters of a National Disability Insurance Scheme. Peter once said to me that the attitude of Premier Campbell Newman and the LNP state government made him want to scream because he was so angry in relation to it. I support this legislation. I commend it to the House.

ADJOURNMENT

The SPEAKER (19:00): Order! It being 7 pm, I propose the question:

That the House do now adjourn.

Queensland Floods

Mr SOMLYAY (Fairfax) (19:00): Beautiful one day but rather battered the next. The brutal forces of nature have again been felt in Queensland this summer with devastating floods now testing communities throughout our state. While these torrents of waters recede, their impacts will stay with us for days, months and, in some cases, years to come. Communities have rallied, all levels of government have rallied and, to those in need, aid is being offered in so many ways. Mud armies have been recruited, charities have opened their hearts and financial assistance, both federally and from the state, is available. Yet, despite all our best intentions, a number of flood victims are being lost in a ‘grey area’ which has nothing to do with the ongoing cloud cover.

In my home electorate of Fairfax on the Sunshine Coast, thousands were affected, in varying degrees, by those dreadful conditions on that fateful Australia Day weekend. Many people, particularly those in hinterland areas and those communities to the north and west bordering close to the local government area of Gympie, suffered flood damage and also endured days and days without power. Gympie, rightly so, has been declared a natural disaster area. The Sunshine Coast, at this time, has not. And so for those who live within the Sunshine Coast, just outside the Gympie boundary, the Australian government disaster recovery payment does not apply. It is akin to having residents on one side of the road having access to the one-off payment and their neighbours across the same road being denied. Same cyclone system, same flood, same situation, but different opportunities for assistance.

Gympie has been declared a disaster area given the flooding of Mary River. However, the source of this very river is deep within the Sunshine Coast hinterland and, as it runs north through the valley to Gympie, it passes local townships, including Kenilworth. I am not pleading for special treatment for residents in communities such as Kenilworth, Belli Park and Kidaman Creek; I am merely asking for fairness, a common-sense approach and compassion. Mother Nature is not constrained by local government boundaries and nor should we be in these circumstances.

So many people in these hinterland communities have contacted me alerting me to their plight. While they do appreciate that there are thousands of Queenslanders doing it much tougher, they feel confused about the disaster declaration process. They also feel overlooked. Today, I am their voice in this parliament. I have also joined with my parliamentary colleague the Hon. Warren Truss, the member for Wide Bay and Leader of the National Party, in writing to the Attorney-General and Minister for Emergency Management requesting urgent consideration of extending the areas that are
eligi
tes for the AGDRP. Our plea is that those communities in the northern Sunshine Coast Regional Council areas of Wide Bay and Fairfax, such as Kin Kin, Cooran, Coorarab, Federal, Cooroy, Pomona, Kenilworth, Kidaman Creek, Eumundi and the Mary Valley area, are deserving of this consideration.

**Griffith Australia Day Awards**

Mr Rudd (Griffith) (19:03): Communities are important. They are the backbone of what we call the Australian nation. Almost 14 years ago, on a hot Brisbane summer's afternoon, a small group of community leaders and volunteers gathered at one of the oldest Meals on Wheels halls on Brisbane's Southside to host the first Griffith Australia Day Awards. On this day, 15 women and men were recognised for their voluntary service to our community, some of them having served as volunteers for more than 30 years. We honoured them in front of about 50 people, taking photos, sharing stories and having a laugh over a cuppa and, of course, some Anzac biscuits.

Just a few weeks ago, I hosted the 14th Griffith Australia Day Awards. On this occasion, we recognised 137 volunteers from more than 49 different community groups across Brisbane's southside. We honoured these folk in front of more than 650 people—and about 1,000 lamingtons.

I began the Griffith Australia Day Awards with one objective: to honour the spirit of voluntary service in our local community. Every Australia Day you see a long list of names of people who have rendered service to the nation. That is good, fair and reasonable. But I think we all know as members of parliament that at a local community level there is a great group of people who receive no formal recognition. That is why I have done this at the local level all these years. I wanted the first community event for the year to be one of the best events of the year, reminding us what a great community we have.

At each and every one of the 14 Griffith Australia Day Awards ceremonies I have hosted, I have witnessed the spirit of service to the community writ large. At each of the awards, we have honoured those who have put the interests of others before themselves—those who have done the hard yards in Meals on Wheels, the local senior citizens, local P&Cs, swimming clubs, after-school care groups, Scouts, Guides and every sporting and community organisation under the sun. It is an impressive list to read.

It is people like Brian and Barbara Daley. For over 40 years, Barbara and Brian have been involved in the local St Vincent de Paul Society. Almost 10 years ago, they established a casserole bank, which involves organising local people to cook and freeze casseroles to provide ready cooked meals to those in crisis situations or suffering illness or bereavement—good, practical work. They have also been involved in establishing and running the local ambulance committee. Barbara has been active in adult literacy programs and Brian has assisted with various employment and training programs. These are rock-solid local folks.

It is people like Marie Dwyer. Marie has volunteered for most of her life and has dedicated years to helping others through her work with local community organisations, including the Cannon Hill Community Association, Cannon Hill Scout Group, Legacy Care and the War Widows Social Group. Marie continues to make a difference as a justice of the peace and by supporting patients in the dementia ward at Greenslopes Hospital.

It is also people like Dr Rachel Field. Rachel has been a tireless and dedicated
volunteer with the Women's Legal Service for over 12 years. She has been unwavering in her commitment to enhancing access to justice for women in Queensland who experience domestic violence. Rachel has served as president of the service for 10 years and has shown incredible initiative and compassion in all that she does.

It is also people like Laszlo Togl. Laszlo has been a valuable and friendly member of the Balmoral Uniting Community Centre for the past several years. Despite having been diagnosed with multiple sclerosis almost 28 years ago, this has not prevented Laszlo from dedicating his time to helping others. He was a popular member of the Friday afternoon movie and lunch group, a terrific initiative that provided free and social entertainment for people with a disability. Laszlo's efforts as head BBQ chef have also been much appreciated. He is now an active volunteer with the Friday friendly group helping frail, aged and isolated local residents enjoy some fun, social activities in what otherwise is a difficult life of isolation.

And let's not forget Brisbane's 'Mud Army' who helped our community recover after the 201 floods. One of my proudest days as a local member was to have put out the call for volunteers that day. We started the clean-up and by the end of the day we had more than 250 local volunteers organised through my office to pick up gloves and equipment and head out to a total stranger's house to help. To each of these terrific volunteers, I say, 'Thank you; thank you for your talents, thank you for your energy You have offered a hand of friendship and support to those most in need. You're the unsung heroes of Brisbane's southside.' Dave Newsome, Ella Giuffrida, Fred Corlett, Rhonda Jackson, Thomas Searles, John Godfrey, Beryl Allam, Clive Harm, Don Hay, Peter Ferguson, Denise Fauth, Raymond Ferguson, Phillip Partis, Helen Hastie, Norman Love, Bernice Finlayson, Lesley Foxlee, Keith Walker, Clement John Frankling, Elizabeth Carrigan and many others—all heroes of our local community.

Superannuation

Mr RANDALL (Canning) (19:08): In making representations on behalf of a constituent, Paul Maeder, I have become aware of an issue with family assistance that exists in the special case of a claimant receiving income protection payments after permanent disability, rather than ordinary income from an employer. As is the case for many recipients of income protection payments, my constituent's insurance provider does not remit any tax or superannuation from the monthly payments they make to him. He therefore pays tax on this income directly to the ATO and pays 9 per cent of what he earns each month into a superannuation fund.

Mr Maeder has stated that he is eager to make a contribution to his superannuation so that when his income protection payments cease at age 65, he will not have to rely on the age pension as his main source of income and he will not be a burden to the taxpayer. In order to pay only the 15 per cent concessional rate of tax on his super contributions, Mr Maeder claims them back as a 'personal superannuation contribution' at item D12 on his tax return.

Were he ordinarily employed, the basic 9 per cent minimum superannuation payments made by an employer would not be factored into Mr Maeder's income when putting in his tax return. In his more unusual circumstances as a recipient of income protection payments, the amount he pays to superannuation is included initially, and he then claims this deduction. The problem arises when it comes to how the information from my constituent's
tax return is used to determine his family assistance entitlements. Mr Maeder is a single parent and is the main carer for his four children. The amount he receives in family assistance is calculated using the information about his income provided in his tax return.

As has been confirmed by the Minister for Human Services, Senator Kim Carr, in correspondence between his office and my own:

Family assistance law requires that Family Tax Benefit and Child Care Benefit are calculated using an individual's adjusted taxable income which includes, among other amounts, reportable superannuation contributions.

Because Mr Maeder claims an income tax deduction for his superannuation, the 9 per cent he has paid is added back onto his total income and the family assistance that he is entitled to is subsequently reduced. Were my constituent's superannuation payments made by an employer in the form of the minimum 9 per cent superannuation guarantee, they would not be included in his assessment of income.

Mr Maeder receives around $1,000 less in assistance each year because his superannuation is included as part of his income. It is worthwhile to note that another government organisation, the Child Support Agency, has made a private ruling on Mr Maeder's case because of his unique circumstances. While they would usually include personal superannuation contributions when assessing a person's income for child support purposes, they have recognised that Mr Maeder's contributions are only the equivalent of what most other income earners would receive from an employer and have agreed not to include them in his assessable earnings.

It is therefore clear that CSA agrees this is a special case and that there are regulations in place that allow them to accommodate these cases. When administering family assistance payments, the Department of Human Services does not have the power to make rulings that reflect unusual circumstances and are therefore bound by legislation, which states 'all personal contributions must be counted towards income'.

I have written to a number of government ministers on this matter. The Minister for Human Services has informed me only that Mr Maeder's assessment is in keeping with the requirements of the legislation, without acknowledging that this legislation fails to properly cater for his unusual case. I have not received any response from the Treasurer.

The problem would be rectified if there were some other way that the likes of Mr Maeder could report their superannuation contributions to the ATO so that they are not assessed in the same way as personal contributions above and beyond the minimum 9 per cent. Another way this issue might be tackled is a change to family assistance legislation allowing for case-by-case assessments, like those that are conducted by the CSA or to make special legislative provisions for recipients of income protection payments.

I seek leave to table a simple case study that has been presented to me by Mr Maeder that compares the family assistance received by two individuals who receive the same income after the minimum 9 per cent superannuation is paid, one of whom receives this income as an employee and another who is the recipient of income protection payments. This highlights the discrepancy of around $1,000 each year.

Leave granted.
Holt Electorate: Australia Day Awards

Mr BYRNE (Holt) (19:13): It is often said that a great element lies at the heart of the Australian nation and runs through its veins. That element, that great truth, can be seen as we look skyward on a clear night. In Kalgoorlie or Cairns, Darwin or Adelaide, Katherine or Sydney, Narre Warren or Cranbourne, we see it in the stars, in a shimmering black sky, the stars of the Southern Cross. Looking at this cluster of stars—this amazing arrangement in the night sky—is a truly great leveller. The Southern Cross is more than just a symbol on our nation's flag; it shows us our place in the world and it demonstrates to us that under these stars we are all equal.

From our First Australians through to those who inhabit these lands today—regardless of race or religion, colour or creed—under these stars we are all equal.

Much has been said of equality in this place, but I believe this concept of equality is a foundation of our country and its future, and it is a concept that truly does define our country. Because we are all equal, we are all entitled to be treated equally by all organs of government; by educational, religious and non-government institutions and bodies; and by the law. It has been, and must be, the cornerstone of any functioning democracy, as I have said. Equality is the precursor to freedom. It also means, though, equality of opportunity, equality of access to every possibility that this country offers—the opportunity to dream, to aspire, to hope and to change the community.

This takes me to the next subject: the sense of being equal under the Southern Cross was never more evident than on Australia Day when I hosted the 2013 Holt Australia Day Awards in Hampton Park and in Doveton. My friend the member for Griffiths was talking about his 14th Australia Day Awards. This was my ninth. We did look at his awards as a template for what we wanted to do.

This annual event, as the member for Griffith has said, is a wonderful occasion on which the community comes together for the common good to acknowledge the work of an amazing group of 33 outstanding individuals and two organisations. For the last nine years I have been honoured to conduct the Holt Australia Day Awards. Each year we recognise the achievements of the unsung heroes in our community. These individuals do tremendous work, donating their time to make the lives of others just a little bit better. But they are the glue that binds our community together. Without their voluntary work, many of the community service and sporting organisation groups would simply not exist.

But they also do this in an authentic, understated Australian way. One of the heroes of I Can Single People Out who received this award, and whom I had the pleasure of honouring on Australia Day, was Captain Shaun Trotter. Shaun joined the CFA as a volunteer at the age of 14 on Ash Wednesday, and has been a volunteer now for over 31 years. Shaun was in charge of the CFA response to the Black Saturday Narre Warren North and Harkaway fires in 2009 and is an active member within the community supporting campaigns such as Stop Violence Against Women and Fire Safe Kids, which promotes fire awareness. Another of the recipients was Margaret O'Callaghan who has been the manager of the Cranbourne Community House for over two decades.

While there were others I wanted to talk about, there was one particular person I wanted to talk about whom I had the honour of presenting the award to—and that is the...
young lady sitting down in the advisers box, Dani Rothwell. Let me tell you about Dani Rothwell. She came up here in a voluntary capacity this week and never knew that I was going to do this to her! But I would like to talk about an exceptional young person. She was an award recipient on Australia Day. Dani, who celebrated her 18th birthday—commiserations: it was in Canberra!—on Sunday is a person with a huge passion for bettering the community around her. She volunteers wherever possible and she works tirelessly to promote and improve the image of young people in our region. This young person was literally the creator and the inspiration behind the Youth Suicide Forum we conducted in Casey after we had unnecessarily lost a lot of our young people. This young woman walked through my door and basically said that, on behalf of the youth of the city of Casey, we had to do something—and we had to do something now. She was the driving force. She was the inspiration. And, on that momentous day, she spoke very bravely of her own experiences of losing some of her friends.

By her own actions she is starting to lead a national conversation by young people about an issue that we as a community we need to address. So congratulations to you, Dani, on behalf of all of the motley crew here, and thank you for your work. It was an honour to present you with the Australia Day Award. You symbolise what it means to be an Australian. You are the hope, the future of our country, and thank you very much for your efforts.

Telecommunications and Personal Safety

Peninsula Link

Mr BILLSON (Dunkley) (19:18): Mobile phone use on our public transport can be quite annoying for passengers sitting close enough to hear much of another's conversation or the music playing. But these communication devices are underutilised in tackling another public transport user concern—and that is personal safety. Despite the excellent and widely supported Baillieu government initiative to deploy Protective Services officers across the network, recent surveys point to a continuing significant public transport passenger safety concern. This user hesitation pushes against the energy and public money being invested to encourage public transport use and to avoid unnecessary congestion on our roads. It is apparent that a higher proportion of people feel unsafe—or that their sense of personal security, or the positive travel experience they hope for, is being eroded—than is reflected by the 1,137 incidents recorded by police on trains across the state in the last year. Unfortunately, a few bad eggs lead to people feeling unsafe. And while these bad eggs may not be breaking the law, their behaviour can make people feel very much the worse for their public transport experience. This is why we can more effectively use the PSOs and make people feel safer on our trains.

The SMS service at the MCG and at Etihad Stadium to report anti-social behaviour at the cricket or at the footy works extremely well in making sure people feel safe, while keeping in check those who want to make life uncomfortable for those around them. On our trains in particular, too often people do not feel sufficiently concerned to dial triple-0, or to press the red emergency button, because this action in the circumstances they confront may well draw more unwelcome attention to them and make them feel even less safe on their journey.

So to deal with abuse, intimidation, unwanted attention or being in the vicinity of an alcohol affected or out of control nuisance, sending a discreet text message to a service, rather than an audible phone call or
a physical march to push the red button, certainly seems to be a better solution. That is where this SMS service, similar to the ones used in the major stadiums in our city, could be used by train users to report antisocial, threatening or criminal behaviour in a very quiet and discreet manner. A service like this could allow people to covertly dob in the louts and they would not feel threatened by the discreet nature of that request for help. The PSOs, who are already employed on the train system, could then coordinate their efforts with the welfare of commuters and also keep an eye on antisocial behaviour. This SMS tool would assist the investment already being made to make our public transport more safe—by way of the PSOs and increasing police presence—even more effective by better targeting that response capability at the kinds of behaviour and incidents that erode confidence in public transport use. The timely and targeted presence of PSOs would be enough to make these bad eggs curb their behaviour and make people feel more comfortable during their journeys.

Beyond an initial stadium style SMS system, an app that could convey the user’s location and the actual train service they are on would be a further enhancement offering smooth integration with the communications systems and tasking technology used by our valued PSOs and by our police.

So, while crime on trains remains fairly static in terms of number of incidents that are reported, there is something we can do to make the vast majority of public transport users be more happy with their experience, particularly on our trains.

Perhaps one of our telcos might support a trial on the heavily patronised Frankston line—a very popular rail service. Many computers make use of that important service between our city and our capital city.

On the topic of transport, it was terrific that recently the Peninsula Link was opened. Speaker, you might recall my campaigning for many years to have what was once known as the Frankston Bypass available to support the transport infrastructure of our community. It was a bit rich when we heard some of the state Labor opposition people claim that this asset should have been opened earlier—perhaps before the end of the year. If it were not for a concerted community campaign over many years and the compelling case many of us put forward on the Frankston Bypass, Labor would never have changed their minds and decided to shift their objection to this project to support.

It is terrific to see so many people using Peninsula Link. We had many people visiting it over the summer period. There is a notable absence of tourist directional signage, which is something I am certainly turning my mind to, to make sure that the benefits of the visitor industry for our region are optimised, as is the travel experience for many of the people in the Dunkley electorate who now have the prospect of reasonable road access to areas of economic, educational and cultural opportunity.

We have a bit more work to do extending the public transport line, but that is a speech for another day, and that is the next instalment on the transport strategy I continue to pursue.

Save the Archives

Mr GEORGANAS (Hindmarsh—Second Deputy Speaker) (19:23): Today I rise to draw attention to an urgent fundraising initiative called Save the Archives, which was launched last year. Save the Archives is a campaign by the Greek diaspora to preserve the migration history of Greek Australian immigrants.

The Save the Archives initiative was launched last year to coincide with a very
important anniversary—the 60th anniversary of the Assisted Migration Agreement signed in 1952 between Australia and Greece. Speaker, as you would know, many thousands of Greeks migrated to Australia under this agreement, which was conducted under the auspices of what was then called the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration or ICEM, which later became the International Organization for Migration that we know today.

Save the Archives has one goal—to preserve the existing documents from those Greek migrants who moved to countries, including Australia, between 1950 and 1975. These records are currently sitting in the basement in the Athens office of International Organization for Migration. There are over 200,000 of these records. Each one tells the story of a man, woman or child, who set off for distant lands for a better future, fleeing war torn Europe, civil wars and poverty, to go to a place where their dreams could indeed be realised. My parents were just two of those people whose records would be in this basement. Many thousands more who would have records in that basement live in my electorate. Speaker, I am sure many hundreds would be in your electorate as well. It is their records and their stories which are under threat of destruction.

Unfortunately, with the Hellenic Republic still in the grips of an economic crisis, the money to preserve these historic records is no longer available. The records are rapidly deteriorating. So unless we act now we are in danger of losing decades of history, culture and heritage of people who left their motherland between 1950 and 1975 to make their homes here in Australia.

Save the Archives is therefore aiming to raise the approximately €25,000 that is required for the IOM in Athens to begin the process of digitising the entry documents so they are preserved forever and a day. More importantly, the process of digitisation means that the records can also be shared—not just with the families of those who migrated to Australia, but with our academia, with researchers, with our cultural institutions and, most importantly, with future generations of Australians who no doubt will be researching their family histories in generations to come.

Once the funds are raised, they will be provided to the IOM in Athens so they can hire staff and equipment to convert all the physical files into digital files. It is estimated that the digitisation of the documents will take nine to 12 months. Plans are also being made about how the digitised archives will be presented, and this is being led by the Greek diaspora in Australia. Save the Archives plans to create an online portal that can make the archives easily accessible. The people behind this effort are a broad group in our Greek Australian community. They are passionate about our history and the people that have migrated to this country from Greece to establish themselves within Australian communities. They are the sons, daughters, nieces, nephews and grandchildren of Greeks who took the bold move to leave the motherland to start a new life in Australia.

As I said, many of them live in my electorate of Hindmarsh and, I am sure, in yours as well, Speaker. My parents are just two of the almost 350,000 whose records are stored in that basement in Athens. So this is a culturally very important project but also one very close to my heart. Records like these are an important part of our identities as individuals but also as communities.

I would like to congratulate and thank in particular Spiro Sarris, who has brought this to my attention, for his activism on this issue. I would like to encourage everyone
interested in helping the campaign to get involved, look at the website, like the Facebook page and follow the Twitter feed. There is also information on how you can donate to the campaign. I look forward to continuing to promote this cause and wish the organisers every success in this very important project. (Time expired)

Queensland: Health

Mr CHRISTENSEN (Dawson) (19:28): The famous psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud believed denial and blaming others was a defence mechanism that helped people sleep at night. It is exactly that kind of behaviour we see across the Labor Party—federal and state—and even in their candidates: denial and blame shifting.

Late last year, the Gillard Labor government tried to sneak through a savage cut in the health funding it had previously promised to state governments around the nation. Queensland's cut is in the order of $103.5 million, out of which $3.2 million is to be cut from the Mackay region's hospitals and health services. A further $7.8 million is cut from the Townsville health service.

Despite this fact, the Gillard Labor government's candidate for Dawson and the Labor member for Mackay have both tried to deny these cuts and shift the blame onto the Queensland government. They have even attacked the independent chairman of the Mackay Hospital and Health Service board for stating the facts publicly. This unfortunate article, which appeared in the Daily Mercury in Mackay on 15 January 2013, entitled 'Mulherin attacks Meng's "politics"', says:

ACTING Opposition Leader and Member for Mackay Tim Mulherin has slammed the Mackay Hospital and Health Board for its engagement in a 'political debate'.

Mr Mulherin said chairman Col Meng's comments on funding cuts had done 'nothing to enhance the board's credibility'.

What was probably worse was that the Labor candidate for Dawson wrote a letter to the editor a few days later, on 21 January 2013. Her first point in that letter was:

There is no federal funding cut to hospitals in Queensland.

That is just plain denial of the facts. She then said:

It is a State Government decision as to where federal funds for hospitals are allocated. If there is a shortfall in our region, it is for the State Health Minister to answer where else in the State our money has gone.”

That is blame-shifting. I have news for the Labor candidate in Dawson. The cuts were made throughout the state. Indeed, they were made right across the nation. We have seen the Labor Party change the definition of 'misogyny' to suit a story they want to tell. Now they are trying to change the definition of a cut, but a cut is a cut is a cut. If you allocate money in a May budget and reduce that amount five months later, then that is a cut. In the current budget and the forward estimates, even in the previous year's budget, health funding to the states has all been cut. Here are the facts. I am going to quote from various Treasury documents: the 2012-13 budget delivered in May last year, the final budget outcome 2011-12 released in September last year, the Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook released in October—any one of these documents should be a cause for major embarrassment to a government that is incapable of making ends meet. But, when you compare some of the content, you will find it is just as chaotic, dysfunctional and destructive as the government that has produced it. Compare the documents and you can see something the Labor Party refuses to admit—that there have been savage cuts to local health services at the exact time when
Labor was attacking the state governments for their cuts. What hypocrisy.

I am going to compare the forward estimates. In 2013-14, the budget document says $2.929 million; MYEFO says $2.84 million, a reduction of $89 million—a cut to Queensland health funding of $89 million. In 2014-15, the budget says $3.267 million; MYEFO says $3.174 million, a reduction of $94 million—a cut to Queensland health funding of $94 million in that year. In 2015-16, the budget says $3.634 million; MYEFO says $3.539 million, a reduction of $96 million—a cut to Queensland health funding in that year of $96 million. But that is not enough.

Not content with cutting funds from the future, this government has decided midway through the year to cut funds from the current financial year. Here it is again. In 2012-13, the budget says $2.724 million; MYEFO $2.661 million, a reduction of $63 million—a cut to Queensland health funding of $63 million. But wait, there's more! Not content with cutting funds midway through the year, the Treasurer decided to grab some money out of last year as well, applying a $40 million retrospective cut to Queensland's health reform funding.

Here it is again. In the 2011-12 budget it is $2.545 million; in the final budget outcome, $2.505 million, a reduction of $40 million—a retrospective cut to Queensland health funding of $40 million. Labor may be able to sleep at night, but the chairman of the health board will not be able to find the savings; and the health workers, whose jobs are less secure, are going to be at risk. (Time expired)

Coal Seam Gas

Mrs ELLIOT (Richmond) (19:33): I rise tonight to speak about the very strong campaign on the North Coast of New South Wales to stop coal seam gas mining. I want to outline some of the remarkable community groups and individuals who are standing together to stop what we see as one of the most harmful activities happening on the North Coast. In fact, today there is an ongoing protest at Doubtful Creek near Kyogle, in the electorate of Page. Members have to understand that there is a lot of passion and commitment from people in terms of the reality and the impact of coal seam gas mining. When we look at the strong community and how everyone has come together, we see so many declarations right across the North Coast, particularly from some of our councils, which have declared themselves CSG free. In fact, in my electorate, Tweed council, Byron council and Lismore council have taken that strong stance so that people know how they feel. Also we have a range of different towns and villages which have nominated themselves to be CSG free. Every day we seem to hear of more towns or villages, streets or communities getting together right across the North Coast. On 8 September last year, during council elections in Lismore, there was also a referendum on CSG where 88 per cent of people, a huge number, voted no to the question, 'Do you support coal seam gas exploration and production in the Lismore City Council Area?'

I want to acknowledge the great work done by the member for Page, Janelle Saffin, in raising this issue, and also the Mayor of Lismore, Jenny Dowell, and some remarkable community groups on the North Coast which are working really hard to stop coal seam gas mining. We have the North Coast Environment Council, CSG Free Northern Rivers, Tweed's Lock the Gate Alliance, Nimbin Environment Centre, Caldera Environment Centre, Transition Byron Shire and also NOROC, the North Coast peak council for local councils, has given money for research into the effect of
CSG on the environment. That is a huge cross-section of groups.

We have also seen a series of different activities right across the North Coast—different marches and protests. In October last year around 4,000 people marched against CSG mining in the town of Murwillumbah and that day was known as 'Rock the Gate'. In May 2012, in Lismore, 7,000 people marched. Recently, when the New South Wales state minister visited Lismore, 800 people protested there. We have the outstanding Knitting Nannas Against Gas—we have to mention them. Also, the Byron Environment Centre coordinated around 10,000 submissions opposing coal seam gas. All of these community groups are opposed to coal seam gas mining on the North Coast.

In contrast, all the National Party state MPs and all the candidates on the North Coast support harmful CSG mining. So there they are, totally isolated, supporting coal seam gas mining. Locals know you just cannot trust the National Party on this issue and on so many other issues.

I would like to refer to an article from the Lismore Northern Star on 12 September 2012. It is called, 'CSG exploration—it's all go'. The whole article outlines how much the state National Party MPs support the CSG mine in our area. I will read some of that to you:

COAL seam gas company Metgasco says the NSW Government has given it the "green light" to explore near Casino.

Just days after Lismore voters overwhelmingly rejected CSG in an election poll, the O'Farrell Government yesterday renewed 21 CSG exploration licences in NSW.

They rubber stamped it. The Northern Star said that what happened was that the local members—Don Page, Thomas George, Geoff Provest and Chris Gulaptis—had a conference call with the Northern Star in a bid to sell the policy. They wanted to tell them how great it all was. What they came up with at the end of it was that one of them—Don Page, who is also the North Coast minister—said that he understood that some people would not be pleased but that it was the world's best policy.

There we have it in the September Northern Star—all the National Party saying how great it is to have coal seam gas mining, all on the conference call telling the editor how great it is and that they all want to get out there and sell the policy. They stand alone on the North Coast. The fact is that they are all too scared to go and tell their boss, Barry O'Farrell, that the people of the North Coast do not want coal seam gas mining. I will keep calling on them to do just that and so will the community. They just cannot remain silent while we have this as our major issue. They all support harmful coal seam gas mining and we will continue to campaign on it. This is a state government issue: yes, they regulate it and they license it. It shows, yet again, why you cannot trust the National Party on an issue that is devastating not just to the environment but also to people's health. We will continue our campaign.

Federal Election

Mr HAASE (Durack) (19:39): I rise this evening to remind the House that it was only last week that we were suddenly alerted of the election date by a Prime Minister who I understand is considering that the future of Australia will be better and more assured if we know that we are going to the election on 14 September. I fail to understand how that is calculated. Unfortunately, none of my learned colleagues are able to tell me why that announcement was made and why such an advantage as calling the election day with short notice was given away.
It does remind me that—and many people may not be aware of this—between now and 14 September there are only about 40 sitting days left for this government. It reminds me that with just those 40 sitting days one ought to take the opportunity to remind the people of the House—and Australia—of the vast differences between this government and the government that may be selected as an alternative on 14 September.

