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SITTING DAYS—2013

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FORTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION—EIGHT PERIOD

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

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, 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,
Ms Maria Vamvakou 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 Jill Griffiths Hall 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

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

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<td>Washer, Malcom James</td>
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<td>Wyatt, Kenneth George</td>
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<td>Zappia, Tony</td>
<td>Makin, SA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
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PARTY ABBREVIATIONS
ALP—Australian Labor Party; LP—Liberal Party of Australia; LNP—Liberal National Party;
CLP—Country Liberal Party; Nats—The Nationals; NWA—The Nationals WA; Ind—Independent;
AG—Australian Greens

Heads of Parliamentary Departments
Clerk of the Senate—R Laing
Clerk of the House of Representatives—B Wright
Secretary, Department of Parliamentary Services—C Mills
Parliamentary Budget Officer—P Bowen
## GILLARD MINISTRY

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<tr>
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<td>The Hon Gary Gray AO MP</td>
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<td><strong>Treasurer</strong></td>
<td>The Hon Wayne Swan MP</td>
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<td><strong>Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation</strong></td>
<td>The Hon Bill Shorten MP</td>
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<td>Assistant Treasurer</td>
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Minister for Small Business The Hon Chris Bowen MP
Minister for Industry and Innovation The Hon Greg Combet AM MP
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Parliamentary Secretary for Higher Education and Skills The Hon Sharon Bird MP
Minister for Finance and Deregulation Senator the Hon Penny Wong
Special Minister of State The Hon Gary Gray AO MP
Minister Assisting for Deregulation The Hon David Bradbury MP
Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth The Hon Peter Garrett AM MP
Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations The Hon Bill Shorten MP
Minister for Early Childhood and Childcare The Hon Kate Ellis MP
Minister for Employment Participation The Hon Kate Ellis MP
Minister for Indigenous Employment and Economic Development The Hon Julie Collins MP
Parliamentary Secretary for School Education and Workplace Relations Senator the Hon Jacinta Collins
(Manager of Government Business in the Senate)

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Senator the Hon Joe Ludwig
Minister for Resources and Energy The Hon Martin Ferguson AM MP
Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry The Hon Sid Sidebottom MP

Minister for Tourism

Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency The Hon Greg Combet AM MP
Parliamentary Secretary for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency The Hon Yvette D’Ath MP

Minister for Health The Hon Tanya Plibersek MP
Minister for Indigenous Health The Hon Warren Snowdon MP
Parliamentary Secretary for Health and Ageing The Hon Catherine King MP
Parliamentary Secretary for Mental Health The Hon Melissa Parke MP

Minister for Immigration and Citizenship The Hon Brendan O’Connor MP
Minister for Multicultural Affairs Senator the Hon Kate Lundy

Attorney-General

Minister for Emergency Management
Minister Assisting on Queensland Floods Recovery Senator the Hon Joe Ludwig

Minister for Home Affairs The Hon Jason Clare MP
Minister for Justice The Hon Jason Clare MP
Minister for Human Services Senator the Hon Kim Carr

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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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>The Hon Teresa Gambaro MP</td>
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<td><strong>Shadow Minister for Infrastructure and Transport</strong></td>
<td>The Hon Warren Truss MP</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Mr Darren Chester MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Roads and Regional Transport</td>
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<td><strong>Shadow Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations</strong></td>
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<tr>
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<td>The Hon Sussan Ley MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Attorney-General</strong></td>
<td>Senator the Hon George Brandis SC</td>
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<tr>
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<td>The Hon Joe Hockey MP</td>
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<tr>
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<td>The Hon Andrew Robb AO MP</td>
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Tuesday, 19 March 2013

The SPEAKER (Anna Burke) took the chair at 14:00, made an acknowledgement of country and read prayers.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Budget

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (14:01): My question is to the Prime Minister. I remind the Prime Minister that every time the government has increased the government credit card limit since it came to office—from $75 billion to $200 billion to $250 billion and, most recently, to $300 billion—it has fully utilised the increase. I ask the Prime Minister: will she now rule out trying to increase the nation’s credit card limit above $300 billion in the May budget?

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:01): I remind the Leader of the Opposition that the thing called the global financial crisis happened. I remind the Leader of the Opposition, who knows nothing about economics, that we have just lived through the single-biggest economic crisis since the Great Depression. And I remind the Leader of the Opposition that in the circumstances of that economic crisis this nation faced a choice. You could see that crisis enveloping the world and you could decide that you were going to cut and cut and cut and cut and cut your budget. In order to do so you would have needed to do something like stop all payments to age pensioners or stop all payments for Medicare. Yes, you could have chosen to do that, and if you had done that then our economy would have catapulted into recession and hundreds of thousands of people would have been put out of work, and the future for young Australians wanting to be apprentices would have been destroyed forever. Instead of taking that reckless, irresponsible approach that developed nations around the world did not take—no developed nation around the world, not President Obama and not Prime Minister Cameron followed that prescription that the Leader of the Opposition apparently believes in.

As a result of that, the government did sustain some debt, and we chose to do that to stimulate the economy. We are now living in the aftermath of the global financial crisis, where company revenue, corporate revenue to the government—indeed, revenue generally—has not returned to the levels that were predicted by our Treasury. Indeed, per unit of GDP, we are seeing less revenue to the government than at any time since the recovery from the 1990s recession. In those circumstances you have another choice: do you cut and cut and cut because of those revenue reductions, throwing people out of work, jeopardising growth in our economy? Is that what you do? Or do you pursue the strategy of the government, which is jobs and growth as well as a prudent budget position?

The Leader of the Opposition might well say that his economic strategy would be to cut and cut and cut and cut. Well, if that is his economic strategy he should have the decency to tell the Australian people who those cuts would fall on, how hard they would hit schools, hit hospitals, hit family payments, hit pensioners and hit defence. He has an obligation to specify that. Instead, he comes in here with these statements that just show he has no understanding of the modern economy and that his only approach to issues of economic management is continued negativity and risk. (Time expired)

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (14:04): Speaker, I ask a supplementary question. Given that government revenue has actually increased
by 7.7 per cent this financial year, why is the Prime Minister now planning to raise the government's credit card limit above $300 billion?

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:05): I refer the Leader of the Opposition to the budget estimates. I refer him to the estimates in the budget in the Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook.

Opposition members interjecting—

Ms GILLARD: I would think it is not appropriate for those opposite to be starting to interject on that statement. We know they always want to insult a public servant when it comes to these debates. But I would refer the Leader of the Opposition to those documents.

Mr Pyne interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The Manager of Opposition Business is warned.

Ms GILLARD: In those documents, forecasts are prepared by the same professional public servants who assisted the Howard government and who should not have abuse heaped on their heads. I refer the Leader of the Opposition to those estimates and to the underperformance of revenue against those estimates. If he has a strategy to cut in order to meet that shortfall in revenue between what was projected and what has been received then he should detail it: tell people where the health cuts are going, tell them where the education cuts are going—

Mr Abbott: Speaker, a point of order: I asked a very simple, straightforward question, without any criticism of the government, and under the direct relevance rule the Prime Minister should simply, clearly and—

Government members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: I am not needing the assistance, thank you. The Prime Minister has the call.

Ms GILLARD: The Leader of the Opposition should have the decency to tell people where the cuts will fall, how many people will lose their jobs—how many thousands of them, how many tens of thousands of them will lose their jobs—because apparently the economic policy of the Leader of the Opposition is to match the downgrades in the revenue being received by government with cuts. Well, who is going to get hurt? Australian families have a right to know. Who is going to lose their jobs? Australian workers have a right to know. Get up and detail that.

Child Care

Ms SMYTH (La Trobe) (14:07): My question is to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister update the House on the government’s reforms to improve the quality of child care for Australian families and support childcare workers?

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:07): I thank the member for Latrobe for her question. I know in an electorate like hers, home to so many families who are seeking to balance work and family life and who are very reliant on local childcare services, that she is incredibly familiar with the struggle it can be for people to get the child care they need and also to meet the cost of that child care. As a government we have always understood the pressures on families when children are very small and people are trying to mix work, family life and care for children, which is why we have increased support to help families with childcare costs. The way the former government did this was completely unsatisfactory, so we have moved to assist people with their out-of-pocket costs by increasing the childcare rebate to 50 per cent and by making sure that
we have increased the maximum amount that people can get to $7,500. We have also understood that for families it is not just the costs; it is also the quality, that people want to make sure that their very precious children are well cared for. So we have had a clear focus on quality standards and early education in childcare centres.

Now the government is in a position to announce that it is going further. We are ensuring that there are trials of new flexibility models for child care. We understand that many families engage in work—they might be police officers, they might be firefighters, they might be nurses—which requires them to work shifts in establishments that necessarily work 24/7. So we are devoting resources to ensure that we can trial some models of flexibility to meet the work and family life balance of people with those kinds of jobs.

Today we are also announcing a new $300-million investment to help us with investment into childcare workers. People want to know that workers in childcare centres are appropriately rewarded for their work and they certainly want to know that there is a strategy for staff retention in the industry which means they do not face the circumstance where every time they drop their child off there is a new worker in the childcare centre, that they see childcare staff on a continuous basis, making sure they have a bond with the children they care for. This is the aim of what the government has announced today. We believe it is very important for staff in childcare centres. We believe it is very important, too, for parents, for families who rely on quality child care. We are very proud as a government to announce it because we believe it will make a real difference.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The SPEAKER (14:10): I inform the House that we have present in the gallery this afternoon members of the Australian Arab Women’s Dialogue. On behalf of the House I extend a very warm welcome to the members.

Honourable members: Hear, hear!

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Budget

Mr HOCKEY (North Sydney) (14:11): My question is to the Treasurer. I refer the Treasurer to the fact that the European carbon price has fallen 45 per cent in the last 12 months to be trading at less than $6.50 a tonne. Given that the budget relies on revenue of $29 a tonne in 2015 when the carbon tax is linked to the European price, will the Treasurer guarantee to revise the budget forecast to accurately reflect the massive loss in revenue of this carbon tax package?

Mr SWAN (Lilley—Deputy Prime Minister and Treasurer) (14:11): It is extraordinary to get a question from the opposition about an international carbon price, a concept they do not even agree with. It is pleasing to hear that it might have some passing relevance to the introduction of a carbon price in Australia and perhaps, for the first time, some approval from those opposite—given the failure of their fear campaign about carbon pricing. The facts are these. This government budgets in a responsible way.

Mr Frydenberg interjecting—

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Kooyong is warned!

Mr SWAN: We budget in line with the Charter of Budget Honesty set down by Peter Costello. So, as is the usual practice, we will bring our budget down in May and we will update all of our forecasts. We will do all
that in May in the responsible way. There is a very stark contrast between the approach of us on this side of the House and the approach of those on that side of the House, because the Charter of Budget Honesty went out the window at the last election campaign. They did not comply with the Charter of Budget Honesty and were found after the election to have had an $11 billion black hole in their budget forecast, in complete breach of the charter.

Mr Hockey: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order as to relevance. The question is about the massive black hole in the carbon tax package and whether he is going to tell the truth in the budget.

The SPEAKER: For future points of order, I will not be tolerating debate. It has been abused too much. The Treasurer has the call and will return to the question before the chair.

Mr Swan: Most certainly. I was asked a question about budgeting and we do follow the Charter of Budget Honesty, unlike those opposite. So it is a bit rich to get the sort of question we got today from the shadow Treasurer about the Charter of Budget Honesty, which they breached massively in the last election campaign—just a little bit rich. Also we have a question about a carbon price they do not believe in.

We will update our figures in the normal way in the May budget and wouldn't it be good if we could see from that side, just once, a costed policy? They are out there all of the time claiming that government is spending too much. They are out there all of the time claiming there is an entitlement mentality and they are going to cut it back, but we cannot see one costed policy about anything.

The SPEAKER: The Treasurer will return to the question.

Mr Swan: So, if you want some honesty about these matters, how about you, who believes that government is too big and government is spending too much, put a policy on the table that is costed and take it to the PBO.

Mr Hockey (North Sydney) (14:14): Madam Speaker, on a supplementary, and it goes to the Treasurer following his last answer. If he is going to tell the truth in the budget, as he just said he would, and there is going to be a $5 billion to $7 billion hole in the revenue from the carbon tax and a $2 billion hole in the mining tax revenue, and he has got to find the money for the NDIS and Gonski review, where is all this money coming from, Treasurer?

Mr Swan (Lilley—Deputy Prime Minister and Treasurer) (14:15): The shadow Treasurer and the Leader of the Opposition like to pretend that there has not been a revenue write-down in the budget of $160 billion over five years. They like to pretend that. So, if you take them seriously, what they are really arguing is that the government should have engaged in $160 billion worth of expenditure cuts over the past five years. Do you know what that would have done? It would have tanked our economy. We on this side of the House are committed to a balanced and responsible budget, a balanced and responsible fiscal policy, and we do that within the framework of our medium-term fiscal strategy, which is committed to surpluses on average across the cycle.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: That is for me to inquire of. The member for North Sydney.

Mr Hockey: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. It goes to relevance. The question was about tax.

The SPEAKER: I thank the member for North Sydney. The member for North
Sydney will resume his seat. The Treasurer has the call.

**Mr SWAN:** What the government is committed to and those opposite are not is a responsible budget policy that puts jobs and growth first. But if you listen to those on the other side of the House, you know what you will get: you will get slash and burn, low growth, higher unemployment, higher deficits and higher debt.

**The SPEAKER:** The Treasurer will return to the question.

**Opposition members interjecting—**

**The SPEAKER:** Order! That is a very good interjection: 'What is this descending to?' But it is of course entirely out of order. I think everyone, including me, is wearing thin of the complete disregard for the procedures of this parliament. The member Reid has the call.

**Economy**

**Mr MURPHY** (Reid) (14:17): My question is also to the Treasurer. Will the Treasurer update the House on the government's policies to support jobs and growth in the economy? And what has the response been to these economic priorities?

**Mr SWAN** (Lilley—Deputy Prime Minister and Treasurer) (14:17): I do thank the member for that question, because this morning we had another reminder of the resilience of the Australian economy. We had some comments from Mr Lowe from the Reserve Bank of Australia. He made a number of points which have been made in the House before, but I think it is important that we go through them one by one. He made the point that we have got growth which is close to trend, we have got low unemployment and, of course, we have got low inflation and lower interest rates. He also made the point that the performance of our economy has been far better than most other developed economies. He made the point that we are so well placed to maximise all of the opportunities that are going to come from growth in the region, particularly in the Asian century. He acknowledged how difficult it has been in the global economy and particularly for Australia, given what has occurred within the global economy over the last few years. It is very important to get all of this into perspective, particularly when there are so many people coming into this House and talking down the Australian economy. He said:

… no matter what one's perspective, we should not lose sight of the fact that maintaining overall macro balance through this period of change has been a significant achievement. And it is an achievement that has benefited the entire community.

There is no figure which better demonstrates that than the creation of 900,000 jobs over the past five years. We have had 900,000 jobs created over the past five years because this government has made the right choices at critical times in the development of the global economy.

When the global economy experienced the global financial crisis and the global recession, we decided to support our economy, to support jobs and growth, to support small business. Of course we live with the benefit of that today, because our economy has jobs growth much greater than just about any other developed economy. But the other thing we have done during that five-year period is we have made the essential investments in the future to ensure prosperity for tomorrow, to make sure that we invested in skills and education. We have got to keep doing that because our future is not assured unless we make the investments for the future, which lift our productivity growth—hence the investment that the Prime Minister was talking about today in the early
years; hence the school improvement program.

All of these things have to be done in a modern economy—investing in the future, running a responsible budget policy. It is about doing all of these things because we believe in growth and jobs, and that goes to the core of living standards. There is a stark contrast here between this side of the House and the other side of the House. They talk about having a commission of audit. That is a plan that they have got to hide the truth. This is from the Campbell Newman play book. Their approach is not to have their policies costed, to go to the election and hide their plans to slash and burn jobs and growth. We on this side of the House stand for jobs and growth. (Time expired)

Budget

Mr ROBB (Goldstein) (14:21): My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to a statement on 11 February 2011:

Every time we announce something we properly account for it and we properly fund it.

Prime Minister, given that the government has not announced how it intends to fund the $300 million child-care worker subsidy, the $10.5 billion for the NDIS and the $6.5 billion for a new school funding model, will you rule out increasing taxes to pay for these unfunded promises? (Time expired)

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:21): I thank the member for his question. What has become increasingly apparent across question time is that the opposition is now opposing the National Disability Insurance Scheme. One could not read any other intention from their questions. This is a very significant day in Australian politics. It is now apparent that one side of the parliament supports the National Disability Insurance Scheme and the other side of the parliament does not.

On the funding of the National Disability Insurance Scheme, we budgeted $1 billion, properly accounted for—

The SPEAKER: Before the member for Mackellar progresses, I would have thought that the Prime Minister is being directly relevant to this question. If it is another point of order, you may proceed.

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop: If you feel that she is, I will wait and see.

The SPEAKER: I will again remind everybody that it is the entire question asked to which the individual needs to be directly relevant.

Ms GILLARD: On the National Disability Insurance Scheme, we have properly budgeted and properly accounted for $1 billion for launch sites that will come into operation from 1 July this year. We have always said in relation to the balance of the full scheme as we reach agreements around the country—and we are still working hard on those; we have reached an agreement with the state of New South Wales—that we will work through COAG processes to reach agreement on the rollout of the full scheme. We, and I in particular, will ask the nation to make a series of quite tough choices, because we will need to fund the National Disability Insurance Scheme by making a set of what will be tough decisions as we look for savings and direct them to the National Disability Insurance Scheme. We have always said that we would do that in the budget.

In terms of our plans for school improvement, we are passionately committed to making sure that every Australian child gets a great education and that we truly distribute opportunity around our country to every child. I have spoken of my sense of disgust at the neglect of Australian schools engaged in by those opposite when they were in government. We have piece by piece
worked to change that and we will do more through our National Plan for School Improvement and our school funding model.

Once again—and I refer the member who asked the question to my Press Club address last year—we have made it very clear that we will be asking the nation to make a series of very tough choices as we look for savings in order to support that expenditure. Put simply, we think Australian children should come first. Those opposite might make a different set of decisions, but our decision is that Australian children and the quality of their education should come first.

The government, as it makes announcements, obviously provides proper costings. That is a complete contrast to the approach of the opposition, which does not properly cost. That is how they got themselves into the $11 billion black hole. As we work through announcements and our budgets, we identify savings. We have identified $160 billion of them. We are waiting to see from the opposition a saving that genuinely stacks up. (Time expired)

Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme

Mr WINDSOR (New England) (14:25): My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, given the government's priorities in relation to the NDIS and education reform, does the minister believe that there is scope for savings in the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme through the extension of the supply of generic drugs under the PBS to fund those reforms?