In my electorate of Durack, we have some great concerns. At the top of the concerns are, firstly, the impact of the additional costs of the carbon tax and, probably secondly, the potential impact created by the introduction of the MRRT and the hesitation of global finance to land in Australia today it creates. As important are the concerns about the declaration of more marine parks. The locking up of another 1.3 million square kilometres of Australia's ocean is an act that none of my fishers can justify, because they are very conscious of the fact that the amount of consultation—the degree of rigour, if you like—that was applied to the location selected and the decision to lock up a further area was not sufficient. There was no serious scientific rigour. More so, it seemed that there was a great urgency to appease Green voters and those Green members within the House and the Senate so as to ensure the continuation of their parliamentary support. That is well known in my electorate to be a very, very bad basis for good governance.

A Liberal government would revisit that whole situation, apply scientific rigour and come up with justification for the creation of those marine parks if it was scientifically necessary. Western Australia and the coastal area of the mid-west is the home of an Australia-wide famous fishery: the Western Rock Lobster Fishery. It was one of the first and is one of the best managed fisheries in Australia. It is recognised nationwide as being a great, well-managed and sustainable fishery—the No. 1 managed fishery in Australia. We accept that situations change and over time in recent years further changes and restrictions have been added to management of that fishery. But this has been done by a state government with good scientific information and great, ongoing consultation with the industry.

The agricultural situation that I referred to is found to be most offensive by my electorate in relation to live exports. Live exports have been effectively destroyed. They have been about halved by the rash decision of the Labor government, and therefore the pastoralists across Western Australia do not trust this government anymore and are pleased by the knowledge that an elected Liberal government will cement those relationships so as to ensure the continuation of the live export industry. There is no doubt that the plan of the Liberal coalition shows real solutions for all Australians and we seriously believe that, if the election does stretch out to 14 September in reality, Australians will have the opportunity for the first time in a long time to secure a good government. (Time expired)

Millennium Development Goals

Mr MELHAM (Banks) (19:44): On 18 September 2012 I met with representatives from Micah Challenge, two of whom were from my electorate of Banks. This is a regular visit, made on an annual basis, to keep parliamentarians up to date with Australia's progress against the Millennium Development Goals. I am aware that many of my colleagues regularly participate in similar meetings. I am always struck by the deep commitment and passion of these representatives to reducing poverty globally. For the most part, these young people work the system to keep politicians up to the mark
and to hold the parliament accountable. This is as it should be.

Members would be aware that Australia was one of the 189 countries to adopt the Millennium Declaration and commit to the Millennium Development Goals in 2000. The eight Millennium Development Goals are a shared world vision for reducing poverty. These include halving extreme poverty, getting all children into school, closing the gap on gender inequality, saving lives lost to disease and a lack of available health care, and protecting the environment. These are achievable commitments to improve the wellbeing of the world’s poorest people.

These goals underpin Australia’s aid program. This year in our meeting we spoke about ‘Finishing the Race’, which is the core of Micah Challenge’s program for the current year. On their website, Micah Challenge, in describing the organisation, say:

Working for justice cannot be left to the politicians and professional lobbyists. It requires long-term effort from all parts of the community working together to speak up.

I agree wholeheartedly. Justice should not just be left to politicians or professional lobbyists—the whole community has a role. I admire those who are part of the Micah Challenge because they not only talk the talk; they walk the walk. They do more than say, as many do, ‘something should be done’. They go out there and take action. They work to ensure that the community is aware of the extent of poverty and the manner in which it can be halved. I have great esteem for the organisation and the membership. The representatives I met outlined specific actions they requested I take in the coming year. They were politely insistent, and I have no problem with that. As a result, I am speaking tonight, have put information up on my website and have committed to attend an event in my electorate.

One has to ask why so many people are so passionate about this. The answer is very simple: the story of poverty in the world is truly appalling. This has been accentuated in recent years by the global financial crisis, and tens of thousands of additional children will die each year in the next five or six years before we reach the target.

This is one of the few issues that is genuinely bipartisan, and I am pleased to acknowledge that. Since 2007, members of all parties have made themselves available to receive our visitors. On 22 June, Prime Minister Gillard announced a $97 million Civil Society Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Fund to work with NGOs doing high-quality water and sanitation projects in Africa, Asia and the Pacific. The new funding builds on the initial $32.6 million program, which was completed in March 2012. The $97 million in funding will support around 40 water, sanitation and hygiene initiatives in 20 countries, teaming up AusAID and non-government organisations with proven records in this area. The program’s many successes include delivering access to safe water to more than 560,000 people and helping 780,000 people gain basic sanitation in Bangladesh, Kenya, Mozambique and Vietnam, among others.

It is rewarding to see—and I know that every member of parliament would agree with me—that our communities, particularly young people, do not let us forget the parliament’s commitment to achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

**National Broadband Network**

Ms LEY (Farrer) (19:48): I am delighted to have the opportunity to address the House tonight, because earlier today the government via the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, Senator Stephen Conroy, gave further assurances regarding the rollout of the
National Broadband Network to regional and rural Australia. I am delighted by the timing as it gives me the chance to highlight the stunning nondelivery of the NBN into my part of rural and regional Australia, which the government seems to conveniently ignore whenever it puts out another fanciful promise about superfast broadband.

Just for the record, the announcement today states that all Australians will now have access to faster speeds with the NBN's fixed wireless and long-term satellite services upgraded to provide a doubling of broadband speeds to 25 megabits per second to download and five megabits per second to upload. I make pointed reference to the government's use of the term 'all Australians' there and add the line that seems to be missing from this morning's media release: 'All Australians will now have access to faster speeds where it is politically expedient for the government to provide them.' You need no greater evidence of this than the breathless media release which came out just two hours later from the member for New England, who suggests this will make it even easier for local people to decide whether to sign up.

I might say that, while an Independent, the member for New England does happen to maintain the balance of power for this government and just happened to formally announce overnight his intention to recontest his seat. Towns such as Armidale, Inverell, Tenterfield, Glen Innes, Guyra, Uralla, Quirindi and Gunnedah are all set to benefit, says the Independent member. This is where I am confused, because each of these towns in New England, apparently now set to benefit from signing up to fast wireless, is already pencilled in to receive the NBN's fibre network on the list released by the minister in July last year.

Confusion exists also in my own seat of Farrer, where towns such as Howlong, Mulwala and Barham are also in line for fibre optic broadband but are currently seeing NBN wireless towers popping up on the outskirts of each town. Let me ask Minister Conroy a rhetorical question: why on earth would any town in the member for New England's electorate, or indeed my own, get excited by superfast broadband of 25 megabits a second out of the sky when in a couple of years they are supposed to have 100 megabits a second delivered to their front door? Let me answer. Originally, half a million households were forecast to be to using the fibre network by mid-2013, but only one-tenth of that number are now expected to be connected.

It is not that long a bow to draw to suggest the government has absolutely no hope of getting fibre to the home to any of these rural areas in the foreseeable future, so it is trying to dupe us into thinking a bit of faster wireless will do. Let me advise the minister that we are simply not that dumb. If the coalition is fortunate enough to be returned to government this year, we will conduct a fully transparent cost-benefit analysis to assess the quickest and most cost-effective means of upgrading fixed line broadband in all areas of Australia where services are currently substandard or unavailable. For my electorate of Farrer, that means every single town, bar Albury—ironically, the only place where Labor has actually announced a rough timetable to deliver its fibre rollout.

I can only echo the sentiments of the National Farmers' Federation about today's announcement by the government. Having faster internet speeds and equivalent pricing is a nice premise, but right now many people in rural areas are still struggling with poor mobile coverage—something many in urban areas take for granted. Let me assure the House that, if the coalition does return to
government, rural and regional Australia will certainly not be the political plaything it has become under Labor.

**Tasmanian Economy**

Mr WILKIE (Denison) (19:52): The fact that Tasmania receives more GST per capita than other states is much remarked upon. Regrettably the commentary from the mainland is sometimes shrill and unhelpful, for instance from the Premier of Western Australia, Colin Barnett, who has gone so far as to describe Tasmania as a beggar state. Of course, it is not as simple as that, because there are many reasons why Tasmania receives, and must continue to receive, more GST per capita than other states, including our relatively poor health outcomes and the fact that Tasmania simply does not have the mining revenue stream enjoyed by Western Australia.

Relevant too is Bass Strait, which is no small matter when you consider not so much the length of the journey, or the treachery of the waters, but the very high costs involved which make some commercial endeavours unsustainable or at least marginal. A friend told me recently that he was getting about $20 for a kilogram of wool, but was having to spend about $1 of that to get it to Victoria. Another friend told me that his family’s manufacturing enterprise in Hobart pays $1,500 to send a container to Melbourne, and that is three times the cost of sending the container on from Melbourne to China. It is not just exports that are being hit with costs being imposed by the shipping lines and port authorities. One constituent told me last year that he had transported a prefabricated swimming pool from Brisbane to Hobart and two-thirds of the almost $15,000 freight cost was just to get the prime mover and trailer over and back across Bass Strait.

This is a ridiculous situation and one which really should have been remedied by the Tasmanian Freight Equalisation Scheme that was introduced in 1976 and is budgeted to cost $102 million this financial year. In essence, the scheme is designed to help reduce freight costs associated with sea transport. It operates under ministerial directions and guidelines issued by the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport and applies to northbound goods, southbound manufacturing and mining goods, and primary production. The trouble is that the amount of money available is simply inadequate, even more so on account of the federal government’s decision to reduce the funding in recent years.

Moreover, the scheme is too narrow, as goods bound for international export are specifically excluded. For example, the boots made by Blundstone in Hobart must first be shipped to Melbourne before being transferred to overseas-bound vessels, yet they attract no subsidy for the Bass Strait leg, even though this constitutes about half of the total freight cost from Tasmania to North America and other destinations. Importantly, this subsidy exclusion for the Tasmania-Victoria leg for international exports is a very significant cost to business and one entirely unavoidable ever since the direct international shipping link out of Bell Bay in northern Tasmania ceased in 2011. It is not for want of trying that this particular problem continues, because the Tasmanian Exporters Group, headed by Bob Gozzi, has been working hard to resurrect a direct overseas freight service and has attracted some interest from the Swire group of companies. Special mention should also go to Doug Dickinson who advocates tirelessly for remedying Tasmania’s freight woes, and to Peter Brohier who continues to push for broader reforms that would see the cost of crossing Bass Strait come down to the cost of travelling a similar distance by road.
Bringing down the cost of moving people and freight to and from Tasmania is the one thing governments can do at relatively low cost to bolster the Tasmanian economy and reduce its dependency on Canberra. But as far as freight at least goes it needs to apply to all goods in and out, including international exports. This is something that could be done quickly and simply by expanding the existing freight scheme and giving it the funding to match—perhaps another $60 million a year. I have lobbied the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition on this matter and trust they have the sense to act on my concerns. Last year, Canberra did provide a one-off $20 million assistance package for international exporters, but that did not go far, and the Tasmanian government pilfered a quarter of it for other purposes anyway. We can but hope that the dynamics of an election year will generate a more effective and enduring solution.

House adjourned at 19:58

NOTICES

The following notice was given:

Mr Gray to move:

That, in accordance with the provisions of the Public Works Committee Act 1969, the following proposed work be referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works for consideration and report: Construction of a new post-entry quarantine facility at Mickleham, Victoria.
Wednesday, 6 February 2013

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Scott) took the chair at 09:30.

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

Victoria: Health Services

Mr TEHAN (Wannon) (09:30): I rise today to ask the Minister for Health what the problem is that she has with the Victorian health system. Why is she treating it with such contempt? Why did she make a decision halfway through a financial year which ripped $107 million from our state budgets? After CEOs had put their plans in place for the financial year, done all the hard work and worked out how their hospitals were going to function for 12 months, why did the minister come in and rip out $107 million five months into that financial year, throwing everything into chaos?

I can tell you what this means locally for my electorate: South West Healthcare, a $1.4 million reduction; Western District Health Service, $430,000 reduction; East Grampians Health Service, $181,000; Maryborough District Health Service, $173,000; Portland District Health, $257,000; Beaufort and Skipton Health Services, $55,000; Casterton Memorial Hospital, $46,000; Heywood Rural Health, a small rural health provider, $31,000; Moyne Health Services, $47,000; Terang and Mortlake Health Services, $69,000; and Timboon and District Healthcare Service, $50,000. These healthcare services could not afford to have this money ripped away from them by an uncaring health minister. Not only that, in our area we have seen utter disdain for a movement which is trying to get in place an integrated cancer centre. Peter's Project wrote to the health minister saying that they would like a meeting to see her to talk about developing an integrated cancer care centre for south-west Victoria. She did not even respond to the letter. She got a middle-ranking bureaucrat to reply, saying, 'Sorry, no meeting, no money.' The community would not stomach that. What did they do? They wrote to the Prime Minister and asked her to get the Minister for Health to reverse her decision. It was only because of that that she reversed it and she will now see them. As the front page of the Warnambool Standard said, 'What an insult.' The Minister for Health has to treat Victoria's health system with the proper due diligence that it deserves.

Blair Electorate: Ipswich Motorway and Blacksoil Interchange

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (09:33): Last Wednesday I was heading out to the flood affected Somerset region along the Warrego Highway and I was held up at the Blacksoil Interchange as I tried to access the Brisbane Valley Highway—a common occurrence made worse by the floods. As I sat in the traffic, one of my constituents from Brassall called me expressing his frustration that he was gridlocked as he tried to access the Warrego Highway. With flood impacted bridges and roads, a large number of vehicles had been forced onto the Warrego Highway and it was chaos—far more than 40,000 vehicles, which usually travel through the intersection along that road. The frustration was compounded by the fact that the upgrade to the Blacksoil Interchange would have assisted to alleviate the gridlock. This federal Labor government agreed with the Bligh Labor government before the last state election to upgrade the Blacksoil Interchange—a $70 million project, $54 million coming from the federal government and $16 million from the state government. In fact, the federal government provided the $54 million and did it by June last year. The $54 million was provided under the
Regional Infrastructure Fund, which those opposite voted against. This money is sitting in the coffers of the LNP state government in Queensland earning interest and doing nothing. So far, the coalition government in Queensland has done absolutely nothing on the project.

Those opposite complain about infrastructure, but they are parsimonious rather than progressive when it comes to infrastructure spending. In Queensland we have funded rail, road and ports to $8.7 billion—more than double the funding of the Howard coalition government.

The economic development of our region is being held back, and lives have been put at risk on a daily basis. The project has blown out to $94 million in large part because of the constant delays and inactivity of the coalition government in Queensland. They have said that the reason for the delay is that they want to redesign an access point on a service road. That is a bit like refusing to lay the slab and building the structure of a house because you are not happy with the location of the dishwasher in the kitchen.

On 14 January 2012, I joined then Premier Bligh in announcing the opening of the tenders, which was interrupted by the election. Signs went up, and 13 months have passed. The coalition government was elected in March 2012 in Queensland. They have seen the project blow out, have done nothing on the project and have opposed road infrastructure in the region. This is typical of what they have done with their opposition to the upgrade of Ipswich Motorway. The coalition government have a horrible record in my area when it comes to road infrastructure. They have opposed the Dinmore to Goodna section of Ipswich Motorway—a $1.7 billion project, delivered on time—in fact, six months ahead of schedule—and under budget.

The people of Blair have had enough of the folly and the failings of the coalition government in Queensland. It is time to start working on the Blacksoil Interchange, it is time for activity and it is time to stop procrastinating.

Volunteers

Mr WYATT (Hasluck) (09:36): Every year, over six million Australians contribute their time, energy and expertise to our communities through volunteering. In all, our country benefits from more than 730 million hours of volunteers' time.

In November, to mark International Volunteer Day, my community celebrated the achievements and the commitment of local volunteers. As a community representative, I have the great privilege of witnessing firsthand some of the fantastic work of volunteers in my region.

Without volunteers in my community, many local organisations would not be able to provide the outstanding services and support that they do. We live in a stronger community because of local volunteers. Unfortunately, all too often these dedicated individuals go unrecognised and unacknowledged for the ways in which they build up our communities. International Volunteer Day was a perfect opportunity recognise just a few of the individuals who make the Hasluck community such a great place to live.

Today I particularly want to share the stories of three of the volunteers whom I was able to recognise on International Volunteer Day. Kiara Hicks is a 21-year-old with a great deal of passion for helping others. Kiara works with the Shire of Kalamunda Home and Community Care Meals on Wheels team as well as several animal shelters in my electorate. She was
nominated to receive the Hasluck Youth Volunteer Award for her efforts with the home and community care program. Each and every Friday, Kiara makes meal deliveries to the High Wycombe area, but with her visits Kiara brings much more than food. She brings friendship and happiness with her as she makes her visits. Everyone loves her bubbly and friendly personality and looks forward to their conversations with her. Her dedication and commitment help the Meals on Wheels team assist many senior Australians in my community to live independent lives.

Another great volunteer from my community who has been recognised with the Long-term Commitment to Community Service Award is Jim Ridgwell. Jim was nominated for this award for his many years of work with the Gosnells State Emergency Service Unit. Our state emergency services deploy critical assistance during times of emergencies, and Jim has been a cornerstone member of the Gosnells team since its creation in 1980. Jim has led many fundraising efforts for the Gosnells SES to allow the team to build a new emergency headquarters and purchase new vehicles.

Bill Dewhurst has dedicated his life to the black cockatoo and has helped establish a sanctuary for the preservation of the Kaarakin Black Cockatoo. He is a founding member and has been successful in breeding young birds for release back into the wild.

The contributions of volunteers give back to our communities an invaluable service and a commitment that could never be matched by the type of funding that would be required.

**Menslink**

**Dr LEIGH (Fraser) (09:39):** Last week I was part of a local team that helped to raise funds and awareness for Menslink at the Prime Minister's XI cricket match at Manuka Oval. Menslink is a Canberra charity that provides counselling and mentoring services to young men. It recognises that while both young men and women suffer from anxiety and depression, the rates of young men who reach out for help are far too low. Only about half of all young men who need assistance reach out for it.

There was an overwhelming response from the public to Menslink and a recognition of the important work that Menslink does. The crowd was asked to wear blue in support of Menslink and many did. As a result of the more than 100 volunteers who worked the crowd at Manuka oval, six new volunteer mentors have become involved. Four young men and their families have made contact with Menslink and the charity raised almost $5,000. The main purpose of Menslink's involvement on the day was to raise awareness, but it was pleasing that a number of corporate sponsors and individuals pledged further support for Menslink in the future.

Menslink was founded by Richard Shanahan in 2002. It takes a strengths-based approach rather than focusing on what is wrong with young men. It identifies and works with positive resources and abilities so that young men can move their life in a more positive direction. Silence is Deadly is one program coordinated by Menslink in partnership with the Canberra Raiders. Players go to local high schools and share their stories with young men to send the message that not reaching out or speaking to someone can be deadly. There is also a mentoring program. People like my friend Tony Shields work in partnership with young men, talking to them about their life choices. As Menslink CEO, Martin Fisk, says, 'For young men who go through Menslink, the only statistic I want them to have is as a taxpayer.'
I want to give special mention to some of those who helped on the day: Michael Aicholzer, Scott Cassidy, Glenn Cullen, Elias Hallaj, Graham Hannaford, Shane Horsburgh, David Mathews, Sandra Marie, James Milligan, Fergus Nelson, Rob Regent, and Margaret and Ian Watt. I also thank Martin Fisk and Scott MacFarlane for inviting me to be part of the Prime Minister's XI Menslink team. Menslink fulfils a vital role in supporting the young men of Canberra. If anyone would like to offer assistance to Menslink or reach out for the help they provide, please contact them or my office.

**Bomford, Mr Stephen**

Mr MATHESON (Macarthur) (09:42): Today I would like to pay tribute to a much-loved member of my community who passed away suddenly in January from complications following surgery. Stephen Bomford was only 58 years old and the principal of St Peter's Anglican Primary School in Campbelltown. He was a principal who knew most students at his school by name and would deliver a Freddo frog to each of them in their classroom on their birthday. If their birthday was in the school holidays, he would deliver a frog to them on their first day back at school so nobody missed out. He was a lovely man who not only dedicated his life to educating children but also loved to see them happy and with a smile on their face.

On 14 January I joined more than 2,000 people at Stephen's memorial service including past and present students, teachers, parents, his family members and friends. It was an emotional service which encapsulated his commitment to the students and staff at the school and the love he had for his family. He had dedicated 15 years of his life to St Peter's Anglican Primary School and was remembered as a passionate educator and a humble man who touched the lives of many Campbelltown families.

At the service, many of his colleagues and students spoke about his great vision, dedication, encouragement and deep Christian faith. In a recent addition of the *Macarthur Advertiser*, St Peter's Anglican Church minister, Reverend Nigel Fortescue, described Stephen as 'a selfless man who was full of energy and vitality'. He said Stephen was a man of great conviction, a man of great faith, and a man of great moral character and passion. He said that as a principal he always sought the best from every teacher, staff member and student who came through St Peter's and knew just about every student by name. Stephen was a great leader who brought out the best in those around him, students and teachers alike.

Deputy Principal, Robert Alderden said that the school had thrived under Stephen's inspiring and visionary leadership. Mr Alderden described Stephen as: … a much-loved and highly respected man, a great friend, a devoted colleague, and an exemplary man of God.

At his memorial service, we were shown some video footage of the 2012 year 6 farewell. In his speech at the farewell, Stephen encouraged the students to remember what they had learned in school. He quoted from the movie *Dead Poets Society*: carpe diem, which is Latin for 'seize the day'.

Stephen told his students to make sure every day counts because every single day they have on earth was given to them as a gift from the Lord—a wonderful parting gift from this principal to his students. The school's 2009 captain Katherine Trotman also spoke at the service and said that Stephen was a truly wonderful headmaster who always encouraged her.
Today I would like to pay tribute to this man who left behind a great legacy to the people of Macarthur. I am sure the children of St Peters will go on to do great things because of the wonderful example he set for them.

I am sure his wife, Michele, and his children, Christopher, Jennifer, and Justin, and stepdaughters, Catherine and Samantha, are very proud of his achievements. My thoughts and prayers are with them all at this difficult time. I am sure that, despite the sadness they feel, they are very proud of the man Stephen was and of the impact he had on so many lives, both young and not so young, throughout his career. Macarthur was very lucky to have such a dedicated teacher and a great visionary in our community, who will be missed by all who knew him.

**Melbourne Electorate: Lunar New Year Festival**

**Mr BANDT (Melbourne) (09:45):** On Sunday, 27 January, I was honoured to be invited as a guest to attend one of the highlights of Melbourne's cultural calendar. The Lunar New Year Festival in Richmond, which is now in its 14th year, also served this year as an opportunity to celebrate Australia Day. This is one of the first Vietnamese festivals in the country. It is the best in Melbourne and it rivals other festivals in Australia. It is not just locals who come from surrounding suburbs but this year almost 80,000 people attended the festival, I am told.

It is appropriate that it was an opportunity to also celebrate Australia Day. It is a reminder that multiculturalism is in fact the defining characteristic of Australia. I am also very pleased that in Victoria there was a tripartisan commitment expressed on the day that multiculturalism would never become an election issue and would enjoy the support of all parties in Victoria.

It is also a reminder to the rest of us that, when Australia extends a welcome to people who are coming here seeking a better life, we all benefit. People who are pillars of the community are people that we would now call 'boat people'. They are now occupying very senior positions within the community, and we can all learn a lot from them.

I want to pay particular tribute to RABA, the Richmond Asian Business Association—in particular, Mr Nhan Le, the president; Mr Meca Ho; Tony Pham; and the committee—for organising what is now the envy of other festivals around the country.

We do, as do the rest of the community, particularly as an electorate where there are many new emerging communities, have a lot to learn from the Vietnamese community in particular but also from the Chinese community. There are, of course, challenges facing traders in Richmond. They are the challenges facing many small businesses and challenges facing those particularly in the retail sector, but it remains one of the most vibrant and attractive parts of Melbourne. I have often said—and I was affirmed in this belief by attending the RABA festival—that if the rest of Australia was more like Richmond, it would be a much better place.

One of the first meetings I had on being elected was with the Prime Minister's department to ensure that the money made available for the gateway project at the top of Victoria Street was going to flow. I have had a number of meetings since then and I am very pleased to announce that during the course of this year construction will begin and hopefully be completed on a gateway at the entrance of Victoria Street. It is my hope that when visitors come to Melbourne they will see Victoria Street in Richmond as an equivalent tourist
destination to Little Bourke Street in Chinatown, and I thank RABA for continuing to put Richmond on the map.

**McMillan Electorate: Avenues of Honour**

Mr BROADBENT (McMillan) (09:49): On listening to these three-minute constituency statements, I have to say it has been a pleasure to stand here and listen to the member for Wannon, Hasluck, Macarthur—and Wright of course; I am yet to hear what he has to say—and their heart for their constituency. It has always been an honour for me to hear what they have to say, especially the member for Macarthur in his response to the loss of that greatly loved principal.

I want to talk to you today, Mr Deputy Speaker, about avenues of honour. I do not know what it is like in your electorate but in Victoria avenues of honour have played a major role in commemoration of World War I and World War II battles, particularly as they affected local communities. Quite often local communities were recruited into the one brigade, the one band. In any given battle, all of the men in that community may have lost their lives.

The avenues of honour with their trees each depicted an individual person who was lost in those battles. Some avenues of honour have been protected, cared for and enhanced; others have lost their glow. Yet still as I drive through small communities of my electorate in South Gippsland, I come across the beginnings of the avenues of honour that are still there.

What I am suggesting to you today, Mr Deputy Speaker, regarding the century of Anzac next year, is setting aside funds either for new Avenues of Honour—there is a two-sided part to this—for reconstruction or rehabilitation or for new Avenues of Honour, because the entrances to the towns have changed. In parts of your electorate where the new highway has changed, the highway comes into a different part of town and the old highway, where the Avenues of Honour were planted, are no longer the entrances. So the visitor to the town does not get the inspiration that is clearly about commemorating the Anzac spirit in World War I and World War II—and other wars that we have been a part of.

It is also a local celebration. We have our war memorials, we have our shrines of remembrance, but local communities have their Avenues of Honour and their memorials. I know when you were a minister in this regard, and I will be very quick, many of the memorials were rebuilt and I honour you for that and all those who were involved in that. However, this is a chance for us to set aside funds for each community to create a new Avenue of Honour or entrance to the community or to give the opportunity for local government and others to respond to the centenary.

Ms RISHWORTH (Kingston) (09:51): Late last year it was my absolute pleasure to host the annual Southern Suburbs Volunteer Services awards ceremony. It was an opportunity to recognise 100 local volunteers, who were recognised for going above and beyond what a normal volunteer does. That is a hard one, because volunteers contribute so much in my local area. There are so many people in it. Whether it is providing services to the elderly, helping out at schools and kindergartens or improving the environment in our local area. There are so many. There were 100 local volunteers recognised at two ceremonies.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank our wonderful guest speakers: Evelyn O‘Loughlin from Volunteering SA and NT; Amanda Blair, an Adelaide personality who gave a very funny rendition of her role in volunteering with the CWA; and Jane Woodlands-
Thompson, head coach of the Adelaide Thunderbirds. She did a great job. They talked about their role of volunteering.

The day was not about the guest speakers, it was about the many volunteers. I cannot go through all 100 of the volunteers but I would like to highlight some not because they were any better but because it shows the range of great volunteering. Rosemary Dunbar was requested by the Aldinga Community Centre to bring spinning, knitting and weaving classes to the centre, to give people the opportunity to learn these skills. She now has over 60 students and these skills have been enthusiastically received in her classes.

Adam Storey was one of the youngest volunteers. He works mentoring young people at the Noarlunga Downs Primary School, every week and will do so for two-thirds of this year. It shows that young people are contributing back to the local area, and he is going to continuously do it. There have been a number of students. The principal reported that there has been an attitude change, and he puts it solely down to the positive relationship with Adam that the young students have.

Alan Griffin OAM from the Southern Football League has been involved as a director of junior football and has had a wide range of responsibilities. He has taken on everything. He has worked with junior players, under 8s to under 18s. He has been exemplary and has inspired football clubs in the south to start primary school aged league for boys and girls. We have Tod Stokes, who volunteers for the Sammy D Foundation. He is a tireless volunteer and gives presentations to football clubs on how to ensure that parties are responsible and that there is not violence or alcohol fuelled violence. He also initiated the White Ribbon round in the Southern Football League. Clint Irvine is from the Noarlunga Little Athletics Centre, which has recently had to move. Clint has worked tirelessly to ensure that Little Athletics can continue to be available to kids in the southern suburbs and in Noarlunga. There are so many volunteers, I could not go through all 100. That is a small snapshot of the great talent we have in the south.