Ms PLIBERSEK (Sydney—Minister for Health) (14:25): I thank the member for New England. I know that he is a very serious and responsible representative of his community. He is always interested in working cooperatively where he can to find savings where it is possible. When it comes to the further use of generics, Australia has already experienced a great deal of change in this area in recent years. Certainly there was a report a couple of days ago that suggested that we could make further savings in this area. But it is worth pointing out that over 1,400 brands of 137 medicines have already fallen in price by between 10 per cent and 87 per cent—some very substantial savings already. In 2010, there was a $1.9 billion saving in one go. More recently, we are looking at another $1 billion saving on the reduced price of generic medicines.

The member for New England asked whether we should perhaps spend that money on the National Disability Insurance Scheme or on the very important education reforms. Both of those, of course, are priority policy areas for this government. They will make huge changes to people's lives—to the lives of Australians with a disability and to our next generation of young people. But I have to say that, as a health minister, I have some priorities of my own. We have listed $5 billion worth of new medicines on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme list since 2007. They are very important medicines for a whole range of conditions. We have new medicines—

Mr Hockey: Are you holding the ERC in the parliament?

The SPEAKER: The member for North Sydney is warned!

Ms PLIBERSEK: Is the member for North Sydney saying that we should not be listing these new medicines for hepatitis C, chronic pain, cancer, arthritis, asthma, diabetes and specialist paediatric treatments?

I want to say to the member for New England that I understand his concerns. I value the recent work that has been done by Stephen Duckett on looking for further areas in which to look for more savings. Indeed, I agree with him on the areas that he has named as important policy areas for the government. But as health minister finding
that money for some of the important new medicines that we want to list is also a priority for me. We have worked hard to find savings in the older, more commonly used drugs so that we can make headroom for those exciting new treatments as they emerge.

Child Care

Mr PERRETT (Moreton) (14:28): My question is to the Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth. How will the government's plan to establish an early years quality fund improve the quality of child care and support childcare workers and educators?

Mr GARRETT (Kingsford Smith—Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth) (14:28): I thank the member for Moreton for his question. There are some 14,260 children who live in Moreton. In fact, the member has a four-year-old son called Leo who attends childcare. There are 135 childcare services. Our decision to lift the childcare rebate from 30 per cent to 50 per cent resulted in an additional $7.5 million ending up in the hands of Moreton families in 2011-12.

The fact is that the early years are absolutely crucial to a child's development, so it is very important that we have a professional early childhood workforce in place to improve the quality of early childhood services. That is why, as the Prime Minister has already referred to today, we were pleased to announce a commitment of $300 million over two years to improve the quality of child care through improved wages for early childhood educators through the early years quality fund.

We really want to make sure that early childhood educators are well supported to do the best they can to care for and educate our children. The fund will provide services with the support to enable $3-an-hour increases for eligible certificate III qualified educators and proportional increases for diploma and bachelor degree qualified staff. It is a significant increase for early childhood educators.

To be eligible under the grants the services will have to demonstrate a commitment to the National Quality Framework—an initiative which has been led by this government—which is intended to make sure that wherever families drop their kids off for early childhood care and education they know that the services are the best that they need to be.

In addition, we will fund a pay equity unit to be established within the Fair Work Commission, and that will provide assistance with data and research collection and specialist pay equity information. This announcement is in addition to the government's existing investments of around $190 million in a range of measures to train and retrain a highly qualified early childhood workforce. That has included the removal of TAFE fees for diploma qualifications, a reduction in the debt of early childhood teachers, and introduction of formal recognition of prior learning assistance. We understand how important it is and we have continued to work with the states and territories on the Early Years Workforce Strategy.

On top of that we also have the commitment to universal access for all kids in the year before they go into school, and we are seeing some extremely good results, with a number of states having their universal access figures really starting to deliver the goods. It is encouraging to see these improvements. I want to acknowledge the important work that was undertaken by United Voice—I think some of them are here today—and others. At the end of the day this government understands how important it is...
to support early childhood care and education and the workers who do an absolutely wonderful job delivering that service.

**Media Reform**

**Mr TURNBULL** (Wentworth) (14:31): My question is to the Prime Minister. I remind her that her foreign minister, Senator Carr, failed to support the government's proposed media regulation in Washington today, and her Chief Whip has openly criticised her handling of the issue today in the caucus.

Honourable members interjecting—

**The SPEAKER:** Order! I am on my feet! The next person who interjects while I am standing will be named. The member for Wentworth has the call. He will commence his question again and will be heard in silence.

**Mr TURNBULL:** My question is to the Prime Minister and I remind her that her foreign minister, Senator Carr, failed to support the government's proposed media regulation in Washington today. And her Chief Whip has openly criticised her handling of the issue, only today, in the caucus. If the Prime Minister fails to convince the parliament to pass these laws this week, will she commit to take the matter to the election and let the voters decide if they want the most onerous regulation of the press in our peacetime history?

**Ms GILLARD** (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:33): I thank the member for Wentworth for his question. I am glad that he got it. To the member for Wentworth, his question contains a number of misrepresentations. As usual the member for Wentworth, bringing this question to the parliament, has misrepresented some facts in the question itself. But on the actual topic of media reform, which the member's question is directed to, I say to the member for Wentworth that reform in these kinds of areas is not easy but it is important. I have seen reported in the *Financial Times* that in the United Kingdom some reforms on media have been secured. I direct people to the reporting today, which says:

> Britain's politicians on Monday vied with each other to declare victory after 20 months of public hearings debate and chaotic last-minute haggling finally produced a new system of press regulation … A Royal Charter enshrining press regulation was agreed at 2.30am on Monday in the Commons room of Labour leader Ed Miliband—

**Mr Turnbull:** I rise on a point of order. Could you please draw the Prime Minister back to Australia.

Honourable members interjecting—

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Goldstein is warned.

**Ms GILLARD:** I was answering a question about media and thought the member in the House might be interested in what has happened in the House of Commons and in the United Kingdom as it deals with media questions. I would have thought that was relevant and I would have thought the member for Wentworth would not treat with disrespect his sister political party in the United Kingdom. Before the member for Wentworth characterises the reform propositions before this parliament I suggest that he has a look at the reform propositions there, which go far, far further than anything in contemplation by the government or for the parliament.

So, every ugly word and every criticism that the Leader of the Opposition and the member for Wentworth have directed against the government's reform proposals now need to be directed against Prime Minister Cameron and the British Tories or they will stand accused of the most gross hypocrisy. The House of Commons over there has gone far further than we are requesting the
parliament to go here. But there are clear issues of public interest here—things that matter to the Australian community: being able to hear a diversity of voices in their democratic debate, being able to see Australian content on their TV screens, being able to make a complaint about the media should they choose to do so, and have that complaint appropriately handled.

I recognise that these are important questions. Prime Minister Cameron has recognised that these are important questions. The only ones, with their typical negativity, not recognising that this is an important debate in democracies around the world is—you guessed it—the opposition.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The SPEAKER (14:37): I inform the House that we have present in the gallery this afternoon members of a delegation of ASEAN parliamentarians. I had the pleasure of meeting with them yesterday. On behalf of the House I extend a very warm welcome to the members today, and wish them well on their bus trip to Sydney after this.

Honourable members: Hear, hear!

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Child Care

Ms ROWLAND (Greenway) (14:37): My question is to the Minister for Early Childhood and Childcare and Minister for Employment Participation. How is the government delivering more flexible child care and improving its quality to meet the needs of modern families?

Ms KATE ELLIS (Adelaide—Minister for Employment Participation and Minister for Early Childhood and Childcare) (14:37): I thank the member for Greenway, who I know has a keen interest in this area as a new mother. I also know that she is a member who is determined, like us, that we be a government with a plan for a modern Australia. We are a government that has recognised that Australia's workforce has changed significantly in the past decade. In fact, we have seen over a 25 per cent increase in the number of women participating in the workforce, and we have seen a big growth in diversity in the roles which women are taking up. We also know that there are more Australian children in early childhood education and care than at any time in this nation's history. We know that that means parents need flexible options. Parents need a government with real policies, real programs and a plan for modern Australia.

We understand that no two families are the same, that no two families will rely on exactly the same programs when it comes to managing their work and family balances. That is why we introduced changes to the Fair Work Act, to make sure that working parents have the right to request part-time work. It is also why we have introduced a range of flexibility trials at over 50 sites around Australia, in partnership with industry, with business and with childcare operators, to provide parents with more flexible childcare hours. We have also announced that the government will expand on these trials at 50 sites by establishing a $1.3 million Child Care Flexibility Fund. This will all form part of our $11 million plan to improve the accessibility and flexibility of Australian child care.

The competitive grants program will build on the trials that have already been announced and that the Prime Minister referred to earlier question time. These trials will be working with family day carers partnering up with police officers, with nurses and with paramedics so that they can ensure that there is care available to match their rosters. There will be partnerships with long day care centres trialling an extension of hours for those parents who are doing the
mad rush through peak hour traffic desperately trying to get there to collect their children before the centre closes. There will be a partnership with out-of-school-hours care, because we know that work does not always stop the moment the school bell rings and that parents need some assistance after hours. We want to add to that with even more partners, with even more innovative new ideas going forward so that we can ensure that Australian child care remains affordable, accessible, of high quality and flexible.

All of these trials will be backed up by independent evaluation so that we can look at what can be rolled out as a more permanent measure and a wider rollout to assist more Australian parents. Ultimately we have real plans, real policies and we are getting on with the job of delivering for modern Australia and working parents.

(Time expired)

Ms ROWLAND (Greenway) (14:40): On a supplementary, the minister has talked about supporting families with young children. How does this build on the government's other childcare policies, and how have they benefited families in my electorate?

Ms KATE ELLIS (Adelaide—Minister for Employment Participation and Minister for Early Childhood and Childcare) (14:41): Thank you again to the member for Greenway, who asked how this will impact on families in her electorate. I can inform the member that there are now more than 13,000 children in Greenway in child care. So it is important that we ensure that it is affordable and it is quality. There are some 9,830 families in Greenway who are accessing child care. These families, I am delighted to be able to inform the House, are being provided with an additional $8.3 million in childcare assistance as a result of the government's decision to increase the childcare rebate from 30 to 50 per cent. We are proud that we are providing record levels of financial assistance. Over the next four years we will provide over $23 billion to the early childhood education and care sector, which I should let members know is over triple the funding that the previous Howard government provided to this sector in their last four years.

Ms Macklin: Are you going to cut that?
Ms KATE ELLIS: This is because we know how critically important it is. But, I am asked whether they are going to cut it. Sadly, those opposite have not actually put forward any policies whatsoever, except for a vague commitments to have an inquiry after the election. Australian parents, and those parents in Greenway, are relying on this assistance, assistance which our government has been proud to continue to provide, but there are big question marks over what those opposite would do if they got their hands on it. (Time expired)

Media Reform

Ms JULIE BISHOP (Curtin—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (14:42): My question is to the Prime Minister. I remind the Prime Minister that her minister for regional Australia stated today that the government's proposal for media regulation could have been ‘better handled’. Does the Prime Minister believe that to be a criticism of her or her minister for communications or both? What confidence can the Australian people have in a government whose cabinet ministers are now failing to support or openly criticising each other?

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: Let's not interject on the Prime Minister getting the call.

Mr Mitchell interjecting—
The SPEAKER: The member for McEwen is warned. The Prime Minister has the call.

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:43): Getting big and important public policy reforms done is never easy. We know that as a government because we have been a government that has sought to shape the nation for the future and to make it stronger and fairer. It is not surprising to me that, when we are talking about something as contested as media reform, we have seen a fast and furious debate, and if we look around the world it is not just us. What would the Deputy Leader of the Opposition have said to a process in the House of Commons in the United Kingdom that had the final deal crunched between the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition at 2.30 in the morning? Presumably, she would have criticised the process. But members of her sister a political party that saw the need to act in the public interest and actually get a reform through presumably thought engaging in that process was important for the people of the United Kingdom. When you are dealing with these big, complex reforms—

Ms Julie Bishop interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The Deputy Leader of the Opposition has asked her question.

Ms GILLARD: of course there are times when the process has a bit of stress on it. Prime Minister Cameron has found that. In this parliament on a number of occasions we have dealt with bills late at night; we have dealt with bills under some pressure. But, unless the opposition is going today to go out and use about Prime Minister Cameron every word, every insult, every piece of criticism that they have used against the government, then they will stand condemned for the hypocrisy that this is, the absolute hypocrisy. There is Prime Minister Cameron with a model of intervention in the media, much stronger than anything ever contemplated by this government, and what do we hear? Absolute silence—because it is hypocrisy, pure and simple. The motivation here is no more or less than a bit of craven political advantage. The one thing that they will never do, that they will never bother about—

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

Ms GILLARD: that they will never worry about is of course the public interest.

The SPEAKER: Is the Deputy Leader of the Opposition seeking a document to be tabled?

Ms Julie Bishop: Yes, Speaker. I note the Prime Minister is reading from a very closely typed, several-page document and I ask if she could table the document from which she is reading word for word.

The SPEAKER: Is the Prime Minister reading from a document?

Ms GILLARD: The document I had in front of me was 'MPs vie to claim press regulation win', from the Financial Times by George Parker, Political Editor, 18 March 2013. That was the document I had in front of me. I table it.

Murray-Darling Basin

Ms RISHWORTH (Kingston) (14:46): My question is to the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities. Will the minister update the House on the progress of the Murray-Darling Basin reform?

Mr BURKE (Watson—Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities) (14:46): I thank the member for Kingston for the question. The member for Kingston has been a champion of Murray-Darling reform. I am pleased to say that the reforms that were signed into law last year are locked in as of
today. The disallowance period expires today. After a century of a tug of war between states, what was required was to get a moment in time when politicians from around the country were willing to accept that the negotiation could only be won by the rivers themselves. Whether it was the communities that were reliant on the rivers, producers who were reliant on the rivers or those who care about the environment seeing the degradation of the rivers, it was only ever going to be solved when the negotiation was won not by any one state but by the Murray-Darling Basin.

In doing that, that moment in time that was required began late last year, when, after the plan had been signed into law, this parliament voted in massive numbers to keep the plan in place. That moment concludes today, where the disallowance period expires. It is now clear that after inaction and challenge for more than a century we have a situation where a century of degradation now turns the corner and, year after year after year, we see the Murray-Darling Basin being restored to health.

There are many members of the community who deserve acknowledgement for their part in a long-run campaign.

Mr Pyne: Like us!

Mr Burke: I have acknowledged members of the opposition before. You do not get overwhelming numbers in a parliament like this without a level of bipartisanship. But I will also say that none of us deserve more credit than Henry Jones, who is in the parliament today. He is a fisherman from down in the Lower Lakes in Coorong, down near Goolwa, who has been a champion of Murray-Darling reform for a long time. He has been the face of the advertisers' campaign to save the Murray and deserves great credit for achieving what activists for a century had failed to.

For those traditional owners, for the communities who were involved in the consultation and for the many people who have seen a challenge that has always been out of reach, it is important for us to acknowledge that this has been the parliament that has solved what no other parliament could. This has been the parliament that has guaranteed that the Murray-Darling Basin will be restored to health and that the degradation of the past is now a thing of the past.

Media Reform

Mr Abbott (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (14:49): My question is to the Prime Minister. Is the Prime Minister prepared to declare that the vote on the media bills will be a matter of confidence in her government?

Mr Albanese: Speaker, I rise on a point of order. It is an absurd question and it is out of order.

The Speaker: I was hesitating; I think you would concede that I was hesitating because I could not see that there was actually a question there. It was a hypothetical. It is a difficult situation but I would ask the Leader of the Opposition if he could rephrase the question.

Opposition members interjecting—

The Speaker: I have taken a point of order from the Leader of the House. I have taken a point of order; I have listened to the point of order and I have reconsidered.

Mr Pyne: Speaker, on your reconsideration, can I say to the point of order from the Leader of the House that the Prime Minister is the head of the government and the media laws are matters before the parliament produced by her government. It is a perfectly valid question to ask her whether she regards them as so important that if they
fail to pass she will go to the Governor-General, and that is what—

The SPEAKER: The Manager of Opposition Business will resume his seat. I have asked the Leader of the Opposition if he could rephrase the question.

Mr ABBOTT: Speaker, I am very happy to put it this way: are these bills of such importance to the government that if the government fails to carry them in the House this week she will regard that as a question of lack of confidence in her government?

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:51): To the Leader of the Opposition, if he wants to answer his own question about motions of confidence I suggest he has a look in this book. I know that he managed to serve as Leader of the House for years without opening it, but it is called *House of Representatives Practice*, and he will find the answer.

On the question of when the election will be, the election will be on 14 September. Let me say very clearly to the Leader of the Opposition, it will be a contest counterintuitive to those believing in gender stereotypes but a contest between a strong, feisty woman and a policy weak man and I will win it.

Ms Roxon interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Gellibrand is warned.

Mr Pyne: Madam Speaker, on a point of order, the Leader of the Opposition asked a perfectly valid question. The Prime Minister answered the question and then she as an aside said for some unknown reason, 'Misogynist Tony is back'. I would ask her to withdraw because it is a slur on the Leader of the Opposition and a desperate play from a desperate Prime Minister!

The SPEAKER: The Manager of Opposition Business will leave the chamber under standing order 94(a).

Opposition members: Why?

The SPEAKER: Why? If anybody needs to ask that they might all just leave the chamber.

The member for Sturt then left the chamber.

The SPEAKER: I did not hear the Prime Minister's interjection but I will ask her to withdraw.

Ms GILLARD: If the Leader of the Opposition is upset in any way then I withdraw.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: Order!

Mr Robert: Joke!

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Fadden is warned. The Prime Minister will withdraw unreservedly.

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: Order! Would the Prime Minister withdraw.

Ms GILLARD: I withdraw.

The SPEAKER: I thank the Prime Minister.

Mr Albanese: Speaker, if the opposition are genuinely concerned about that then I think they might like to look at the Manager of Opposition Business's behaviour in screaming at the Prime Minister and those opposite's behaviour in screaming at you, Speaker, consistently.

The SPEAKER: The member for Bass has the call.

Workplace Relations

Mr LYONS (Bass) (14:52): My question is to the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations. How is the government supporting low-paid and
vulnerable working people? Is the minister aware of any obstacles to this support?

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation and Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations) (14:55): I would like to thank the member for Bass for his question. This government really respects low-paid workers. We understand that there are a lot of Australians who go to work who do not earn the average wage. In fact, members of the House may be interested to know that one in seven of every Australian that goes to work receives the minimum wage. Members of the House may or may not be aware that the minimum wage in Australia is $15.96 an hour. We know that these Australians who work so hard are paying taxes and delivering profits for their companies. We also know they are raising families, they are building communities and they are making Australia a better country. That is why it is important that this government stands and supports low-paid workers with a strong safety net. The sort of people I am talking about work in accommodation and they work in retail. They drive through the night doing part-time work in the trucking industry and they work in administration. Many of them did not get the chance to finish school. Many of them are from migrant backgrounds. Some are single and many are young.