Mr BUCHHOLZ (Wright) (09:54): I rise today to advise the members of the House of an outstanding Australian, an outstanding Queenslander and an outstanding constituent of mine in Wright: Graham Porter. Graham Porter has recently been awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia for his work as a volunteer. Graham's OAM (General Division) is officially described as the pre-eminent means by which Australia recognises the outstanding and meritorious service of its citizens. It has been awarded to Graham for his services to the community in sporting, youth and service organisations. It is a suitable acknowledgement of Graham's 50 years of service to the communities in which he has been involved.

At the age of 22 Graham was already involved with the Presbyterian Fellowship of Australia, and the scope of his community service involvement included rowing clubs, music clubs, youth orchestras, youth clubs, service clubs and school P&Cs, where he specialised in fundraising. There is not a town or city where Graham and his wife Marjorie have lived that has not had Graham as a member of the committee or executive member of the P&C association.

Graham trained as an engineer, gained a Bachelor of Applied Science in Applied Geography and a postgraduate diploma in town planning. Graham worked in various fields
with the roads and aerodromes branch of the then Commonwealth Department of Works and was part of the team of the Department of Works and Planning which prepared Sydney Airport 2 for its first jet passenger aircraft.

Graham spent 12 years in Canberra with the National Capital Development Commission, which taught him practical town-planning solutions. During this time, whilst also studying, he built the family home and was on the committee of the Chapman Primary School P&C. After leaving Canberra, Graham moved the family to various places depending on the available work and spent some time in Mackay, where he managed the Mackay Regional Development Bureau. During this time he was involved with the Queensland Conservatorium of Music, set up a new home and was elected as a Mackay City alderman. He was the founder and inaugiral President of the Mackay Regional Beekeepers Association and the Mariculture Association. Additionally, he was the inaugural Chairman of the Mackay Conservatorium of Music, Community Support Committee, President of the Mackay Youth Orchestra and founder and life member of the Mackay Rowing Club. It was during Graham's time in Mackay that he joined Rotary—the relationship that I know him through. Following their relocation from Mackay in 2004 to Harrisville he joined Boonah Rotary. He then became Charter President of the Rotary Club of Fassifern Valley which was founded in 2010.

Graham sees a cause and asks: 'Why aren't we doing anything about this?' When people say that it is too hard, he looks at solving the problem through an organisation or else he will form an organisation which addresses the issue. I congratulate Graham.

**Australian Floods**

Ms SAFFIN (Page) (09:57): I am going to continue talking about the floods that have hit my area and put on record in this place in essence what I have said in my local newspaper. There is often confusion about the way the flood assistance works, and people rightly are concerned; they just want to know that everything works.

I have been pushing hard, building the strongest possible case—with the Treasurer, the Attorney-General and the Prime Minister's office—to activate the Australian government disaster recovery assistance payment, AGDRP, for the Clarence Valley local government area. This is the one that is referred to as 'cash assistance'. However, there is assistance aimed at alleviating personal hardship or distress which is available already under the joint Commonwealth-state natural disaster relief and recovery arrangements that were announced by Prime Minister Gillard and New South Wales Premier O'Farrell last week when he was in the Clarence Valley.

The flood recovery centre in Prince Street, Grafton, is dealing with category A assistance, which can include emergency food, clothing, temporary accommodation, repair or replacement of furniture and personal effects, essential repairs to housing, removal of rubbish and things that have accumulated post flood—and this one was fast and furious and really dirty—and personal and financial counselling. Category B assistance is also in force under the NDRRA, and this allows our councils to apply for funding to restore or replace essential public assets and for primary producers to apply for concessional loans—and also small business.

I have stayed in contact with state MPs Don Page, Thomas George and Chris Gulaptis—the members for Ballina, Lismore and Clarence—particularly in relation to activating category C
assistance for the entire region, which we all want and which would provide recovery grants for primary producers to help cover the cost of clean-up and reinstatement. This is the way it works: the state puts it forward to the Commonwealth; Premier O’Farrell makes a formal request in writing to Prime Minister Gillard. That has happened already in Queensland. I know that the region’s cane, macadamia and small crop farmers see category C as crucial to recovery in the agricultural sector.

Last Friday I witnessed firsthand with Governor-General Her Excellency Quentin Bryce, Clarence Valley Mayor, Councillor Richie Williamson, Councillor Jeremy Challacombe and state member for Clarence, Chris Gulaptis the terrible damage and loss to families in the Copmanhurst area alone and heard about many others in the Clarence Valley. Many constituents have contacted me directly or through my office from Lower Kangaroo Creek, South Grafton, Coaldale, Southgate, Brushgrove, Woodford Island, Harwood, Palmers Island and Chatsworth Island. Once again, we have had a summer of bushfires, floods and storms. I commend the State Emergency Service, Rural Fire Service volunteers, council workers, local media and all of the good neighbours in the community who do such great work to keep people safe and get on with the big clean-up.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott): Order! In accordance with standing order 193, the time for members’ constituency statements has concluded.

Sitting suspended from 10:01 to 11:31

BILLS

International Tax Agreements Amendment Bill 2012

Second Reading

Debate resumed on the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr TONY SMITH (Casey) (11:31): On behalf of the opposition I rise to speak on the International Tax Agreements Amendment Bill 2012. This bill was introduced by the Treasurer, Mr Swan, in the last sitting week of last year. As was made clear in the second reading speech and in the explanatory memorandum, it amends the International Tax Agreements Act 1953 to bring into force new taxation agreements with India, the Marshall Islands and Mauritius. I will deal with each aspect briefly.

The India protocol was signed in New Delhi on 16 September 2011 and will amend the agreement between both governments for the avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to tax on income. That was signed in 1991. The protocol will also seek to improve the administrative framework for tax co-operation between both countries and will update the rules for the taxation of business profits and services, bringing them into line with international practice. As well, it will insert rules to protect taxpayers from tax discrimination.

With respect to the Marshall Islands and Mauritius agreements, both cover allocation of taxing rights and transfer pricing adjustments. The Marshall Islands agreement was signed in May 2010. There was no pre-existing agreement of this type between Australia and the Marshall Islands. The Mauritius agreement was signed in December 2010. Both agreements
include provisions dealing with a range of circumstances. They were outlined in the explanatory memorandum and in the second reading speech.

Very briefly, income from pensions and retirement annuities will generally be taxed only in the country of the recipient's residence, provided the income is subject to tax in that country. Income from government services will generally be taxed only in the country that pays the remuneration. Payments from abroad to visiting students and business apprentices for the purpose of their maintenance, education and training will be exempt from tax in the country visited, and a non-binding administrative mechanism will be established to assist taxpayers to seek resolution of transfer pricing disputes.

These are noncontroversial international agreements that seek to avoid double taxation, codify tax allocation and combat tax avoidance. The coalition supports the bill.

Mr HUSIC (Chifley—Government Whip) (11:34): We are here today to talk about the amendment bill for the international tax agreements of 1953 designed to cover a number of jurisdictions—chiefly, Mauritius, Marshall Islands and India—and, in particular, to deal with a number of issues arising from the taxation of profits and cross-border services. The agreement with India, as indicated by the Assistant Treasurer in his second reading speech, is basically a protocol that will amend the Australia-India tax treaty, which was signed well over two years ago, and promote closer economic cooperation. The protocol will also improve the integrity of the Australian tax system by improving the exchange of information and also build in new provisions providing mutual assistance in the collection of tax debts. In relation to Marshall Islands and Mauritius the bilateral agreements eliminate double taxation of certain income, particularly that earned by individuals, government workers, students, businesses, apprentices, pensioners, retirees and the like. Both Marshall Islands and Mauritius will need to provide reciprocal taxation treatment in relation to Australian government employees in some of those categories. Importantly, this will also provide a mutual agreement procedure for the resolution of taxpayer disputes involving transfer pricing. The government has had a big focus on this issue and ushered legislation on it through the parliament last year.

I want to reflect on the impact of the economic relationship with India and what elements of this agreement will do. Something that deeply impresses me is the strong entrepreneurial spirit of the Indian-Australians I see in my area. Indian-Australians and other Australians from the subcontinent are a part of our community that is growing in value. In fact, it is often reflected upon that one of the most common surnames in Blacktown is Singh. This reflects the huge contribution of Indian-Australians to our community. The number of stores, enterprises and other small businesses operated by Indian-Australians continues to grow and continues to be valued because it is providing jobs, prosperity and vibrancy to the region. I take this opportunity to thank those members of the Indian-Australian community for their efforts in promoting economic growth and jobs in the area and for what they do to promote closer economic relations between our two countries. Again, that is a subject that is touched upon by this amendment bill.

It is worth noting that the businesses operated in my area and throughout Australia started by Indian-Australians sometimes become platforms to launch into broader ventures reaching across borders. The diaspora here forms an important link in strengthening the bonds between our two nations and boosting trade and commerce. Trade and investment links between our two countries are especially strong, and expanding. Trade has more than doubled in the last
six years to well over $20 billion. Within Australia, Indian investment approvals are up by $11 billion over 2011-12. That is no small amount, and it has grown a hundredfold over 10 years. Taking this into account, it is important that we have solid, transparent and well-known standards for the taxation of business profits and cross-border services, with international tax norms being crucial as this level of economic activity continues to expand.

Another element of this legislation that is worth reflecting on hinges on efforts to help combat tax avoidance and evasion. The focus on this area across various parts of the globe continues to grow and sharpen. Governments are starting to give voice to concerns about the impact that the structuring of cross-border commercial arrangements by multinationals is having in terms of eroding the taxation revenue of governments. In the UK, for example, there has been a very active debate about the taxation contribution of—of all companies—Starbucks. The heat of this issue has been fuelled by strong remarks by the British Prime Minister, David Cameron, who spared little in expressing what he really thinks of this issue. He says: 'It is a world where some companies navigate around legitimate tax systems, and even low tax rates, with an army of clever accountants.' He also knows that the UK cannot deal individually with the issue of tax avoidance and evasion and he recognises that international tax agreements like the one we are talking about today do need to be strengthened. He says: 'Acting alone has its limits. Clamp down in one country and the travelling caravan of lawyers, accountants and financial gurus just moves on elsewhere.' Importantly, Prime Minister Cameron said, 'We want to use the G8 to drive a more serious debate on tax avoidance and evasion.'

If you move to the other side of the planet right here in our own backyard, we have been focused on the amount of tax paid by some well-known international firms. It is interesting that the other week it was revealed that Apple Australia generated over $6 billion in revenue here in Australia but paid only $40 million in tax. Apparently that is two-thirds of one per cent of its turnover. People will rightly rush and point out that we tax profits, not revenue, so it might be wrong to needle that firm on this.

According to analysis reported by the Financial Review, Apple's profit was $99 million, shrinking 48 per cent on its 2011 result, and this is despite the fact that sales revenue ballooned 23 per cent off the back of the new generation of iPhones and iPads. Given this, is it fair to needle a multinational like Apple about the amount of tax paid? Because while they generated $6 billion in revenue, they apparently racked up, from what I understand, $5.5 billion in costs. How? They do not manufacture here. They have no factories here. I do not know what their R&D effort is here—I do not if they are claiming that this is driving their costs up. They have got a growing number of retail outlets, which I am happy about—they are creating jobs locally; that is great—but surely those outlets do not cost $5.5 billion to maintain.

They have a head office here, but you would not know it because they maintain a cloak of invisibility and their key management team dodge any scrutiny and refuse to even engage on public policy issues. Given the lack of work they do on that front, you would hardly say that it cost $6.6 billion to maintain a head office here and dodge that limelight.

According to Mark Zirnsak of the Tax Justice Network Australia, 'it seems somewhat incredible that they have $5.5 billion in costs'. I imagine that their costs are probably tied to transfer pricing arrangements, which again is the subject of an element of the amendment bill.
that we are debating now. I imagine that the costs are tied to that transfer pricing arrangement between Apple's Australian operations and their US parent. It would be great to learn more about what they do, but Apple steadfastly refuses to engage with stakeholders. Ask anyone who has sought answers from them about their Australian operations and you will hear a common theme: they will not talk.

Another firm that is certainly in the frame when it comes to its tax bill is Google, who is being similarly targeted. I think, by way of contrast, Google at least engages with government, is prepared to talk and be a lot more open about issues. While they will obviously—and all the major tech firms—be a remaining focus on the impact of transfer pricing and the impact of their tax arrangements and what they do in terms of our tax revenue and our base of tax revenue, at least they are willing to engage. Apple, on the other hand, believe that they are above scrutiny, and that is completely unacceptable.

I have been a great admirer of this firm and its impact on the way we engage with IT but, over the course of the last few years, following attempts to get answers on their pricing strategies, my admiration has well and truly dimmed. There have been well-known price disparities between the US and Australian markets that Apple operates in. They are not the only culprit but they are by far and away the most defiant, and Australian consumers have borne the brunt of price discrimination by them and now Australian taxpayers are shouldering a heavy burden too. So it seems that others are seeing beyond the glitz to start driving change on taxation arrangements.

You can see that is part of what we are doing here today in the International Tax Arrangements Amendment Bill. You can see it in the transfer pricing arrangements and what we have been doing in terms of legislation there. Assistant Treasurer David Bradbury has announced work is being done to improve the transparency of the Australian business system to discourage aggressive tax minimisation.

I have to confess I have been a bit cynical about Treasury's desire to tackle this mainly because, as a member of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Infrastructure and Communications that is looking at IT price discrimination, Treasury made a submission, which I have to characterise as an apologia. They justified price discrimination that is costing businesses and consumers up to $10 billion and, while businesses and consumers have been waiting for the power of Treasury and even the ACCC to be brought to bear in driving out this level of inflationary waste within our economy, that hope has been for nothing. However, it has been a contrast to see Treasury move as quick as greased lightning to shore up the tax base.

There is no doubt this is important. The bill tackles this in part—the bill we are debating now. We cannot afford to have some businesses paying their fair share and others having a lighter load. That lighter load has been carried, as Prime Minister Cameron said, by a travelling caravan of lawyers and accountants.

I just wish that Treasury would apply an equal level of fervour to tackle the scourge of price discrimination as it affects consumers and businesses.

While on the issue of tax and efforts to broaden the GST to cover online transactions, there is an interesting aside. State governments are locking arms to push the federal government to lower the threshold on online retail transactions, reckoning that this will provide a protective
blanket for small business in Australia. That is interesting, given that the New South Wales
government slashed support for small business advisory services in my state and the federal
government had to step in to provide over $200,000 in extra funding for the Greater Western
Sydney Business Enterprise Centre. At the same time they were saying that state governments
are protecting small business by changing online transaction thresholds. Any move to lower
this threshold will be counterproductive because every dollar of taxation revenue raised will
see us spend more on Customs or Australia Post to try and enforce the lower threshold.
Customers lose, taxpayers lose and, in the longer term, small businesses lose. This move
should be resisted and both sides of politics should lay their cards on the table about what will
be done in terms of the threshold. I for one argue against lowering the threshold because I do
not think it will be of benefit.

Coming back to the legislation and what it is trying to give effect to, in terms of the way in
which we relate to a number of jurisdictions, in part it also deals with transfer pricing and tax
evasion. This will take greater focus as we move ahead. It is certainly the case that the level of
work that has been applied by the group of people brought together to look at the way we
change our taxation arrangements to avoid aggressive tax minimisation by multinationals will
continue. I think a lot of these firms do have something to answer in relation to the way they
have structured their affairs, and we need to move on this more. Australian consumers who
have been affected by price discrimination and taxpayers who have been affected by
minimisation should be helped. As I said earlier, I hope that Treasury applies an equal level of
fervour in dealing with the inflationary impact of price discrimination as it does in trying to
protect our taxation base. They are equally important, they both deserve attention and there
should be moves to deal with these issues. That certainly should be championed by Treasury,
which I would imagine can recognise that lower cost bases for business are good for
economic stimulus and growth within our nation. It will potentially give a platform for
business to be able to expand further, not just here but in international markets.

It is good to have the opportunity to speak on this bill. I look forward to seeing this and the
other work that is being done to tackle what are fairly serious issues being considered by
governments both here and abroad.

Mr ZAPPIA (Makin) (11:48): I welcome the opportunity to speak on the International
Tax Agreements Amendment Bill 2012. The bill amends the International Tax Agreements
Act 1953 to give effect to new bilateral taxation treaties with India, the Marshall Islands and
Mauritius. The purpose of these treaties is twofold: firstly, to foster and develop closer
economic and trade relationships with those countries and, secondly, to enhance the integrity
of the tax system through enhanced frameworks through which tax administrators can prevent
international fiscal evasion. A moment ago, my colleague the member for Chifley spoke
about that eloquently and identified how the taxation and transfer pricing systems are causing
problems for this country and internationally. They are worthwhile objectives.

I will focus my remarks on how this legislation affects our relationship with India, a
country with which Australia has had a longstanding special relationship and with which we
have much in common. Australia and India both celebrate 26 January as an important national
day. For Australia, 26 January is the anniversary of the landing of the First Fleet in Sydney
Cove and has become our national day. For India, since 1950, 26 January has been celebrated
as the day India became a republic. Both countries are members of the Commonwealth and

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have had a strong British influence in their history. Both countries share a love for cricket, and both countries have democratically elected governments. In fact, India is the world's largest democracy, and Australia is one of the modern world's oldest democracies.

Today, around 400,000 Australians are of Indian origin, and India is Australia's largest source country of migration and skilled entrants. It is also Australia's largest source of international students, with around 40,000 international students from India currently studying in Australia. I would estimate that, over the years, the number of students from India who have studied in Australia must now number a million or more, and that in turn reinforces the ties between our two countries, because those students, having gone back to their own country, would have made connections and friends with people here in Australia.

Two-way trade between Australia and India in 2011-12 was about $18 billion and is growing rapidly. Indian investment in Australia is about $11 billion, whilst Australian investment in India is over $4 billion. Today India is the world's third largest economy and, with an expected economic growth rate of 6¼ per cent per annum over the next decade, India's international influence will continue to grow. In acknowledgement of the important ties between India and Australia, Prime Minister Julia Gillard visited India in October 2012, and in recent months foreign minister Bob Carr, trade minister Craig Emerson and arts minister Simon Crean have all visited India to reinforce the importance of the relationships between the two countries by signing agreements in areas of mutual interest.

Since 2008 around 60 ministerial visits have taken place between the two countries. Adding to the ministerial visits, the second Australia-India roundtable was held in New Delhi on 4 and 5 December last year, with resources minister Martin Ferguson inaugurating the roundtable. The roundtable brings together government, business and academic leaders from both countries to discuss areas of common interest. I particularly note that at the roundtable there was discussion about the deepening of security collaboration between India and Australia, including through regular bilateral naval exercises. Potential areas for future defence cooperation include development of amphibious capabilities, submarine rescue, operational communication links and maritime domain awareness in overlapping zones of interest in the Indian Ocean. The two nations could bring together maritime legal specialists to develop shared understandings on critical regional issues such as freedom of navigation. Of course, the two countries could also engage with China, Indonesia and other countries in the region on regional security matters. I also note that at the roundtable there were discussions on energy and education, which also paves the way for future investment decisions between the two countries. These are all welcome announcements.

For the Indian people who have resettled in Australia, seeing the two countries actively engaging with each other must be heartening for them. Their ties with their homeland will remain an important part of their lives. It is particularly encouraging to see the number of Indian families at local citizenship ceremonies taking up Australian citizenship and embracing Australian life. Indian people can now be found in all walks of Australian life, including in business, in the professions, in hospitality and in farming communities. They are hard working, enterprising and appreciative of the opportunities that Australia has to offer them. They are also people of faith and strong family values, perhaps well reflected in the words of the great Indian statesman Mahatma Gandhi who listed wealth without work, pleasure without conscience, knowledge without character, commerce without morality, science without
humanity, worship without sacrifice and politics without principle as the seven blunders of the world. Mahatma Gandhi's grandson Aaron later added the eighth blunder: rights without responsibilities.

The brutal gang-rape and murder of a young Indian woman last year would have been particularly distressing for the Indian community in Australia, as it was for people around the world. It is a credit to Indian authorities that the alleged offenders have been arrested and are already before the courts. It is equally encouraging and heartening to see the widespread public outrage and rallies undertaken throughout India in support of women's rights, women's safety, and bringing an end to violence against women.

In my electorate of Makin, the Indian presence is notable. Many Indian families have settled in the area and Indian students are possibly the largest group of overseas students at the Mawson Lakes campus of the University of South Australia, which is located within the electorate of Makin. My own immediate neighbourhood has become home to several Indian families and I compliment them on the seamless and harmonious way in which they have settled into their new community. About two years ago, my daughter travelled to India at the invitation of one of her university friends, whose family was returning to India for the holiday period. My daughter was invited to join them and she was overwhelmed by the generosity and hospitality afforded to her while she was in India. Only last week, I spoke with family friends of Italian origin who had just returned from overseas having attended the marriage of their son to his Indian fiance. This kind of integration is wonderful to see.

The legislation we are debating can and will serve the interests of Australia and India. The issue of taxation can be both a barrier to investment decisions and a problem for governments seeking to ensure legitimate tax revenue is raised and that the tax system is neither manipulated nor evaded. In a global economy, taxation laws have become an influencing investment consideration. Consistency of tax laws and their enforcement provides a level playing field for all. Strengthening the taxation system of both Australia and India throughout this agreement will, therefore, create greater certainty for business investment and business operations in both countries. Noting the level of trade and business investment between India and Australia, and the growth trends projected, this agreement becomes even more important to both countries. The treaty reinforces and builds on the close and long-standing friendship and alliance between India and Australia, and I commend the bill to the House.

Mr LAURIE FERGUSON (Werriwa) (11:57): The Protection of Cultural Objects on Loan Bill 2012 undertakes a number of financial agreements with India, Mauritius—which ironically has got a very strong Indian influence—and the Marshall Islands. Previous speakers have detailed most of those changes, including to the amount of time for an enterprise to be a permanent establishment et cetera. I want to join with the previous speaker, the member for Makin, in speaking about India and the Indian community, because they are so crucial to this country.

What we have seen that is relevant to this legislation is that India's growth for the period 2011-12 was 6.5 per cent and over 2011 itself it was 7.1 per cent. These countries have had a very close diplomatic relationship since 1945 when India sent a High Commissioner here. This has been reinforced in recent years by meetings between the last two prime ministers of this country and the Indian Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh—in November 2009 and again in October 2012—where the relationship was strengthened by being elevated to a strategic
partnership. There has also been the instigation of annual education ministers' meetings. This is symptomatic of a reality where India is Australia's fourth-highest export market and, from our side of things, the interest is in the export of minerals, fuels, education, copper and ores; and from the Indian side of the ledger: tourism, diamonds and medicaments etcetera being very significant. India has also attracted, in recent years, very strong foreign direct investment; it was 51 per cent greater in 2011 than in 2010, and $36.5 billion was raised. India is the 19th largest exporter and the world's 10th largest importer. It is the 10th largest entity by nominal GDP.

We have a significant need to engage and to be involved, and the current government has very much emphasised that reality. We are talking about a country of 1.2 billion people which is governed through 28 states and seven union settlements. One thing that always intrigues me about India is when we compare it to our national population. We can look at the language groups in India—I and other members in Western Sydney are aware of this from attending a wide variety of language group meetings in Sydney: there are 83 million Bengali speakers— as I said, think of the Australian population—46 million Gujarati speakers; 38 million Kannada speakers in the state of Karnataka; 33 million Malayalam speakers; and 72 million Marathi speakers. Those are just the second string of language groups after Hindi, which is the language of 46 per cent of the population.

India is also a country which has wide pluralism with regard to religion, obviously predominantly Hindu. The last estimates, which are probably serious understatements from certain demographers, say Muslims comprise 13.5 per cent, Christians 2.3 per cent and Sikhs 1.9 per cent. This is an amazing phenomenon. Despite all the problems of this nation, they have held this together. I made this point at a public meeting recently. In comparison, having been in the United States during the recent presidential and congressional elections, not only should we say that India is the largest democracy in the world but we should also say they are far more capable of conducting their elections than the United States of America, given the challenges of such separate language groups, religious diversity, state divisions and the very traumatic security issues that surround the country.

The reality of the Indian diaspora in Australia is also of relevance to me and other speakers. We are talking about a very significant movement of Indian-background nationals in this country. If we look at India's migration ranking relative to other countries, they are the largest contributor in general skilled migration. That is similarly the case with the total skills stream. They are the third highest in the total family stream and the fourth largest national source of migration. What is also relevant is that they are not quite up there with languages spoken at home, because of the predominance of English. What has driven this stream in recent years, with regard to the resources boom and the failure in past years to train Australian people, has been the high reliance on skilled migration. Because of India's strength in English instruction they have been one of the major sources of this migration.

They contribute to us in the sense that they are very youthful—the median age is 31 years, which is six years younger than the Australian population. They are predominantly employed in the professional sector, as seen in the last census and migration movement statistics. Twenty-nine per cent are in the clerical and administration sectors. Just to reinforce the question of skilled migration, 76 per cent of Indians entering this country have come through the skills stream.
It has not been without difficulties. Changes were made to the rules with regard to skilled migration. There was a rather ill-thought out proposed change in recent years, whereby people were essentially promised permanent residency on the basis of Australian qualifications rather than having to compete with people from the rest of the world with university qualifications. We have seen some degree of exploitation of Australian migration rules by the smart operators, the spivs, the migration advisers and their alliance with certain questionable educational institutions in the private sector. We know that the current government had to step in, bring in some rules to make sure that it was regulated properly and not exploited. As I said, to some degree people come here for migration rather than for education. That of course can have a spill-on effect with regard to the credibility of Australian educational institutions. In general, we have been well rewarded by Indian migration to this country.

As I said, in general we have been well rewarded by Indian migration in this country. We see in Western Sydney the enhancement of many of our previously decaying suburban shopping centres. We see a resilience growing up in some of those sectors in regard to retail. When we go to the administrative sector in our country, when we go to professional organisations and the various people who provide services in this country, we know that Indian migration to this country has been very strong and very worthwhile. Let us hope it continues.

Finally, I want to refer to two organisations that are preparing for the long-term reality that confronts any diaspora that comes to this country, and that is ageing. As I said earlier, the Indian diaspora is far younger than Australians in general and the migration stream. However, they are thinking about the future. Many other migration streams in this country, many other communities long established, did not think ahead about ageing and did not prepare for the need for aged care. The first organisation is Sri Om Care, established in August 2007, which under the leadership of Jay Raman has been active in respite care, short-term and day care, seniors programs, undertaking accredited courses, active ageing, health performance and day centres in Chester Hill, Auburn and Seven Hills. I hope that they establish one in my part of Sydney, where there has been a significant Indian migration in recent years.

The other organisation is the South Asian Muslim Association, with whom I have also been heavily engaged over many years, a group that is essentially focusing on MOUs with existing care providers to make sure aged care is culturally sensitive in regard to food, religious practices et cetera. I compliment them for having a bit of morality, a bit of ethics, which does not always characterise groups in the NGO sector. They refuse to take any money from clubs because of the association with gambling. That is a pretty principled stand given the amount of money that other groups receive. There was of course one group that was legendary in the recent debate over gambling; it had been a long-term opponent of gambling but it was exposed for taking considerable amounts of money and therefore was not too keen about change. But this organisation, providing for aged care in the Indian and subcontinent communities, took a principled stand.

India is a country that is crucial internationally and far more important to this country. I commend the legislation to the House.

Mr BRADBURY (Lindsay—Assistant Treasurer and Minister Assisting for Deregulation) (12:07): I thank all the members who have contributed to this debate—in particular, the member for Werriwa and the member for Makin. They have ensured that this has been a very
wide-ranging debate that reflects the commitment of so many people in this place and this
government to enhancing relations in trade and investment and cultural relations with those in
other countries—in particular, the Asian region and India.

By the end of this decade, Asia is expected to overtake the economic output of Europe and
North America combined to become the world's largest economic power. Average GDP per
person in Asia is set to almost double by 2025, a feat that took the United Kingdom over 50
years to achieve during the Industrial Revolution. Our bilateral tax treaty network, which sets
out tax arrangements with partner countries and establishes mechanisms for dealing with
disputes, needs to cover our emerging trade and investment links right across the region.
There is no better time than the present, in this the Asian century, to strengthen our
relationship with India by giving the force of law to the new bilateral tax agreement between
Australia and India. The Indian protocol will improve the administrative framework for tax
cooperation between our two countries. It also provides for enhanced information exchange
between the two taxation authorities and ensures the integrity of the tax system by providing
for mutual assistance in the collection of tax debts.

The Indian agreement is in addition to the new bilateral taxation agreements between
Australia and Marshall Islands and Mauritius. Such international cooperation between
revenue authorities is essential to improve transparency and combat tax avoidance and
evasion. The government is committed to removing taxation barriers that impede Australia's
bilateral trade and investment relationships with other countries, and this bill will give effect
to both of these commitments. Each of these agreements will strengthen Australia's bilateral
economic relationship with these jurisdictions and, directly or indirectly, will help to
discourage taxpayers from seeking to use offshore arrangements to avoid Australian tax. I
commend the bill to the House.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Ordered that this bill be reported to the House without amendment.