What we are doing to support low-paid Australians, the people who help make this country, is we are lifting superannuation from nine per cent to 12 per cent. Only we voted for that. We are ensuring that truck drivers have safe rates of pay. We are increasing the tax-free threshold to $18,000 and we are abolishing the tax that people who earn less than $37,000 a year pay on their superannuation. We are making sure that community sector workers, an industry predominantly worked in by women, get some pay equity. Today, we are making sure there is a down payment for Australia's childcare workers, with whom we entrust our children for their development and safety. So our government absolutely stands up every time for low-paid workers.

The member for Bass asked: are there any obstacles? I am afraid there are. It is an obstacle when one side of Australian politics refuse to ever talk about their workplace relations policy. There is a problem in this country in politics when the opposition complain on one hand—they say there is a flexibility problem—but on the other hand they never actually say what they mean. When you are on the minimum wage, you have no flexibility between balancing your family budget and going to work. When you are on the minimum wage—

Mr Briggs: What about the pie shop owners?

The SPEAKER: The member for Mayo will leave the chamber under 94(a).

Mr SHORTEN: Up goes the IQ of the chamber.

The SPEAKER: The minister will withdraw.

Mr SHORTEN: I withdraw.

The SPEAKER: The member for Mayo had better leave quickly and quietly. I am not in the mood.

The member for Mayo then left the chamber.

Mr SHORTEN: When you are on the minimum wage, you need those penalty rates on the weekend to be able to pay your petrol bills to get to and from work. When you are on the minimum wage you do not always have the choice of prioritising family over work. People on the minimum wage in this country—one in seven of Australians—who work hard deserve better from the opposition than the opposition's complete refusal to
engage in workplace relations policy in this country.

**Asylum Seekers**

**Mr MORRISON** (Cook) (14:59): My question is to the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship. I refer to the fact that, between November 21 and February 9, 11 transfers of asylum seekers to Manus Island were undertaken on average every week and that since 9 February there have been no transfers. Does the minister still maintain that there has been no suspension of transfers by the Papua New Guinea government of asylum seekers to the Manus Island processing centre?

**Mr BRENDAN O’CONNOR** (Gorton—Minister for Immigration and Citizenship) (14:59): I thank the honourable member for his question. I made clear last week, after speaking with the foreign minister, that there was an agreement in place between the Commonwealth of Australia and the government of Papua New Guinea to ensure that we continue to transfer people to the centre at Manus Province. That agreement is still in place and transfers will continue.

**Medicare Locals**

**Mr HUSIC** (Chifley—Government Whip) (14:59): My question is to the Minister for Health. How are Medicare Locals delivering fair and better access to health care and are there any obstacles in the way of Medicare Locals continuing the great work they do in my community and in others?

**Ms PLIBERSEK** (Sydney—Minister for Health) (15:00): I want to first thank the member for Chifley for his question. We had some good news for patients today: we saw that bulk-billing rates are up to 82 per cent. That puts them at equal historic highs. Indeed, in the member for Chifley’s electorate, 99.1 per cent of GP services are bulk-billed—a phenomenal achievement, and a sharp contrast with the 67 per cent rock-bottom rates reached when the Leader of the Opposition was the health minister. We all remember how he slashed training places, leading to doctor shortages.

Sadly, times have not changed—because the party that killed Medibank now wants to kill Medicare Locals. Australians are rightly proud of our universal health system, and Medicare Locals are the logical extension of our universal system. The decisions are made by local doctors, local nurses, local health workers, communities and patients—decisions made by communities themselves rather than a one-size-fits-all approach from Canberra. All of this is helping make a stronger, smarter, fairer Australia.

Last week we had confirmation from those opposite that of those local health workers, doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, psychologists, podiatrists, speech pathologists and pharmacists, thousands will get the sack if Tony Abbott ever becomes Prime Minister—

**The SPEAKER:** The minister will refer to individuals by their appropriate titles.

**Ms PLIBERSEK:** because $1.2 billion will be cut from primary care. What does that mean in practice? In the member for Chifley's electorate, we know what it means. We were out there just last week, with the member for Greenway, announcing $500,000 for a diabetes prevention program—very important in their local community, where diabetes is a huge problem.

Also in Western Sydney is an after-hours service, run by the Nepean-Blue Mountains Medicare Local—cut, if those opposite form government. In country Victoria is a service to transport people with chronic conditions, run by the Lower Murray Medicare Local and the Royal Flying Doctor Service—cut, under those opposite. The Southern
Adelaide-Fleurieu-Kangaroo Island Medicare Local is lifting child immunisation rates—cut, by those opposite.

Mr Dutton: Why do you continue to lie!

The SPEAKER: Order! The minister will resume her seat. The member for Dickson will withdraw.

Mr Dutton: I withdraw.

The SPEAKER: The minister has the call; if she obeys the standing orders.

Ms PLIBERSEK: It is a very clear choice: more decisions made locally by local communities or $1.2 billion—

Opposition member interjecting—

Ms PLIBERSEK: They are not bureaucrats; they are doctors, nurses, psychologists, podiatrists, speech therapists, health workers—losing their jobs.

Carbon Pricing

Mr HUNT (Flinders) (15:03): My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to the fact that Amcor, Penrice and now CSR have cited the effect of the carbon tax on electricity prices as one of the primary reasons behind job losses in their own manufacturing firms. Why has the Prime Minister made it harder for manufacturing workers in Australia to keep their jobs? Will the Prime Minister apologise to workers who have lost their jobs, including at the Amcor plant in her own electorate?

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (15:04): First, the member should acknowledge that over 130,000 jobs have been added to the economy since the introduction of the carbon price, in complete contrast to the negative, false fear campaign run by those opposite, who tried to scare Australian workers and pretend that, as a result of carbon pricing, hundreds of thousands of jobs would be lost—every claim shown to be incorrect.

And yet, despite every claim shown to be incorrect—their claims about jobs, their claims about the mining industry, their claims about cost of living, their claims about Whyalla being wiped off the map—they continue the fear campaign, rub their hands whenever there is any bad news about any worker losing his or her job and desperately try to do anything they can to blame it on carbon pricing, irrespective of the facts. What the member should well acknowledge is—

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop: Speaker, I rise on a point of order: 'directly relevant' means it must have a relationship to the substance of the question, which was the loss of jobs in the Prime Minister’s own seat. Is she saying she does not care about those people in her own seat who have lost their jobs?

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Mackellar will resume her seat. The Prime Minister has the call.

Ms GILLARD: Thank you very much. After that offensive interjection, let me assure the parliament that I care about it very deeply, and I respect these workers enough to believe that they should be told the truth and not used as pawns in the opposition's ugly political game, the way they have used workers as pawns against carbon pricing.
We have had the Leader of the Opposition go to workplaces and raise fear amongst working people that they were going to lose their jobs, only to see some of those businesses grow, thrive, prosper and expand since the Leader of the Opposition has been there. That is treating people with contempt. That is treating people with disrespect. That is the conduct of the opposition.

The SPEAKER: Order! As the member for Mackellar has raised a question on a point of relevance, does the member for Mackellar have another point of order?

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop: Yes, indeed, Speaker. It is this: the standing orders and indeed the Practice are quite clear that when a minister cannot answer a question they should be asked to sit down and take it on notice. As you cannot answer the question—

The SPEAKER: The member will resume her seat—

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop interjecting—

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Mackellar will leave the chamber under standing order 94(a).

The member for Mackellar then left the chamber.

The SPEAKER: The Prime Minister has the call and will refer to the question before the chair.

Ms GILLARD: After that display of contempt for working people, in answer to the member's question he well knows that the businesses he refers to have on their shoulders the pressure of the high Australian dollar and some of the economic circumstances that have flowed since the global financial crisis. Our attitude is to work with manufacturing and to work with businesses to help them and to help employment. The attitude of the opposition is to cut that assistance and to end those jobs—hundreds and hundreds of thousands of them around the country. That is what the member stands for. On this side of the House we stand for jobs and jobs have been created—130,000 of them—since a price was put on carbon.

Carbon Pricing

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (15:08): My question is to the Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency and Minister for Industry and Innovation. Minister, what impact has the carbon price had on meat processors? How do the facts compare with the claims and why is it important that any false claims are dropped in light of the facts?

Mr COMBET (Charlton—Minister for Industry and Innovation and Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency) (15:08): I thank the member for Blair for his question. I know he has a keen interest in the meat industry. The fact of the matter is that nine months into carbon pricing the meat industry is one where you can look quite clearly at how the carbon price is working to help transform the economy. In the industry it is reducing carbon pollution and driving investments that improve the industry's competitiveness.

Those opposite made many dire, terrible, doom-and-gloom predictions about the future of the meat industry as we went towards 1 July last year, with its introduction. It will be recalled that Senator Joyce predicted a $100 lamb roast and that a single head of beef going into an abattoir would cost the abattoir $575,000. That is the nature of the absolutely ludicrous claims that were made, joined in by the Leader of the Opposition. The member for Wright raised the case of AJ Bush and Sons and their Bromelton plant in Queensland, in particular. He said that that particular meat facility would face an 'absolute walloping' from the carbon price. He visited the abattoir with Senator Joyce and prophesised all the terrible
doom and gloom about never being able to afford another T-bone.

But now that we are nine months into carbon pricing, what has actually happened at the Bromelton plant is quite interesting because, with government support, the company is capturing its methane emissions, cutting its electricity bills and also cutting its emissions. It is doing it through an investment in a biogas facility and more energy efficient boilers. Recently, in the Beaudesert Times, AJ Bush's manager, David Kassulke, previously a critic of carbon pricing, said that these investments will cut their emissions by more than half and allow the company to produce half of the plant's electricity requirements. He said that as a consequence the abattoir 'will ultimately be in a much more competitive position in the marketplace as a direct result of carbon pricing—

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Flinders!

Mr COMBET: This is exactly what he said:

What the imposition of the carbon tax has done is make industry take stock of what it is currently doing and has forced it to look at doing things in a better way. It means companies are now looking at ways to use less energy which equates to less cost … That has been the intention of the tax and clearly from that perspective it is working and working well.

That is a quote from the head of AJ Bush at the Bromelton facility in Queensland. They are supportive of how the carbon tax is working. It is working and working well, cutting their electricity bill in half and reducing their emissions by a half. The only walloping at AJ Bush has been to the credibility of the member for Wright, Senator Joyce and the Leader of the Opposition for all of the ridiculous and bizarre claims that they will be held to account for. (Time expired)

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (15:11): Speaker, I ask a supplementary question. I refer to the minister's answer and I ask him if there are other examples of where the facts have been distorted on carbon pricing and climate change.

Mr COMBET (Charlton—Minister for Industry and Innovation and Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency) (15:12): I thank the member for Blair once more, because, sadly, there has been a litany of bizarre and ridiculous claims made by the Leader of the Opposition and other members of the coalition. First and foremost amongst them, of course, is the claim by the Leader of the Opposition that hundreds of thousands of jobs would be lost as a consequence of the carbon price coming in. But what do the labour force figures tell us? More than 130,000 jobs have been created in our economy since carbon pricing began. They said there would be unimaginable price increases—absolutely unimaginable prices increases, the Leader of the Opposition claimed. Inflation is under control; interest rates have come down by 500 basis points. How can you account for these claims—a senior political figure in this country making these ridiculous claims?

How about the coal industry? There is still a very strong pipeline of investment coming into coal. It is extremely important in my region in the Hunter. But, of course, the Leader of the Opposition claimed that it would be the end of the coal industry, that it would be completely destroyed. It would be absolute Armageddon. And do not forget towns being wiped off the map. Employment is up in Whyalla. Remember that he claimed Olympic Dam investment was deferred because of carbon pricing, and then confessed on the 7.30 program that he had
never read the company update, which did not mention carbon pricing. This is absurd from a senior political figure. He misrepresented electricity bills in this parliament—absolutely ludicrous from the coalition. *(Time expired)*

Ms Gillard: Speaker, I ask that further questions be placed on the notice paper.

**PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS**

Mr Abbott (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (15:14): Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation.

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

Mr Abbott: Yes, on numerous occasions in question time today.

The SPEAKER: Please proceed.

Mr Abbott: I simply want to correct one particular most outrageous misrepresentation. The Minister for Health today claimed that I wanted to close down the Nepean after-hours service. In fact, I started the Nepean after-hour service, I opened it and I funded it, and its funding is not dependent upon divisions of general practice funding.

**QUESTIONS TO THE SPEAKER**

Questions Without Notice

Mr Hockey (North Sydney) (15:14): Madam Speaker, is it your intention that ministers will be held to account when they get a fact wrong in answer to a question, and, if it is the case, will you ask the minister for climate change to come back into this place and correct a number of facts, including the 500-basis-point drop in interest rates since the last election?

The SPEAKER (15:15): The member for North Sydney will resume his seat.

**DOCUMENTS**

Presentation

Mr Albanese (Grayndler—Leader of the House and Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) (15:15): A document is tabled in accordance with the list circulated to honourable members earlier today. I may as well just say what it is, since there is only one: Department of Health and Ageing, *Infant Formula—Advisory panel on the marketing in Australia of infant formula—Report for 2011-12*. I table it. Details of the document will be recorded in the *Votes and Proceedings*.

**BILLS**

Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Improving Electoral Administration) Bill 2013

Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2012-2013

Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2012-2013

Returned from Senate

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

Foreign Affairs Portfolio

Miscellaneous Measures Bill 2013

Insurance Contracts Amendment Bill 2013

Reference to Federation Chamber

Mr Fitzgibbon (Hunter—Chief Government Whip) (15:16): by leave—I move:

That the bills be referred to the Federation Chamber for further consideration.

Question agreed to.
COMMITTEES
Cyber-Safety Committee
Appointment

The SPEAKER (15:16): Message No. 562, 18 March 2013, from the Senate has been received:

That paragraph (17) of the resolution of appointment of the Joint Select Committee on Cyber-Safety be amended to read as follows:

(17) That the committee may report from time to time but that it present its final report no later than 27 June 2013.

The Senate requests the concurrence of the House in this resolution.

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House and Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) (15:16): I move:

That the message be considered immediately.

Question agreed to.

Mr ALBANESE: I move:

That the resolution of the Senate be agreed to.

This is simply a proposition to ensure that the report is presented no later than the last day of the current sitting.

Question agreed to.

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE
Carbon Pricing

The SPEAKER (15:17): I have received a letter from the honourable member for Indi proposing that a definite matter of public importance be submitted to the House for discussion, namely:

The adverse effect of the carbon tax on jobs and manufacturing.

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

Mrs MIRABELLA (Indi) (15:17): I rise on this very important issue: the adverse impacts that the carbon tax is having on jobs and manufacturing. What compounds the damage that the carbon tax has caused to Australian jobs is the fact that the government has ignored warnings. Last year in February we had the CEO of Penrice Soda say:

The carbon tax, if it is implemented the way it is intended to be, could be the death knell for a lot of Australian industry … From this year Penrice will pay $8m in carbon tax. Adelaide Brighton $80m, one of our big clients. The timing of it is excruciatingly poor.

But this government did not listen.

The government did not listen to the very basic logic. And the logic is this: if you impose a tax on Australian energy intended to increase the price of energy, to increase the price of electricity, it makes conducting business in Australia more expensive. That means running hospitals becomes more expensive. It means manufacturing operations are more expensive. And why? Let us remember why.

The purpose of this tax was not to reduce emissions. It was not for some environmental benefit because, as we know, when Australian businesses go offshore, we are exporting our emissions offshore to nations that do not have the same clean, green production processes and regulations we do. What happens is: they will make the same things we used to make but create more emissions in the process, so it is a lose-lose.

We know from the government's own modelling that the carbon tax is intended to cut production in key areas. We see that their own modelling shows that aluminium production is supposed to fall by 61.7 per cent, and that alumina production is supposed to fall by 44.1 per cent and iron and steel production by over 21 per cent.

More than the number of members required by the standing orders having risen in their places—
What that is telling you is that, with the fall in production, necessarily there is a fall in jobs in those industries that are directly affected by the carbon tax, because, in the manufacturing sector, those businesses that compete with imports are put at a competitive disadvantage. It is a very simple thing to understand. When you put the cost up of something in Australia and an import comes in that competes with an Australian-made product, that import, which obviously does not have a carbon tax imposed upon it, is even cheaper than it would have been.

Now let us take our exports, because manufacturing contributes to 29 per cent of our exports. Our exports in manufacturing are also put at a competitive disadvantage when they are competing with goods overseas that do not have the high costs of production that we have.

The government are in pure denial. They are in pure denial because there is the lack of maturity to make a very simple statement: ‘We got it wrong.’ The Prime Minister is not big enough to say she got it wrong in choosing the Greens over Australian workers; she got it wrong in caving in, showing poor judgment. It was not very tough then, was it? No woman of iron then, no tough cookie then, in standing up to the Greens. She could have thrown the Greens a bit of a carrot; they would have still supported her. But, no. The Prime Minister, in what will arguably—and there is a lot of competition for this—go down as her worst judgment call ever, chose the Greens and this ridiculous, job-destroying policy over Australian workers. For what? Not to reduce emissions but to desperately try to cling on to power.

Over this year alone, let’s look at some of those businesses. In March, CSR announced the loss of 150 jobs at Ingleburn, with its managing director later confirming that the carbon tax had added around $500,000 to annual costs at the Ingleburn facility. In February, Amcor announced that over 300 jobs were lost across the country, many in Brisbane and also in the Prime Minister’s own electorate. What did the company say at the time? It cited significant cost increases, and it included energy as one of a series of factors that had a significant impact on its ability to remain competitive. That is what it is about. The Prime Minister may think that costs in relation to a business operation is a boring topic, but it is a basic fact that, if a business cannot keep its costs under control, it will not remain competitive. It is not a charity; it must make a profit in order to employ people, and in the manufacturing sector we are seeing that this is becoming more and more difficult.

There are significant international challenges. We know that there are challenges, but why on earth, in that environment, would any government ignore the challenges and sometimes use them as a crutch to absolve themselves of their poor policy, their job destroying policy? And there is the economic sabotage of the carbon tax at a time when we can least afford it. Often you get the response from the minister or the minister’s spokesman. It is interesting that, in the areas of industry policy and manufacturing policy, when things get a bit too tough, ministers are too afraid to front up to the media to pursue their argument. Instead, they send out a spokesman. One of the things they invariably rely on is the high Australian dollar. That is their crutch. It is not the carbon tax. In fact, there is the perverse Orwellian language, as if the carbon tax is great. Well, if it is so great, they should have put it at a higher rate and it would have created more jobs. But they know in their heart of hearts that that is absolutely absurd. So when they rely on the high dollar, not
only are they not being totally up-front with Australian workers but they are insulting the businesses that are trying to remain competitive and continue to employ Australians.

Rob Sindel, CSR's managing director, said only the other day that it is 'just too easy for people to say it's just the Australian dollar'. CSR is a company that has experienced job losses recently. What we see is continued evidence from business and industry groups when they tell the government about the cost of making things in Australia: the barrier to investment and growth is increasing costs, and energy costs, important input costs, are an increasing barrier to that growth and investment.

Greg Evans from the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry said:
The lack of pricing power and inability to pass on cost increases, such as the effect of the carbon tax, has dented small business profits and its ability to employ and expand.

But, of course, the Prime Minister and the minister for industry are totally and utterly deaf to that, because to accept that would mean accepting responsibility—a very grown-up thing—which, unfortunately for this nation and the workers of this nation, this government is incapable of doing.

We have seen a record number of companies go into liquidation. We saw reports in the media on Monday about over 10½ thousand companies. The government just brushed that aside. In relation to that, insolvency practitioners have said that the carbon tax for many of those companies was the last straw. We heard that it was like pulling a leg from under a chair. What do the government do in response? They say, 'You're all pretending, because, really, the number of jobs has gone up.'

The other week the government quoted some figures from the ABS. According to media reports, the ABS briefed the government on labour force gains for February 2013 and warned them. This is according to media reports. It will be very interesting to see what happens with the update on job figures next month. They were briefed that the figures would be overstated, most likely by a factor of two. Of course, this did not stop the Treasurer and the Prime Minister boasting about all the jobs, even though it was reported that they had been briefed that the figures would be overstated. So the Labor Party should stop the spin and tell the truth, because out there—not just in the suburbs of Western Sydney but in the regional towns and centres of this country, in the manufacturing centres of our capital cities—people are seeing Australian jobs disappear. For every large listed company that has its job losses reported in the newspapers, there are dozens of small and medium-sized businesses whose job losses go unreported, but the impacts are felt just as deeply in the families that lose their livelihood. Why? Only because the government are incapable of owning up to the fact that the greatest economic sabotage inflicted on the Australian economy was the carbon tax.

We even see the impact of the carbon tax on the auto sector. The Labor Party likes to pretend to promise the industry the earth, the moon and the stars.

Mr Champion: We know what you'll do with the auto sector. There won't be an auto sector.

Mrs Mirabella: There is a lot of delicacy and sensitivity on the other side, because at the last election they promised the industry whatever they needed to get over the line, and what did we see after the election? Not only did the Prime Minister break her promise not to introduce a carbon
tax but she imposed $460 million in increased costs on Australian manufacturing. They also broke $1.4 billion worth of their promises to the auto sector. So, the Labor Party is saying: 'We will tell you whatever you want to hear. We will promise you anything you want up until the election, and afterwards we will do the exact opposite.' So much of the discussion about the auto sector is around the components sector. We have heard the chief executive of the Federation of Automotive Products Manufacturers say:

We are going to be impacted by a carbon tax, and our competitors (overseas) won't.

And in a very challenging environment, this government is saying, 'That's too bad.'

We even see, in the case of the large companies that were awarded compensation and in the words of Graham Cray of BlueScope, that any compensation is like a bandaid over a bullet wound—because, let's face it, you can never totally compensate for the damage you have caused. At least the so-called compensation was admission of the damage the carbon tax would cause. But even these large companies need to make decisions for when the so-called compensation runs out. Companies do not make decisions for a three-year period; they look to the long term, particularly when they are looking at significant investments. But what about all those businesses that do not even get the pretense of a look-in with compensation? They are left there to accept the additional burden.

You will have the Labor Party tell you, 'But we've given all this free money to households so they can afford the increased energy costs.' But they ignore—and the reality is—that so many of the products made in Australia are being replaced by cheaper imports that are given a head start because they do not have the additional electricity and energy charges imposed upon them, because they come from countries, unlike Australia, that do not subject their manufacturers to the world's largest carbon tax.

The reality is that there is great concern about job security in this country, particularly across the manufacturing sector, where 109,000 jobs have been lost since this party came to power. They can get up here and come to the dispatch box and pretend that the reality is something else. But workers out there, and their families, know the damage that is being done, because they are losing their jobs and their friends are losing their jobs. Manufacturers have come together in a new organisation called Manufacturing Australia to ensure that their voice is heard, because they want to continue to have viable businesses and they want to continue to have a viable future. And there is every reason that we can have that viable future. The simple first step is to remove damaging government policies like the carbon tax that are intended to slug and slow down the production of our manufacturing sector.

**Mrs D'ATH** (Petrie—Parliamentary Secretary for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency) (15:33): It is my pleasure to stand up and speak to this matter of public importance before the House this afternoon. What a surprise! Here we go again: the scare campaign. We saw it last year being rolled out by the Leader of the Opposition, Tony Abbott, commenting on price rises. In June 2011 we heard that the hit on Australians' cost of living would be 'almost unimaginable', and the Productivity Commission found that if Australia were to impose a carbon tax or an emissions trading scheme it would dramatically raise prices to consumers. We heard the Leader of the Opposition saying in August last year in parliament:
The thing about the carbon tax is that it … will clean out people's wallets and it will wipe out jobs big time.

We heard the Leader of the Opposition saying, in June 2011, on radio 4BC:

It will destroy the steel industry, the cement industry, the aluminium industry, the motor industry and it will be, over time, the death of heavy manufacturing in Australia.

That is what we have heard time and time again from the opposition: that hundreds of thousands of jobs will be lost. The Leader of the Opposition said that 'entire towns, like Whyalla, will be wiped off the map'. And we have heard it again today from the member for Indi.

We heard it over the weekend as well. We heard the O'Farrell government carrying on about electricity prices and once again trying to shift the blame onto the carbon price. The fact is that the O'Farrell government should start being honest to householders in New South Wales and acknowledge that the biggest contributor to increases in electricity prices is rising network charges. The question is: when is the O'Farrell government going to actually start doing something about tackling network charges and taking that pressure off households in New South Wales? We are taking the pressure off, because we are providing tax cuts to 2.2 million people across New South Wales and helping nine out of 10 households with household assistance of $10.10 per week.

In the past we have also heard from Senator Barnaby Joyce about the $100 leg of lamb. Finally, last night on Q&A there was this question to Senator Joyce:

Senator Joyce, in November 2011, you said that citizens would not be happy when they were paying $100 for a roast under the carbon price. Now that the scheme has been in for some six months, this seems highly unlikely. Was your original comment intended to be hyperbole, or were you being deliberately deceptive?

Senator Joyce's answer: 'No, I tell you what, um, er, there's a whole range of things.' He went on to say: 'Okay, I agree it is not going to make it $100.' We are really glad that Senator Joyce was able to set the record straight last night—just in case we had not figured it out yet—that lamb roast is not going to go up $100.

And of course we have heard all about jobs. We heard the member for Indi talking about jobs today. We heard her saying that Australian jobs are disappearing. And I agree: Australian jobs are disappearing—but not at the hands of the federal Labor government. They are disappearing at the hands of state Liberal and LNP governments all over this country.

Campbell Newman is sacking public servants left, right and centre. I cannot do a mobile office in my electorate without someone coming up and telling me they have lost their job because of decisions of the state LNP government. If we want to talk about job losses, let us be honest with the Australian people. We have already heard the shadow Treasurer and the Leader of the Opposition saying: 'Elect me. We will make savings by cutting jobs. We will sack public servants.' That is how the opposition supports jobs in this country.

We have heard other fear campaigns. Yesterday in the Daily Telegraph we saw the headline, 'Carbon collapse'. You do not want to read past the heading because you would have read that a lot of businesses in the manufacturing sector in Australia acknowledge that the biggest pressure is the high value of the Australian dollar. You do not want to delve into the article to see what it is all about.

We saw a further heading today, in the Daily Telegraph, 'Carbon tax is sinking
tourism'. About three-quarters of the way through that article it does not state that it is a correction but restates yesterday's Daily Telegraph report and talks about the number of businesses which have closed over a certain period. It is interesting that today's article has different figures based on different time frames. Yesterday it was up until 1 March and today it has figures up to 12 months to 31 December 2012. So, when we talk about the Australian Securities and Investments Commission data showing 10,632 businesses going into voluntary administration, only six months of that crosses over with the carbon price; but they do not want to state that fact.

I am happy to talk about the figures from the article yesterday and the number of businesses which have gone into voluntary liquidation or administration over the last 12 months. For 12 months up to 1 March 2013, 10,632 businesses closed, but let us also talk about how, in that 12-month period, 186,583 new companies were registered, according to ASIC figures. If we want to quote figures, let us be honest about those figures. Let us give the Australian people all of the information which is out there about these allegations.

I am always in awe of the detailed analysis and research that the opposition put in when deciding their position on a government policy. They get up in the morning, they read the newspaper, they put out a press release and they prepare an MPI. Then they come and argue an MPI based on what they read in the paper that day or the day before. That is what we are talking about. What we see from the opposition is a bit like playing bluff in poker. We have seen the member for Indi today quoting industries and how they say it is all doom and gloom. I say to the member for Indi: I am happy to see her industry group and to raise her an industry group. In recent surveys of businesses the Australian Industry Group noted that it appears the businesses surveyed had overestimated the impact of the carbon price on electricity prices and that these estimates are not consistent with the PPI or CPI estimates. The survey found that most business estimates of electricity price increases were 2.1c to 2.3c per kilowatt hour. This is broadly consistent with Treasury modelling of projected increases in electricity prices of 10 per cent and actual jurisdictional price determinations. The Australian Industry Group highlights that recent electricity prices have mainly been driven by increases in network costs and that this will continue to be a source of upward pressure on electricity costs. I call on the opposition to start quoting those Industry Group comments as opposed to the ones they bandy around in this House all too often.

We have heard the member for Indi talking about insulting businesses. I agree: it is an insult to businesses for members of the opposition time and time again to come in here and start twisting the words of businesses on why they have shut down part or the whole of their business. We heard it again today on the Penrice closure. On 18 January 2013, Penrice announced it would cease production of soda ash, partially cited in the introduction of a carbon price. What the member for Indi did not state is that, when asked whether the soda ash plant would have closed without the carbon price in operation, Penrice's general manager of chemical operations said yes.

**Dr Southcott:** It didn't help. He said it had a major bearing.

**Mrs D’ATH:** 'It didn't help'—that is the contribution of the opposition. Let us be honest with the Australian people about what we are doing. I am happy to stand here and state the facts for the Australian people and the opposition. Since the start of the carbon price on 1 July 2012, 133,500 extra jobs
have been created, more than 20 every hour. There have been 118,546 new companies registered, more than 20 every hour. Company share prices have grown strongly with the S&P and ASX200 index up 25 per cent. The economy grew at an annual rate of 3.1 per cent in the year to December.

Australia has retained one of the lowest unemployment rates in the developed world at 5.4 per cent. The average weekly earnings grew by 4.6 per cent in the year to December, and business investment has continued at very high levels with almost $270 billion in confirmed investment into Australia's resources industry alone in the pipeline, according to the latest Bureau of Resources and Energy Economics figures. Last week we saw a strong employment result highlighting that 926,000 jobs had been created since the Labor government came into office in November 2007 and that 71,580 jobs were created in the last month—the largest monthly growth in jobs since July 2000. So I am happy to talk about our record.

We want to talk about manufacturing. We want to talk about jobs. We know that parts of the economy are experiencing pressures from the high dollar and other structural changes. That is why we are taking action to support jobs through our $5.4 billion new car plan, supporting 250,000 jobs. Through our support for Vodafone, with which we are bringing 750 jobs back to Tasmania from India, we are actually onshoring. The Gillard government is investing $1 billion to grow jobs through our plans for Australian jobs.

If we want to talk about the clean energy future package, we can talk about the support that we are giving manufacturers through the Jobs and Competitiveness Program, the support we are giving through the Clean Technology Investment Program and the Community Energy Efficiency Program and the assistance that peak bodies are providing through the Energy Efficiency Information Grants. But let us talk about real examples: Mackay Sugar Ltd. Mackay Sugar is investing over $120 million to reduce carbon emissions across its operations by 70 per cent for every unit of production. There is Crafty Chef of Emu Plains. With the help of nearly $500,000 from carbon pricing revenue, Crafty Chef, a Western Sydney food processor, will install a new commercial blast freezer. This will reduce the carbon intensity of its operations by 54.1 per cent, reducing energy intensity by over 56 per cent and boosting turnover by 150 per cent to $50 million. We have already heard from the Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency today in relation to AJ Bush & Sons. They were one of the loudest opponents to the carbon tax and they are now saying, 'You know what? It works, and it puts us at the forefront of energy efficiency and we are leading our industry.' So do not take our word for it. Go talk to these companies.

I quoted before the Leader of the Opposition saying that the cement industry will be gone. Does he extend that to asphalt and clay products? Boral Bricks in Queensland are increasing their energy efficiency by 56 per cent and saving over half a million dollars through the Clean Technology Investment Grants. Downer EDI Works have just received a grant from the Gillard government's Clean Technology Investment Program, which means that they will be able to upgrade their plant to manufacture asphalt containing up to 40 per cent of recycled material. This project will allow Downer EDI Works to cut energy costs at the site by $480,000 a year and reduce the facility's carbon emissions intensity by 33 per cent. These reductions will be achieved through cutting-edge processes and technologies that will allow asphalt to be produced at a lower
temperature and therefore it will require less energy. So I welcome these industries, small and large across this country, stepping up and seeing the opportunities that come with moving to a clean energy and renewable energies future and becoming more energy efficient in their business.

I will finish with this: the member for Indi talked about significant challenges for businesses and about the international pressures. We agree that there are international pressures, and that is why we need to step up and be part of the action on climate change. If we were to see the Clean Energy Future Package ripped up after 14 September, all of these businesses would be left in the lurch. It will set this country back years in relation to our international negotiations for taking action, and all of these companies will be left behind, because they are out there taking the initiative, investing in clean energy, investing in energy efficiency, and the opposition are saying: 'Vote for us and we'll rip the whole lot up.'

Dr SOUTHcott (Boothby) (15:48): The previous speaker mentioned Boral as an example of how good and how fantastic the carbon tax is, and not two months ago Boral announced that 790 of its workers would be made redundant. This is just one in a very long roll call. I want to speak about this government's record on jobs. I want to go through the roll call of major companies that have shed their workers. These are Australian icons. They are well-known major manufacturing firms. Let us just run through the list: CSR, Rosella Foods, Amcor, Penrice Soda, Boral, BlueScope Steel, Holden, Ford, Pacific Brands, Goodman Fielder, Holden again, Toyota, CSR, BlueScope Steel again, OneSteel, SPC Ardmona, Golden Circle, Ford again. Bosch, Bradken, Boral for the second time, National Foods, Austal Shipbuilder, Cadbury, Bridgestone, Caterpillar, Rio Tinto, Pacific Brands with a massive 1,850 jobs, Ford for a third time, Holden for a third time, and one very close to my heart—the closure of Mitsubishi.

This is the record of the government over the last five years on jobs. This is their record. Paul Keating once famously said of a trade union leader that he had the jobs of 100,000 workers around his neck. This government has the jobs of thousands of these workers around its neck. These are people who had a breadwinner one day and then they came home to their family having lost their job the next day. These are private sector jobs. The government is responsible for the economy. What we have seen is a terrible indictment of this government—a roll call of Australian icon business after Australian icon business and the loss of thousands of jobs.

I want to now turn to the carbon tax and—

Mr Perrett interjecting—

Dr SOUTHcott: They are Australian workers, you dope. They are Australian workers and they are Australian jobs.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott): Order! The member for Boothby will withdraw the reflection on the member for Moreton.

Dr SOUTHcott: I withdraw that I called the member for Moreton a dope.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: No, you withdraw unreservedly.

Dr SOUTHcott: I withdraw unreservedly.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Boothby has the call.

Dr SOUTHcott: Thank you very much. I now want to speak on a very important matter for Australia and
particularly for South Australia, and that is the impact of the carbon tax. I have spoken about the job losses we have already seen under this government, and that is the climate in which the carbon tax was introduced. It is a tax based on a lie. We all remember that quote, when six days before the last election the current Prime Minister said, 'There will be no carbon tax under the government I lead.' It was explicit and unequivocal.

Not a single member of the current government, not a single member of the Labor party and not a single Labor candidate campaigned on the introduction of a carbon tax. The lesson from Australian political history and from politics around the world is that a party that says one thing before an election and does another thing in government pays a very high price at the ballot box.

This is a tax that will impact on every facet of our lives. It is going to increase the cost of everything and put further financial pressures on businesses within Australia. Businesses are calling the carbon tax 'the straw that broke the camel's back'. Many Australian businesses were surviving on wafer-thin profit margins before the introduction of the carbon tax. All the carbon tax has done is put their budget bottom line into the red. ASIC reports that over the past 12 months to March there were 10,632 company collapses—886 a month. The number of firms being placed into administration is now 12 per cent higher than it was during the GFC. While the carbon tax is not the sole reason for these closures, the carbon tax is adding to the financial burdens of already struggling firms, tipping them over the edge of profitability.

Greg Evans, the chief economist of ACCI, has stated, 'Rapidly escalating energy prices caused by the carbon tax and other green programs are taking their toll on many Australian businesses'. He went on to state that this is already being demonstrated in job losses, deferred investment and, in the worst cases, business closures. Businesses in industries like steel, cement, chemicals and plastics, car and car component manufacturing, food and grocery processing and aluminium and glass have been crippled by the introduction of the carbon tax. These industries are all electricity-heavy industries, and the carbon tax has caused their electricity prices to skyrocket. You only need to look at the list of businesses that have cut jobs since the carbon tax was announced and then introduced. The introduction of the carbon tax is just sending manufacturing and jobs overseas to countries that are not crippling their industries with unnecessary costs for emissions. In food and grocery industries, the cost is only compounded, increasing the cost of transport, power, refrigeration and logistics.

I turn to South Australia and the impact of the carbon tax on jobs and manufacturing there. The carbon tax is having and will continue to have a negative effect on jobs and manufacturing across the state. On 2 November 2012, Holden announced that it would cut 170 jobs at the Elizabeth plant. That came on top of two previous job cuts under this government. On 18 January 2013, Penrice Soda announced that it will cease soda ash production at their Adelaide plant in June 2013. They have been producing soda ash there for the past 70 years—in the forties, the fifties, the sixties, the seventies, the eighties, the noughties. Now, under this government, they have decided that they will cease soda production. This will cause the loss of up to 70 jobs at the plant. The jobs will now go overseas, as Penrice have decided to import soda ash from now on. They specifically cited the
carbon tax as having had a major bearing on this decision.