Financial Framework Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 4) 2012
Second Reading

Debate resumed on the motion:
That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr ROBB (Goldstein) (12:10): I rise to speak on the Financial Framework Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 4) 2012. This bill seeks to amend five acts across three portfolios as part of an ongoing program to ensure the Commonwealth’s financial framework remains up to
date and consistent across government. This is the 12th financial framework legislation
amendment bill since 2004. They are generally noncontroversial and housekeeping in nature,
and this bill is no exception. Ten of the previous bills have become law while two previous
bills lapsed with the proroguing of the parliament for the 2004 and 2010 elections.

The five main purposes of the amendments include, firstly, amending the Commonwealth Authorities and Companies Act 1997 to substitute references to 'Commonwealth procurement
guidelines' with 'guidelines in relation to procurement' to reflect the name change and to
Secondly, they amend the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 to increase the threshold of the amount the Director of National Parks can enter into a contract, from $250,000 to $1 million, without having to seek ministerial approval. This reflects the increase in costs since the previous increase in 1992. Thirdly, they amend the Ozone Protection and Synthetic Greenhouse Gas Management Act 1989 to establish a distinct new special appropriation for making emissions or refunds in relation to important manufacturing levies related to synthetic greenhouse gas management equipment. Currently refunds and remissions are paid under section 28 of the Financial Management Act and the amendment is designed to increase the transparency and workability of the refund mechanism. Fourthly, they amend the Papua New Guinea (Staffing Assistance) Act 1993, which prescribes retirement benefits for former employees of the administration of the territory of Papua New Guinea to provide clear provision for the recovery of retirement benefits deposited inadvertently into an account after the death of a recipient. It also sets new requirements for public reporting by ComSuper and any recoverable death payments that have been made. And, finally, they amend the Public Accounts and Audit Committee Act 1951 to replace the terms 'chairman' and 'vice-chairman' with gender neutral terms 'chair' and 'deputy chair'.

As you can see, the amendments are very much in the housekeeping sense and they are amendments that we support. Things such as increasing the contract for the Director of National Parks from $250,000 to $1 million reflect the reality of increased costs. The issue relating to ozone protection and synthetic greenhouse gas management is a welcome move as it will further improve efficiency, and these people need it. Many of those businesses who are relying on refrigerants have had a horror few months, and they have many more to come, with the impact the carbon tax is having on them—even businesses I know that have been in flood affected areas. An IGA, one of my colleagues reported to me, has an initial cost of $40,000 to re-gas with the refrigerants.

It is $40,000 due to the carbon tax. Given the very onerous and very direct impact on those industries of the cost of gas, anything we can do in that space to improve the profitability and the cost structure for these industries is very important. This is affecting smaller operations right across the country; it is affecting lots of small and medium-sized businesses. The coalition supports the ongoing financial framework housekeeping process which we commenced. We have no objections to this bill.

Mr BRADBURY (Lindsay—Assistant Treasurer and Minister Assisting for Deregulation) (12:15): I thank the member for Goldstein for his contribution, at least insofar as it related to the bill. This is a bill that amends five acts across three portfolios to address an issue whereby payments made from certain appropriations may risk breaching section 83 of the Constitution. The bill also amends the governance and financial arrangements of existing government bodies and corrects a drafting error to ensure gender-neutral terms for the definitions of the chair and the deputy chair of the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit. I commend the bill to the House.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Message from the Governor-General recommending appropriation announced.

Ordered that this bill be reported to the House without amendment.
Protection of Cultural Objects on Loan Bill 2012
Second Reading

Debate resumed on the motion:
That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr KEENAN (Stirling) (12:16): The coalition supports the Protection of Cultural Objects on Loan Bill 2012. The bill is intended to provide greater certainty and confidence in the minds of institutions, both internationally and domestically, when it comes to cultural objects borrowed from overseas for temporary exhibition in Australian libraries, museums and galleries. Let me say at the outset that there is no disagreement when it comes to the way that cultural objects, which include both works of art and cultural artefacts, can enrich the lives of all Australians. When these objects are borrowed from foreign sources there can be little doubt that they enrich the experience of Australians visiting our collecting institutions, museums, libraries and galleries. They also add to the viability, utility and economic success of the institutions.

This bill is intended to address an issue relating to the manner in which cultural objects are borrowed by Australian institutions from overseas sources, when such arrangements are for the purposes of temporary exhibition. The bill establishes a scheme which provides some protection to these cultural objects for the duration of their loan to institutions approved by the minister. The scheme, as the minister has already explained, augments the existing Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Act 1986 which gave effect in Australian law to the UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property. As I have said, we support the bill. We hope it has the effect over time of helping to build confidence, in the minds of the owners of cultural objects overseas, that Australia is a safe place for loan and exhibition of their works and pieces. We support and agree with the government when it comes to this bill and to the establishment of this particular scheme.

Having said that, it is regrettable that when it comes to borrowing, the government was not able to confine itself to bringing international works to Australian exhibitions. Instead, as we know, it is a government which is surviving very much on borrowed time. And it is a government which is surviving on borrowed money. When Australian galleries, libraries and museums borrow, the result is the enrichment of the cultural and artistic lives of all Australians; when the Labor government borrows, it digs all Australians deeper into debt and deficit.

As predictable as the Labor government borrowing money it can never repay is the minister taking every opportunity to talk about the national cultural policy. In speaking to this bill the minister has this time tried to spruik how it will deepen our ties with Asia. Yet it remains a policy void—something that has long been said to exist, but something that no one has actually ever seen. What is very real is the coalition's plan to deepen our ties with the region and to build cultural exchange. Just last week the Leader of the Opposition, Tony Abbott, addressed the National Press Club and talked about our policy to engage with our region through the new Colombo Plan. It is going to be a two-way arrangement between Australia and other countries in our region, exchanging our best and brightest, and part of that
cultural exchange will be building and connecting our next generation of Australians with the world.

The Deputy Leader of the Opposition and shadow foreign minister, Julie Bishop, told the APEC Study Centre in Melbourne a few weeks ago:

> We want it to be the norm not the exception that Australian students spend part of their tertiary studies in a university in our region—a rite of passage. The opportunity for our students to learn from the culture, politics and society of Australia's neighbours will be of enormous, incalculable benefit, both individually and to our country.

Under the coalition's policy, more young Australians would grow in an appreciation and understanding of the cultural, social and political differences and challenges of our world. That is our policy, and it is a real policy. But the minister's national cultural policy is not a policy, it is a fairytale; a fairytale that is carried along from one generation of Labor arts minister to the next generation of Labor arts minister. With an election having now been called for 14 September, no doubt many in the arts community will have by now concluded that the Gillard government could be finished before its national cultural policy is.

We support the objects of this bill. It is a sensible bill that will build the confidence of people overseas if they were going to loan objects and art to Australian institutions, and therefore it has the support of the opposition.

Ms RISHWORTH (Kingston) (12:22): I am very pleased to speak on the Protection of Cultural Objects on Loan Bill 2012. The bill establishes a scheme to protect cultural objects on loan from overseas.

This is very important. As the previous speaker said, it does give places overseas the confidence to lend institutions their objects, and having recently been to the National Gallery and having seen some of the pictures on loan for the *Toulouse-Lautrec: Paris and the Moulin Rouge* exhibition, it was very much appreciated by many people that they could see these wonderful pictures on display from around the world. In fact, some had first been displayed in the Louvre overseas in the late 1800s. It is very important that Australians here on Australian soil are able to see some wonderful things from around the world in our special institutions, and to ensure that countries, organisations and individuals that have possession of these wonderful items have the confidence to loan those to Australian institutions. This is a sensible bill, and not a controversial bill, so I commend the bill to the House.

Mr MELHAM (Banks) (12:23): This government takes its responsibility towards the protection of cultural objects very seriously. That is why I speak in support of the Protection of Cultural Objects on Loan Bill 2012, introduced by the Minister for the Arts to ensure the protection of objects brought to this country for the purposes of loan for exhibitions to recognised institutions. I understand from the minister that this bill has had a lengthy gestation period to ensure appropriate input from arts institutions in Australia, and indeed from overseas, so that they have had sufficient opportunity to consider and respond to the government's discussion paper on the matter. I note from the list of submissions on the arts department website that almost all the major Australian cultural institutions have responded. I also note input from the British Museum, referencing the legislation passed by the UK government in 2007.

The minister outlined the reasons for the need for this legislation succinctly in his second reading speech. I note he said the following:
... in the past 10 years it has become increasingly difficult for Australia's major galleries, libraries and museums to secure overseas loans.

He continued:

... foreign lenders are increasingly reluctant to loan to Australia's major cultural institutions in the absence of national legislation.

In essence, this legislation will apply to cultural objects if they are imported into Australia on loan for temporary public exhibition under arrangements involving an institution that has been approved by the minister. The protections will apply to approved collecting institutions which meet the criteria specified in the bill.

I note that the legislation provides special consideration be given to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in relation to cultural materials. In addition, ATSIC objects defined as class A are exempt. These include: human remains; bark and log coffins; secret sacred ritual materials; rock art; and dendroglyphs—carved trees. Other ATSIC materials and objects—or class B—will be the subject of special consultation for the proposed loans, with the communities to be actively involved in discussions prior to any objects coming to Australia on temporary loan.

The provisions in the bill relating to ATSIC objects were an area where there were differing opinions in the submissions to the discussion paper. I am pleased with this outcome. It is useful to consider some specific examples of how the legislation as a whole might operate. The Council of Australasian Museum Directors provided an example in their submission to the discussion paper. They said:

The ban on museum loans to the United States of America by Russian museums, following a perceived threat to immunity for loaned objects, indicates the seriousness with which other countries take this issue. The CAMD cites a journal article published online, 'US-Russia cultural cold war continues', The Art Newspaper, 26 May 2011, which describes a situation in the US. The US state and federal authorities became involved in proceedings involving the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the Russian government over 38 works of art on loan. A group in Brooklyn had won a judgement that Russia return a group of religious manuscripts seized during the Bolshevik revolution after the Second World War. This had major repercussions for other cultural institutions in the US, not only in relation to Russia but also in relation to the precedent set for lending institutions around the world. It meant that objects on loan could be seized and not returned to the country or institution which had loaned the objects.

Closer to home, the National Library of Australia in its submission provided an example of the difficulties facing Australian cultural institutions prior to the introduction of this legislation. I quote:

For example, the Library is partnering with the State Library of New South Wales in 2012 to produce an exhibition of works on paper by J.W. Lewin, widely considered Australia's first professional artist. Under the terms of reference of the current PMCH [The Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Act 1986] control list, all of the works that have been requested from British institutions could be considered Class B Australian Protected Objects. As this category does not give credence to how many other works by Lewin are held in Australian collections, the automatic exemption of such works from any anti-seizure legislation might be viewed by lenders as an attempt to repatriate this Australia-related material by proxy. This would render the loan of such material without an accompanying anti-seizure guarantee an unattractive prospect for the lending institutions involved.
The bill outlines specific requirements in relation to the nature of the Australian 'borrowing' institutions. The explanatory memorandum states on page 1 that:

Objects normally in a foreign country will be protected if they are imported into Australia on loan for temporary public exhibition under arrangements involving institutions approved by the Minister. Certain institutions will be able to apply to the Minister for approval and the Minister may approve the institution for a specified period of not more than 60 months. Objects of any description will be protected from the time of their importation into Australia to their export, to a maximum of two years. Objects on loan for a period of longer than two years will not be protected unless exceptional circumstances exist.

Clause 5 provides the definition of those cultural institutions:

... an organisation in Australia that collects and publicly exhibits objects that are of interest for archaeological, artistic, ethnological, historical, literary, scientific or technological reasons. It must also be either established by a law of the Commonwealth, a State or a Territory (except for those laws prescribed in the regulations) or be prescribed in the regulations. A borrowing institution could include, but is not limited to, a Commonwealth, State or Territory art gallery, museum, library or archive and it may be a legal person or not.

The bill makes it clear that the institutions seeking approval must demonstrate the necessary expertise, rigour, capacity and resources to meet the demands of ensuring the object meets the high standards required in determining providence and be able to provide the curatorial standards required in relation to loan objects.

It supports the necessity for Australia to meet its international obligations under the 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property. The bill also provides for potential exhibitors who do not fall within the clause 5 definition of borrowing institutions. This includes people who have a temporary loan arrangement with a lender of the object and who have a temporary loan arrangement with an exhibiting institution for the object or the parent of such an institution. Occasionally, an institution may be involved in a loan arrangement that has been organised by another party, in essence an exhibition facilitator.

Australia has a proud history in its support for the treatment of movable cultural objects. In 2009, the minister undertook a review of the Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Act 1986 and the Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Regulations 1987. One aspect of this review included discussion of whether Australia should ratify the Unification of Private Law Convention on the International Return of Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects 1995, the UNIDROIT convention. Currently, Australia, at the request of a foreign state, is able to seize illegally exported objects that have been imported. PMCH does not allow for private action to be taken through the courts to seek the return of stolen or illegally exported cultural objects. It is important that Australia continues to build on its past record to combat illicit trade in cultural heritage objects. This ratification is currently being considered. In appendix 2 of its 2011-12 annual report, the Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport notes:

The Department, in response to requests from the relevant governments, returned more than 120 protected objects to the Arab Republic of Egypt, nine protected objects to the Republic of Peru and two protected objects to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.
While Australia is determined to protect its own cultural heritage, it continues to honour its international obligations to assist in the protection and repatriation of the cultural heritage of other nations. I commend the bill to the House.

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (12:33): I rise to speak in support of the Protection of Cultural Objects on Loan Bill 2012, which is a very important piece of legislation designed to provide protection for cultural objects on loan from overseas. The objective of the bill is to ensure overseas lenders of artworks continue to make available their collections so we can display them at public exhibitions. This bill has the full backing of the state and national collecting institutions, and state and territory arts agencies. Tourism bodies are equally supportive of this legislation and this is especially so here in the ACT. Before I talk about the other specific objectives contained in this legislation, I want to highlight the importance to Australia of bringing in from overseas great cultural works for public display.

Our ability to import and protect cultural artworks is critical to the ongoing viability and popularity of our museums and galleries. I am very fortunate that the National Gallery of Australia is located in my electorate of Canberra. The NGA is one of Australia's most significant and popular tourist attractions and cultural institutions. It attracts visitors from all over the country and all over the world. For example, its major summer display, the Renaissance exhibition of the 15th and 16th century Italian paintings, attracted over 200,000 visitors. Ron Radford, the current director of the NGA, noted in the latest annual report that the gallery has had over nine million visitors to its touring exhibition program, which the NGA began over 20 years ago.

The touring program is designed so that Australians in regional areas can see the world's great art and cultural works; over the past two decades the NGA has toured 119 exhibitions to 734 venues with exhibitions held in every state and territory around Australia. During the past financial year over 900,000 people visited the NGA in Canberra and its touring exhibitions. Almost 700,000 of these were visitors to Canberra, which makes a very significant contribution to the economy of my electorate and, indeed, the entire ACT region. It is important too, as the NGA highlights, that over four million people saw 1,675 National Gallery works on loan to exhibitions around Australia and the world. The ability to both lend and have on loan cultural works is vital to the ongoing success and viability of our cultural institutions.

The popularity of the National Gallery is due in part to its amazing Indigenous and Australian art collections and, of course, its international exhibitions. Currently the Toulouse-Lautrec exhibition is on display at the NGA—and if they haven't seen it yet I urge all members to visit the gallery before 2 April, when it concludes. This is the first time the Australian public have had the opportunity to see a major retrospective exhibition devoted to the art of French 19th century artist Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec.

After Toulouse-Lautrec, the National Gallery is hosting a Turner from the Tate exhibition. From June to early September this year Australians and tourists to Canberra will be able to see one of Britain's greatest artists—an artist who has been described as a major figure of the Romantic generation. According to the National Gallery of Australia:

Turner from the Tate includes many of the artist's most famous paintings. It provides a comprehensive overview of Turner's monumental landscapes and atmospheric, light-filled seascapes, while offering extraordinary insights into his working life and practices.
And many of you will have seen the hugely popular Impressionist exhibition which literally packed the gallery out day and night. The beauty of that exhibition was that it did not just draw people to the gallery and that wonderful exhibition; it drew people to Canberra and they stayed in Canberra for a number of days during which they toured the wineries in the region, they visited our restaurants, they shopped in our shops. It was a significant boon for Canberra and it had a huge knock-on effect for the economy. We were very happy with the outcomes not just in terms of the soul food that people got from the exhibition but also in terms of the economic impact that that wonderful exhibition had on Canberra and also the region.

I speak with some experience of the importance of looking after objects and artistic works that are lent to us here in Australia from overseas, because in the mid-1990s I was posted to India as the cultural attache with the Australian High Commission. One year we had what we called a huge intercountry promotion whereby we promoted Australia as a manufacturing nation, as a sophisticated technologically advanced nation, as a nation with a great depth of culture and artistic achievement. We had a range of performing artists coming over to India. We had a kind of 'chefs on show' program whereby we had Christine Manfield as well as Tony Bilson and Thai food chef David Thompson coming to India to showcase our culinary delights achievements. We had a range of exhibitions travelling right throughout the country. One of the most significant of them was an Indigenous art exhibition. It was the first time a body of work of this nature had ever been lent overseas.

In India there were many challenges and, unfortunately, the Indigenous art exhibition did not tour because it was too much of a challenge in terms of moving objects and artistic works around. It was held in Delhi in a very prestigious institution. Being involved in processing those works of art—those incredibly valuable works of art—was an extraordinary job, a challenging job for me as the cultural attache—and this goes for all the behind-the-scenes work that public servants do that is not really appreciated particularly by those opposite here in this chamber. When the works arrived, I had to arrange for them to settle in a hangar at the airport in the middle of an Indian summer when it was about 45 degrees. Trying to get the space organised in the hangar at the airport was a real challenge with the Indian authorities.

I spent much time going out to the airport, having meetings with officials out there, trying to get approval for the artistic works to be settled in the hangar so that they could get used to the environment and then they could be moved into this beautiful, prestigious gallery in Delhi. It probably took me about four months of going out to the airport nearly every second day and speaking to those officials to finally get that approval, but it was vitally important that these works were handled and managed carefully when they were moved and when they landed in Delhi in order to ensure that they would be preserved and well looked after for future generations to enjoy.

The purpose of this bill is particularly important in ensuring that we look after those objects that we borrow from overseas. As I just said, in my own experience we also value those who look after our objects when we loan them overseas, and this was particularly the case with this beautiful Indigenous exhibition that was very popular and very well received in Delhi when I was there for the intercountry promotion. That story underscores the need for us to be able to protect cultural objects so that lenders continue to have faith in our institutions. The provisions of this bill aim to limit the circumstances in which lenders, exhibiting institutions, exhibition facilitators and people working for them can lose ownership, physical possession,
custody or control of the objects because of any legal proceedings in Australian or foreign courts.

The bill has four parts but, in essence, it protects cultural objects imported into Australia and details the considerations and arrangements for approval of an institution by the minister. The outcome of this bill is that it enhances the ability of our major cultural institutions to involve all Australians by providing temporary public exhibitions that include objects on loan from overseas.

It has been pointed out that our major cultural institutions often create activities specifically for children, and this enhances the experience of families and schools when they attend exhibitions. I know that when the beautiful Chihuly glass exhibition came to the NGA they had a fabulous program for kids. It did not involve glassblowing, because that would have been way too hazardous for the kids, but there was a whole range of activities that the kids were involved in, such as designing little glass artworks. I know that quite often they had a chance to do this with Chihuly as well, and it was incredibly well received. The NGA, as do all of our cultural institutions here in Canberra, do fantastic work in terms of kids' programs. There is always a touring program, there are always visiting speakers and there is always a kids' room and a range of kids' activities involved in these exhibitions. I think it is a wonderful way to introduce children to culture and art, to visual art particularly.

Australia has a very successful record of presenting national and international artworks and cultural objects, and this legislation builds in further protections that will allow for the continued security and protection of cultural objects. It is important that all Australians continue to have the opportunity to see the great artworks of the world.

Mr CREAN (Hotham—Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government and Minister for the Arts) (12:43): I thank members who have spoken in support of the Protection of Cultural Objects on Loan Bill 202 and for the fact that there is bipartisan support for it. I also want to reiterate an aspect of the member for Canberra's speech: those members who have not seen the Lautrec exhibition at the National Gallery should do so. It is another great example of an institution that not just houses our collections but has the credibility to draw great exhibitions from all around the world.

When I introduced the bill I said that it was being introduced at a time that is exciting for the arts and culture in Australia.

We have, through the Prime Minister's *Australia in the Asian century* white paper, identified a key plank in that policy being cultural diplomacy. There is a recognition that it is the people-to-people links and the cultural links that are so important in building and strengthening relationships with our neighbours—and that they underpin so much of our relationships going forward. That is one of the exciting aspects and opportunities in terms of the development of the cultural exchanges.

So too is the fact that as a government we are finalising a National Cultural Policy—the first such policy in 20 years. The last time there was a creative cultural policy in this country was under another Labor government. It is true that there is bipartisan support for these things, but when you look at the big changes in history and the big changes in in terms of driving cultural policy and the importance of the arts, it was Whitlam, it was Keating and Hawke, and now it will be the Gillard government—started at the 2020 summit.


Opposition members interjecting—

Mr CREAN: You just wait and see. Then get in behind it and support it rather than bag it when you get the chance.

This is the bill that further develops an opportunity for cultural wealth, experience and engagement because it directly supports international cultural exhibitions coming to this country. It does it by establishing a scheme to protect cultural objects on loan from overseas. The legislation addresses a significant obstacle, up until now, that those institutions have faced in securing loans from overseas. In the absence of legislation, it has become increasingly difficult for Australia's major cultural institutions to secure loans of cultural objects from overseas—legislation that protects them whilst they are here. The bill addresses that obstacle. It deals with objects that are normally in a foreign country that come to Australia on loan for temporary public exhibition under arrangements made by institutions approved by the minister of the day. It seeks to achieve its objective by limiting the circumstances in which the ownership, physical possession, custody or control of the objects can be affected whilst they are in Australia. The legislation therefore reassures foreign lenders that Australia is a secure destination for loans of cultural objects and enables our great cultural institutions to successfully compete for world-class exhibitions.

The legislation also aligns Australia with numerous other countries that have implemented legislation to protect cultural objects on loan from overseas. It is legislation that will ensure that Australians continue to have access to artworks and cultural objects from the great collections around the world. As I noted when I introduced legislation, many of our leading cultural institutions are planning ambitious future exhibition programs, and I know some of them would not have been able to proceed were it not for the passage of this legislation. Therefore this legislation is commendable and it comes with bipartisan support, not only in this chamber and in this parliament, but also across all governments in Australia—support that was agreed at the inaugural meeting of cultural ministers that I convened a year and half ago. It shows how expeditiously we can move on important initiatives where we secure bipartisan support. I thank the House for it, and I commend the bill to the House.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Ordered that this bill be reported to the House without amendment.

Federal Circuit Court of Australia (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2012

Second Reading

Debate resumed on the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr KEENAN (Stirling) (12:49): This bill makes amendments consequent to the passage of legislation last year to change the name of the Federal Magistrates Court to the Federal Circuit Court of Australia, and the title of federal magistrate to judge. The bill makes amendments to Commonwealth legislation to reflect the new name of the court and title of federal magistrates. It updates relevant references and legislation consistent with the new name of the court and title of federal magistrate as judge or chief judge as the case may be. The bill also makes bulk amendments to substitute Federal Circuit Court or Federal Circuit
Court of Australia for Federal Magistrates Court wherever it appears in the act listed in schedule 2. It also makes contingent amendments to a number of bills which are currently before parliament that make reference to the Federal Magistrates Court or federal magistrates. Commencement of these contingent amendments will be subject to passage and commencement of the relevant bills.

The Federal Circuit Court of Australia Legislation Amendment Bill 2012 was passed so that the new name accurately reflects the court's role. The change in name will also highlight the valuable service that the Federal Circuit Court provides to regional Australia through its regular court circuit program. Currently, the Federal Circuit Court is the only federal court that regularly conducts regional courts, which in turn alleviates the burden of litigants having to travel to major cities to have legal matters heard. After the name change commences, it is important that these new amendments come with specific provisions in order to preserve existing arrangements and ensure a smooth transition.

The Federal Magistrates Court was established by the Howard government in 2000, in order to provide for timely, efficient, and less formal adjudication of disputes in the federal jurisdiction. Since this time, the range and amount of cases heard by the Federal Circuit Court greatly increased, highlighting the vital role that the court plays in Australia's federal judicial system. Although the court deals mostly with immigration, bankruptcy and family law matters, it also deals with issues as diverse as water efficiency and telecommunications interception and access. This demonstrates the court's broad jurisdiction. Despite the success of the court, Labor have sought, since 2008, to abolish the court and reconstitute it as separate, lower divisions of the Family and Federal Courts. This was strongly opposed by the Federal Magistrates Court and the Federal Court and successfully resisted by the coalition. The former Attorney-General, the member for Gellibrand, conceded defeat and instead proposed that it be maintained under a new name to reflect its expanded workload and jurisdiction. In doing so, Labor accepted the recommendation of the federal judiciary, which itself adopted the policy announced by the coalition in the 2010 election.

The bill makes necessary amendments to update references about the Federal Magistrates Court and the Federal Circuit Court of Australia across all Commonwealth legislation. While I am speaking on this bill I would also like to take the opportunity to recognise the invaluable work and dedication that the federal magistrates have provided over the past 13 years, in providing justice to people all over the country. I therefore commend the bill to the House.

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (12:53): The federal Labor government has made a commitment to improve administrative outcomes, and make sure that justice is more accessible and transparent as it meets Australians. The majority of Australian families who separate do not go anywhere near the Family Court, and even those who go to court in relation to family law matters are more likely to go to the Federal Magistrates Court, yet the Federal Magistrates Court has not quite got the stature and has not received the public recognition that is so thoroughly deserves for the dedication and diligence of those lawyers who are serving as federal magistrates.

What we have done—and it has a long history, as the previous speaker said—is have a look at this issue through the Skehill review. We have also listened to stakeholders—magistrates, judges, lawyers, law societies and bar associations, including Chief Federal Magistrate, John
Pascoe AO, on behalf of the court—and asked them to take into consideration the changes that we wanted to make.

The Federal Magistrates Court, as a court, has much jurisdiction and it has grown imperialistically since it was created by the Howard coalition government. In many ways it is a court that was created out of frustration, hostility and anger, because the Howard government had a very testy relationship with the then Chief Justice of the Family Court, Alistair Nicholson. I think in large part many of the challenges that the Family Court faces could have been resolved by way of rules, regulations and additional funding by the Howard government, but they chose to go a different way. I am sure that less complex cases could have been dealt with by the Family Court. In fact, that was a process by way of the appointment of judicial registrars and the like which dealt with matters in relation to mediation and also interim hearings in less complex matters. But the Howard coalition government chose to create a federal magistracy.

There are now over 60 federal magistrates around the country and they get paid quite well—a salary well in excess of $300,000. They are, according to the Australian Constitution, judges. That is not recognised. They are robed. I have appeared in hundreds, if not thousands, of cases in the family law jurisdiction before federal magistrates. In my experience they are generally fine lawyers and dedicated servants. They work very hard indeed across the country, and I appreciate the fact that they do travel around the country. Too often we find that Family Court judges in particular are based in urban areas like Brisbane Sydney and Melbourne. But federal magistrates now go to places like Ipswich, where they deal with that jurisdiction more expeditiously, in a more timely fashion, and deal with the matter at less cost to the litigant. I found that particularly in my practice as a lawyer before I was elected to parliament in 2007.

The court's jurisdiction covers a lot of areas. It does not just cover family law. It covers bankruptcy, migration and the like. Indeed, when it was first created it could not deal with what we used to call custody cases; it could only deal with access. Now, federal magistrates' final hearings are dealt with in two days or less, and it certainly costs litigants a lot less if they have a matter dealt with in the Federal Magistrates Court as opposed to, say, the Family Court.

I know that there has been an issue in relation to superannuation, but I will not go down that road. Federal magistrates' income is paid not by way of a 60 per cent pension, as for judges, but by way of a 15.4 per cent contribution. And I know there has been significant litigation in that regard.

The government has responded to the stakeholders and looked at what the two reports have said in relation to this issue—in particular, the Semple review, and the Skehill review—and the outcome is the legislation that was passed in 2012 and now this legislation. These consequential amendments are about making sure that federal magistrates have the title of judge and that there is some continuity in terms of consistency of legislation, particularly the amendments in relation to part 5.3 of the Criminal Code, to reflect the new names and titles. Of course, those consequential amendments were not part of the original bill. But there was consultation in relation to the states and territories and, as a consequence of some intergovernmental agreements concerning counterterrorism, the amendments take place today.
I recognise the importance of this court. Like a magistrates court, it deals with Australians at the grassroots level. Most Australians never see the High Court, the Supreme Court or the District Court. They do not get charged with criminal offences. They do not usually get involved in car accidents or have civil disputes or commercial disputes that require the engagement of a silk or a junior counsel. But they often have situations where they or someone else they deal with has been bankrupted; they have got a claim in bankruptcy because one of their creditors or debtors has been involved in a commercial dispute. They might get involved in court. They might separate and need their dispute in relation to parenting arrangements resolved. There is a very low level of court in that sense.