On 16 January 2013, Boral announced the loss of 790 jobs across its Australian operations. This will impact on local operations in South Australia. Peter Macks, the principal at a local Adelaide based insolvency firm, Macks Advisory, has stated publicly that the carbon tax has been quite debilitating for many hotel operators who have been struggling for a long time. You only need to look at the Belair Hotel, a hotel in my electorate. I raised this issue in this chamber late last year. The hotel's off peak power rate increased by 45 per cent. The bill clearly listed 'carbon adjustment' as the main reason for the increase. The effect of this, according to the hotel manager, was either jobs or prices. The first post carbon tax electricity bill—a monthly bill—of the Lakes Resort Hotel in South Australia cost them an extra $3500 a month due to the carbon adjustment alone. These costs will have an impact either on price or on jobs.

The carbon tax is a bad tax. It was introduced dishonestly. It has crippled industry. The single biggest thing that this parliament could do to help with the cost of living, to help jobs and to help the economy would be to abolish the job-destroying carbon tax. That would restore the confidence of and give support to the manufacturing industry in Australia. It would support the creation of local jobs. The coalition, in government, will abolish the carbon tax.

Mr CHAMPION (Wakefield) (15:57): The other day I was looking at Twitter. There was a very interesting tweet from an individual quoting the Economist from 1848. What the Economist said in 1848 was 'Suffering and evil are nature's admonitions; they cannot be got rid of'. That is what the Economist magazine said about the introduction of the sewer. You can be sure that whenever there is some form of progress in human affairs there will be some conservative out there saying: 'The sky's going to fall. You can't fix these problems. It's all too hard. It'll all cost too much. It's the end of the world as we know it.' Haven't we just heard that from the previous speaker? He got up there with a long list of jobs. He was all grim. He talked about armageddon and all the rest of it. He talked about Mitsubishi, which closed in 2008, in discussing the carbon price.

There is a fair bit of disingenuous conduct going on over there among the opposition on these matters. That is because they cannot win the substantive argument that is going on not just in Australia but around the world. That argument is, on one hand, jobs, growth and investment and, on the other hand, austerity, recession and the downward spiral of disinvestment. That is the choice that Australia has and that indeed is the choice that is having to be made around the world. This country during the GFC made the right choice. That is why we have an unemployment rate of 5.4 per cent. That is why we have seen growth in our economy. That is why we have seen business investment in our economy. That is why around the world Australia is regarded as something of a lone survivor of the GFC period. Look at the nations that have embraced the austerity policies of the opposition. The United Kingdom had a jobless rate of 7.8 per cent the last time the figures came out. That country has zero growth.

As their economy fails to grow, their ability to service their debts lessens. That is what is happening in the United Kingdom.

If you look at Europe, where they have embraced austerity, you will see 50 per cent youth unemployment rates in places like
Spain and Greece. The choice that the world has had—it has been no different since the depression—is about how you tackle these periods that occur periodically in capitalism. There was the global financial crisis and, before that, the Great Depression. The right way to embrace it is through Keynesian economics—that is, to support growth and economic confidence and to use the benefits of economic growth to service debt. The wrong way to go about it is to try to cut your way out of trouble—to try to cut government expenditure—because cutting government expenditure destroys growth in your economy, and, as you destroy growth, your capacity to service any debt goes downwards.

The approach of the opposition was best espoused by Hoover's Secretary of the Treasury, Andrew Mellon. What he said was, 'Liquidate labour, liquidate stocks, liquidate farmers, liquidate real estate; purge all the rottenness out of the system.' That was the approach of conservatives in the 1930s and that is the approach of conservatives now. They have not learnt a single thing along the way from these great crises in capitalism.

It is a critical point that you are always better growing your economy to service your debt. You heard the Leader of the Opposition in question time today referring to the nation's credit card. Of course, it is completely misleading to the public to talk about household budgets and credits cards. A nation's economy is not a household budget, and it isn't a credit card. If you are going to use those sorts of analogies, a much better analogy is to say, 'It's like a young person taking out a loan to go to university, to get higher skills to get a higher income to produce more to be able to service that debt.' That would be a much better analogy to make than the one that is made constantly by those in opposition, which is based on the idea that there is some sort of fixed amount of money and some sort of fixed debt and your capacity to service it is best served by cut, cut, cut. I tell you: it is not. The proof is in the pudding. Go to the United Kingdom. Look at what they have tried over there. They have tried exactly what you are going to do, and it has been a dismal failure.

There is another debate going on around the world, and that is about how best to deal with climate change. You have two choices here. You can deal with it through a market mechanism, which this nation has done. Electricity emissions have dropped by 8.6 per cent since the carbon price was introduced, jobs have been created—I will go through the figures later on—and investment has continued and the ASX risen. The market mechanism is sending a price signal to people—to companies and consumers alike—and that puts the onus on the polluter.

The other alternative is to have big-government plans. In this case the opposition wants to have a big-government subsidy to polluters. In effect they are saying: 'We're not going to leave it to investors, markets and businesses to deal with this problem. We're going to leave it is politicians and bureaucrats.' Common sense would tell you that a price signal and markets are a much better way of dealing with this issue and a much better way of sorting out climate change; and around the world we are now starting to see price signals being put into place. In China, in California and in other places around the world, this is the way the world will deal with climate change.

Having gone through all of this debate and legislation, and having had the parliament's attention on it, the opposition intends to tear up the government's reforms—to unscramble the egg and to cause massive dislocation to the economy of this country and the business community of this country by tearing it all
up. They are going to cut pensions. They are going to put their hands into the pocket of every low-income earner in the country and put them back into the tax system—one million people going into the tax system. But for what? Look at the facts. Do not listen to me; listen to Stephen Koukoulas from the *Climate Spectator*, who said that since the carbon price has been put in the Australian Stock Exchange has gone up 25 per cent—that is, by $296 billion. It paid out $30 billion in dividends. House prices have gone up 2.8 per cent since the carbon price came in, and that adds about $110 billion to household wealth. So the gains overall are about $410 billion in the eight months, which is about $50,000 per household. That does not sound like disaster to me. It does not sound as if the world is going to cave in.

As I said before, in electricity emissions there has been 7.6 million fewer tonnes of carbon—an 8.6 per cent drop.

Look at the facts that the parliamentary secretary read out before. There have been 133,000 extra jobs—more than 20 extra jobs every hour since carbon pricing started. There have been 118,000 new companies—20 every hour. Company share prices have grown strongly, as I said before, and growth has been at the rate of 3.1 per cent. There has been low unemployment—5.4 per cent: the envy of the world. There were 71,000 jobs created in February alone.

This is an economy that is operating exactly as it has always operated. It has taken the carbon price in its stride. We know that the Henny Pennys from the opposition want to go out there and talk everything down. We heard the member for Boothby talk about Holden. Those on the opposite side of the chamber do not talk about the Holden Cruze coming off the line. They do not talk about the new model Commodore. They do not talk about the exports to the United States of police cars and performance cars. They do not talk about the two new models that we have locked in, maintaining production at Holden until 2022. The most important thing a government can do is co-invest to ensure a billion dollars worth of investment down there at Holden at Elizabeth.

The member for Boothby comes in here. But they do not have an automotive policy—and the policies they do have terrify those in the automotive industry. For him to come into this chamber and talk about jobs is just ridiculous. The choice around the world is growth and jobs and investment versus austerity and recession. That is the choice that we face, and the opposition insist on embracing austerity and recession. It is a fool's errand, and the people of Australia will find that out.

**Mr TUDGE** (Aston) (16:07): We have just had five minutes from the member for Wakefield as to how fantastic the carbon tax is and the impacts it is having. He says house prices are up, job numbers are up, new companies are being created and cars are running off the line because of the carbon tax at $23 per tonne. If the carbon tax is so fantastic for house prices, so fantastic for jobs and for new company creation, why not make it $50 per tonne, or $100 per tonne, or $200 per tonne? On the Labor Party's warped logic, that would mean that house prices would be even higher, there would be even more jobs, there would be even more companies created and the share price would be even higher, according to the member for Wakefield. But, of course, it is absolute nonsense. The carbon price has no such impact. The carbon price is a dampener on...
all of those activities, and every economist in the nation will tell you.

I would like to give the member for Wakefield and those opposite, first of all, some cold, sober and tragic facts. Let me just go through what happened last week. On 12 March 2013, the last wholly Australian-owned cannery, Cowra's Windsor Farm Foods factory, was placed into voluntary administration, with 70 jobs lost. The day before that, on 11 March, CSR's Viridian put off 150 jobs. The week before that, on 1 March, the iconic soup manufacturer, Rosella, shut down, with the loss of 70 jobs.

The week before that, Amcor announced that it will cease soda ash production and cited the carbon tax as having a big bearing on its decision. A couple of weeks before that Boral announced that 790 jobs will be lost. The week before that BlueScope Steel announced the loss of 170 jobs. That just brings me back to mid-January. I could continue to go through this exhaustive list, going week by week by week, all the way back to find jobs lost after jobs lost after jobs lost in our manufacturers.

I ask the Labor government members, in all seriousness: how many jobs need to be lost before they realise that the manufacturing sector is struggling? And why is it struggling? In part it is because the Aussie dollar is high. But a big part is also because the government's policies are making it so much harder for Australian manufacturers. We know that they have re-regulated the labour market, which makes it tougher. We know that they have added 20,000 new regulations and only removed 200. But the worst aspect of it all is the introduction of the world's largest carbon tax. This diminishes the key competitive advantage of our manufacturers, which is cheap energy. Do not just believe me or the coalition in making these statements, but listen to the businesses themselves as to why they are laying off workers or why they are closing down their businesses. Many will cite that the carbon tax has been a direct contributor to it.

Or you can read yesterday's ASIC report, which also blamed the carbon tax for contributing to so many businesses closing across Australia. That report found that there were 10,632 company collapses over the last 12 months. That is 12 per cent higher than during the global financial crisis. The member for Wakefield tells us how fantastic everything is, and yet we have had company collapses 12 per cent higher than during the peak of the global financial crisis. This report says that, while the high Aussie dollar is seen as the main factor behind manufacturing closures, experts say the carbon tax is adding to increasing cost burdens for many firms struggling to stay afloat.

You also could listen to what the ACCI chief, Mr Greg Evans, says in relation to the carbon tax:

In energy reliant industries—such as manufacturers—it is already showing up in job losses, deferred investment and in the worst cases, business closures.

That is the reality. The member for Wakefield and those opposite can say for as long as they like how fantastic this carbon tax is, how it is leading to growth and to companies starting up and how it is leading to additional jobs and all sorts of other great things. But the reality is in fact the opposite. The reality is that we have had more companies close than at the peak of the GFC, and almost every week we are having manufacturers laying off workers. The reason this is occurring is very simple. The carbon tax is damaging to our manufacturers
because it makes them less competitive versus their fierce competitors from overseas, because the carbon tax applies to the production here in Australia but does not apply to manufactured goods produced overseas and imported into Australia. In that regard it acts like a reverse tariff. Nearly all manufacturers these days compete against Chinese, Indian or Vietnamese imports. All this does is make the cost burden high for our manufacturers compared to those manufacturers of imports. It is a remarkably simple concept.

The Labor Party do not understand these basic business concepts because they do not have any business people on their benches. They are all union leaders, and it is terrific that they are all union bosses and they are all union members now. But they do not have any people who have had experience in business or in basic economics to understand that if you make our businesses more expensive and you do not put the same costs on our competitor businesses then our businesses will be worse off and will therefore be at a competitive disadvantage. The member for Wakefield talked about the car industry. PricewaterhouseCoopers examined the impact of the carbon tax on the car industry and it said that there would be a $400 per car cost associated with the carbon tax. That applies to every car manufactured in Australia, but it does not apply to the cars coming in from Japan or from China or from South Korea or from the UK or from Germany. So what does that do to our car manufacturers? It adds $400 to our cars but not to those imported ones.

The Prime Minister talks about sending price signals, but what price signal does this send, when you add $400 to the cost of an Australian made car but that does not apply to an imported car? The price signal it sends is, ‘Go and buy the imported car,’ and that consequently leads to fewer jobs.

In my own electorate I have 1,000 manufacturers, employing about 10,000 people. It is a huge proportion of my electorate. Nearly all of them are competing with overseas players, and many of them have told me that they are struggling because of the high energy costs. Those high energy costs, particularly in the last 12 months, have been driven almost entirely by the carbon tax. This year is just the start of the carbon tax. It is $23 per tonne and it is causing a 10 to 20 per cent increase on electricity prices for businesses. But that is just the start. In two years time it will be $29 per tonne. By 2050 it will be $350 per tonne, according to the government's own figures. You can look up the government's own figures and they say it will be $350 per tonne by 2050.

If this carbon tax stays in place and it goes up to $350 per tonne, I would predict that that will be the end of manufacturing in my electorate and almost all manufacturing across Australia. I cannot see how manufacturing in this country could survive if the carbon tax went up fifteenfold to $350. That is what is at stake here in this debate, and that is what is at stake in this election coming up. We have two competing visions in relation to our manufacturing sector. From our side, we would scrap the carbon tax. Make no bones about that—it would be gone, and we would provide other incentives to boost manufacturing in this country. On the other side of the ledger, the Labor Party are promising to continue with the carbon tax and continue with the upward trajectory of that tax—starting at $23 this year, going to $29 in two years time and going all the way up to $350 in 2050. That is exactly what the government has forecast and exactly what the government actually desires. This carbon tax needs to go, for the benefit of our manufacturers and the benefit of Australian jobs. (Time expired)
Mr STEPHEN JONES (Throsby) (16:17): Since 1 July last year, 133,500 extra jobs have been created. That is almost 20 each hour. There have been 118,546 new companies registered. That is more than 20 every hour. Company share prices have grown strongly, with the S&P/ASX 200 index up 25 per cent. The economy grew at an annual rate of 3.1 per cent, and Australia has retained one of the lowest unemployment rates in the developed world, at 5.4 per cent. I understand that this is devastating news for those opposite, who hate good economic news. But it is good news for the people in my electorate and it is good news for Australia.

I listened with great interest to the member for Aston's contribution to this debate, because the debate has at its centre the policy to reduce carbon emissions. I should say that, if you are going to have a policy to reduce carbon emissions, it is not a bad starting point to actually believe that carbon emissions are having an impact on climate change. Many on that side of the House do not seem to believe that. I actually respect and listen very carefully to the member for Aston's contributions because I learn a lot from him. I particularly learned a lot from him when I read the article that he wrote in the Australian on 27 February 2007. Members sitting alongside the member for Aston might want to listen to what he had to say before he came to this place. He had this to say:

In determining the appropriate climate change responses, what is needed is not grandstanding but hard, rational analysis to determine how we can reduce global greenhouse gas emissions with the least possible cost.

Governments are poor at making such hard-headed assessments to determine what gives the best return for a dollar invested: political considerations and emotional arguments inevitably cloud judgments. The decisions should be left to the market.

I could not agree more. I see the member for Wentworth has entered the chamber. If the member for Wentworth and the member for Aston had more authority and more say over the economic and environmental policies of the coalition they would not be in the confused and irrational mess they are in today.

What we have in this debate is a clear choice between a market based solution and the solution once decried by the member for Aston and the member for Wentworth—the policy of planting trees and picking winners. It is the plant-and-pick policy, aiming to plant more trees than the entire surface area of Tasmania, at last count. Is it any wonder that the serious end of town, when it comes to business, are running away from this policy at a great rate of knots? They know that it will not work. But it will cost business more and it will cost Australian consumers more.

As the head of the AiG, Mr Inness Wilcox, has noted:

The scheme has shaped forward and contracted prices for electricity, gas and other business inputs.

Businesses have factored it in; they are getting on with the business. I have to say the policy is working. As the member for Wakefield said in his thoughtful contribution, the policy is working, because carbon emissions from electricity generation have dropped 8.6 per cent since July last year. The policy is clearly working at the lowest cost of abatement.

If you are going to come into parliament this afternoon and say that manufacturing is a matter of public importance, it would not be a bad idea if you had a manufacturing policy yourself. If you are going to say that manufacturing in this country is a matter of
public importance it would be a damn good idea if you had a policy yourself—then we could have a proper debate.

I searched for a policy on the member for Indi's website. Do you think I could find one? No, I could not. There was not a policy. It was a policy-free zone. There was a bunch of ideas and some dot points including: toughening up our anti-dumping laws—we have done that; better targeting funding for commercialisation—we have done that; and redrafting the current legislation in relation to research and development tax incentives—we are doing that. I love this one: consider a national inquiry into manufacturing with wide stakeholder involvement. This is devastating stuff.

If you are going to say that manufacturing is a matter of public importance, do your policy homework. Come in to this chamber and have a policy in hand. We have a well-thought-out policy, one that has been arrived at after wide stakeholder consultation and one that will work. It includes putting Australian workers first in the labour market. What we are saying to employers is: you cannot be job snobs. I do not have a problem with employers using the 457 skilled migration program to fill genuine shortfalls in the skilled workforce. I do not have a problem with that program, but what we do say quite clearly is that, if there are skilled Australian workers who can fill those vacancies, they should be at the front of the queue.

We are establishing a $1 billion program to establish industry and innovation precincts around the country because we know we have put an enormous amount of money into research, development and scientific research in this country through our universities and other fine research institutions around the country. The challenge for us is to ensure that we can connect that great research, those great innovations that are occurring at universities like my own university, the University of Wollongong, where I graduated from. It is a very important part of the local economy in my region. We need to join that research up to ensure that we have a well-informed, well-resourced national innovation strategy and to also join it up with small and medium-sized businesses in our regions.

We need to have an Australian industry participation policy to ensure that, when we have large government investments in new infrastructure or when the private sector is investing, as it is with billions of dollars in new resource projects around the country—despite the doom and gloom that has been spouted by those opposite—Australian businesses, Australian fabricators and Australian manufacturers get a chop at getting some of those contracts they have the capacity to win to ensure that they are able to thrive with this great mining boom going on.

I have to say it is already working. I can tell the story of Maintech, an engineering company from my own electorate which, once upon a time, not two years ago, had over 90 per cent of its work from BlueScope but saw the writing on the wall and decided that it had to diversify. It is now winning large contracts including a $100 million contract with Anglo American Australia, a large mining project in Queensland, which is going to employ over 100 people in my electorate.

There are numerous other elements to our policy I could talk about. I could talk about how small and medium-sized enterprises, which have great innovations or great ideas, can convert those great innovations or ideas
into a business opportunity. We are doing that through our jobs program and by ensuring that they have access to venture capital.