I do appreciate that people need to show respect, and the idea of the magistrates being called judges does show that respect. I also appreciate the fact that they have taken on the practice of robing, that federal magistrates sit there in a robe. I think that is fine. I am not always comfortable with the idea that senior counsel should wear robes and wigs in jurisdictions—I personally have never favoured that—but I do like the idea that there is respect.

I think the amendment in this legislation—and in the previous legislation—is a good one because having a Federal Circuit Court of Australia clarifies the court's role: it is a court for the regions, not just for the capital cities. I think the recognition that they are judicial officers under chapter III and the fact that this legislation recognises that they are judges—and that the previous legislation recognises the circuit nature of the jurisdiction and the court presiding—is doing the right thing by all Australians. I commend the legislation. I think it is a good piece of legislation. I commend the states and territories for the intergovernmental agreement in relation to 5.3 and the criminal aspects. In that regard, I am very pleased to support this legislation.

**Proceedings suspended from 13:01 to 16:01**

Mr DREYFUS (Isaacs—Attorney-General and Minister for Emergency Management) (16:01): I thank honourable members for their contribution to this debate. The Federal Circuit Court of Australia Legislation Amendment Act 2012 passed the parliament late last year. It will rename the Federal Magistrates Court as the Federal Circuit Court of Australia and will change the title of federal magistrate to judge. This bill, the *Federal Circuit Court of Australia (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2012* (inaudible) a smooth transition to the new name without altering (inaudible). The government will commence this bill concurrently with the Federal Circuit Court of Australia Legislation Amendment Act 2012 so that changes are implemented consistently across all relevant legislation. The new name, the Federal Circuit Court of Australia, and the new title of judge better captures the court's modern role and properly reflects the important services that the court provides to rural and regional communities through its program of regular court circuits.

I turn to some comments that have been raised by honourable members in the course of the debate. In particular, the member for Stirling commented on the government's decision to not proceed with the restructure of the Family Court. The government's position was rightly informed by the Skehill strategic review of small and medium agencies in the Attorney-General's portfolio. The government accepted the Skehill report's recommendation that the
restructure not proceed as the shared administration between the Family Court and the Federal Magistrates Court, in place since 2009, had already generated efficiencies and strengthened court operations.

The member for Blair, who is again with me in the chamber, commended the important circuit work undertaken by the court for regional communities. I agree with the member for Blair's comments. To illustrate the extent of the court's program of regular court circuits, in the 2011-12 financial year the court circuited to 33 rural and regional locations and spent the equivalent of approximately 145 weeks in federal magistrate hours hearing matters in regional areas.

The changes implemented by this bill form an important part of the government's broader court reform package, which also includes bedding down the judicial complaints framework that was passed by parliament late last year; providing more transparent processes for handling complaints about judicial officers; injecting $38 million over four years to the courts to ensure that they can continue to deliver key services, including regional circuit work; implementing new court fee structures to better reflect the capacity of different litigants, such as large corporations and government departments, which are balanced by the reintroduction of fee waivers and exceptions for disadvantaged litigants; and introducing legislation to establish the new Military Court of Australia to deal with serious service charges against ADF personnel. I commend the bill to the House.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Consideration in Detail

Bill—by leave—taken as a whole.

Mr DREYFUS (Isaacs—Attorney-General and Minister for Emergency Management) (16:05): I present a supplementary explanatory memorandum to the bill. I ask leave of the House to move government amendments (1) to (9) as circulated.

Leave granted.

Mr DREYFUS: I move government amendments (1) to (9), as circulated, together:

(1) Schedule 1, page 23 (before line 18), before item 111, insert:

110A Subsection 100.1(1) of the Criminal Code (paragraph (c) of the definition of issuing court)

Omit "Federal Magistrates Court", substitute "Federal Circuit Court of Australia".

(2) Schedule 1, page 23, after proposed item 110A, insert:

110B Paragraph 105.2(1)(c) of the Criminal Code

Repeal the paragraph.

(3) Schedule 1, page 23, after proposed item 110B, insert:

110C Subsection 105.11(1) of the Criminal Code (note)

Omit "Federal Magistrates,".

(4) Schedule 1, page 23, after proposed item 110C, insert:

110D Section 105.12 of the Criminal Code (heading)

Repeal the heading, substitute:
105.12 Judge, AAT member or retired judge may make continued preventative detention order

110E Subsection 105.12(1) of the Criminal Code (note)
Omit "Federal Magistrates."

(5) Schedule 1, page 23, after proposed item 110E, insert:

110F Subsection 105.18(2) of the Criminal Code
Omit ", a Federal Magistrate".

110G Subsection 105.18(2) of the Criminal Code
Omit ", Federal Magistrate".

(6) Schedule 1, page 23, after proposed item 110G, insert:

110H Subsections 105.43(4), (5) and (7) of the Criminal Code
Omit "Federal Magistrate" (wherever occurring), substitute "Judge of the Federal Circuit Court of Australia".

(7) Schedule 1, page 23, after proposed item 110H, insert:

110J Section 105.46 of the Criminal Code (heading)
Repeal the heading, substitute:

105.46 Nature of functions of Federal Circuit Court Judge

110K Section 105.46 of the Criminal Code
Omit "Federal Magistrate" (wherever occurring), substitute "Judge of the Federal Circuit Court of Australia".

110L Subsection 105.46(3) of the Criminal Code
Omit "Federal Magistrates Court", substitute "Federal Circuit Court of Australia".

(8) Schedule 1, page 23, after proposed item 110L, insert:

110M At the end of Division 106 of the Criminal Code
Add:

106.4 Saving—Federal Magistrates

(1) An appointment that is in force immediately before the commencement of this section under subsection 105.2(1) in respect of a Federal Magistrate continues in force, after that commencement, as an appointment in respect of a Judge of the Federal Circuit Court of Australia under that subsection.

(2) A consent that is in force immediately before the commencement of this section under subsection 105.2(2) in respect of a Federal Magistrate continues in force, after that commencement, as a consent in respect of a Judge of the Federal Circuit Court of Australia.

(3) A thing done by, or in relation to, a Federal Magistrate, as an issuing authority for continued preventative detention orders, under Division 105 before the commencement of this section has effect, after that commencement, as if it had been done by, or in relation to, a Judge of the Federal Circuit Court of Australia, as an issuing authority for continued preventative detention orders, under that Division.

(9) Schedule 4, item 3, page 99 (line 20), after "108, ", insert "110M, ".

I propose amendments of the Federal Circuit Court of Australia (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2012 to include additional consequential amendments to part 5.3 of the Criminal Code Act 1995. The Federal Circuit Court of Australia (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2012 will operate together with the Federal Circuit Court of Australia Legislation Amendment Act 2012
and make consequential amendments to Commonwealth legislation to reflect changes to the
name of the Federal Magistrates Court and the title of Federal Magistrate. These government
amendments will update relevant references in part 5.3 of the Criminal Code in accordance
with the court's new name as the Federal Circuit Court of Australia and the new title of
Federal Magistrate as Judge. The amendments also include provisions to preserve the
continuity of existing arrangements for functions exercised by a Federal Magistrate under the
new title of Judge.

The proposed consequential amendments to part 5.3 of the Criminal Code were not
included in the originating bill to allow for the necessary consultation with states and
territories on the proposed reforms. Members of the House may recall that the jurisdictions
entered into the Inter-Governmental Agreement on Counter-Terrorism Laws in 2004. This
agreement sets out a process for obtaining national agreement to any proposed amendments to
part 5.3 of the Criminal Code and requires the Commonwealth to obtain the agreement of a
majority of states and territories including at least four states prior to introducing any
proposed amendments in parliament. The government is pleased to have obtained the
agreement of jurisdictions in accordance with the inter-governmental agreement.

I have also approved minor corrections to the explanatory memorandum of the Federal
Circuit Court of Australia (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2012 to correct descriptive
information and typographical errors.

Question agreed to.

Bill, as amended, agreed to.

Ordered that this bill be reported to the House with amendments.

STATEMENTS ON INDULGENCE

Australian Natural Disasters

Mr NEVILLE (Hinkler—The Nationals Deputy Whip) (16:08): In rising to speak on this
very important matter, in which my communities were sorely affected, I recognise that your
city of Rockhampton, Madam Deputy Speaker Livermore, also received quite a large flood
and that that impacted severely on that community, and a lot of my remarks today could well
include your own area.

There have been six major flood events in the Bundaberg area since the 1890s. They varied
quite dramatically. The daddy of them all was 9.04 metres in 1890 itself, with 8.9 metres just
three years later. In 1942, during the war years, they had 8.5; it was 7.3 in 1954; and then they
had two peaks in 2010-11, with 7.9 before the new year and 5.8 after the new year. But what
we saw in this current circumstance was a once-in-200-years flood, where it went to 9.53
metres.

That just sounds like a lot of figures, but let me put that into context. We had a severe flood
two years ago, and this flood was 1.5 metres above that, which is shoulder height. You can
imagine that volume of water on top of a then almost record flood, and it was 0.5 metres over
the all-time high. So you can see from that that we were in uncharted territory. And no-one
knew that Cyclone Oswald, which started up in the Gulf of Carpentaria and moved across
Cape York, was going to spend its time coming down the east coast and then move inland
doing strange twists and turns, feeding inland rivers and causing tornadoes as it came down the coast.

The circumstances around Bundaberg started on Australia Day, with most of the functions in the Bundaberg area cancelled. I came home from Childers that morning and the rain was pouring down. We were anticipating 400 millimetres of rain, or 16 inches, over that Friday, Saturday and Sunday, which would have been just horrendous. That afternoon and night, five tornadoes hit. The first hit Bargara at 1.35 in the afternoon. Pine trees came down, houses were unroofed, the shopping centre lost its roof and the Bargara bowls club was grievously affected. In fact, the staff and patrons who were in the club at that time had to take refuge in the coldroom, which was the only secure place in the building. One of the Norfolk Island pines came down on a car. Fortunately it did not kill the two people inside, but they had to be removed to Brisbane for expert medical attention.

There were then three tornadoes at Burnett Heads, slightly north of Bargara, at 3pm, 6pm and 6.30pm. I went to both of those locations—Bargara and Burnett Heads—in the second instance with the Governor-General. We saw a house there which the tornado had gone right over the middle of and completely taken the roof and all its struts and sucked the contents out, as if a huge vacuum cleaner had been put in it. It was just horrendous. Then the fifth tornado hit at Coonarr, a small and rather secluded beach just south of Bundaberg. In the early hours of Sunday morning a sixth tornado hit Burrum Heads. We did not know the extent of that at the time because Burrum Heads lost its mobile telephony and was cut off for two days before we could get in to see the extent of the damage.

I thought the damage at Bargara was horrendous. I remember one vivid image that I was looking at with the Prime Minister. There was a five-foot-long piece of timber, about a metre and a half, that had speared through the door. It was spiked at one end and it had gone clean-through the back of a house. Anyone standing next to that door would have been a goner. In fact, our local parish priest had only just moved away from the window of his house, which was not far from that, when a Norfolk Island pine slapped against the window and showered the whole kitchen area with glass. There were some very lucky escapes. But Burrum Heads has to be seen to be believed. The caravan park was just a total wreck, like a tsunami had been through it. There were caravans that had been tossed through the air and were on their sides, strips of aluminium and timber, and household items almost up to waist height everywhere. Then there was a swathe—this was similar in Bargara—of about four blocks wide cutting across, ripping out trees and foliage and taking off roofs. Old houses were wrecked. Strangely, new metal-roofed houses survived, but the tile-roofed houses were just lifted off and smashed into a thousand pieces. I came back from Burrum Heads, and the Army were at that stage on their way to Bundaberg. I was able to have one unit diverted as they came through Maryborough into Burrum Heads, and those boys worked there right through till two days ago.

The river came up very quickly this time. I was there in 1974 and during the 2010-11 floods in Bundaberg, but this one came up with a vengeance. On Sunday at 6.30 am it had reached 5½ metres. We can always tell when these things are coming down quickly, because there is a monitoring station at Wallaville, which is near Gin Gin, west of Bundaberg. Once it reaches around 22 metres, you know you are in trouble, and in this instance it went over 23 metres, so we knew something fierce was coming. By 6 pm that Sunday, it had passed the
2010-11 peak. Late in the evening it had reached 8½ metres. At dawn it was 8.7. I know some firms called their staff on that night when they were warned by the city council that a heavier flood was coming than had been expected, and they tried to move stock and everything. By the next morning, they were paddling in knee-deep water; that is how quickly it came down.

But the real focus was in Bundaberg North. As I said, we were in new territory. The river was an absolute torrent. One expert estimated it was running at about 40 knots. As you know, there were cuts closer to Brisbane at places like Caboolture, so there were no trains. Both the traffic bridges were gone, and you could not take a boat into the river. The lifesavers made one attempt; it just threw the rubber ducky into the air, with the three lifesavers in it. Luckily they had vests on and were able to get to the bank. So water crossings were out, and there were more than 2,500 people that had to be either moved or evacuated. Fortunately, we had been able to get two Black Hawk helicopters from Townsville on one day and another two the next day. The idea was then to shift people over to the south side of the river, where all the emergency services were located, while another 1,200 who were originally to go to Bundaberg North State High School were moved out to a small state school on the edge of town, called Oakwood. At one stage there were nearly 2,000 people there, but when they scattered to various farms and friends and neighbours it came down to 1,200 and later down to 700. Then, of course, they had to be fed. That meant the helicopters were doing two things: taking people south and bringing food north.

At the council's instructions, 20 teams from the SES went around to warn people to be out in three hours when the river was coming up. Sadly, some people did not take that advice, and we were plucking them from the roofs with rescue helicopters and Black Hawk helicopters. In fact, I was talking on *Australia All Over* on Sunday, and Ian McNamara had an expert with him who said he thought it was the greatest civilian rescue by air that he had heard of—certainly by helicopter—since the days of the Second World War. So thank God for the helicopters, which plucked 35 people from the roofs of houses. Every one of those was a hairy rescue, so you can imagine what that involved.

But it did not just stop at simple rescues and moving able-bodied people around. The RSL retirement home, which had high-care and low-care patients. A retirement village called Liberty Villas had to be evacuated. The Lakes, also a retirement village, which only had minor damage at the end of the day but still was too close to the centre of things to be left there, had to be evacuated. So all of those people had to be ferried across by helicopter to the south side.

So the north was isolated. The damage there was horrendous. I went back there with the Prime Minister when she came to Bundaberg. You could not get into the suburb, but to give you a bit of a colour of what it looked like: it was not just a matter of putting down some new bitumen, because the streets were scoured out to the depth of a metre or more. Sewerage, water pipes and cables were exposed. The two bridges were closed. On one of them, a new bridge that luckily had nothing wrong with the integrity of the bridge itself, the up-ramp had been undermined and had collapsed, and that will not be fixed properly for another three weeks. The Army are building some form of Bailey bridge construction to at least give us one lane as an interim measure. In the 2010-11 circumstance Bundaberg Slipways had severe damage but this time was just swept away.
I went over to North Bundaberg on Monday afternoon to see some of the shops just before I came back. I went to Digger Thiele Electrical. He is the bloke who will have to fix up all of the appliances that have to be tested—fridges, stoves, washing machines, hot water systems, toasters, jugs and all those sorts of things. They cannot be used again until they are fixed up. In fact, it would be quite dangerous to use them. But the firm that will have to do that work is not there. They are one of the firms that have to be got up quickly.

In another place, a building that used to be a pharmacy but is now a real estate agency—it was next to but not attached to a two-storey building—fell into a sinkhole. In North Bundaberg, mainly—but there are a few more instances on the east side of the town—49 structures either floated away, like they did in my colleague the member for Blair’s area in similar circumstances during the Lockyer Valley evacuations, fell off their stumps onto their sides or went into sinkholes. There were 49 of them. Imagine that.

So, when you looked at North Bundaberg it was just a horror scene. A lot of work will have to go on there. I went around and looked at some of this with my friend Bill Morehead, a very responsible developer, and I am coming to the conclusion that we have a circumstance where we are going to have to look very seriously at relocation. I talked to the Prime Minister about it this morning, but I do not want to go too heavily into it until there are community consultations. I have spoken to the mayor and so on. But we cannot just go back for a 10th time and revisit this sort of destruction, especially if we are going to have these more violent weather events that we have noticed over the last four or five years.

Talking more broadly about Bundaberg and not just North Bundaberg, nearly 400 houses are severely affected. They are structurally sound but severely affected. In other words, until they are repaired and properly cleaned out there will be 400 that cannot be used. There are 870 homes with medium damage, which is where you have to pull out gyprock and walls like that. There are another 829 homes with minor water damage above the living area. There are 1,808 homes that are undamaged but have water under the house—and the Deputy Speaker would be familiar with this, because Rockhampton cops this a lot. So, the total number of dwellings wrecked, unusable, requiring repairs or in some way affected is just a tad under 4,000. That is a major disaster.

The farms—and I have not had a chance to visit many farms—suffered in the electorate of my colleague here, the member for Flynn, but citrus seemed to cop it worst. They not only had hail in the last four or five months; now they have had floods that have ripped trees out—whole trees are gone. I will let the member for Flynn talk about that in more detail. The Bundaberg-Mundubbera-Gayndah area is one of the biggest citrus-growing areas of Australia, so do not expect a lot of oranges in the coming season.

I also went to a blueberry farm. The product was all under igloos, and you can imagine what happened there. Luckily, they only lost about 11 igloos, but there was a lot of water there. Some of the cane will survive because it was a reasonable height, about the height of the table in front of me, but lower down still it got waterlogged and you can write that sugarcane off for the coming season. I visited with John Cobb, the shadow minister for agriculture and food security, last week and I am going up on Friday with Senator Ludwig, the minister himself. We should get a better picture of the agricultural damage to many crops. I am touching on that because I recognise the importance of the crops, but the assessment of them is still going on.
Bundaberg was well prepared for this because, as you know, it copped a flogging in the 2010-11 floods. Actually, there were two peaks to that flood. As I said earlier, one peak was at 7.9 metres and the other was at 5.8 metres; one was reached just before New Year and the other was reached about 10 days after New Year. I remember returning from holidays in Perth in the middle of that circumstance. That was bad enough. At that time, the Prime Minister and Minister Crean travelled north and were of great assistance, as was the Leader of the Opposition.

I have to say that I got enormous support this time—from Campbell Newman three times in the week, from the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister on one of the days, from the Leader of the Nationals and the shadow minister for agriculture on the next day, and from the Governor-General on that afternoon. The next day, we had the Leader of the Opposition and Senator Joyce, the Leader of the Nationals in the Senate. And I mentioned that I will visit there with Senator Ludwig on Friday. I do not think any member of parliament has had a retinue of that seniority in his or her electorate, certainly not since the Victorian bushfires.

Honourable members interjecting—

Mr NEVILLE: No, it is not that. I think it is the gravity of the situation.

From a personal perspective, my daughter's home went under. She survived the 2010-11 flood in Rockhampton because it went under the slats of the house. This time, it was about two feet deep throughout the house. The kids from Shalom College came out and helped her on the first day to get all the muck out. The worst thing is taking out the damaged furniture, the linen and the carpets. It is heartbreaking pulling all that stuff out. There is the piano that will never be used again, and the fridge, the stove, the washing machine and the hot water system that you have to just chuck in the street. There were piles of stuff. I travelled down Skyring Street in east Bundaberg with the Governor-General. There were piles of refuse, 2½ to three metres high, on both sides of the street. You had to see it to believe it.

My daughter's place went under, as did my sister-in-law's place. In fact, I went down at 11 o'clock at night knowing that the water was coming up fast—it caught us all by surprise, though I am supposed to be right on the ball on these things. I went to my sister-in-law's place with an idea that in the morning I might go down with a few sandbags. When I got there, there was four feet of water. I said to Margaret, 'I'm prepared to wade through water in daylight, but I'm not going into waist-deep or shoulder-high water at night.' That is how quickly came up.

My son, who is a builder, came up from Brisbane and we gurneyed out the houses and ordered the cabinet-making. We were the lucky ones.

Tony Abbott and Barnaby Joyce came up, and they said: 'Look, no point in going around just inspecting things again; everyone's inspecting things. How about we pick a house somewhere and get into it?' So, we got on to a house. The council referred us to a Mrs Margaret Bullpitt of East Bundaberg—just near the distillery, for those of you who have been to Bundaberg, up on that hill that normally does not flood. And there were Tony Abbott, Barnaby Joyce, myself, the guy who is endorsed to follow me, and some staffers. They all brought their galoshes and old clothes, and we went through that house and got out the muck, got out the furniture. We had to gurney it out four times to get it right. Then we went up to the distillery for lunch; they put on lunch for us which, just for the record, was bread rolls and soft drink—
none of the local product! Nevertheless, it was a little bit of local colour on top of everything else.

As I said, the management of the flood has been quite remarkable. The Bundaberg Regional Council was well practiced from that last flood. The new mayor, Mal Forman, a former deputy mayor, was very much in the leadership role, as was his deputy, David Batt; and the CEO, Peter Byrne, who was virtually executive officer of the show. And then there was the infrastructure engineer, Andrew Fulton. I have enormous respect for his opinions. He almost picked the heights that this river was going to hit and the hour it was going to hit. To have people with that sort of expertise on a committee is just remarkable. Then we had Major Patrick O’Neil from the Army. He directed the operations not just in Bundaberg but, as I said before, in Burrum Heads and also out at Gayndah and Mundubbera.

People generally get impatient at times of floods. Ergon, in reconnecting people, did a remarkable job. The Salvation Army and the Red Cross, at the peak, were doing up to 1,000 meals and, as I said, taking other meals across the river by helicopter. All the service clubs were involved. At its peak there must have been close to 1,000 people in three evacuation centres—one at the civic centre, one at Agro-Trend and another small one at the PCYC. And of course, as I said, there is this unofficial one at North Bundaberg, at the Oakwood school. We kept those people there because there was no point pushing them across the river, because they were in the parts of North Bundaberg where the floodwaters were going to go down earliest, and they could get back to their homes, whereas the ones down on the flat were going to have to wait a lot longer.

So it was a remarkable event. It is not finished yet, as you know. The flood and the drama fires up your adrenaline, and you make sure things happen. The real thing is going to be the reconstruction. I am coming to the conclusion that we have to do something different across Australia. We are doing it to some extent now with bushfires; we are much more expert in how we handle them than we were, say, 10 years ago. But when we see places go under repetitively to floods, I think we have to do something like what has happened in Grantham. Councils have land banks. They can cut up land. Some of the worst houses can be moved. Houses that are aesthetically pleasing can be put up on stilts, with garage doors underneath. I notice that some were done like that in Brisbane after the floods; that can be done. I think there has to be some sort of buyback program or a transfer program. If you are prepared to go to the new estate you will get perhaps a three-bedroom brick home to the level of, say, $115,000 or $120,000—not a mansion, but certainly better than some of the houses that some people are coming out of.

I think we have to look at this, as a nation, in a bipartisan way, and look at a 10-year horizon. I do not know what the right figure is, but I would guess that it would not be less than $200 million a year—so probably $2 billion over 10 years, where state governments and councils made a contribution as well. But we looked within that 10-year horizon at doing many Granthams, getting some of these towns to a point where it does not happen again. It is false economy because when it does happen—and I am not saying this with any complaint—we all hop in and do it. But there are costs involved in helicopters, rebuilding roads, getting people there, emergency services, cleaning out houses and rebuilding houses. There must be a better way to start eliminating floods from some of those places that go under. That is my appeal.
I salute all of those who did just remarkable work. I salute all of those people I just referred to and there were many more, far too numerous to name. But I think, having been through this myself many times, and this probably being my last flood in this place, that we need to look very seriously in future to some form of flood mitigation and flood replacement.

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (16:36): In this place most of us represent electorates named after famous people relevant to that particular area with a few exceptions such as Perth, Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney. My electorate of Blair is named after Harold Blair, a very famous civil rights activist and opera singer in Australia. Often I have to explain where Blair is. I say to people that is all of the Somerset region and the majority of Ipswich. But since the 2011 floods, on numerous occasions, I have explained that my region contains the Wivenhoe Dam, the Somerset Dam, the Bremer River, the Brisbane River and the Lockyer Creek and then they know because those areas in my electorate were impacted. If you look at the AEC website and look at the map of the electorate of Blair, right in the middle is the Wivenhoe Dam and to the north of it the Somerset Dam and below that the rivers and creeks I referred to.

Following Australia Day, the electorate of Blair was fighting floodwaters yet again. My heart goes out to the people who were flooded and to the businesses and farmers. I remember the ’74 flood when I was a kid and my parents' house going eight foot under the water and me—doing something quite silly when I look back—on a rowboat going out and sitting above my bedroom on the roof of the house. The area around Ipswich, I know very well. The damage this time was not as severe as in 2011 and certainly not as bad as 1974, but people living in the lower part of the Somerset region were very badly damaged. The area around Patrick Estate, O'Reilly's Weir, Clarendon and Lowood was inundated and isolated as were all the country towns in areas up around Linville. Mount Stanley is still cut off. Like last time, there were people that we had to helicopter food in to and there are still areas of isolation now with causeways, roads and bridges cut off.

Over 250 properties are believed to have been severely impacted in the Somerset region. Some of the worst affected homes had about 1.5 metres of water through the living areas. About 165 businesses, mainly agribusinesses, in the lower Somerset were adversely affected. These are big farms, big areas that you can see on the map. They are significant farming properties. Many of these farmers had corn, lucerne, soya beans or other types of horticulture there. They were flooded and they lost their fences. Last night I spoke to Trevor Barber and his wife, Marilyn. They are soya bean and corn farmers in Clarendon in the lower Somerset region. Their farm was submerged in water, destroying most of the crops and causing considerable erosion. They sent me images of what it had done to their farm and it was terrible. The financial cost to them will be severe. For the second time in two years, they have lost their crops to flooding. Like them, Andrew and Roslyn Jackwitz's family farm in Clarendon suffered the same fate. Now I have photographs that illustrate the desolation of their farm as their crops and their fences were washed away, and the topsoil from their prime farming land is just gone. The impact will be felt for years to come.

The mayor of the Somerset Regional Council, Graeme Lehmann, told me about a week and a half ago that he expected the damage bill to be in excess of $20 million because of damaged infrastructure such as roads, bridges and causeways. I expect that will be much higher. Certainly that was the experience last time with the Somerset council. They initially
underestimated the damage. Later, when they were able to go through the whole region—and it is the council covering the biggest geographic region in South-East Queensland—they found out that it was much worse. Somerset regional councillor Jim Madden has sent me some photographic images of some of the damaged infrastructure that I have not had the opportunity to get to and I have seen quite a lot of the damage.

In October last year I announced the completion of 70 causeways up towards the Mount Stanley region in the north-west of the electorate of Blair. That was done through NDRRA. That area has been cut off yet again by heavy water and the farmers have been isolated. It is disturbing to see $5 million of repairs literally go down the drain. I note the very wise comments of the member for Hinkler in relation to this. The causeways in the Mount Stanley region need repair yet again. We have to do it. The farmers need them. There are dairy farmers there and beef farmers. We have to do—there is no alternative. These are significant contributors. People have been in these areas for generation after generation. They are Australians. They pay taxes and they deserve our love and affection and our financial support as well.

In March 2012, the Somerset Regional Council mayor, Graeme Lehmann, and I opened the Richards and Hubner bridges at Sandy Creek in the north-east part of the electorate near Kilcoy. That was funded under the federal government's Roads to Recovery program and the Natural Disaster Recovery and Relief Arrangement. Now they are damaged and need repair yet again. The opening of the Alf Williams Bridge over Gregors Creek and O'Connors Bridge in Colinton were delayed due to the passing of long-serving councillor Neil Zabel. The official opening was to be next month. Those bridges are completely submerged and very damaged. It will be very difficult and costly to get them repaired.

I congratulate the Somerset Regional Council, which in 2011 had its headquarters wiped out in the flood, for its handling of the flood situation. I thank the council for its expeditious opening of the evacuation centres in all the country towns in my electorate. Up to 150 people were in Kilcoy. There continues to be a recovery centre in the Lowood showgrounds. The council kept the public and the media well aware of what was happening, with constant updates and information. The council's disaster recovery group has been reactivated, with Councillor Jim Madden heading up the economic subgroup to handle the significant impact on local businesses. He will be joined by members of the Business Enterprise Centre Ipswich region, the Kilcoy Chamber of Commerce and the Somerset Regional Business Alliance and ably supported by council staff, including Brad Sully, the manager of council planning and development. This is a council that has learned from the 2011 events and that has responded quickly. I commend the council and all the council staff for the great work that they have done. I also commend the not-for-profit organisations such as the SES, the rural fire brigades and all the local service clubs such as Lions and Rotary that got behind the council.