The one thing that matters more than anything else in my electorate is ensuring that BlueScope is able to see its way through this difficult period it has encountered due to the high Australian dollar having a bigger impact than anything else. The $300 million steel transformation plan, which was voted against by each and every one of those coalition members on the other side of the chamber, is ensuring that not only are the doors of BlueScope being kept open but they are turning the corner. In the latest announcement to the Australian Stock Exchange, BlueScope said it expects to turn a profit in the very near future.

As the member for Wakefield said, you have two options: you can bury your head in a bucket of sand—or pick and plant—which is their policy, or you can try and show some leadership. That is the policy that is adopted by this side of the House. (Time expired)

Mr O'DOWD (Flynn) (16:27): Manufacturing in Australia is on a knife edge. There is no denying that. The government's carbon tax is proving to be job destroying and confidence crushing. Over the last five years since 2008, 109,000 jobs have been lost in manufacturing. The Gillard government proved its negligence of and contempt for the manufacturing sector when it dumped the manufacturing portfolio in December 2011, before realising its mistake and reinstating it.

The Australian manufacturing industry once enjoyed a huge competitive advantage. It had access to cheap and abundant energy and access to cheap water. Now the industry has to cope with a $23-per-tonne carbon tax, which will increase on 1 July each year rising to $350 per tonne by the year 2050. That is something for the industry to look forward to indeed.

Some industries receive bailout money while others are ignored. There is no formula with this government on who gets it and who does not. It is just handed out on a whim. There is no science behind it they want industry to survive. As we all know, the high Australian dollar has made market conditions difficult for our manufacturers.

But the implementation of a carbon tax has significantly added to the pressures, and the government says, to the contrary, 'It's going to be okay; everyone's going to thrive.' As the people on this side say, if it is such a good thing, why not double it? Why not triple it?

The 20 per cent by 2020 renewable energy target has also added to the problems of the manufacturing industry, and it affects their bottom line. The 20 per cent renewable energy target cannot be achieved by 2020—and, if it is, it is going to be too expensive, which will add another burden to our manufacturing arm.

Repeated budget deficits are placing pressure on interest rates and the availability of capital, as the government is competing in the money market with our private enterprise. This means that many Aussie businesses and manufacturers are surviving on paper-thin margins. How much longer can they take to get back into profit? As the member on the other side has just said, they hope to come into profit soon. How soon is 'soon'?

Industries affected by the government's destructive policies include steel—BlueScope, OneSteel. When they put up their hands and asked for help they were told by this government: 'Get used to the new world.' What does that mean?

Vehicles and car-component manufacturers are also under the pump.
Toyota and Ford not only have to compete against each other in Australia but have to compete with other plants run by Toyota, Ford and Holden in other parts of the world. They rely on 50 per cent local consumption of their vehicles and 50 per cent for the overseas market. If one of those markets falls, the car industry is in deep trouble. The carbon tax will cost the car industry about $500 million a year, but the government says, ‘Well, we will refund them $500 million a year.’

Cement companies that are based in my town of Gladstone are under the pump as well. They have to compete with the Chinese clinker, which can be imported cheaper than they can produce them in Gladstone. Chemical companies like Orica, which again are situated in Gladstone, are facing competition from overseas. Our food and food processors certainly have to compete.

The cost of aluminium production is about $2,300 a tonne. The current price for aluminium is about $2,000 a tonne. Glass, and the rag trade—textiles—are also disappearing. You cannot buy locally made stubbies, shorts or uniforms—they now all come to us from overseas. They are all under the pump. The government have perfected the art of chasing our industries offshore. They are doing a very good job at that—that is about the only good job they are doing.

The carbon tax is a total contradiction: whilst our emissions will go down, globally they will increase. Our cement industry in Gladstone is the most efficient plant in the world—and yet, if we were to lose that plant to some overseas country, you would find that Australia’s best practice, as with a lot of industries in Australia, would be lost to other countries that can produce a similar product but for a much lower price.

The carbon tax has elevated costs in the transport, power, logistics and refrigeration industries. A friend of mine who has a hotel in Yeppoon told me at a luncheon that his electricity prices have risen from $12,000 a month to $19,000 a month—and that spells a loss of jobs for that industry. The power bill of the cement industry in Gladstone has risen by $1 million a year. That puts that industry under a lot of pressure.

The Gillard government has failed to reward those companies who have had voluntary programs to reduce their emissions. The aluminium industry has reduced its emissions by 26 per cent since 1990. Cement companies have reduced their emissions by 20 per cent since 1990 and reduced their carbon intensity by 24 per cent per tonne. Meatworks, and all sorts of other industries, have reduced their emissions—not because of the carbon tax but on their own initiative and their own pride in their workplace. And now those particular industries are being punished by this reckless government.

Senator Penny Wong, on 21 and 22 June 2012, could not define what a 'green job' was; she could not give an example of one. And they say these green jobs are going to replace the tens of thousands of manufacturing jobs that have been lost. They just don't get it—no-one can tell me what a green job is and how they are going to replace the manufacturing jobs. They cannot.

The government has conceded that the carbon tax has brutalised the Australian manufacturing sector. The coalition knows what needs to be done: we need to scrap the tax and give our manufacturers a fighting chance.
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE:
ADDITIONAL ANSWERS

Economy
Mr COMBET (Charlton—Minister for Industry and Innovation and Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency) (16:36): On indulgence, Mr Deputy Speaker, I seek to add to an answer I gave in question time.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Indulgence is granted.

Mr COMBET: I misstated the amount by which interest rates had fallen since 1 July last year. The correct answer is in fact 50 basis points.

BILLS
Royal Commissions Amendment Bill 2013
Consideration of Senate Message
Bill returned from the Senate with amendments.
Ordered that the amendments be considered at a later hour this day.

Senate’s amendments—
(Government)
(1) Schedule 1, page 3 (before line 3), before item 1 (before the heading relating to the Royal Commissions Act 1902), insert:

Freedom of Information Act 1982
1A After subsection 7(2D)

Insert:
(2E) A Minister and an agency are exempt from the operation of this Act in relation to the following documents:
(a) a document that has originated with, or has been received from, the Child Sexual Abuse Royal Commission (within the meaning of Part 4 of the Royal Commissions Act 1902) and:
(i) that contains information obtained at a private session (within the meaning of that Part); or
(ii) that relates to a private session and identifies a natural person who appeared at a private session;
(b) a document that contains a summary of, or an extract or information from, a private session.
(2) Schedule 1, item 30, page 7 (after line 24), after the heading to Part 4, insert:

Division 1—Definitions
(3) Schedule 1, item 30, page 8 (after line 3), after section 6OA, insert:

Division 2—Private sessions
(4) Schedule 1, item 30, page 8 (line 15), omit "section 6OD", substitute "Division 3".
(5) Schedule 1, item 30, page 9 (line 27) to page 10 (line 23), section 6OD to be opposed.
(6) Schedule 1, item 30, page 11 (after line 10), at the end of Part 4, add:

Division 3—Privacy of private sessions
6OG Privacy of private sessions
A private session must be held in private, and only persons who are authorised by a member of the Child Sexual Abuse Royal Commission holding the private session may be present during the private session.

6OH Offence for unauthorised use or disclosure of information given at a private session
A person commits an offence if:
(a) the person obtains information:
(i) at a private session; or
(ii) that was given at a private session; and
(b) the person makes a record of, uses or discloses the information; and
(c) none of the following applies:
(i) the record, use or disclosure is for the purposes of performing functions or duties or exercising powers in relation to the Child Sexual Abuse Royal Commission;
(ii) the person is authorised to make the record of, or use, disclose or publish, the information in accordance with section 6OJ (inclusion of information in reports and recommendations), 6P (Commission may
communicate information) or 9 (custody and use of records of Commission);

(iii) the person gave the information at the private session;

(iv) the person makes the record of, uses or discloses the information with the consent of the person who gave the information at the private session.

Penalty: 20 penalty units or imprisonment for 12 months or both.

Note: For a defence to this offence, see section 6OK.

6OJ Inclusion of information in reports and recommendations

Information that relates to a natural person that has been obtained at a private session may be included in a report or recommendation of the Child Sexual Abuse Royal Commission only if:

(a) the information is also given as evidence to the Commission or under a summons, requirement or notice under section 2; or

(b) the information is de-identified.

6OK Defence for disclosure to person who provided the information

Section 6OH does not apply to a disclosure of information to the person who gave the information at a private session.

Note: A defendant bears an evidential burden in relation to the matter in this section (see subsection 13.3(3) of the Criminal Code).

6OL No other exceptions under other laws

(1) A provision of a law of the Commonwealth, a State or a Territory has no effect to the extent that it would otherwise require or authorise a person to make a record of, use or disclose information obtained at a private session if the record, use or disclosure:

(a) would contravene a provision of this Division; or

(b) would not be permitted by a provision of this Division.

(2) Subsection (1) has effect whether the provision concerned is made before or after the commencement of this section.

6OM Relationship with the Archives Act 1983

(1) For the purposes of the Archives Act 1983, a record:

(a) that contains information obtained at a private session; or

(b) that relates to a private session and identifies a natural person who appeared at a private session;

is in the open access period on and after 1 January in the year that is 99 years after the calendar year that the record came into existence.

(2) To avoid doubt, subsection (1) applies in relation to a record even if the record came into existence after the private session.

(3) Subsection 3(7) and section 56 of the Archives Act 1983 do not apply to a record referred to in subsection (1).

(7) Schedule 1, page 11 (after line 14), after item 31, insert:

31A After subsection 6P(2B)

Insert:

(2C) A person who obtains information, evidence, a document or a thing in accordance with this section may (subject to sections 6DD and 6OE) make a record of, use or disclose the information, evidence, document or thing for the purposes of performing his or her functions or exercising his or her powers.

Broadcasting Legislation Amendment (Convergence Review and Other Measures) Bill 2013

Television Licence Fees Amendment Bill 2013

Cognate debate.

Debate resumed on the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth) (16:38): These two bills relate to the commercial television industry, substantially, and also make some changes to the legislation relating to the ABC and SBS. They have been presented by the government as part of a package of six bills, the other four
establishing the Public Interest Media Advocate, whose role it is to oversee the content of newspapers and determine whether media acquisitions can be permitted.

I have agreed with the Leader of the House that these two bills will be debated, first, in one group and dealt with and, then, the Public Interest Media Advocate legislation can be dealt with together. The government have said this is an all-or-nothing exercise and unless all the bills are passed then none of them will go forward. I do not know if they are still holding to that position, but, speaking on behalf of the coalition, we are determined not to play politics with these issues. We will examine the bills on their merits.

I will now turn to the principal bill we are considering at the moment, which is the Broadcasting Legislation Amendment (Convergence Review and Other Measures) Bill. The purpose of this bill is, firstly, to state or conclude that the sixth channel shall not be used for a fourth commercial television licence. This has been a controversy over the years. There have been arguments made that there should be another free-to-air television licence, but, as is so often the case, technology has rather overtaken those debates. As the internet has evolved into the ubiquitous super-platform for all manner of content, and as it is more ubiquitous and broadband is more ubiquitous—and will become more ubiquitous a lot faster if the coalition is returned to government—the number of video services competing with free-to-air television stations is greater than ever. And, of course, that does not even take into account what is happening in the world of pay TV, whether it is through the Foxtel platform or through the various IPTV services that are available over the internet.

The free-to-air television stations are operating now in a dramatically transformed environment. When these licences were originally granted they represented the only way in which people could receive audiovisual entertainment, or indeed news and information, in their homes. That was it. There was a national service, the ABC, followed by SBS. But, in terms of advertising, subject to the SBS's rights to carry some advertising, the only advertising platform was the commercial television stations. That oligopoly is a matter of history now. It is becoming increasingly obvious to all of us that Australians, like people everywhere else in the world, are accessing their content from a very wide range of sources.

We are indeed in a world of multisourcing. This poses great challenges for the free-to-air television stations. They are in a position now where, for example, if they do not broadcast a program, such as a drama that has been released in the United States, almost immediately after its international release, the extent of illegal downloading will be so considerable that its impact in Australia will be dramatically diminished. I regret to say—and this is an issue that is relevant to this bill but is not covered by it—that Australia is the leader in unlawful movie and television program downloads. A Game of Thrones, for example, was unlawfully downloaded in Sydney more than in any other city in the world, so the rights owners have assured us. I think this is a very dubious honour for us to have. It is an issue that has to be addressed. It is not covered in this legislation, but it provides part of the context for the challenge for the free-to-air television services.

The other issue the free-to-air television stations have to grapple with is that, in addition to all the competition for eyeballs presented by the vast range of services
available online, the internet itself offers a very cost-effective advertising platform. The impact on free-to-air television advertising revenues has not been as marked or as damaging as it has been on newspaper advertising revenues. Classified advertising, particularly, moved online very quickly. When you reflect back on it nowadays, the idea of looking for a motor car or a house—or a lost goldfish, for that matter—by wading through pages and pages of newspaper classifieds seems completely absurd. But, until very recently, that was the only way you could effectively advertise and indeed search for classified information. All of that has changed and what we have seen with the newspapers is that their advertising revenues have declined dramatically even though at the same time their audience—when you aggregate their print audience and their online audience—has, if anything, expanded. So actually the frustrating thing for the newspapers is: they are being read by more people, but the advertising revenues are declining. So the business base, the revenue model, has deteriorated.

Television still has that formidable impact: the impact of not being able to be avoided—other than by perhaps recording a program and fast-forwarding through the ads. But for most people that impact of a television advertisement is still the most engaging form of advertising today. But it is not unique to the free-to-air television stations and so they have suffered from a deterioration in revenues as well. As a consequence, the free-to-air television stations have been able to say, I think with some justification: ‘The deal that we have—what we are getting in return for our licence fees—was not part of the original bargain. We originally had, in effect, a monopoly or an oligopoly, and now we are in an increasingly competitive world.’

In addition to that, as part of the whole digital switchover, because they have moved out of analog broadcasting into digital broadcasting, into a more efficient use of spectrum, the free-to-air broadcasters have now received additional channels, multichannels, and that, too, has brought with it attendant costs—and, potentially, additional revenues. But whether the sum of all of the primary channels and multichannels will ever be in excess of what the sum of the primary channels was some years ago remains to be seen.

The coalition are very sympathetic to the television industry's concerns in this regard, and that is why we have said publicly in the past that we support the provision in the license fees legislation, the smaller of the two bills we are discussing, which reduces by one-half the television station licence fees. I should say that they remain relatively high by global standards, as television licence fees.

The license fee is, of course, not the only thing that a commercial licensee provides in return for his or her licence. The licence is a right over a public asset—that is to say, the spectrum—and it carries with it a lot of other obligations. They include obligations to carry high levels of Australian content. These have traditionally been imposed by way of regulation and program standards administered by the ACMA, and in this bill there is a new development, where the Australian content transmission quota is now being set out in the legislation for the first time. So, in the Broadcasting Services Act, the proposed new section 121G will require, for example, that, on the primary channel, there must be 55 per cent of Australian content during the relevant targeted viewing hours.

There are also obligations imposed to require the commercial licensees to transmit
a number of hours of Australian content on their multichannels. These step up from 730 hours in 2013 to, in 2015 and thereafter, 1,460 hours. There is also a provision that provides an incentive to licensees to broadcast first-release Australian drama on their multichannel, in that subsection (3) of the proposed new section 121G states that, if a first-release Australian drama program is transmitted during the targeted viewing hours—which, I should have noted, begin at 6 am and end at midnight—on the multichannel, then it will be deemed to be twice as long as its actual duration in terms of meeting the quota of hours set out in proposed subsection (2).

I should say that—while they largely restate what the existing obligations are, and are subject to the additional flexibility provisions relating to the multichannels—these arrangements are the subject of some controversy. The Australian screen industry, represented by the Screen Producers Association of Australia, the Australian Writers Guild and the Directors Guild, are concerned that these arrangements will result in broadcasters not so much transmitting less Australian content but transmitting less high-quality Australian drama. This is because they will be able to transmit drama programs and especially children's television programs on the multichannels, and, because the audience on the multichannels, at least at present, is quite a bit lower than it is on what they call the primary channels, they will therefore pay less money to the producers for those programs. This is a fair point. It is one that deserves a very good hearing.

I have to say that it is a matter of considerable disappointment that the government, for whatever reason, has chosen to try to rush this legislation—and, indeed, the more offensive legislation relating to the Public Interest Media Advocate—through the parliament in the course of this week. There is absolutely no special urgency for it. There are committees sitting, still, considering this legislation, and they should be able to do their work and report in due time. There should be time for their reports to be considered by the time the legislation is debated in the Senate. But there is an indecent, even obscene, haste in all of this, and it is very hard to find any explanation for it. There is no particular urgency for this legislation to be dealt with this week. It has been considered, and these issues have been debated for some time; that is true. But it is one thing for issues to be considered in the context of an industry review like the convergence review, where the general issues are kicked around, and quite another thing for there to be a rush to deal with a specific set of proposals. The devil is always in the detail.

While there has been broad debate about content and the associated issues, once the government comes to a landing and actually draws up some amendments and some specific proposals, that is worthy of more detailed consideration. And that is not going to be available, given the government's haste in seeking to push this through the parliament. The industry has been very critical of that. The government has been criticised from every quarter and not simply because of the Public Interest Media Advocate legislation, which so dangerously impinges on press freedom.

Returning to the substance of this legislation, there are also changes made to the charters of the ABC and the SBS—indeed, changes to their acts. The most important changes include the provision of digital media services in the charter of the ABC and, indeed, that of the SBS, each of which is chartered to provide broadcasting services. You could no doubt make a reasonable legal argument that digital online services amount to broadcasting, but, out of
an abundance of caution, no doubt, it makes sense to change the charters to allow that to occur.

I will speak of the ABC in particular, but what I say about the ABC and its public obligations applies with equal force to the SBS. The ABC is more important than ever. Our public broadcasters are more important than ever. The great foundations of journalism are under real threat. I spoke earlier about the threats to the newspaper industry. The big daily newspapers were the greatest foundations of journalism and they are threatened. One thing we can be sure of is that there will not be as many of those big newspapers in five or 10 years time as there are today. There are new sources, there are new online publications, and that is to be welcomed. There is in every respect a greater variety of news services available to us, but I fear that the sheer mass, thoroughness and comprehensiveness of the big daily newspapers will not be there in the future given the threat to the business model.

The ABC and the SBS, not being solely dependent on advertising revenue—not at all dependent in the case of the ABC and not substantially dependent on it in the case of the SBS—therefore have a heavier responsibility. I am very pleased to see the way the ABC is putting more effort into news and information. The ABC, however, is in a very different position relative to the public than the commercial broadcasters, let alone commercial publishers. The ABC is a taxpayer funded entity, a chartered entity, and it has an obligation to the public, not simply as consumers but, as Jim Spigelman, its chairman, has said, as citizens, and it has a statutory obligation in the presentation of its news and information to be accurate and impartial, according to the recognised standards of objective journalism. It has that very clear obligation.