In Ipswich, the flooding was not as extensive as it had been in 2011. The Brisbane River cuts through Ipswich. The Bremer River rose to five metres shy of the 2011 flood waters, 13.9 metres as opposed to 19.5 metres in the Ipswich CBD. In 2011, it was 19.5 metres. That was an enormous flood. This time, it was 13.9 metres. The council today reports that in Ipswich the expected damage will be $30 million. I spent the Australia Day long weekend knocking on doors in low-lying suburbs like Booval and East Ipswich and Basin Pocket. They were inundated in 2011, as they were in 1974. I was providing assistance, helping people to
evacuate, getting muddy, warning people about the flood levels and sometimes hugging people and giving them a shoulder to cry on. Residents were living through what they thought was a recurring nightmare.

I was in constant contact with Councillor Cheryl Bromage, who was the deputy chair of the disaster management group. Cheryl and I are good friends and we spoke again and again. I thank her for her wonderful work in the flood. I thank the Ipswich mayor, Paul Pisasale, the chair of the local disaster management group, for letting the people of Australia know what was happening in Ipswich via his constant and well-thought through media commentary. He let the people of Australia know what was going on.

That disaster management group had two local disaster coordinators, staff members of the council, Craig Maudsley and Bryce Hines, and I thank them for their great work. It is well represented by community and emergency services, including Energeq, the Red Cross, the Ipswich District Police, Queensland Ambulance Service, the Department of Transport and Main Roads, Queensland Urban Utilities, the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service, Queensland Health, the Department of Communities, Amberley RAAF and 9 FSB Army battalion, which is also based at Amberley. The group would not be complete without Ipswich SES headed by Arie van den Ende.

Arie has taken every opportunity to bring the needs of the SES to me and to the Prime Minister, particularly in relation to the need for another sandbagging machine. He made that request once in the past through the office assisting the Queensland flood recovery to the Attorney-General and straight to the Prime Minister. The request was made to the Prime Minister in front of the national press. I was pleased and relieved that the federal Labor government was able to deliver the funding for the purchase of a sandbagging machine. The Prime Minister came to Arie and the Ipswich SES volunteers in June last year to give them the good news.

The SES volunteers in Ipswich and the Somerset region, indeed throughout Queensland, have been inspirational in their efforts to protect businesses, farms and homes and assist in evacuations and road clearing. The Ipswich SES volunteers logged over 3,000 hours of community support. In the 2011 floods, the Ipswich SES volunteers hand filled over 11,000 sandbags. These sandbagging machines, including the one we delivered at the request of the Ipswich SES in July last year, can fill up to 300 bags an hour. I thank the Australian Defence Force personnel who assisted in sandbagging in very muddy conditions which I witnessed first-hand at the Ipswich SES headquarters. I thank the SES workers. I know they ate plenty of sausages and plenty of burgers on that day. They were well fed and they worked so hard. In 2013, the Ipswich SES was able to provide 9,000 sandbags thanks to the new sandbagging machines provided by council and by the federal Labor government.

On the first day of the flooding event, 220 people were registered at the evacuation centre at Ipswich Showgrounds. I thank the Ipswich Show Society President, Marcia Cruikshank, and her hard-working vice president, Rusty Thomas, for facilitating those efforts. I thank the Salvation Army and the Red Cross for their efforts at the Ipswich evacuation centre. I thank Pat Roach and the St John's Ambulance team for their work. Pat and I had a conversation about the fact that we were back at the evacuation centre. She was there in 2011 along with her workers. The look on Pat's face when I arrived there was so heartbreaking. Residents were able to bring their beloved pets and the pound at Ipswich relocated to the showgrounds, which
was very important for the people. When floodwaters receded, centres at Ipswich Showgrounds and at Shilo, in the electorate of Oxley, were closed.

At the peak of the flood 47 Ipswich roads were severely affected. The Sydney Street bridge was out and the Hancock Street bridge was out. I make this point to the government: if ever there were a demonstrated need for a second crossing of the Bremer River, it was clearly the case in this flood. We have one major bridge in town, the David Trumpey Bridge, which takes 40,000 vehicles a day. We need the Norman Street bridge from East Ipswich across to North Ipswich, because the traffic congestion was terrible. Thirty-one residential properties in Ipswich were badly affected, with homes in Tiger and Keogh streets in West Ipswich inundated up to the eaves, as they had been in 2011. Fifteen businesses in West Ipswich were badly flooded and 28 UniLink student accommodation units in Churchill were affected. Flooding left about 5,000 people in Ipswich without power.

We are looking to rebuild. The iconic Colleges Crossing Recreation Reserve is very important to the people of Brisbane and Ipswich. It recently received an $11 million restoration following the 2011 floods, of which $9 million came from the Natural Disaster Recovery and Relief Arrangements. The council has yet to fully assess the damage to the reserve, but it will be extensive. It must be rebuilt for the people of Ipswich and Brisbane. As people in the Somerset region and Ipswich assess the damage, they will continue to have challenges in relation to insurance.

I have been a pretty vocal critic of the insurance industry and I was fairly significantly influential in making sure that a House of Representatives Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs chaired by my colleague the member for Moreton, looked at this particular issue of insurance around the country. That inquiry took us around the country. We saw after 2011—and I hope this does not happen again—a process whereby premiums were raised to ridiculous levels and people could not get flood insurance. Things were done by way of postcode. Effectively what was happening was a re-victimisation of flood victims.

I think the insurance industry needs to be monitored in relation to what happens across the country in places like Ipswich, Somerset and indeed Bundaberg, the member for Hinkler's electorate. I thank the government for the extensive assistance they have provided. I hope and expect that the Queensland government—and I have to say this—will cease politicking. If you read the media back home in Ipswich, in Queensland and in Brisbane, you see the LNP state government has engaged in egregious and disgraceful politicking and you can see again and again wrong claims in relation to the degree of assistance we have provided. Indeed Campbell Newman was in Ipswich this morning criticising the federal government's assistance to the region. Instead of pulling together at this particular time, outrageous claims, inaccurate claims, were being made in relation to the degree of assistance provided by the government—so I will only say that much. I thought that the Premier of Queensland and his Treasurer would rise above that and stop playing politics, and I urge them to do so. This government has had a proud record of working with Queenslanders to rebuild communities. We will do that this time as we did in 2011.

I want to make one final point. Today we are seeing in Ipswich the reopening of Coles after extensive flooding in 2011. The loss of the Coles supermarket devastated Ipswich in the middle of the town. Today Coles opened a 6,000 square metre flood proof store employing more than 200 local staff. It is a terrific morale boost for business in Ipswich, particularly in
and around Brisbane Street and Limestone Street, so badly affected by the 2011 flood. I thank Coles for doing so. I thank the council and the people of Ipswich. I thank the council and the people of Somerset for their fortitude, resilience and their commitment and for the great communitarian spirit they have shown at this time. I am with them, we are with them, we will not forget them and we will be there every step of the way.

**Mr CHESTER** (Gippsland) (16:52): I start by congratulating the member for Blair and also the member for Hinkler on the contributions they have already made during what I think is an important opportunity for members in this place to put on the public record their experiences in their electorates over this troubling summer of natural disasters. It does feel quite alien to be standing here in a suit and looking around at my colleagues in these quite salubrious surroundings, having come from a bushfire scene in Gippsland where over the past couple of weeks it has been flannelette shirts, jeans, workboots and gloves while standing beside my constituents. Having heard the member for Hinkler's tales of his experiences in dealing with the mud, the sludge and the disgusting mess left behind by the floods, I know it would have been quite compelling for anyone listening at home.

I welcome the opportunity to report, first of all, back to the parliament on the impact of the devastating fires in my electorate and I do note that many of the speakers here today—from regional communities including many of my Nationals colleagues and also my friends in the Labor Party—as regional MPs are joined by our experiences in this regard. With the bushfires in Tasmania and New South Wales and in my own electorate and in Western Australia and also in other parts of Victoria, along with the floods and the storms in Queensland and New South Wales, tragically this has been a dangerous summer for our constituents. There has been loss of life. In the fires in Tasmania one of my constituents passed away, a man from Tyers by the name of Peter Cramer, and in the recent Gippsland bushfires Stanley Hayhurst from Seaton was killed. I believe there were seven fatalities in the Queensland event.

Having looked at the coverage and listened to my colleagues over these past few days, I believe we were quite lucky. Given the rapid rise of rivers we experienced in Queensland and given the extraordinary spread of fire in Tasmania and Gippsland, I think we were quite lucky that we did not have greater loss of life. We have been sorely tested in many parts of regional Australia over the past couple of months but I can assure the House that none of our communities are beaten. I am constantly amazed by the resilience we see from our communities. It is a part of life in regional communities, and we are lucky to represent such amazing people who are so incredibly tough. I guess it is the price that we pay for the magnificent environment we live in: the majestic forests of Gippsland and Tasmania, the beautiful rivers, the coastal areas and the extraordinary expansive coastline of Queensland. When nature turns vicious on us, unfortunately these beautiful surrounds make it very difficult for us to deal with it.

In Gippsland, unfortunately, we have had a lot of practice in natural disasters. In my short time in the parliament we have dealt with significant floods, the Black Saturday bushfires and now these bushfires. I would like to take the opportunity to thank the emergency services in particular, both the paid emergency service people—the police, the ambulance, the Department of Sustainability and the Environment and the paid staff within the Country Fire Authority—and the volunteers, whether they be with the SES or the CFA. I also thank the staff of the Wellington shire, the Department of Human Services and the Department of
Primary Industries. It is an enormous contribution that we get from so many different people pulling together when we have these events.

It is something that we should be very proud of as a nation that we do have plans in place to help our fellow man in very difficult circumstances. We are a lucky country to have such organisational capacity and people ready to swing into action at a moment's notice. The professional people are there, the plans are in place, and they are backed up by teams of volunteers who are just so desperate to get in there and lend a helping hand. I would also like to thank, in the time I have today, the local media. We benefitted enormously in our regional communities from not only the ABC but also our commercial radio networks and our newspapers and television stations. They are very responsible in trying to report the most accurate information they can, and some of the information they provide is faster and more relevant to people facing particularly bushfire threats. When they can get people ringing in, giving up-to-date information over the ABC, it is very handy for people who are literally in the firing line.

It is a real community effort and I am very proud of the way that the people of Gippsland and beyond Gippsland have rallied to this enormous challenge. It would be remiss of me not to thank the communities—

A division having been called in the House of Representatives—

Sitting suspended from 16:57 to 17:03

Mr CHESTER: As I was saying, it would be remiss of me not to mention the support that the people of Gippsland have received from people throughout Victoria and, indeed, from throughout Australia. There were CFA crews present from right around Victoria during the efforts to control this bushfire.

The amazing thing about an event like this when you get out amongst your community and start talking to people is their capacity to count their blessings. You meet people who have been adversely affected by the fires but who will automatically point to someone else down the road who has been more adversely affected. They will say, 'Don't worry about me,' and they will direct the aid effort to someone else even though they certainly should receive some support. They are quite selfless and humble in the way they respond to these tragic events.

The Gippsland bushfires started on 17 January but they are still going today. While the department staff and the CFA have done a great job in establishing containment lines, the fires have now burnt in excess of 74,000 hectares. They have burnt an area from Aberfeldy, which is north-east of the Thomson River Dam—and at one stage the fires threatened the water catchment of Melbourne—right through to Seaton, Glenmaggie and areas to the north of Heyfield. The fire perimeter itself, if you went around the entire perimeter, is 300 kilometres.

In the first 24 hours, when the fire did most of its damage, when it ripped through the communities around Seaton and Dawson particularly, 21 houses, 54 sheds, 13 vehicles, several caravans and about 170 head of stock were lost. The fencing losses are still being assessed and the fodder loss is obviously a major challenge for the farming sector. At the peak we had more than 600 firefighting personnel in Gippsland working on the fire. We were a bit lucky, I suppose, in some regards that we were the only major event in Victoria at the time.
and so there were a lot of crews and tankers on the ground and also aerial support. It was
tremendous to have that at the time.

But you cannot measure an event like this in raw numbers like that; the statistics do not tell
the full story. It is only when you get out amongst the community, talk to the people on the
ground or fly over the area, as I had the opportunity to do, that you appreciate the full extent
of the damage that has been inflicted upon the Gippsland community. As I flew over the fire
ground I was stunned by some of the more remarkable saves that you could see, where fire
had burnt right up to the very outside of homes and yet landholders had been able to save their
properties. They had lost a lot of shedding around the properties but they had made a stand at
their homes and were able to save them. People had taken the messages well in terms of early
preparation, reducing the fuel load around their properties and having the appropriate
firefighting pumps in place, and a lot of people were able to save their homes.

The fire itself, as any fire I have ever experienced, was very indiscriminate in its nature.
There were examples where one house had been burnt to the ground and the neighbour's
property was unscathed. There were sheds that had been burnt to the ground and the house
was fine and vice versa. That is the nature of fires.

I went out and spoke to my uncle and aunty, John and Lee Gell, who live at a place called
Paradise Valley. Thankfully, I can report to the House that Paradise Valley has earned its title
and retains its title because the fire somehow managed to jump over most of the valley and
burnt both sides of the hills, leapt over the Macalister River—where campers were seeking
refuge at the time—and no-one was injured and very little damage was actually sustained.
Remarkably, when I spoke to my uncle and aunty about their experiences, they said that it
was just like 1965. The weather conditions, the typography of whatever seems to shape the
fire in a certain way where that particular place seems to be blessed. So it seems that Paradise
Valley has survived.

Their neighbours at the Montana Caravan Park, Barry and Sue Taylor, with their family
fought the fire literally to their backdoor step. Their preparations held them in good stead and
they were able to prevent major damage to their residence.

Unfortunately, there were some very severe losses. I spoke to some great friends of mine,
Richard and Dianne Dennis—and people who read the Weekly Times may well have seen the
photo of Richard on the front cover. I must say that it was probably not the happiest that I
have ever seen Richard look. He is a tremendous fellow. He and his wife Dianne and their
family are a great support. In fact, their parents, Michael and Helene, have been heavily
involved in the farming family business for many, many years. Tragically, the Dennises lost
more than 100 head of stock and an enormous amount of fencing. They are facing some very
tough times ahead. We hope to be able to support them as they work their way through this.

The thing about fire is that we see it on the news and we hear about the loss of life and
buildings that are lost, but some of the costs of a fire are hidden to those who do not live in
the community. The environmental toll it takes is something that members who come from
regional areas probably understand more than others. When you go back to these communities
the silence in the bush is something that strikes you as quite eerie. That is because the birds
are gone. You see the other native wildlife and the charred remains of wallabies, kangaroos
and wombats that were not fast enough to flee such a fast-moving event. So there are these
hidden impacts on the native environment and on the birdlife and the impact that it has on
stream and water quality in the aftermath. These are all things that these communities have to deal with for not just days, weeks or months but for years after the event.

I know the member for Lyne has experienced similar things in his beautiful environment, and I am sure his community will be facing similar challenges. But I can report that the environment is extraordinary and it does recover. To endure the Black Saturday events, and to go back to some of those communities now, only a couple of years later, and see that environment restored is something quite extraordinary.

The rebuilding effort is going on even though the fire is still burning. So we have the unusual situation where the response to the fire is continuing. The DSE and the CFA are out there trying to do their best to protect against further losses, but the rebuilding effort is going on at the same time. We have had volunteers on the ground from a wide range of local community groups. We have efforts from the VFF and other organisations to provide fodder relief for our farming community and we have people on the ground like BlazeAid organisation helping out with restoring fencing. As I said, this is going on while the danger period continues. The danger period certainly has not passed for Victoria. We are maybe halfway through the fire season. I notice that tomorrow has been declared a day of total fire ban in Gippsland and I assume in other parts of Victoria as well. There are warnings coming through, in my email as I speak, about a large fast-moving bush fire at Hotham Heights in the Dinner Plain area in the member for Indi’s electorate—but neighbouring my electorate as well.

There are continuing fire threats in the Gippsland region as I stand here today. There is plenty of fuel out there, there is a likelihood of hot and dry conditions and there is always going to be a point of ignition in an environment like ours in Victoria and in south-east Australia—whether it is a natural event like a lightning strike, an unfortunate accident or a deliberate act by someone acting maliciously. On that point, I urge people in regional communities to be extraordinarily vigilant in the weeks and months ahead in this fire season and to report any suspicious activity to local police immediately. There are people in our community—who I simply cannot understand—who get some perverse enjoyment out of lighting fires on these days. We ask people to be vigilant, to report suspicious activity and to give the authorities every chance to, first of all, catch the offenders; but, if they do happen to succeed in lighting a fire, early detection is so important for the emergency services.

We are constantly learning from experiences like this, and the Gippsland bushfires are no exception. The fire experts were stunned by the behaviour of the Aberfeldy fire as it burnt through the Gippsland region. They described it to me as a forest fire behaving like a grass fire. It moved so quickly and ripped through that community ahead of a wind change. It certainly moved quicker than any of the locals expected, and it proved extraordinarily difficult for them to contain on the evening. It was only the return of better weather conditions that actually helped them out. Frankly, our best efforts—whether it is the CFA, the DSE or our water bombers—will not put this fire out. Only a good drenching rain will put this fire out and we face that reality over the coming weeks.

As I said, we are constantly learning and there still remains room for improvement despite our great efforts as a community to combat this fire. One area we need to have a better look at, as responsible agencies in the community, is the issue of roadblocks. The issue of roadblocks is one that constantly causes additional hardship and exacerbates the trauma for
people in the affected communities. People recognise the need for roadblocks once a bushfire has gone through. They recognise it in that immediate stage, but in recent times we have seen roadblocks continuing for many hours after the apparent danger has passed, restricting access to and from areas. People who have a legitimate reason to be there want to return to their properties to check on the welfare of their properties and also to check on the welfare of their stock. They did not have that opportunity within the first 30 hours of this particular bushfire, and there was a certain amount of grief in the community about that. They wanted to get back there and make sure their stock was alright. They knew they did not have enough feed; they knew they needed water and they knew they needed tending to. We need to finesse the way we manage these roadblocks in the future. Safety is paramount and the community accepts that. The risk of falling trees causing further deaths in the aftermath of a fire is a very real risk. We need to prevent looting, so we do not want people moving indiscriminately through these communities. We want to reduce the intrusion by any sightseers who think they can just turn up and have a look at what has been damaged. People need to be able to get back into these areas as quickly as possible. Perhaps in the future we may need a little bit more common sense in the way we provide escorted trips into the fire areas once the immediate danger has passed. I think it would be one way to not exacerbate the situation.

I can report to the House, in a very positive manner, that the text message warning system—which we have talked about in the past and has been partly sponsored by the federal government and partly sponsored by the state government—worked well in this particular event. Again, the only proviso remains that it only works well if you live in a region with mobile phone coverage. Large parts of my region have had mobile phone coverage in recent years over the past decade, but there are still sections in my area—some of the most bushfire prone parts and some of the most flood prone parts—that do not receive mobile phone coverage, and they will not benefit from the text warning system in the future. But I have heard very positive feedback, and I would like to pass that on to the minister for emergency management, on the ground about the way the text system worked and about the way it was used by the authorities to provide accurate and useful information. In these events, you do not want to be plying people with too much information to the extent that they start ignoring some of the warnings. The text system is something that my community certainly appreciated.

It is tempting on these occasions to run through a huge list of people who need to be thanked. I will not do that now, but it would be remiss of me not to thank the political leaders in this country for the support they have shown to the people of Gippsland at this time. I include in that the Prime Minister, who visited Gippsland with the Premier of Victoria. They were very well received as they moved through my community and offered some support to the residents who have been affected. I also thank the Deputy Premier of Victoria and Police and Emergency Services Minister, Peter Ryan; my state colleague, Tim Bull; and Mayor Scott Rossetti and his fellow councillors.

It is a difficult role as a local member or political leader at a time of natural disaster. You run the risk of being seen, quite cynically, as turning up for a photo opportunity. Those in the community may wonder what you are doing there. But I think it is an important role as well for members and senior leaders to show that they are interested, that they are there to support these committees and that they understand the troubled times and the challenges we are now facing. I listened to my great friend the member for Hinkler as he described the floods
through his community. In such harrowing times the role of an MP is almost a mix between parish priest and advocate for the community. You are there to offer support and to be a mate and a friend—because they are our family and friends as well—and make sure that people who are perhaps traumatised do not fall through the gaps in the system and know what support is available for them. I can recall many occasions where just a phone call from someone in my office has been able to help people in the community access the support they needed at that time. It is true that we need to reassure these communities that we will be there and stand shoulder to shoulder with them for the long term. The recovery effort in Gippsland, in Tasmania and, of course, in Queensland is going to be long term; this is not going to be something that is going to take a few days or a few weeks. The effort is going to be ongoing and require enormous amounts of support from the state government and also the Commonwealth.

On the behalf of the people of Gippsland, I pass on our best wishes to the people who went through the floods. It amazes me how many people in the bushfire affected areas talked to me about the floods. They would say, 'Can you believe what happened to the people in Queensland!' It was extraordinary. They were more worried about those things. When you saw those things on TV they did beggar belief. We have had floods in Gippsland, but 4,000 homes have been so badly damaged, particularly around the Bundaberg area. The people of Gippsland felt great sympathy for the people in the Queensland region.

Our fellow Australians are facing such enormous adversity and rallying together and getting on with the clean-up. As we gather here in this place at the start of a parliamentary year, there is a real challenge for us to focus on the things that matter to these people and to these communities. I think we will be judged very harshly in this place, particularly in the next few weeks, if we indulge in petty political games. When we have got people on the ground building fences, helping mates out and shovelling mud out of their living rooms while we are shovelling dirt on each other I suggest we will be judged very harshly by our constituents if we cannot find ways to work in a very bipartisan way, particularly when it relates to these communities which have been so adversely affected.

There is a challenge there for us as members, and I think we are up to it, to stand shoulder to shoulder with each other as we help our fellow Australians who are in this for the long haul. I take on board the comments from the member for Hinkler that we need to take whatever steps we can to help minimise and prevent such damage in the future. There is an opportunity for us, as state and national leaders, to find ways to reduce the impact of these disasters in the future. We need to help our businesses and our farming sector get back on their feet. One of the things we sometimes forget is that business communities, in particular tourism businesses, suffer a fair bit of damage after a natural disaster. We need to get the message out there when we can, when these communities are safe to return to, that these are great places to enjoy a holiday. I think it is going to be a challenge for us in the months ahead in these tourism areas which have been adversely affected.

I think as a nation we have been sorely tested over the last couple of months. I think we have been reminded about nature's great power. Our communities are certainly looking to us as leaders of the community to put aside our petty political differences, and I think that, as a parliament, we dare not let them down.
Mr ADAMS (Lyons) (17:19): I wish to enter this debate in relation to the natural disasters that have hit our country and, on indulgence, say a few words. Of course, the true destructive nature of Australian bushfires was very much felt in January, when a number of communities across the Lyons electorate, and also the Braddon electorate in the north-west, were devastated by bushfires. A number of homes and properties were destroyed in the firestorms that caused real damage and a real loss of livestock on many, many properties. The worst were the fires that swept through the Tasman Peninsula from Forcett right down to the back of Taranna, and raging through Dunalley on its destructive path. Dunalley is a very old settlement with a canal that was built at the small top end of that peninsula over 100 years ago to lessen the burden of sailing right around the bottom end where Port Arthur is. In those days, boats were used much more as transport.

As the fires approached Dunalley and that area, many people took refuge on the beaches and under jetties, and some people were on boats—if they were able to get the boats in—and they got their neighbours on and went out and moored. The police commissioner, and also the Chief Fire Officer of Tasmania, both said to me that they believe that we did not suffer any loss of life because we were so close to the water. When you recall the Victorian fires, with so many people caught trying to get off mountains in those sorts of circumstances, we were lucky with the amount of water that was there and that people were able to take advantage of it. It certainly lead to a Dunkirk-style flotilla of boats going down to evacuate residents and their pets, and some stranded tourists were taken off because they could not get off the peninsula either.

I visited the fire-devastated town of Dunalley with the Prime Minister following the disaster. On our visit, we talked to a number of local residents who had been affected by that disaster and we listened to their stories of hope and survival. Many of them were talking about how they were going to rebuild and start again. We visited the town's devastated school, where I had been only a few months before, reading to the students and the students in the leadership group showing me the boats that they had built. Although the school had been lost to the fire—as well as all its teaching resources—I was pleased to see that the hall we built and did up through the BER funding had survived and was being used as a recovery centre after the fires because of all the showers and toilets that had been put into it. The hall was on a slightly lower level than the school, but the whole school had gone. The community understood what an important community the school can be and they rallied around to rebuild that school. It was the Parents and Friends Association rather than the education bureaucracy that managed to get a temporary school in place so that when school opened yesterday, 5 February, the students in Dunalley walked into their brand new temporary school, with a replacement permanent school already in the planning process. Quite a feat, and a surprise, for the state minister for education.

Although it is never the same after losing a special place, the speed with which the rebuilding has been achieved has allowed hope to arise from the ashes. Thanks must go to the Dunalley Parents and Friends Association, under the careful guidance of Elizabeth Knox, with help from the state body, and Jen Eddington, without whose dedication and commitment the school would still be in ruins.
The fires also took a boatbuilding project, as I mentioned, that was being undertaken through the school. The year’s work lies in ashes; they were going to show their boats at the Wooden Boat Festival this weekend in Hobart.

Luckily the boatbuilder who was running the course had a couple of unfinished shells, one was in the Nubeena school further down the peninsula and one was safe in his workshop, which did not get burnt, down near the slips on the canal. With the help of the children and one of my staff members, the boats have been rebuilt and there will be one or two of those boats at the Wooden Boat Festival this weekend in Hobart. That will be a great opportunity for the school and for the kids to show what they have achieved and that the community is still achieving.

I also visited the temporary emergency shelter that had been set up in Sorell for those who had lost their homes. I heard the stories of loss and remarkable survival. All of our service clubs in that area were working there. The Sorell RSL, which is attached to that hall, was involved right in the middle of it as well. The church groups were all busy and active in a pastoral care role, and the council, with a mayor who had been elected to that job only three months before, came through with shining colours.

I learnt of the website that had been set up by Mel Irons. She was one of the key assistance services dealing with the countless donations of food, clothing, livestock feed—there was a great set up at the Sorell sports grounds—bedding, fuel and money was made. Hundreds of hours of voluntary work was also being offered through this Facebook website that Mel had set up. She was a tireless volunteer behind most of the donations and coordination for the Dunalley Tasman Peninsula fire. In her own time, she coordinated the thousands of donations that were made, as well as using Facebook to keep people updated on everything that was happening—reconnecting friends and family who had been separated during the disaster. There were people whose children were on the peninsula with other families—it is a big holiday area—and for the people who were in Hobart while their families were on the peninsula with a fire between, it them caused a lot of angst.

I spoke with Mel and thanked her for all the hard work that she had done, and social media had played a really important role. I just heard the member for Gippsland talk about social media from the fire service in Victoria. It certainly was used very successfully by the fire service in Tasmania. They feel that they got their message out very successfully to many people. Social media was used to keep people abreast and also, as Mel had done, keep people in touch with family and caught up with where things were happening. Mention must also be made of the state member Bec White, whose office in Sorell was thrown open to help all comers. Her staff spent hours working with Mel to ensure that cries for help did not go unanswered. They need to be thanked gratefully for all the work that they put in.

But Dunalley was not the only area that suffered great devastation in January; fires were experienced across the state. The Lake Repulse fire around Ellendale, which is high in the Derwent Valley—a very large forest area that goes right back into national parks as well as active working forests—was a very big fire burning through there for quite some time as well as in the Bicheno area, which burnt right through to the Coles Bay national park. I have spent time in each of these areas talking to the residents and making sure that Centrelink was available to issue those first areas of assistance to help, and then later talking of other means of assistance and helping in that area.
I also want to thank Centrelink for getting their bus to Tasmania from the mainland. I think that was a bit of a rush down to the ferry in Melbourne to get it on the ferry and get it over overnight to Tasmania and then a big rush down to the south. I thank them for the work and the effort; those officers put in a lot of time.

In late January, I again visited Dunalley, with the Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Sid Sidebottom. Following the disaster, the federal government made emergency funding available to those who had been directly affected by the fires. The community and the whole of Tasmania have been raising funds for the disaster appeal. Our regular and our volunteer fire brigades, along with the SES, who were involved in much of the clean-up afterwards, all played an enormous role around the state in fighting fires. Also, despite it being the holiday period, many people on their holidays were actually fighting fires. Many of them worked many long shifts. I visited the control centres and was extremely impressed by the efficiency and coordination of all the emergency groups: fire, ambulance, police and the SES. We would have to have one of the best services in the country in Tasmania, and I think it was a credit to those services that there was no loss of life in these fires. The people at Aurora, our energy company, must also be thanked for getting on with the job of putting in new poles even when the old ones were still smoking. They are a remarkable bunch of workers.

Unfortunately, a volunteer firefighter from the mainland—I think the member for Gippsland mentioned he was from that electorate—Peter Cramer, lost his life during this period. It was not as a result of the fire but rather a medical condition. I and my constituents thank him and his family from the bottom of our hearts for coming to our aid in our time of need. It was a truly heroic gesture on his behalf.

One of the greatest property losses was the loss of fencing. While much livestock perished in the fires, those animals that survived were left without adequate fencing. Of course, this causes problems with stock getting onto roads and into other areas. Also, some damage was caused to potato crops, which is an important feedstock for Tasmanians—we feed quite a few mainlanders potatoes from Tasmania.

I say thank you to BlazeAid, a voluntary organisation set up following the Victorian Black Saturday bushfires in 2009. BlazeAid was supported by a number of sponsors, including the Country Women's Association, the Salvation Army, the ABC, Rotary International and the St Vincent de Paul Society. BlazeAid volunteers helped rebuild fences in bushfire-affected areas and have volunteers around Australia and the world, including, I understand, in New Zealand, England, Canada, Germany, France and America. Through their efforts, many kilometres of fence line have been restored in the Evandale and the Sorell-Dunalley Tasman Peninsula area.

But there is still a lot more to be done and I am sure many of the property owners will welcome working bees to help them continue to repair their working lives. The next few months are going to be a hard time for those people who have lost houses and businesses or whose farms have been affected. The clean-up process is beginning and the insurance people have been out and about, working on their assessments. Both of my offices are available for people seeking assistance and have been working with Bec White, the state MHA for Lyons, in the Sorell area. So, hopefully, we can cover most of the problems that might arise.

There are also a few communication problems that need to be fixed. Our local ABC was wonderful in giving out regular emergency messages. I met up with them at Bicheno and at
Sorell. They do a tremendous job throughout high-sided areas where you can still get a signal. As the member for Gippsland mentioned, there are parts of regional Australia where you just do not get phone coverage. That is no-one's fault. The difficulties are in gullies and mountainous areas where you do not get a direct signal. Sometimes the ABC have a signal, and they provide an important service in an emergency. Their messages were loud and clear right across all these areas. I thank them for the work they did. They went into some regions and put out the message, and they talked to people who were affected. Some of the signals did not get through, in some cases because of substandard equipment, particularly in outlying areas where work still needs to be done. We need to continue to work to have those upgraded.

I also want to thank all the Tasmanians who came to help and who donated goods and money, and who volunteered all sorts of things to help out. Some provided help to businesses they compete with—in particular, some of the oyster growers at Boomer Bay who lost their sheds. The other guys helped them get their fish to shore and process it in their sheds. We saw great community spirit in helping out your neighbour.

When we are in crisis in Tasmania, the island pulls together. It is great to see. Many teams who came down to help us have now headed back north and are probably helping out in Queensland. I want to thank all those volunteers from Victoria and other places who came to help us in Tasmania. It was a great effort and I thank them very much. Tasmania is a great place to live. It is not what you have but what you can contribute to others that seems to be the Tasmanian ethos, and that is a wonderful value to have. Thanks to everybody who assisted. I also pay special thanks to the Prime Minister for coming and lending her support to all my communities.

Mr O'DOWD (Flynn) (17:38): Who would have thought of this after the 2010-11 floods that affected the people of my electorate and those in the electorates of the member for Ryan and the member for Brisbane? I have often had this question put to me: what would you prefer if you were a farmer, a flood, a fire or a drought? It is a very good question and I do not expect an answer. You could debate the matter with yourself over and over again. I tend to think that, if I were a farmer, I would prefer a drought. Fires are very destructive, as are floods. Floods will wipe out everything on your property, as will a fire. Droughts do not take your house, your machinery or your farm infrastructure. That is something just to think about.

My electorate takes in a little of North Bundaberg. It was a record flood, equal to the 1942 flood. People said they never thought they would ever see it in their lifetime. It is certainly a record for Bundaberg.

In other parts of the Burnett River, sometimes it registered over the 1942 floods and in other places it did not. But one thing is for sure: the rain came down very quickly, which caused the movement of the water to be very quick. That is why it hit Bundaberg in not so many days. It did the same thing in Rockhampton. The local water is never really a problem for flooding around Rockhampton, but it was this time. There is total devastation across two-thirds of my electorate. Fortunately Emerald and Theodore, which were so badly affected in 2010, escaped. But the other two-thirds of my electorate was hit very badly. It affected railway lines and roads to an extent. But I am pleased to report that, maybe because of the action of Main Roads, which has cleared a lot of debris and put drainage along the sides of the roads, the main highways did not seem to be so badly affected as they were in 2010.
There was a lot of destruction on new bridge works. I think in future we have got to spend a little bit more money on bridge ends and use more concrete instead of bitumen because, with this heavy rain, the bitumen will soon lift off and create great holes and wells in the bridge ends, which makes those bridges impassable. When I saw the holes that have been gouged in the sides of roads and bridges, it certainly changed my mind about driving in heavy rain. The holes are so dangerous they could swallow a car in one go.

There was crop destruction along the Burnett River, which runs for about 250 kilometres before it gets to Bundaberg. Some parts the river were five or six kilometres wide; in other places it was narrower. Of course, the narrower it is the faster the water runs. The citrus plantations—oranges and mandarins—and blueberry farms have been hit very hard. Fences have been destroyed everywhere. Over 1,000 kilometres of fences were knocked down in the Banana Shire alone. Hundreds of homes were inundated and some were lost forever; some of them were seen floating down the Burnett River. Some sheds in the Stanwell area were picked up, with their concrete base attached, and dumped on other people's properties. That is how strong the water was.

Very high stock losses were reported in the early days. But as the floodwaters receded, cattle, pigs, sheep and other stock bobbed up on other properties downstream. At one stage one particular grazier thought he had lost 3,000 head. Fortunately, at this stage he has recovered about 2,000 head on other people's properties downriver. A dairy farmer at Mundubbera had a dairy herd of 400 cows. He initially lost the lot; they were washed away. Fortunately he has recovered half to 60 per cent of his herd—and, who knows, he may recover more. There was a loss of herds on the Gayndah Bridge, which is a pretty high bridge. When the waters receded, cattle and timber—full trees—were stuck in the bridge and they had to be removed before the bridge could be used. One particular farmer did not suffer floodwater damage to his shed, but the whirlbirds on the roof of his shed were sucked out and, of course, the rainwater did the rest of the damage.

Irrigation systems were lost. They were bent and twisted. Machinery was inundated with water. A brand new grader of the North Burnett shire was put on a hill which they thought was high enough to be out of floodwaters. It had all the modern gizmos and electronics. It went under. There are many stories like that where cars and tractors and other vehicles and cattle trucks have all been lost. Pump stations have been covered in mud and sand. There are not enough electricians to fix those yet. It is going to take a long time. On the Binjour Plateau a highway between Gayndah and Mundubbera has had great holes washed in the side of the road and people are unable to use it bar one lane.

There were two motels in Mundubbera. They were completely inundated with water. So there is no accommodation as such from motels. My good friend's hotel in Gayndah was washed away completely. He had poker machines, a TAB agency, living accommodation for him and his family and the accommodation in the motel units. That has all been lost. It is very devastating.

I think it has been mentioned before in the lower house that Lizzy Connelly from Eidsvold was a very lucky girl indeed. She went to bed, there was heavy rain and she got up to have a look around. The waters picked her up and threw her out of the house, down over the yard, over the fence, across the highway and over another fence. Fortunately, she ended up in a plantation of trees. The trees were pretty branchy and leafy and for the next five hours she...
clung to these trees along with a big brown snake in the same tree as she was. I think they were both pretty frightened. She lived to tell the tale and it was a marvellous and miraculous escape by a very brave young lady.

I will go through my electorate, where four or five shires were flooded. I will start with the north, with Rockhampton, Neerkol, Kabra, Stanwell, Bajool, Mount Morgan, Alton Downs—and Alton Downs has been under water twice in the same flood. The road from Mount Morgan to the dam has been very badly damaged. I have seen that with my own eyes. The Neerkol bridge has been washed out. That is on the main Capricorn Highway from Rockhampton to Emerald. So it has been severely damaged. There is a side track there now until the bridge is fixed, which will take months. Take Wilson's farm on the Yeppoon-Emu Park road. They have sent me photos. There is a lot of erosion and a lot of gouging of soil.

If you head into the Banana shire, the towns of Jambin, Wowan, Goovigen, Baralaba were all heavily affected. I was talking to a lady in Wowan who had not seen her husband. He was safe. He was on top of a roof. What happened on the Sunday and the Monday, probably at the peak of the flood, was that all the telecommunications lines went out. Telstra did apologise profusely. They had two lines in Queensland. One south of Mirrimbah got washed out and they could not get in a chopper or a vehicle to join it all up again. There was another one near Kingaroy. Again, they could not get in vehicles to fix or repair. So most of those flood affected areas were out of communications. That led to a lot of confusion and misinformation as to what was happening. Well, there was no information at all. It was all hearsay.

That is what the people of our electorate had to endure. As you move south to North Burnett, Gayndah, Mundubbera, Eidsvold and Monto, all had major damage. South Burnett towards Kingaroy and Wadeye had huge flood waters, again doing damage to farmland and fences et cetera. My good friend Paul Neville, the member for Hinkler, described the scene at Bundaberg, so I will not go into that again. Needless to say, there are still people assessing their losses. My staff have only today got into a place called Winfield, and Battle Creek, which is a fair way north of Bundaberg. They have been cut off and no one has been able to get in there.

I experienced a fair bit of difficulty getting around because the Army, which do a great job, came in. When the Army come into your area—and fortunately they did—they do take control of the fuel, so some private helicopters and planes were short of fuel. That was not a big help to me but the fuel was better off being used by the Army for the rescue of people than for my cause. People stood shoulder to shoulder. Some had no outside assistance. I ran into two ladies at Stanwell. The police could not get in. They just took control of that area. They rounded the people up and made an evacuation centre for them in the Stanwell hall. For 2½ days no-one knew they were there, but they kept them calm. They raided their own fridges and fed the people. When the police finally did arrive they were amazed to see what a good survival job they had done.

Throughout the electorate there are all sorts of stories and there will be more over the coming months. The emergency services, the volunteers, the police and the Army all did a wonderful job and there was no loss of life. That is something we can be grateful for. The government assistance is starting to flow in now. We only have South Burnett and Banana, which will be declared in the next day, I hope, with some funding and the AGDRP, the Australian Government Disaster Recovery Payments. Once that happens it is going to take a
long time to rebuild. A lot of the farmers, who are devastated, are still paying back loans from the 2010 flood, so they are going to be hit hard. They say to me, 'We don't want to owe more money.' I had the services of John Cobb, our shadow agriculture minister, and Warren Truss, Leader of the Nationals. A lot of politicians, including the Prime Minister, went to Bundaberg. We elected to do the country areas. All those people came to Bundaberg and up north to Burnett and Rockhampton.

I thank them all. There are too many to mention, both state and federal politicians. I want to also thank our colleagues in Canberra, whatever electorate they come from. They rang on numerous occasions to offer their condolences and help. I thank them very much.

Ms SAFFIN (Page—Government Whip) (17:54): I wanted to speak to the statement, on indulgence, that the Prime Minister made yesterday in the House and that the Leader of the Opposition spoke to. I have spoken twice in this place, both last night and today in an adjournment speech and in a constituency statement, on the floods that have affected my area, but I still have something to say here. What I want to raise is about the fires and floods that have devastated some of our lands—Victoria, Tasmania, Queensland, New South Wales and other areas. It is as though every year, sometimes twice a year, there is some sort of natural disaster happening. The honourable member for Hinkler in his contribution, which was a very fine contribution, spoke about how over the past four or five years there have been these extreme weather events that have happened and that is what I have been talking about locally in my area, the Northern Rivers area in my seat of Page.

In October 2007 there was a huge hail storm, the likes of which we had not seen for a long time, and it seems every year since then we have had some big weather event. We do get a lot of floods in our areas. When I say we are used to floods, you can never be used to them but we are organised because we do have a lot of floods. Our SES and Rural Fire Service, the people who live in flood areas, the council workers, the agencies that hop in and help with the emergency management: they deal with the emergency issues but they also deal with the recovery and that is what we are in now. It is something that seems to be happening a lot more, and that is what people are talking about. That leads me to the issue of people talking about what more we can do in the area of flood mitigation.

A division having been called in the House of Representatives—

Sitting suspended from 17:57 to 18:15

Ms SAFFIN: Before the suspension, I was talking about the extreme weather events we have experienced in the Northern Rivers. It has had a huge impact on our emergency services, our local councils, the people who live in flood affected areas and the local media, who are very active when we have these flood and extreme weather events. I also want to talk about the impact on farmers. There is a large agricultural industry, which includes horticulture, in my seat of Page and the Northern Rivers. These events that keep coming year after year in the way that they have do not allow farmers to get back on their feet. I want to read a letter from the Australian Macadamia Society. Their headquarters are in Lismore in the seat of Page. At least 60 per cent of the national production happens in the Northern Rivers. Their letter states: Janelle

I appreciate you will have a lot on at the moment. This is to provide you with a preliminary update on the impact of the storms and floods on macadamia growers in your electorate and to seek your help in securing appropriate assistance for growers and the industry.
The Northern Rivers has also been severely hit, particularly north and easterly facing orchards. As always the effects of weather are very variable in the region and reports vary from less than 5% crop loss to almost 50% loss. On some exposed orchards 1 in 5 trees have been blown over or suffered severe damage.

I went and looked at the damage. The big wind that came with the floods actually shook the trees and shook the nuts off. I visited Rick Paine's farm on Rouse Road. He has been a grower for years and he said that that had never happened before. It happened five or six weeks short of the picking season, so it was tragic to see the nuts on the ground. There are some left on the trees but they have to get them quickly cleaned up off the ground to deal with what is left on the trees. The letter from the Australian Macadamia Society continues:

The industry in the northern rivers accounts for some 60% of national production and is valued at $70 million at farm gate. An across the board loss of nut of around 20% would mean a loss to the industry and the region of over $10 million. This does not include the cost of repairs and replanting. These are conservatively estimated at $60/ha or a further $5 million.

Of the approximately 600 growers across the region reports indicate that around 70% have been significantly impacted. The individual loss and damage bill reach over $100,000 for some with a loss of $30,000 common.

This letter was written on 31 January, so more assessment has been done since then. The letter continues:

Macadamia growers in the northern rivers have had at least 3 very difficult years from the big storms of 2009, dry weather at nut set in 2010 and a wet harvest in 2011. Many have not covered the costs of production in that time. 2012 saw a cautious step to recovery with a reasonable yields and firm prices. 2013 was shaping up to continue that recovery and a lot of effort and expense had been put in to maximise returns. This is now all in jeopardy.

What is happening now is that there is an assessment going on at state level. A lot of the carriage of that is with DPI, the Department of Primary Industries. They will then put forward the request, which goes through to the Commonwealth. It will be a category C request under the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Assistance program. I know that there are a lot of farmers anxiously waiting for that to happen.

The other issue that I wanted to talk to that I started on before and then left was the issue of flood mitigation. In the area that I live in, we have done flood mitigation. We have levies. We have raised houses. We have bought houses back. We have done all that. Now is the right time, as the member for Hinkler said in his contribution. He was talking about the same kinds of conversations that I am having in my electorate. I will be having some meetings on the weekend on that very issue. It is time. It would be good if we could look at this in a solid bipartisan way with technical expertise. We need to look at what we can do over the next 10 years in terms of more work in that area. We cannot prevent these events, but we can do a lot of work to mitigate in certain areas.

I also wanted to say that I was pleased to have the opportunity to speak for the third time in this place about the floods, particularly those in my area but also the natural disasters impacting everywhere. I express on behalf of my community sympathy and sorrow for everybody who suffered loss. People in my area have suffered loss. As we have said, we have not suffered loss of life. To those communities that have, we extend our sympathy and sorrow. Thank you.
Ms GAMBARO (Brisbane) (18:21): I rise to speak after the member for Page, who represents a very beautiful part of Australia. I want to commend her care for her constituents, along with the previous speakers, the member for Hinkler and the member for Flynn. This is the second time in two years that I have been on my feet in this place expressing condolences as a result of flooding events in my electorate and across Queensland. The damage and the devastation from ex tropical cyclone Oswald in my electorate was not as severe as that in 2011 and nowhere near the level that we have seen in Bundaberg and other central Queensland and northern New South Wales communities. However, the effect on some pockets of my electorate was very significant.

In 2011, the flooding in Brisbane predominantly occurred as a result of the Brisbane River reaching dramatic heights. This time, it was localised flooding as a result of storms that caused suburban creeks and waterways to swell and to overflow. This led to houses and businesses getting flooded all over again. There were hundreds of thousands of dollars of storm damage, with trees and power lines coming down right across my whole electorate. Tens of thousands of my constituents were without power for periods of up to three or four days. Businesses lost their Eftpos facilities. Homes were flooded. Possessions and memories were lost.

Tragically, little Angus Burke, a three-year-old boy from Gordon Park was killed after a tree fell on him and his mother, Dr Zara Weedon, as they were innocently standing and watching the water rise in Kedron Brook creek while taking a walk with his dad, Dr Andrew Burke, and his little brother, Joseph. Dr Weedon is still in a critical condition in a coma at Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital. The Courier Mail today printed a very moving eulogy that was given by Dr Burke at Angus's funeral yesterday morning. Our thoughts and prayers are with his family and his friends at this very sad time.

The sense of deja vu as the waters poured down and emergency warnings were issued sent shivers down my spine. We all recall the trauma and the devastation of the 2011 disaster. However, the extra warning made a big difference and people rushed to SES depots and began sandbagging their properties. The fact that some people sandbagged their businesses and properties and were not flooded was a good thing. This time, the Brisbane community was much more prepared than ever before.

I want to thank the Leader of the Opposition, Tony Abbott, for visiting the Newmarket SES depot with me and helping to fill sandbags with volunteers. It is really important during times of disaster that we as a community—and particularly community leaders—express our appreciation for the work of volunteers. There were so many people out there helping so many of their fellow men and women. I want to pay tribute to all of the parents, the P&C and the principal, Paul Zernike, of Milton State School. A working bee of some 100 people and more rolled up at the school before the anticipated waters hit. Fortunately, Milton State School was not flooded, which was a great thing. They then had the mammoth task of putting back all of the equipment. Their preventative action is to be applauded.

The most affected areas in my electorate were parts of Windsor, Albion, Enoggera, Milton and Ashgrove. I want to pay tribute to Councillor Vicki Howard for coming out with me when we visited the northern suburbs of Brisbane where people were starting the heartbreaking process of cleaning up. The anguish and frustration on people's faces was truly heartbreaking. I want to also acknowledge Councillor Peter Matic and Saxon Rice, the state
member for Mount Coot-tha, for coming out to the Rosalie shopping district, which was the scene of much devastation in the 2011 floods. Luckily, this time it was spared, so we all breathed a sigh of relief. I do not think that you ever recover from watching residents carry out wrecked and mangled furniture onto footpaths and hosing out their living areas for the second time in two years. That is a terrible thing.

When I visited Newmarket I saw businesses that had been flooded with two metres of water. Elite Dance Studio, for example, had just finished refurbishing their dance studio. They were waiting for enrolments and the start of dancing classes for the year. It was terrible to see the devastation of their fittings. There were volunteers working there. There is a wonderful bakery at New Farm, Chouquette Bakery. I want to pay tribute to this incredible bakery. People line up there every day to have a coffee and taste the finest French pastries. They had just started a wholesale bakery, had purchased the equipment and were about to start producing wholesale pastries for delis and for businesses in Brisbane. I saw the effect of the floods on their $80,000 brand new baking oven. You cannot move huge ovens like that. They were able to move some equipment but sadly they are now in the middle of an insurance claim.

The incredible community spirit that was celebrated in 2011 was on show again as neighbours and community members rallied to help their fellow Queenslanders. It was the case in the CBD, where I again waited and watched the water in the Brisbane River rise, praying that it would not go over the boardwalk, with Councillor Howard and also the state member for Brisbane Central, Robert Cavallucci. Watching the waters was very tense. Many CBD workers and many of those who owned buildings in the CBD were watching with dread and anticipation. Sadly, the effects of the last flood, the one in 2011, came to our minds. I want to acknowledge that, while the water did not reach the upper end of the boardwalk, it did damage Matt Moran’s Riverbar restaurant. Our thoughts are with them at the moment as they try and rebuild from the damage that was done there.

Remarkable stories abound always in times of crisis. Strangers help other community members with hot showers and accommodation. They roll up and clean up houses. They clean up businesses, even though they do not know the owners. To see those acts of pure selflessness and generosity makes me really proud to be the member for Brisbane.

There are so many people I want to commend. I commend Volunteering Queensland for the website that they set up, Emergency Volunteering. There were some glitches during the 2011 flood; I know that they took away a lot of those lessons, and they were absolutely marvellous. This website basically connected those people interested in volunteering to help businesses and residents that needed help with sandbagging or cleaning up. This service was of huge benefit to my constituents who needed help. It ensured that help went to those who needed it the most.

I want to thank all of the police officers, the SES volunteers, emergency service personnel and community volunteers for their service. I have incredible admiration for their commitment. I want to particularly thank Mike Swanston and Energex. I did not have the need to ring Mike Swanston on this occasion. He and his crews were out there trying to reconnect power under some very difficult circumstances. I want to thank all of the workforce at Ergon Energy for the incredible work that they did, particular as they were under incredible pressure. Interestingly enough, the time that it took to reconnect homes and businesses was
much shorter than it was in the 2011 disaster. I acknowledge the inconvenience of having no power for extended periods, causing food to go off in fridges and freezers, meaning that it needs to be replaced.

I want to thank the Australian and Queensland governments for activating the National Disaster Relief and Recovery arrangements. I am encouraging my constituents to take advantage of the emergency assistance grants available at community recovery centres. I have written to most of the affected areas, informing them of what relief grants are available to them. I would like to thank the Premier, Campbell Newman, and the Lord Mayor, Graham Quirk, for their outstanding leadership throughout this disaster period. The efforts that they went to to provide Queenslanders with as much information as possible and as soon as possible were suburb. Those efforts provided reassurance to residents that the government was there no matter what.

In particular, I want to commend the Premier. I met with him last Thursday and he announced the decision that allowed SEQ Water to release water early from Wivenhoe and Somerset dams. This ensured that when mass water flowed into the Brisbane River from the Lockyer and Bremer rivers there was capacity in Wivenhoe and Somerset to hold and contain water that fell within their catchments until the Brisbane River went back down. The people of the electorate of Brisbane would have been much more severely impacted if this action by the Premier had not been taken. I thank him for his leadership. I want to place on the record also the thanks that was expressed by Mayor Pisasale. I also acknowledge the incredible work that Mayor Pisasale did in his region as well.

I also agree with many representatives and the Premier on the need for governments at all levels to work together to ensure that we invest in infrastructure and planning policies so that neither I nor any future member for Brisbane has to stand up in this place and make a similar speech about floods ever again.

I would like to talk about something that I feel is absolutely essential. After a crisis, it is really important that we think about ways in which we can prevent these disasters from happening again. But I cannot emphasise enough—and I have spoken at roundtables with Minister Shorten about this—the need for digital elevation modelling and the real need for DEM mapping. This would allow more extensive and accurate hydraulic modelling. Normal flood mapping is useful, but it is a very generalised tool across suburbs and often does not allow or account for the different property levels within a suburb. While a property may be coded a certain way on a flood map because it is within a certain area, it may in fact be higher or lower than the proposed water levels because of individual characteristics of that property. DEM mapping also allows for identification of impediments to the water flow. It is really important that governments at all levels—local governments and the Queensland government—work together to make sure that this information is available not just to prevent floods and disasters from happening but also to help with infrastructure planning in the future.

I would like to urge insurance companies to act with fairness and compassion when dealing with claims from flood victims. I note the concerns that have been raised by many members of this House both on the opposite side and from our side of politics, particularly in the media, regarding the length of time that it is taking for insurance companies to respond to claims.

I am also getting reports that insurance companies are refusing to pay claims and, instead, are blaming local councils regarding local flooding and backflow issues. I share these concerns
and will not hesitate to publicly expose any disingenuous conduct by insurance companies. The last thing that people need when they have gone through a natural disaster is again to have a fight with an insurance company.

In concluding I want to acknowledge the resilient spirit of Queenslanders and to reaffirm my commitment to continuing to work to get Brisbane families back on their feet after these recent events.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM (Braddon—Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry) (18:35): Fire, drought and flood are so much part of our environment. Might I pass on my sympathies and best wishes to those folk further north who have been affected by very serious flooding again. The member from Queensland and my colleagues here have been working assiduously with their communities again, and I really do sympathise with you. To face this again after two years is a monumental challenge. But our sympathies go with you, particularly from Tasmania, and of course into New South Wales.

In my home state of Tassie, as you might be aware, towards the end of January very serious fires occurred in the Tasman Peninsula in particular, which is part and parcel of Dick Adams's electorate of Lyons; on the east coast of Tasmania, which is also in Lyons; and in the Derwent Valley, which was Dick Adams's patch. We had some serious fires up in my electorate, but fortunately they did not threaten, beyond our immediate concerns, houses or persons.

I joined the member for Lyons recently, at his invitation, and went to visit the Tasman Peninsula. I know that there are people in this chamber and certainly in this parliament who have before faced serious bushfires and their consequences, and also flooding. But I must say that these fires, like most extraordinary fires, needed to be seen to be believed.

I particularly want to congratulate the people of the Tasman Peninsula on the way that their community has rallied in the face of these extraordinary fires, fires that in fact crossed rivers and bays of considerable size—they completely skipped major rivers—and, of course, caused damage in areas that you would never believe would face serious fire. That community has responded magnificently. In congratulating them, I would like to also recognise their local council, which has done everything possible to rally to support the community. The Tasmanian government has been very, very good. So has the federal government in giving ready support and assistance, particularly in declaring disaster assistance and disaster zones. I know that has been replicated throughout the country with the unfortunate circumstances in Queensland. We expect nothing less of federal governments, no matter what their political persuasion, than to support their people. But I do congratulate the Tasman Peninsula community in particular.

I attended a meeting with the member for Lyons, Dick Adams—and I must congratulate Dick; he really does know his area and they know him well, and he seems to know every little nook and cranny that was affected by the fires. I also want to congratulate Dick and his office for the tremendous work that they were able to do—as I congratulate my colleagues here. I say to every person, no matter what their political persuasion: I am so sorry your communities have been touched by disaster; I know how much work you would have done and how much you care about it, and I do thank you all for the work you do there.

We went to the meeting, which was auspiced by Sue Madden from Blue Lagoon Oysters. There were three oyster farms in a row and Sue's business was completely wiped out. I have
never before seen the consequences of heat as I saw in this circumstance, and in an area with very few trees. Right next door, they were processing oysters. All this was going on and we were having the meeting, and the next minute a bloke arrived with a tray of oysters from right next door to Sue's. Then, next door to this oyster place that looked like it had not had a fire near it, another business was wiped out. It is extraordinary. Fire does not discriminate, in either its path or its ferocity. But I thought it was typical of the spirit shown that here was a guy coming around with oysters for us from his oyster bed. He did not have a factory left, but he had the oysters, so he brought them round for everyone. It just demonstrated a fantastic spirit.

Sue Madden auspiced this meeting, and we must have had at least 35 people representing, in particular, primary industries and small business in the area. One of the things that came out of the meeting, apart from an expression of shock and grief and the resilient attitude shown by the locals, was that sometimes disaster relief is paid, for instance, immediately to the primary producer but not necessarily to the small business that depends on the primary producer. So the provision of disaster assistance is an issue that Dick and I will be taking up.

Colleagues in this chamber and others have talked about the insurance industry. I know there are some insurance people who do the right thing, but I have heard of so many cases where people are dealing with an insurance company and do not feel confident that there is any certitude in their relationship with the insurance company. All I know is that the premiums continue to go up, so the service should be commensurate with the premium. People should not be worrying about the definition of an 'act of God'—that is a slippery definition. We have taken steps towards amending this problem, making sure it is expressed in plain English and is more definite, but I think we have a way to go. As members of parliament, if we believe someone has been done over by an insurance company, we are more than happy to step in, and they tend to listen to us when we do.

On that matter, whatever happens in Australia when it comes to the insurance industry affects us all. We have sought clarification of and fought over the definition of 'flood'. To give you an example, I live in the valley of Forth, near the Forth River, which I suspect would now be classified as a zone at risk of flood. My insurance premiums have gone from $1,100 to $4,000. I have not been flooded out, but that is the effect of living in that region. So I will go shopping for insurance and I urge others to shop as well. If insurers are going to charge these sorts of rates, the service they offer must be commensurate—and people should not have to worry about whether they are insured or about slippery stuff like what defines a flood. We hope we have overcome all of that. I know members in this place are listening to and taking up the cause of their people on the subject of insurance. It was something that was raised with us on the Tasman Peninsula. People should not have to worry about that.