We had some controversy about the *Daily Telegraph* this week. The *Daily Telegraph* is free to be as biased as it likes. Its readers can decide not to read it, they can be appalled by it, they can cancel their subscription, they can throw it in the bin or do whatever they like, but it is free to do that. The ABC is not, any more than the SBS is free to do that. These are critically important institutions and they have to maintain the very high standards of objectivity, impartiality, fairness and balance. No doubt, journalists at the ABC will look at what their colleagues and friends are doing in the commercial media and say, 'Why can't I be as outrageous as that?' Well, they cannot be. They are being held to a higher standard and that is a function of their very important public status. We welcome those changes to the charter. They make perfect sense.

However, there is one amendment to the ABC legislation which makes no sense at all. It is the new section 31AA to be inserted in the ABC's act. It states:

The Commonwealth must not enter into a contract or other arrangement with a person or body other than—

the ABC—

if the contract or arrangement:

(c) is for the provision of international broadcasting services …

This is designed to remove all prospect of contestability in terms of the provision of the Australia Network.

We all remember the catastrophic and chaotic tender process relating to the Australia Network. At the end of 2010, the then Minister for Foreign Affairs, the member for Griffith, announced a tender for a 10-year contract to provide the Australia Network—a really important part of Australia's public diplomacy. As it turned out, there was a contest between the ABC, which, of course, had been providing the
service in the previous five years, and Sky. When the first tender closed and it was considered by an independent committee established by DFAT, Sky apparently won the tender. This was not very satisfactory to the government, so they announced a variation to the tender and, in effect, had a retender. After that, Sky won it again, at which point the government abandoned the whole process because, they said, there were concerns about probity, leaks and so forth, and granted the contract to the ABC. It was a humiliating shambles and classic mismanagement on the part of the government.

You had—apparently—the foreign minister, the member for Griffith, arguing for Sky and the Prime Minister and Senator Conroy, the communications minister, arguing for the ABC.

I will say this: the ABC is a perfectly appropriate entity to deliver the international broadcasting service for Australia. Most international broadcasting services are delivered by the public broadcaster of the relevant nation. There is nothing wrong with that. They were awarded that contract when we were in government. We made no complaints about it. But you have to ask yourself: what government in its right mind—with a rational, business-like mind—would preclude itself from ever making this job contestable? Even if you took the view that the ABC was, all other things being equal, the appropriate body to provide this service, why would you want to put yourself in the position that, if the ABC proposed at some future date to provide the service at a price or on conditions that were unreasonable or too expensive or too over the top in some manner or other, then you could not say to the ABC: 'That's not good enough. You've got to sharpen your pencil. We'll put it out to tender' or 'We've got the power to put it out to tender'? Why would you preclude yourself from being able to do that? That is exactly what the government has done. It is a rather bizarre turn of events, because it was only a few years ago that the government apparently thought that a competitive tender was the best way to award this contract and actually held a tender. Then, because the government did not get the result that at least part of it wanted—it seems the other part did want the result that was delivered—it aborted the tender and ended up having to pay, we understand, well over $2 million in damages and compensation to Sky. It was really a hopeless failure of process.

In due course, in the consideration in detail stage, we will move an amendment to delete section 31AA from the bill, and I would commend the amendment to all members. I sincerely ask the government to think again. It is perfectly open for a government, under the legislation as it stands, to take the view that the ABC is the appropriate entity. Indeed, that was the view John Howard took—so it is not a partisan issue. To deprive yourself of the ability to make this contestable seems to us to be the height of foolishness.

So those are the principal matters dealt with in the legislation. As I said, broadly speaking we support the changes. We are appalled by the haste with which it is being presented, but we are not going to treat this bill in a political way. We have looked at it carefully on its merits and have presented—which I trust honourable members will recognise—a considered response to it. The converging media world is very challenging and very exciting. We have more diversity than ever before. We have more opportunities than ever before. Established players are under great threat. Rupert Murdoch, who is the great paragon of the honourable member opposite me, the member for Reid—he features in all of his
speeches!—has said that the internet will destroy more profitable businesses than it will create, and certainly a lot of Rupert Murdoch's businesses are very much under challenge.

We have to ask: how long will it be before the AFL, the NRL and the other owners of sporting rights—the big sporting codes—decide to use the platform of the internet to sell their programming direct to consumers, rather than selling their rights to a pay TV company or even a free-to-air television station? How long will it be before Mr Demetriou and the AFL just sell an AFL app, for a few hundred dollars a year, which entitles subscribers to watch every game on any device, live or in replay, with the metadata and so forth? You can see the platform of the internet potentially disintermediating all the other platforms, just as it has cut out the newspapers as the platform for classified advertising and just as, increasingly, it is cutting out free-to-air and subscription television as the platform of choice for delivering drama. So many people now are watching drama directly downloaded or streamed, purchased from the rights owners or companies such as Netflix and their local counterparts. How long will it be before these businesses are under real threat? It is important for us here to remain very flexible in our approach to regulation. We have clear objectives: protecting the Australian content and ensuring that Australian voices are heard and all of those very important objectives. But we have to recognise that we are in a rapidly changing environment, and it is important that legislation be regularly reviewed so that it keeps up to date with the changes in technology.

So that is my response to the legislation. As I foreshadowed, we will be moving the amendment to delete the proposed section 31AA in the consideration in detail stage.

Mr MURPHY (Reid) (17:06): I will say a few words on the Broadcasting Legislation Amendment (Convergence Review and Other Measures) Bill 2013 and cognate bill. There was lot that I agreed with in the contribution by the member for Wentworth on this broadcasting legislation. We all support the new Australian content requirements—that is a good thing. Despite the growth of new digital services and channels, Australians still want to see more Australian content. The new Australian content transmission quota to be imposed on broadcasters is important. Also, we will get a lot of new Australian drama programs—and that is a good thing.

It will also provide commercial broadcasters with the flexibility to meet their content quotas for drama, documentary and children's programs—and that is a good thing. It will give innovative programming choices. It provides a limitation on the number of commercial television licences, which must surely make the free-to-air television providers happy. There will be no fourth television network, which has been promised for such a long time. Even I understand the pressures that the commercial television providers are under—hence the Television Licence Fees Amendment Bill, which provides relief to the high annual fees payable by those networks.

The member for Wentworth talked about the haste of this legislation. What is contained in these bills, and in the other bills which are going to be debated through the night, has been well known for the last two or three years. There has been a hell of a lot of publicity in the media about the Finkelstein review and the convergence review. While the member for Wentworth might not like the fact that the government is determined to pass these bills in the life of this parliament, it is a fact of life.
It is interesting that the member for Wentworth is of the view that newspapers may not exist in the next five to 10 years. The member for Wentworth made special reference to Mr Murdoch, who has a stranglehold on the print media in our country. Mr Murdoch has made it quite clear that he has great confidence in the future of print media. I tend to share that view, because people like to pick up a newspaper each day and read it. Many people in our country feel it is a lot easier to access news reading a newspaper than it is to sit at a computer or to access it by other means in this digital age. So I do not think the member for Wentworth is quite right when he says that there is a threat to newspapers in Australia. I do not see any evidence that Mr Murdoch, or anyone else at the moment, wants to sell his newspaper.

We all support the ABC. As the member for Wentworth said, the ABC is very important to our democracy. The member for Wentworth made it quite plain that he is not going to support the part of the legislation that will allow the ABC to provide an international broadcasting service. The member for Wentworth failed to say that the public broadcaster is not driven by the commercial imperative of making a profit. The provision of an international broadcasting service is more appropriate for the public broadcaster than is extending the reach of News Limited, which will be driven by the dollar to broadcast what it sees as appropriate for its commercial objectives. So I have to disagree there with the member for Wentworth. The member for Wentworth alluded to other elements of the total package of bills, which I understand we will probably be debating here all night. I will reserve my comments for when we get to those bills, particularly those which impact on the future concentration of media ownership in our country.

In short, I am pleased that the member for Wentworth has seen fit, with a couple of exceptions, to support these two bills. Let us hope that, by the time he has heard the total debate on these bills, he will support the legislation—because there has never been a better time for us to reform the media in Australia. The media are crying out for it and so are we. What worries us is the fact that all those assets might fall into fewer hands.

I put on record how refreshing it was yesterday when Mr Kerry Stokes, the proprietor of Channel 7, appeared before the Joint Select Committee on Broadcasting Legislation, which is chaired by Senator Thistlethwaite. We were discussing the abolition of the 75 per cent reach rule. The various manifestations or applications that might apply to Mr Stokes' interests in Western Australia would mean that Mr Stokes would become the one dominant player in the west. He conceded that that was not in the public interest or good for our democracy. I did not see that on display when Mr Williams, the chief executive of News Limited, appeared before Senator Cameron's committee. History shows that, if you make any concessions to News Limited on the acquisition of media assets, they just want more and more. That is why I have been such a vocal, outspoken critic, particularly of that company, though not of the way they present their stories—it is their right to do that. I think it is very bad for the future of our democracy if we allow that approach to media to drown out the other voices in Australia. That would create an even more unhealthy democracy in a country where we have some of the highest concentration of media ownership. I will have more to say later tonight or early tomorrow morning—whenever we get out of this place.

Mr HAWKE (Mitchell) (17:14): I also rise to speak on the two bills, the
Broadcasting Legislation Amendment (Convergence Review and Other Measures) Bill 2013 and the Television Licence Fees Amendment Bill 2013, which the government has separated from its package of six bills.

I start by saying that there is a certain reluctance on the part of government members at the moment to speak on these bills. I certainly think the member for Reid was hardly compelling in his support for these bills as they have been presented. I am certainly looking forward to hearing his remarks later on, because, as I see it now, I can understand why government members are so reluctant to put themselves on the record as being behind the Prime Minister's package of media reforms. I understand completely that there is a fear amongst Labor members that they ought not to say what they really think about the government's approach to media reform in Australia, because it is so chaotic and so haphazard.

When I look at the detail of the legislation that is before us, I do think there are some concerns with various elements of it, and these have been raised by the member for Wentworth. I correct the member for Reid on one thing that he said about this, which is that the member for member for Wentworth did not say that he did not support the ABC having the tender for the Australia Network. The member for Wentworth was making a very sensible point about the legislation in front of us, which is that, on the Australia Network—and why we are proposing an amendment—the question is: why would we seek to bind a future government to not tendering for the Australia Network to provide that service? The member for Wentworth was very clear in saying that he supported the ABC having the tender. In fact, the Howard government gave the tender to the ABC. But there is no reason to put through legislation that would bind us to not having a tender process in the future. There may well be good arguments for having a tender process.

Certainly the way this government has handled the tender process is not a good argument for a tender. Why have a tender for the delivery of the Australia Network and award it to Sky when you have no intention of going through with your tender? In fact, you have this ugly, unedifying approach from an incompetent government to issue a tender, to vary the tender, to abandon the process and then to award it to the people who had the tender in the first place. Of course that is not a compelling argument for having a tender—I understand that. The argument there is that we have an incompetent government run by people who do not understand the realities of commercial broadcasting, the realities of tender processes or the realities of how you conduct a proper approach to government. This does not necessarily mean that we need to bind governments in the future to not having tender processes; there are valid reasons, and the member for Wentworth outlined some in relation to the ABC. We may want to sharpen the focus of the ABC at some point and make it compete with various carriers for the Australia Network. There are valid reasons that we might seek to do that. So it is not right for the member for Reid to say that we do not support the ABC tendering for the Australia Network.

These two bills have been separated from the other four bills, and there is a sense that the government is doing this on the fly. So we are all here at the last minute hearing arguments about Finkelstein and convergence reviews. The member for Reid said that the media are crying out for all of this. Certainly there has been a broad public discussion about the role of the media and media reforms and regulations. These proposals, including the bills before us, were
introduced into this place on 14 March, so we have not had time to review these processes thoroughly and neither have all of the relevant media associations. The proposals do not match the realities of what the discussions have been about, and that is of great concern. Even in recent days we have heard from the CEO of Fairfax—never mind the member for Reid's lament about Mr Murdoch—telling us that he is not aware of the problem that the government is trying to solve. So it would be good to ask government members what the problem is that they are trying to address with all these packages of legislation.

The simple bills that we see before us right now—the member for Reid flagged that we are going to be here all night debating the rest of them—do have some non-controversial elements that the coalition is prepared to support. There are the Australian content provisions, including prescribing the Australian content requirements, which already exist in the 55 per cent range, and amending the charter of the ABC and the SBS. The ABC and SBS charters are really non-controversial in terms of the proposals in the bill, including the addition of non-executive directors and one of them being Indigenous, with the establishment of the national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander free-to-air television channel. But the Australia Network tender section 31AA makes no sense. We are amending this part of the bill to ensure that we do not bind a future government.

Similarly, the Television Licence Fees Amendment Bill 2013 has elements which are non-controversial. Of course, the reach rule has been sent to the joint select committee for discussion. We support the deferring of any decision on the abolition of the reach rule, because the reach rule prevents any one commercial television network from broadcasting to more than 75 per cent of the population. It seems to me that, if you are going to take the opportunity to reform media and media regulation in Australia, these sorts of issues go to the core of what is good and effective regulation in Australia. Is it really relevant to have a 75 per cent reach rule in Australia today? It is an argument that I would be interested in hearing about, because there is a revolution going on in internet service providers and the availability of the internet and television. I can now watch every rugby league game live on my iPad at any point, no matter where I am in the country.

The serious contestability issues about media and binding television broadcasters are, I think, valid for us to consider. Yet we have not yet heard all of the regional implications of abolishing the 75 per cent reach rule.

The member for Wentworth mentioned Game of Thrones. It is a great series, and I happily paid for it. But people are illegally downloading material—which is wrong—because of restrictions that do not allow Australian customers to pay for materials. There are many issues like that in Australia that we are not addressing in this legislation. There is other legislation that may well be out of date, such as that dealing with parallel importation laws which prevent Australians from paying for the goods and services that they are seeking to pay for, including books, downloads of books, and downloads of media broadcasts of things like popular series such as Game of Thrones. Well-considered legislation with well-considered proposals might well have had great relevance and support from the opposition.

The Prime Minister today has been keen to lecture this chamber about the conservatives in the UK and the proposals that are being put forward on media reform there. I say to the Prime Minister that that is...
exactly the point. There is a huge difference in approach. They have a cross-parliamentary working group working to ensure that both sides have input into the reforms which have arisen out of the problems that they have had in the United Kingdom so that there is genuine bipartisan support for them. We have not seen anything like that here. We have seen unreasonable haste.

The member for Reid said that there has never been a better time. What does he mean by that? We have had no explanation of that. We have had no substantiation of that statement. I cannot see it being a good time after listening to all of the media proprietors in this country and all of the executives that came before the committee explaining their horror at the proposals that have been put forward. What is meant by 'there has never been a better time'?

The Labor Party could take a leaf out of the book of those in the UK by making genuine proposals through well-thought-out public policy proposals put into quality legislation that can get the support of opposition parties. There is a lesson in there for Julia Gillard, the Prime Minister, and this government. It certainly is not that we are foolish to oppose this.

We have concerns about many elements of the other four bills that will come before us later tonight. I will not address them now except to say that we have a minister for communications who I am highly sceptical of. This is a minister who wanted to introduce mandatory internet filtering into Australia—he wanted to filter the entire internet. This minister put in a proposal for mandatory retention of the data of individual citizens. This minister told an international audience that he could make executives wear red underwear on their head. I am not making things up; this is a government minister lording his power over the media and trumpeting in the public domain proposals to severely regulate and restrict perhaps the greatest tool of individual progress and freedom that is available to human beings today—the internet. That is the attitude at the heart of the proposals that we see here today.

The government has put up these first two bills as a way of shoving something out there while they work out what to do. Many of the things in these bills are completely non-controversial. On limiting the number of commercial networks to three: there has long been concern in the commercial industry about the idea of an additional commercial network. Maintaining that restriction is non-controversial. We have been through many of the issues. The member for Wentworth outlined our position on the non-controversial sections.

I clearly highlight that on the Australia Network it is untenable for Labor and the government members to come in here and argue that our amendment is anything but reasonable after the absolute debacle that we saw in recent years. You can add that debacle to the long list of debacles that have arisen out of the absolutely incompetent approach of this government to managing any type of tender process. It was probably one of the most embarrassing episodes in the history of the Gillard government, which is certainly saying something. The Sky tender variation was very unedifying to see a government involved in. It is emblematic of why this government is so poorly regarded by so many industries and sectors.

I will reserve my comments on the appalling proposals which are coming before us later on and which go to the heart of freedom of speech in Australia today and freedom of the press. We will certainly be having a vigorous and lively debate on those
proposals. These two bills are a package that the government has thrown together as a bit of stop-gap while they try to work out what to do, considering that the minister for communications has said that he will not negotiate and will not barter. He certainly will not be bartering, because the principle of bartering relies on two parties having something of equal worth. We know that the minister's proposals are not of any worth, so he will not be bartering with anybody—but not by his own choice.

With all those comments in mind, this is fairly non-controversial legislation. I look forward to the very serious debate that will happen in this Australian parliament later tonight. I particularly note the reluctance—the fear—of Labor members to come into this chamber and put themselves on the record in support of Minister Conroy and the Prime Minister's package of reforms.

Mr CRAIG KELLY (Hughes) (17:28): I rise to speak on the first two bills of this dog's breakfast of a package of legislation on media reform, the Broadcasting Legislation Amendment (Convergence Review and Other Measures) Bill 2013 and the Television Licence Fees Amendment Bill 2013. Firstly, comment needs to be made on the absolutely shambolic way that this government has brought these bills into this House. What is the urgency? What is the rush? Why do these bills need to be rushed through parliament in a few days without due consideration, ignoring the constitutional processes that this House and the Senate can use to consider these bills? What is the rush? Why do these bills need to be rushed through parliament in a few days without due consideration, ignoring the constitutional processes that this House and the Senate can use to consider these bills? What is the rush? We know what the rush is: this government has brought these bills into this House. What is the urgency? What is the rush? Why do these bills need to be rushed through parliament in a few days without due consideration, ignoring the constitutional processes that this House and the Senate can use to consider these bills? What is the rush? We know what the rush is: this government is in its dying days and looking to rush this legislation through parliament without due consideration.

The coalition is willing to support these two bills of the six that have been introduced recently, and we will vote on these as stand-alone propositions. These bills include measures that reduce annual licence fees paid by commercial broadcasters, set Australian content rules for the multichannels and amend the ABC and the SBS charters.