We then visited Kelly's Timber. This tells you a little about fires. When I was entering the Tasman Peninsula, there was a mill and you would swear that they would not know what fire was. Then, straight down the road, a complete sawmill was absolutely wiped out. It was worse than a bomb zone; it was completely wiped out. They employed 50 people. They had been there for over 50 years and were completely wiped out.

One of the things that came through all of this was: when we talk about insuring, do people understand what it means to insure for the replacement value because so many people were underinsured. It is like a national consciousness; we really have to take stock of ourselves
when we look at this stuff. So many people are underinsured, like Kelly's Timber at Dunalley. Through all of this they lost all their business. It is heartbreaking. There is an opportunity for them to continue one aspect of their business and they want to try to do that. I hope, through Dick and myself, the federal government will be able to assist but that is dependent on the intergovernmental agreement on forests in Tasmania. Again, all of this stuff is tied up.

Then we visited a potato growing and packaging business, which had taken up fence insurance. It is a dichotomy of emotion. They see people getting assistance, in some cases the full amount, to rewire their properties yet they do not have insurance for it. It is these types of issues that we need to have a look at as a community and what that means in the insurance industry. I do thank Sue and Dick and all those people who attended that meeting. I know Dick now is in communication with our government to try to assist individual cases there. He did a superb thing.

I would like to finish by thanking some people in my electorate. I am up in the north-west of Tassie. This fire was right down in the south and the south-east. Like your communities, my community feels very deeply for those who suffer. I do want to thank those people who came, particularly from Victoria, to help with rebuilding fences. Tasmanians went over to Victoria and did it for them. Isn't it remarkable how these people share? So much for their holidays—they spent them helping other people. It was fantastic.

I would like to thank Greg McDonald and John Sadler from beautiful Flowerdale up my way. They asked: what can we do to assist our colleagues? People said they needed stockfeed. So we gathered stockfeed. How were we going to get it there? Through my office—and I thank my office so much for the work they did—we were able to talk to some transport and logistics companies. Chas Kelly from Searoad Logistics, Bruce Monson from Monson Logistics, Hazell Brothers Group and De Bruyn's Transport came on board and worked out with Greg and John and Bill King, who was up at Wynyard, as well as Alan Lord from Smithton to bring down stockfeed to support their colleagues on the Tasman Peninsula. I thank them very much and I thank my office for the work they did in coordinating that. It is not something you put out publicly because the last thing you want to do even look like you are grandstanding on anything like this. I want to thank my office for their terrific work and have it on the record. I do want to thank Greg and all those who carried out that fantastic support.

Again, to my colleagues in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria, commiserations and I do have great sympathy for you and your communities. I hope they can get through it. To have it twice in two years is very difficult to comprehend. Thank you for all the work you do and thanks to the federal government for the work it is doing. I know that whole communities are banding together, particularly on the Tasman Peninsula. It is not to be forgotten.

Mr BUCHHOLZ (Wright) (18:49): In the final days of 2010 and early days of 2011 the electorate of Wright endured a level of flooding which was incomprehensible, a level of flooding that changed the lives of many people in the community and a level of flooding which will have a lasting impact on their psychological wellbeing.

The 2010-11 floods were floods that one should only have to endure once in a lifetime, but these communities have had to endure once again this unprecedented amount of water through the electorate. In certain places we had more inundation, higher levels of water, than
we had in the previous flood. In the 2010-11 floods we suffered an enormous loss of life. I do not know if one can steel oneself to loss of life, but do you thank God that we only lost three people? It is not something we celebrate but something our community will mourn.

Again, the Lockyer Valley was not spared. This time it was the communities of Laidley and the Glenore Grove districts. To paint a picture of Laidley: it is a small country town with one main street with a couple of branches. It has got showgrounds, a high school and predominantly everyone knows everyone. There was not one business in the main street which was spared from the flood. At the top end of the street probably a foot of water went through businesses—enough to have destroyed the furniture or to have put a layer of silt over their floors; enough to throw their businesses into absolute turmoil. At the other end of the street, the water was about two-thirds of the way up businesses walls.

If I take you on a visual journey into the grocery shops, Foodworks—IGA was a little bit higher—in Laidley from about eye level down, every product line on their shelves was destroyed. These are the businesses that are still trying to recover from financial hardship because, even for those businesses that were insured in the last floods, there are always out-of-pocket expenses which cannot be claimed.

The main street of Laidley again felt like a war zone, but it was humbling to see the community rally together—and I compliment the younger generation of Laidley, that got out and became the mud army. You could go to any business, help them pull out their furniture, pull up their carpet, pull out anything in the sea of mud—anything that you could see that was visible—and it would be thrown onto the street. In the main street, the council had six little bobcats pushing everything into a pile and a convoy of semitippers or body-tippers came through the main street to try and get the place into some sort of order. The very next day, after the bulk was cleaned out of the commercial precinct, the same street was still alive with pressure cleaners trying to get rid of the silt—there was a lot more silt and mud in this flood.

The Mount Sylvia area, which is a valley, took the brunt of the water. When we talk about water, we are talking about a year's worth of rainfall in three days, so we are talking about landslips down the sides of mountains that have taken out infrastructure, power poles. These people had just had road infrastructure finished only months beforehand—seven crossings to get into these places—destroyed; heart-breaking. For the last two years they have been compromising and working patiently with construction crews to try and get their lives back to some kind of normality.

A laser leveller is a machine which levels farmland. On the Thursday before the rain started on the Sunday night, one farmer in the area had just had the laser leveller leave after levelling land from the 2011 flood. They had not yet received the invoice only to wake up to washouts—if I were to stand in beautiful, black fertile soil, I would disappear—in excess of eight feet and, in other parts of the electorate, 14 feet or deeper.

In addition to that, there were growers that had just purchased gypsum. They had stocked $20,000 worth of gypsum. It was stockpiled in a paddock. You looked and said, 'Where's the gypsum?' There was no evidence that it had actually been delivered. Every last skerrick of the powder had gone. Again, there is still no invoice received for the out-of-pocket costs.

The mental anguish, the psychological trauma and the emotional heartache that these people, the people of Wright, are currently enduring is something that we need to be
cognisant of as a government. We can rebuild infrastructure—we can do that well—but I am truly more fearful this time as to the health, mental health and wellbeing of my electorate, as some might say: 'This is just too hard. I can't go on. I can't rebuild again. I'm maxed out with my banks. The land that I would normally rebuild on is now a creek. It is just not economically viable to go down that track.'

Let me go to another part of the electorate, because obviously it draws on my emotions to be able to hold to continuation. Take Mount Tamborine, a beautiful iconic rainforest-style part of my electorate. The trees, with their heavy leaves and foliage, were affected. Those people there were affected for a minimum of six days by loss of power. Can you imagine this? In itself, when you say in a sentence 'six days without power' it is not that traumatic. But take into consideration that most of these people and communities do not have town water and actually run things off tanks and pressure pumps. So consider it when you are getting to day 4, when you have not had a shower and your septic runs on a pressure pump so even a basic task of trying to use the toilet is beyond your capability—and all this was around the time when we were trying to get kids back to school.

Let us go then to Jimboomba and other parts of my electorate which were affected. They were cut off from their main commercial centres for three to four days by the unprecedented heights of water levels they experienced. These were parts of the community which were spared in the last flood, so there was no corporate knowledge and understanding of floods. These people were affected for the first time.

The most severe damage to our prime agricultural farming land would have been most definitely in the Fassifern Valley and the Tarome Valley. I know these people to be the salt of the earth. I know them to be great Australians. They are the people who are always the first to help within their community when there is a need. I suggest that at this time the need they require to be met is far greater than what the community can respond to. We have to now enter into a partnership with these guys, from a state government perspective and a federal government perspective. To date, through no fault of the federal government, the area within the valleys has not yet been declared category C. The Attorney-General's office is still seeking information from departments in Queensland. I will do everything within my power that is humanly possible to try to get that information. At the outset I had the benefit of understanding, from costs of the previous flood, the costs of rebuilding. I can tell you that with these areas the number is going to start at $100 million plus. I am sure that once inspections have been made of the devastation through these areas category D criteria will be implemented. We need to help these people because otherwise I am very concerned that they are not going to make it.

So I have moved through my electorate, which is 7½ thousand to 8,000 square kilometres. I could not have been as effective in working with my communities without the assistance of our state members up there, Ian Rickuss in the Lockyer and Jon Krause in Beaudesert. I would speak to either of them two or three times a day, still trying to understand the community's needs.

We have encouraged our local communities to use the local councils as their first ports of call in trying to help with the recovery. Steve Jones, Mayor of Lockyer Valley, and his councillors, have done an outstanding job in this rebuild. It is not a great badge of honour to wear that Steve Jones becomes a very effective mayor because of the experiences he had two
years ago. I am sure he wishes that he and all of his councillors had been spared the heartache of the work they have done. Mayor John Brent and his councillors from the Scenic Rim escaped a lot of the hardship and devastation in the last flood, so this is unprecedented country, unprecedented times and extraordinary circumstances for this council to fathom. They are a motivated and collective team and they work closely with their communities. I know that they will do everything to make sure the assessment process is given every opportunity.

The emergency response teams, the SES, police officers—we just do not pay these people enough. No money can substitute for their contribution when you have someone—as you walk into their business or onto their farm—before you even open your mouth to speak to them, greet you with open arms and cry for 15 minutes and wait to compose themselves. There are our volunteers, the mud army, the neighbours and those who rallied and helped people in their communities. They did not know them. They knew of their businesses but did not know them personally. Our community will be a better place tomorrow, as a result of generational change that is the next group coming through.

I will reserve my comments for the insurance companies for a later stage. As insurance companies try to sneak out the back door I do not want to miss the opportunity to line them up, and they should be under no illusion that we will not be coming after them.

In closing, I thank the work that the media, on all fronts, did on television, radio and in print in getting the message out as the water levels were rising, and in sending out sanitary and boiling water to communities until processes could be reinstated. I am under no misconception that this is going to take the electorate of Wright many years to rebuild. In some circumstances, regretfully, there will be businesses that are unable to rebuild. The financial hurdle will be too great. The emotional hurdle will be too great. To those people: my heart goes out to you.

Ms KING (Ballarat—Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure and Transport and Parliamentary Secretary for Health and Ageing) (19:03): I commend those speakers who previously made their contribution to this motion. I know there are a number of speakers to follow. What we are hearing in this debate and what we are being reminded of is that every one of us comes from regions and communities across this country and it is certainly very distressing to hear about the experiences and just how widespread the experiences of disaster have been, this summer, in different towns. Many have experienced it not just once but twice or three times now in a very short succession.

Combating Australia's natural disasters is something that is obviously becoming of increasing interest and certainly one that we are, unfortunately, having to talk about far too often in this place. The nation that we live in is a pretty remarkable place. So many families around this country have been impacted by devastating floods over this holiday period and many across other states have been impacted by and are continuing to combat severe bushfires and severe bushfire risk. It is very upsetting to see people across all communities in a state of absolute despair as they struggle to cope with the impact of losing a home, having their belongings destroyed and having to start from scratch again.

During the member for Wright's contribution I was reflecting on the impact it also has on children, and children who are not necessarily directly affected as well. I have a four year old, and we often have the news on in our house. It just did not even occur to me about the floods
in Queensland: he said, 'Are they near here; are we safe?' Suddenly I realised that he was thinking, 'Gosh, am I safe?' And in the same way—and I will talk a bit about this in a minute—I am a member of the fire brigade. I have a pager system which, unfortunately, has gone off fairly regularly this summer. He said, 'Is that a fire?' Suddenly I realised he was getting very anxious about what was happening. It is really important to remember that we talk even if we have not been directly affected—and I will talk a bit about my community in a minute—and that kids really have a very heightened awareness to what is actually happening across the country. It is important that we start to talk a little bit about that, about their safety and how they feel. I know Australian Emergency Management has some really great resources for kids. I would encourage people, particularly with primary school age kids, to have a look at that and to use it as a resource in their communities to talk about not only what has happened but also about how resilient they can be as communities, and as children about what they can do. That was an important reflection I wanted to make.

There is comfort for a lot of people to know that in local communities there has been such incredible support from across the country and also from within local communities. We are hearing amazing stories of people coming and getting stuck in and helping right across districts. Those of us who are not directly affected by fires and floods have watched the morning news and read the newspapers and struggled to truly comprehend the trauma to those who have been hardest hit.

On Australia Day, I often speak about the many inspiring stories we have in our own communities and across the country. There have been outstanding responses in all parts of the nation to the recent fires and to the floods in Queensland. In my own electorate I want to particularly thank our emergency services personnel, the members of the country fire authority and the DSE, and those services who worked alongside them, and continue to work alongside them this summer, the Victoria Police, VicRoads, the Red Cross and the local council staff, who have often had to come back from summer holidays to assist. They should be recognised for the significant support that they have given to local communities.

The volunteer work of many local residents should also not go unmentioned. Year after year volunteers turn out in droves to assist their neighbours when they are in a state of great need. In my community we have had a number of fires in Yandoit, Creswick, Balliang East, Blampied, Greendale and other communities as well. We have been incredibly fortunate, and there is a range of reasons why that is the case. Some of it has been about weather. It has also been about the lessons we have learnt from previous bushfire experiences; if you can get in and hit these things as hard as you can as fast as you can and stop them getting a run on, you have a better chance of actually containing them. It also obviously depends on the territory and where they start.

We have also been very fortunate about some very good decisions that have been made by both state and federal governments. Back in December when the fire season was just starting I went out to Ballarat airport—it is a very small airport—and inspected one of the nation's firefighting air cranes, the Gypsy Lady, which is one of the Sikorsky helicopters that we have. In Victoria that has been absolutely invaluable in getting fires in my region out incredibly quickly. I want to personally thank the crew of the Erickson sky crane who have been located, and continue to be located, in Ballarat. They come from all across the world and have left their families, often for long stretches of time—for up to three months at a time—to come and
live in Australia. They have been absolutely integrated into our firefighting services. It has been a very important investment by both the Australian and state governments in providing financial support to get this equipment into regions, and to have it located in areas where it can be responding very, very quickly. Obviously we have Elvis at Essendon Airport, but having an air crane in my region has certainly meant we have been able to put out fires very quickly.

I want to talk a little bit about one of the fires in Carngham. Given the job that I do and as the mother of a four-year-old, I am not as active a firefighter as I would like to be or used to be, but I went out on one day to the community of Blampied to help with the blacking-out activities. For people who do not know, often fires leave behind stumps that continue to burn and when you have hot days if they are continuing to burn internally—and you may not even notice that they are there—they can be the source of a new spread of fire. It was amazing to see again the number of crews, people from all across the community who would normally be on summer holidays and with their kids, downing everything, with their families giving them the space to go out and do really vital work to try to prevent fire, often in environments that were not safe. I know that in Blampied the hill we were on was a bit steep. We do not do anything that is dangerous and we very much look after each other, but they can be pretty precarious circumstances that you find yourself in. It is amazing to watch that.

I also had the opportunity to go out with the Premier of Victoria to visit and have a look firsthand at the Carngham fires. Again, you just realise how devastating these fires are and how quick they are. I met with the Nunn family, who had a large farming property out there and had lost pretty much everything. Listening to their stories, we could see they were still very much in the shock phase but starting to move into recovery. We learned a bit about the impact on the community. It was a real privilege. I was very pleased to be able to talk about the extension of the national disaster relief and recovery arrangements out in that community and what that hopefully would mean for their rebuilding. The Nunn's property was directly impacted, and Julie and Kim really highlighted how much work is needed to be done in the immediate aftermath let alone required to get back on your feet. So I want to thank them for having a media pack, the Premier and all of us suddenly descend on them in a period of time when they were still having to deal with some very difficult issues. More strength to them.

My thoughts are certainly with the families of the seven people who died in Queensland. Again, I think that they are just incredible tragedies. The stories of survival are extraordinary, but we need to absolutely remember the lives that we lost. There are a number of things we have learned from this flood, but it still amazes me to hear stories about people crossing floodwaters. I just cannot understand, given how much we know about it, why people are continuing to put themselves and SES and rescue services at risk. I think the more we go out and talk about it and the more we learn from every experience hopefully the more lives that will be saved. I want to recognise that seven people have lost their lives and are not with us as a result of the floods.

We watched from Victoria very much with amazement at just how much water was up north. My thoughts also go out to the resident and firefighter who died in the Seaton fires and the Victorian volunteer firefighter who died in Tasmania. Members of my own brigade in my own region went over to Tasmania and, again, I think the community of firefighters are pretty amazing people. There was not a single day that they did not have more people who wanted to
go and help in Tasmania. While continuing to fight fires in our own region as well as in other parts of the state, there were a lot of people who were very keen to go and help. I want to acknowledge that a Victorian firefighter died in Tasmania but also the extraordinary works that those CFA volunteers did in Tasmania.

Again, it is important for us as we talk about these disasters to learn as we go through each of those experiences. Obviously the national disaster and relief recovery arrangements work differently in each state and territory and in each circumstances, but I do not think this is going to be the last time we are going to be here talking about these issues, unfortunately. I wish it were, but I do not think it will be. It is very important that members hear some very strong-lived experiences of how people manage through these disasters and how the recovery and relief arrangements work or do not work in certain circumstances.

I think it is really important that we make sure we bring these stories here, that we make sure we talk to the relevant ministers about some of the real, on-the-ground issues that are happening and that we make policy adjustments as we go along. I want to again commend all the members from the many, many affected electorates, across this vast, vast, land, that have been affected by these national disasters. But I also want to send out a plea: it is February; it is incredibly hot in Victoria as we speak—it is hot here in Canberra, although I have not been outside yet and so I cannot verify that—and we are in a pretty precarious bushfire circumstance still in many of the states, so I want to put out an absolute plea that people stay safe, be careful, listen to their fire authorities and also that every one of our emergency service personnel continues to stay safe this summer.

**Mrs PRENTICE** (Ryan) (19:15): Australia is yet again living through a summer of natural disasters and heartache. Communities across Victoria, Tasmania and New South Wales are recovering from some of the most devastating bushfires this country has ever seen. I extend my condolences to communities in the electorates of Gippsland, Parkes and Lyons during this very painful time.

Queensland too was not immune from the fire danger. At one stage, in early December, the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service reported 54 fires active across an area spanning two-thirds of the state: south to the New South Wales border, west to the Northern Territory border, east to the coastline, and as far north as Charters Towers. Larger indeed than many Western European countries. These fires destroyed vast tracts of grazing land in the north towards the gulf as well as in the Western Downs in the south-west. I extend my condolences to the farmers and related industries affected by this fire event and I commend their exceptional community spirit during this time. We saw, of course, volunteers in the local rural fire brigades who were out fighting fires knowing that back home their own property was burning.

For the second time in as many years, Queenslanders are also experiencing a heartbreaking clean-up following flooding and cyclone damage. Brisbane residents watched in horror as tropical cyclone Oswald left a trail of destruction as it made its way down the eastern coast of Queensland over the Australia Day weekend. Memories of the devastating 2011 floods resurfaced as rain continued to fall and the Brisbane River once again reached peak levels. Indeed, talking to some of the older residents in my electorate, they said it was more like the floods of 1974 where we had rain for so many days. Some of you will remember that in 2011 we watched the floodwaters come up in relatively sunny weather. Meanwhile, an army of
volunteers including members of the University of Queensland—and once again we saw the younger generation come out in their hundreds—descended on suburbs in my electorate like Auchenflower, Torwood, Milton, Toowong, Taringa and St Lucia to help sandbag local residences and businesses.

Trees were knocked down across the electorate, cutting roads and leaving around 220,000 homes in the Brisbane region without power. The Brisbane River, which swamped thousands of homes two years ago, broke its banks in several areas and water entered some low-lying areas which were badly flooded in 2011. In my electorate, some evacuations did take place in Torwood Street in Auchenflower, but fortunately the high water levels in the Brisbane River, although they continued throughout the week, did not actually flood liveable parts of the homes. It was a frightening time for many people in the Ryan electorate, but thankfully we were spared any significant devastation and have learnt from past events and so we were able to respond quickly and effectively. I must commend the Brisbane City Council, which was able to produce more than 147,000 sandbags, and I can testify that our leader, Tony Abbott, was down there with Teresa Gambaro, the member for Brisbane, personally filling them.

The Brisbane City Council attended to more than 200,000 calls at the Brisbane City Council contact centre. They also provided important updates for the people of Brisbane through their Facebook and Twitter pages.

I acknowledge the work of the Queensland government under the guidance of Premier Campbell Newman. Working with our local councils, Premier Newman and his team were quick to assess the situation across the state and to activate a number of measures which will help residents as they recover. The government also started the Queensland floods appeal 2013, and I acknowledge the generous donations from some of our large corporations in contribution to that appeal.

The State Emergency Service worked tirelessly throughout the entire week, responding to more than 1,200 calls for assistance. Within four days more than 700 jobs had been completed. I thank the SES volunteers who helped so many people in the Ryan electorate. Once again we saw neighbours helping each other. Where I live, all four roads that I could use were cut off by fallen trees, yet the neighbours got out with their chainsaws—a little larger than Kevin's but nonetheless with the same spirit that the member for Griffith had—and they were chopping enough of the trees so that emergency vehicles could get through to people who needed assistance.

I also thank the Energex crews who worked over the course of the weekend, despite dangerous weather, to restore power to homes and businesses across Brisbane. Within four days of the event more than 110,000 homes and businesses had power restored and the rest followed shortly after.

I acknowledge the work of Connected Inc., a charity with which I am involved, who are dedicated to helping people in hardship. Connected volunteers—and I stress that everyone at Connected is a volunteer, and no-one is paid—worked around the clock to provide essential items for people affected not only by tropical cyclones in Queensland but also by the fires interstate. Indeed, they sent emergency supplies to communities as far away as Tasmania. I congratulate the CEO and founder, Craig Michaels, and president, Gwen Braga, and their committee for their quick response and outstanding efforts at this time. Everything they provide is free, and I know they are on call to anyone who needs things, from those early
emergency personal kits right through to furnishings for their homes as they start to get back on their feet.

I thank all the local volunteers, like those from the University of Queensland Student Union, who assisted in sandbagging homes and businesses not just in the Ryan electorate but also in the neighbouring Brisbane electorate. Although the storm impacted our city we must consider ourselves fortunate in comparison with the communities in Central Queensland, South-West Queensland and the Lockyer Valley who are only now beginning to see the real impact of this weather event.

Having witnessed a natural disaster in my own electorate just two years ago—and, as the member for Moreton will testify, many residents are only today getting back into their homes—I can understand the heartbreak many people will now be experiencing as they move into their recovery phase. On behalf of the people of Ryan I extend my condolences to the families and businesses who have lost so much in this natural disaster. However, I have no doubt that Queenslanders and, indeed, all Australians will once again prove their resilience during this tough time.

Mr PERRETT (Moreton) (19:23): I also take this opportunity to speak of the hardship that many Australians have endured over this summer due to natural disasters—particularly Queenslanders. Sadly, despite commentary from some political leaders, climate change is not complete faeces. The reality is climate change is occurring. Science is not a weather vane on this topic; the science seems to be clearly heading in one direction, and that is the reality that we will be having more horrible, horrific weather events in the future.

It pains me to say that, again, Australia has this summer not escaped the devastating effects of natural disasters. Sadly, fires still burn across the south-east of the country and floodwaters are still receding to the north. The people in Bundaberg North are, I know, doing it particularly tough right at this moment. In my home state of Queensland ex-tropical cyclone Oswald caused destruction right along the Queensland coastline, with damaging winds, heavy rain, flooding, tidal surges and tornados, and then moved down into New South Wales.

When I drove around my electorate on Sunday, 27 January, people were making preparations in my electorate in the suburbs of Yeronga, Graceville, Sherwood and Chelmsford—I particularly spent time talking to councillor Nicole Johnson, the independent councillor for that area—and also in my suburbs of Oxley, Corinda and, particularly, Rocklea, an area of my electorate that seems to flood every six months or so.

I would like to commend Cameron Crowther and the Annerley ALP branch who took time to go out and help people to move their furniture, an example of the Labor Party getting out into the community and doing what is right at the ground. I would also like to thank Jenny Goulburn, one of my friends in the Sherwood area, who pointed out some of the streets in her area that needed help. Thankfully, my constituents mostly escaped major damage. Sadly, those in Bundaberg, in Gayndah, in Mundubbera, in Gladstone, in Gympie, the Fraser Coast and many other areas endured extreme levels of flooding—some people are saying it was a once in 200 year flood—that will affect these communities for many years to come. Sadly, the water was about the same level as the floods of two years ago. So when you are talking about a once in 200 year flood things are changing. As the flood water recede, the massive extent of the damage is becoming clear with thousands of homes, businesses, roads, bridges and services inundated. Six people have died in this tragic crisis and my condolences go out to...
their friends and families. I would especially like to mention Yu-Kun Pan, a 25-year-old from Taiwan, who was here on a working visa. He was from the Taoyuan county, south of Taipei, and I especially pass on my condolences to his family. To lose a son so far from home must be truly heartbreaking.

The authorities are estimating more than 7,500 people are affected and 3,000 homes flooded, not to mention the power outages that affected so many people. I know it is not the same as losing a life, but I had no power for three days so I got to eat a lot of steak and ice cream to clean out my freezer. I know that some people are still having power problems. These troubles are obviously nothing compared to the many Queensland residents who are dealing with catastrophic flooding for the second time in two years. The impact from these floods comes as many people are still recovering and rebuilding their lives after those floods that seem so long ago. In fact, I had organised to send out a letter commemorating the two-year anniversary of the floods and, as you know, to send out a letter to 40,000 homes takes a bit of preparation. I wrote the letter, got the letter ready to go out and in between time the floods for 2013 came. So, some people received letters in mailboxes about the anniversary event two years ago while they mailboxes were under water. It was unfortunate timing.

Sadly, so many people of my electorate have had the insurance premium hikes that go with a flood event, and they have had to deal with those for the last two years. Like most of the people in Moreton, I well recall seeing water on my streets, water everywhere, and then after the water went away, the stink of the mud. Even at the end of my street, I remember the stench and how it affected the skate park, and then going to other houses in my electorate that were totally underwater in 2011, especially in Rocklea.

As we see time and time again, the volunteers stepped up. They came from everywhere to help their fellow Australians and Queenslanders in a time of tragedy. It is a Queensland thing to do and a very human thing to do, wherever you come from around the world. As I have a particularly multicultural electorate, it was heartwarming to see my varied and various communities working together to rebuild; neighbour helping neighbour, business helping business, stranger helping stranger, and I express thanks to those who have donated to the flood appeal, helping those in a time of great need. And more needs to be done.

I commend the volunteers who came together across the south-east of Australia during the catastrophic fires that have caused much pain and heartache for many Australian families, which previous speakers have mentioned. I would like to thank the hundreds of ADF personnel, especially the reservists, involved in the emergency response to the Queensland floods and storms. I would also like to thank the SES, the Rural Fire Service, the Australian Red Cross and all the many other community organisations involved in helping out over the summer throughout these devastating times, particularly the service organisations in Moreton. It was their finest hour for Moorooka Lions—where I live—Macgregor Lions, Archerfield and Salisbury Rotary to name but a few. There were also the Crescents of Brisbane—an Islamic group—and the Taiwanese communities many organisations.

Thankfully, as I go around the Moreton electorate, I see evidence that our community has worked hard to rebuild, and has mostly returned to normal and maybe dodged a bullet. I am sympathetic to the words of Premier Campbell Newman—please do not quote me on that—and his comments about rebuilding properly in a way that we will not be swept away in a year or two.
I would like to finish by quoting one of my local constituents, Martin Finbow from Graceville, who was talking about the priority infrastructure plan and what we needed to do. I would ask Campbell Newman and the Lord Mayor of Brisbane to bring in backflow devices in my suburbs—not just New Farm and Milton which are LNP electorates, but in my suburbs. Hopefully he is not punishing the independent councillor Nicole Johnston because she used to be LNP but has switched to become independent. My suburbs need to be considered in round four of the natural disaster resilience program. Some of that $10 million needs to come to my electorate. We raised $1.7 billion from the flood levy and the reality is that it cost the community about $5.7 billion to rebuild. I note that the Libs voted against that flood levy, but the reality is that there are going to be a lot of expenses. Campbell Newman—when he was the Lord Mayor—said that the state should pay when it was a Labor government, although now that he is the premier he says that the federal government should pay. It is a weird journey to Damascus that he has taken. Australians are pretty tough, but these natural disasters really put to the test. The nation's response shows the true sense of community spirit as we come together to clean up and rebuild. I thank my constituents particularly for their great efforts.

Question agreed to.

Federation Chamber adjourned at 19:31
QUESTIONS IN WRITING
Football Federation Australia: Television Rights
(Question No. 1315)

Mr Hartsuyker asked the Minister representing the Minister for Sport, in writing, on 28 November 2012:

Did the Minister, the office of the Minister for Sport, or the Office for Sport, have any involvement in the process of negotiating Football Federation Australia’s recently announced television rights deal; and if so, what was the extent and nature of the involvement?

Mr Crean: The Minister for Sport has provided the following answer to the honourable member's question:

No.