However, the coalition will move an amendment to one measure in the Broadcasting Legislation Amendment (Convergence Review and Other Measures) Bill, which has the effect of ensuring that only the ABC may offer a Commonwealth funded international broadcasting service such as the Australia Network and Radio Australia. The coalition believes—and I imagine most of the public would believe—that these publicly funded services must remain contestable. If we enshrine in legislation that only the ABC can run Australia Network or Radio Australia to reach overseas, we risk that service being just another monopoly. Without any risk of competition coming in, it becomes uncontestable. This is a recipe for reduced standards; it is a recipe for lower quality. In fact, we want the Australia Network, which goes overseas, to have the highest quality to promote Australia. The only way to do that is to make sure that service remains contestable. This bill, as it is, will prohibit that. That is why we should have some support for the coalition's amendment.

We should also look at the absolute debacle we had previously in terms of the Australia Network tender under this government. Cabinet twice over-ruled unanimous Public Service advice that Sky News be given the 10-year contract. What was the point of having a tender if this government did not even want one of the tenderers to have the possibility of winning? Not only did the best tenderer not win the tender to provide that Australian service around the globe but the government's bungling in this debacle actually cost...
taxpayers $2 million in compensation that had to be paid. Two million dollars may not seem much in the context of the waste and mismanagement and the record debt we have seen from this government, but that is another $2 million that Australian taxpayers have to pay that has been put on the long line of waste and management of this government.

The other slight concern I have with this bill is on the SBS charter. The SBS charter provides that the SBS will have at least one non-executive director who has an Indigenous background. We need to be very careful about having such quotas. There is no reason that we could not have several non-executive directors of SBS who have an Indigenous background. It is a very dangerous track to go down to have special requirements for race for someone taking on any position—whether it is in government or in the private sector.

I will leave my comments there. There is a lot more that needs to be said on these other media bills, which will hopefully be brought to the House tonight. Again, I ask: what is the rush? We still have a Senate committee sitting today. These bills should not be rushed through parliament. It is bad process. It is another example of the dysfunctional government we have, and their chaotic processes. We need an election sooner rather than later.

Mr FLETCHER (Bradfield) (17:34): It is a pleasure to rise to speak on the Broadcasting Legislation Amendment (Convergence Review and Other Measures) Bill 2013 and the Television Licence Fees Amendment Bill. Deputy Speaker Lyons, as you are well aware, these two bills form part of the rushed package of so-called media reforms being pursued by the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy. Although the minister has told us that he would not negotiate on the terms of his package, what we are now doing is debating two of those six bills, principally on the basis that they are what might be described as the less egregious part of a package which is overall very much an egregious, offensive and indefensible complex of measures.

These two bills form a reasonably sensible but far from perfect part of the overall package. What we have seen in what has been introduced by the minister in a furious rush since last Tuesday, when it first saw the light of public scrutiny, is a package which is deeply flawed in substance and which is just as deeply flawed in process. And it is no surprise that members of this House—both on this side and on the crossbenches—have spoken out very strongly about how flawed the process is. Even more importantly perhaps, industry participants across almost the entire broadcasting and media industry have highlighted this extremely flawed process.

The particular two bills that the parliament is debating this afternoon are, as I said, the relatively more sensible part of this package. Nevertheless, they still stand out as dealing with at least two areas where we have seen grossly incompetent behaviour from this minister. The first is the reduction in licence fees paid by television broadcasters—an episode which was first seen in 2010, and which we are now seeing a repeat of. The second is the botched process for allocating the right to be Australia's international broadcaster. Both of these inglorious episodes of public policy are dealt with in this bill. In essence, it seems that the minister is trying to cover over some of his past mistakes.

In the brief time I have today, therefore, I want to make just three points in relation to the bills that the House is considering this
May I speak for a little longer? I want to expand on the proposition that, as a public policy process, what we have seen has been utterly shambolic and completely contemptuous of the parliament and of the Australian people and, in particular, of the thousands of people who work in the media and communications sector, the future of whose companies depends upon the rules being made here.

Secondly, I want to make the point that the approach taken in these bills in relation to the reduction in television broadcasting licence fees is better than the approach taken by the minister in 2010 but still raises some significant questions. There has not been time to properly consider these questions. Thirdly, I want to make the point that the proposed new section 31AA, which would have the effect, if it passed into law, that only the ABC would be permitted to provide Australia's international broadcasting service, is a fundamentally bad piece of policy which we on this side of the chamber object to.

Let me start with the proposition that, as a public policy process, what we have seen here from the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy in relation to his so-called media reforms has been absolutely horrible. Supposedly, what we are considering before the parliament this afternoon is a package developed in response to the convergence review, conducted in 2011, and the Finkelstein inquiry into media regulation, conducted in 2012. Despite the fact that it has been nearly two years since the convergence review reported, the detailed statutory provisions that were proposed to be passed by the parliament only saw the light of public visibility last week. Ludicrously, the minister is proposing that the parliament should pass this entire package of six bills by the end of this week, not just the House of Representatives but the Senate as well.

It is an indefensible proposition to seek to argue that this is in any way a sensible, respectable and appropriate public policy process. It plainly is not. It is the very opposite of what one would hope to see, which is a measured and steady process of public policy development; critically, a process which includes extensive consultation with stakeholders. That is what one would expect to see. That is the very opposite of what we are seeing. The minister has said several times over the last week and a bit that it has been known for a couple of years that he was wanting to make major reforms in this area. That is no answer to the criticism that this has been a truly horrible public process, because a knowledge of a generalised desire on the part of the minister to make changes is one thing; the chance to read, analyse and respond to the detailed statutory provisions is quite the opposite.

What the minister is proposing is that the parliament, as well as the affected industries, should have only a few short days to consider many, many pages of detailed legislative provisions which are central to the very operation of major industries: the television industry, the newspaper industry and other associated industries. These are industries which employ thousands of people and provide news, entertainment, information and other services to millions of Australians. It is a scandalous and indefensible proposition that this is in any way a process which is appropriate or can be justified.

Not only has the minister treated the parliament with contempt; it seems he has even been prepared to treat his cabinet colleagues with contempt, because a package of this scale and complexity was considered by cabinet without the papers even being available before the cabinet meeting commenced and with no coordinating comments from other departments, it is
reliably reported. What a scandalous way to deal with an important area of public policy. The minister has sought to impose a ludicrous deadline where the entire package should be considered and voted on by both chambers of the parliament by this Thursday. It is really almost indescribable what an abomination of a public policy process this is. It is no surprise, therefore, that leading figures in the affected industries have been very, very critical of the process. Mr Kerry Stokes, Chairman of Seven West Media, said: 'I can only recall legislation being pushed in this haste in the wake of 9/11. My submission is you shouldn't be doing any of this.' The CEO of Fairfax Media, Greg Hywood, said, 'To be plain, the impression, voiced almost universally over the weekend, is that the process is at least unseemingly rushed and the bills mirror that state of affairs.'

I want to make the point that in criticising the process I am not making a partisan comment; I am making a comment about public administration. The best piece of evidence I can offer to demonstrate that this is not a partisan comment is to look at what happened when then Minister for Transport and Communications, Kim Beazley, introduced the Broadcasting Services Act in 1991 and 1992. I have no hesitation in saying that Kim Beazley can properly be regarded as one of the giants of the communications sector in Australia. When you look back at the history of the way he dealt with the Broadcasting Services Act, what you see is an exemplary process, a process that is very different to the one being conducted by the present minister, who could more appropriately be described as one of the pygmies of the communications sector.

On 7 November 1991, the then Minister for Transport and Communications gave a statement on the exposure draft of the Broadcasting Services Bill, and I emphasise 'on the exposure draft'. He was putting out a detailed draft of the legislative provisions. He had this to say:

As I mentioned earlier, the Bill is not the Government's final position on the new legislation, but an exposure draft intended to facilitate community consideration of the issues. A widespread process of consultation will be undertaken over the next three months on several fronts:

- I intend to make myself available to speak at a number of major conferences on issues arising out of the review of broadcasting and to receive the views of any interested parties who want to make a submission.

He goes on to say that senior departmental officials will be available, his department has established a process to receive requests for the relevant documents and the caucus subcommittee will be initiating widespread community consultation. That is a good process of consultation. What we have seen with the package of bills being put forward by the present minister is an appalling process.

The second issue I want to raise is the reduction in licence fees for commercial television broadcasters. The level of licence fees is always a contentious issue. Understandably enough, the television broadcasters would like the licence fees to be as low as possible. On the other hand, the parliament of Australia must be conscious that the government, through the parliament and through the agencies of government, granted the television broadcasters a scarce and valuable right to use spectrum—a limited public resource—so granting them in effect the right to participate in an oligopoly protected by statute. That is a very valuable economic privilege. No doubt it will be pointed out by the television industry that it is less valuable than it once was, given the well understood difficulties their businesses are facing with competition from the
internet, but it does remain a valuable economic privilege granted by the parliament on behalf of the people of Australia.

The parliament has seen fit over the years to extract from the broadcasters in return certain commitments, particularly commitments to carry Australian content. Those are very important commitments and people have for many years made the point about the cultural and national identity significance of Australian television carrying many hours of Australian programming; at the same time, as we all know, it costs more to produce an hour of Australian television programming than it costs to buy an hour of American or other foreign programming, so you have some conflicting principles at work here.

The key point is that in this legislation the minister has proposed to entrench permanently a material reduction in the broadcasting licence fees. This is an area where the minister has form, because in 2010, with very little notice, he granted the industry a substantial reduction in fees—a 33 per cent reduction in 2010 and a 50 per cent reduction in 2011. The reduction totalled over $200 million across all licensees, yet the minister did not bother to get any commitments in return. You would have thought that an obvious commitment to obtain would be one in relation to increases in Australian content—some demonstration that in exchange for the significant economic relief the broadcasters were receiving there were some additional public policy benefits. The question for present purposes is whether the benefit the minister purports to have obtained on this occasion is sufficient to make an informed assessment of that important public policy issue.

I turn thirdly to proposed section 31AAA, which would have the effect of permitting only the ABC to provide Australia's international broadcasting service. This is another example of the minister using this bill to backfill the gaping holes left by his woefully incompetent carriage of public policy in this area, particularly in this case the flawed process by which the right to provide Australia's international broadcasting service, and of course to receive substantial payment from the Australian government for doing so, was to be allocated through a competitive process. Not once but twice that process led to the relevant officials recommending that Sky should be chosen to carry out the task and not once but twice this government interfered to say no, they wanted the ABC to do it. Now it seems they want to entrench that in legislation. There can be no good basis for doing so when all they are doing is removing competitive tension next time we come to have a tender. This is the less flawed part of a terribly flawed package—and it certainly has plenty of flaws.

Mr JOHN COBB (Calare) (17:49): The member for Bradfield hit the nail on the head when he said this broadcasting legislation is incredibly flawed. I will confine my remarks basically to those parts of the bills that deal with licence fees and local content. Others will speak on the ridiculous overview that the government is seeking to assert on the industry. That is not something this country has ever done before.

The coalition is willing to support two of the six bills—the Television Licence Fees Amendment Bill 2013 and the Broadcasting Legislation Amendment (Convergence Review and Other Measures) Bill 2013. These bills are now going to be voted on as
stand-alone propositions and they include measures that would reduce the annual licence fees paid by commercial broadcasters, set new Australian content rules for multichannels and amend the ABC and SBS charters. The coalition will move an amendment to one measure in the Broadcasting Legislation Amendment (Convergence Review and Other Measures) Bill which will have the effect of ensuring only the ABC may offer Commonwealth funded international broadcast services such as the Australia Network.

I repeat that I am appalled by this abuse of the democratic process. The minister for communications introduced this bill into the parliament with a mere two days allowed for committee inquiry, and both houses are expected to then vote on it. It is not the way we have come to expect—and, more to the point, our country has come to expect—democracy to work. It is a bill which is rather breathtaking in the way it looks at change.

The media landscape has changed dramatically in my time, and certainly over the last 10 years, and we can now access content from all over Australia and, in fact, the world. It has given us choices that we never had and broadened our horizons for all the good reasons. We have digital TV and digital radio, and can tap into stories, interviews and information on demand. But I do still relish the fact that I have a local newspaper that I can read as I pick up my morning coffee in Molong, and a few local news stations to keep on top of the local issues in the electorate of Calare. However, I am immensely concerned that the removal of the 75 per cent reach rule could dramatically decrease the diversity of television ownership, thus concentrating control, increasing the possibility of television network mergers and decreasing the amount of quality content available to the electorate.

Concern over local content is not new. In 2002, what is now the Australian Communications and Media Authority, ACMA, undertook an investigation into the adequacy of local news and information programs provided on commercial television in Australia's regional and rural areas. It was concluded that there had been a decline in competing sources of news since the mid-1990s and a similar decline in the offering of local information other than news broadcasts since the aggregation of television markets. It was considered that community concern about the lack of diversity in broadcasts of matters of local significance by commercial television licensees was legitimate. It also concluded that there was a lack of competition in delivering local news and information, and that some regional commercial television broadcasters were not sufficiently responsive to audience needs for local content, particularly the need for programs which reported on matters of local significance. As a result, additional licence conditions and quotas were imposed on regional television broadcasters.

I mention all that as background to the situation we now face. The legislation is complex and it certainly demands time to be scrutinised. Removing the reach rule would allow Seven, Nine and Ten to acquire a merger with regional affiliates WIN, Southern Cross and Prime, to cover 100 per cent of the population. In broad terms, the current legislation prevents any one commercial network from broadcasting to more than 75 per cent of the population. In the rush to the finishing line, this tick-and-flick government has given the new Joint Select Committee on Broadcasting Legislation only one day to examine just how the reach rule will impact on local news services and how we might best ensure regional Australians are not disadvantaged by this haste.
Those of us who live in regional Australia are very cognisant of the fact that, in parts of New South Wales, Western Australia, Queensland and South Australia, in particular, it is quite often a long time between drinks, and a community really does need access to local news and stories so that they know how their part of the world is getting on. I think anything that decreases the level at which local issues are put before our people means the more we suffer as a nation and, certainly, in the case of regional and rural Australia, the more we suffer as a community. It is a very precious thing. While we are a nation of people who live in cities and on the coast, our ethos is very much tied up in rural and regional Australia—in the way that we communicate with one another and in our sense of community. If people are not given the opportunity to be aware of what is happening in their local region, it is not just us but Australia's whole convergence as a nation and how we see ourselves, our pride in ourselves, that is threatened.

Given the fact we have been given next to no time to look at all this broadcasting legislation, I think we are agreeing only on two of these bills, with one amendment, because the coalition at least are incredibly aware of the fact that regional Australia does need local content safeguards. And I am not one who necessarily assumes that media owners are always going to do the wrong thing when it comes to local content and not give us local news. They are not fools; they know that we like to see what happens in our own region. But I do think it is important to safeguard the reach rule and local content. If, along the way, that means looking at the way in which broadcasters and station owners pay for their licences, then I am good with that. But, when it comes to the amendment, I hope that the government realises—and we say this out of sincerity, not out of any political motive with these two bills—that Australia needs a regional Australian focus for everybody's sake, and that is something we have to safeguard. Thank you.

Mr McCormack (Riverina) (17:59): It is a pleasure to speak on the Broadcasting Legislation Amendment (Convergence Review and Other Measures) Bill 2013 and the Television Licence Fees Amendment Bill 2013 and indeed a pleasure to follow the member for Calare. I particularly want to endorse his remarks about the importance of local content on television stations. In Wagga Wagga, my home town, we have two free-to-air television stations at the moment producing local news: Prime Television and WIN TV. The respective news editors of those two stations, Benjamin Shuhyta at Prime and BJ Conkey at WIN, know the importance of producing good local content in their news. They know the importance of the community advocacy that they do on behalf of many groups, many of them charities or sporting groups, and just getting the news out there to the people. The respective managers of those stations know how important those half-hour bulletins are to getting advertising, because many local businesses want to advertise in those local news bulletins.

For both of those stations the actual production of their bulletins is done elsewhere, but what we do not want to see in the future are television news bulletins done out of a hub with very little local content, with syndicated statewide news. People are pretty parochial. People are concerned with their own patch, and they are often interested only in what is happening in their local area. Whilst I appreciate the value of knowing what is going on in Bathurst, Tamworth and elsewhere, I have to say that many people in Wagga Wagga are really not all that interested if there is a big story happening in Bathurst unless it is a national breaking news story. This is so even to the point where
there was considerable criticism when WIN merged its Wagga Wagga and district and Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area district news. Whilst people in Wagga Wagga were concerned about what was happening in Griffith, they really wanted more Wagga Wagga content, and vice versa. We are talking about a right over a public asset, and that is the spectrum, the ability to have those channels and the ability for free-to-air stations to broadcast on that spectrum. Australian content is important, but local content to regional areas is absolutely paramount. As far as Australian content is concerned, I feel we are far too Americanised with our television stations now. It is great that we have a percentage of content being Australian, but some of the Australian-produced programming and documentaries are tremendous and need to be encouraged.

I have considerable disappointment that the government has tried to rush this and the other two bits of legislation, which are all part of a six-pronged attack on the media. I have great difficulty understanding why the government is trying to rush this through. There has been an obscene and indecent haste in the way the government has tried to get this through. Yesterday we saw the unedifying spectacle of Senator Doug Cameron verbalising the TV executives who had flown in from throughout Australia to give their views on what is very important legislation. I know how much bullying has been in the news lately. To watch that last night on television and watch the spectacle of those TV executives, champions of people who want to have good Australian content, champions of people who want to give viewers a great variety of news and information, being absolutely lambasted by the questioning of Doug Cameron as though they were doing something wrong—it is so typical of this government to want to knock down anybody who is trying to achieve something and trying to make a go and make some money.

As we heard shadow minister Malcolm Turnbull say earlier—and he enters the chamber now—the devil is in the detail with this particular legislation. How appropriate. The devil is in the detail with this particular piece of legislation and with the other tranches of this attack on the media. We have a committee sitting at the moment to consider this legislation, but it has been given little time to be able to do that. I cannot understand why this is so. For the life of me I cannot understand why any government wanting to be re-elected would want to take on the media in an election year. It just does not make any sense. But, then again, that fits in well too with everything else this government does because not much of it really makes sense, and the public has stopped listening. The public has turned off.

We stand in this House to debate the largest changes to media regulation since 2006. These two bills are only part of a wider six-bill package that the Labor government wants passed by this House and by our Senate by this Thursday. It is ridiculous haste. The Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, Senator Stephen Conroy, has stated that the government will not be bartering. The Broadcasting Legislation Amendment (Convergence Review and Other Measures) Bill 2013 will introduce changes announced by the minister in response to the Convergence Review relating to Australian content, the use of the six-channel spectrum and public broadcasting. The other bill before us is the Television Licence Fees Amendment Bill 2013, which will permanently reduce the annual licence fees payable by commercial television broadcasters by half to a maximum of 4.5 per cent of revenue. Here we have Senator
Conroy wanting to halve the broadcasters' licence fee and them still not being in favour of it. I ran a media company once. I would hate to have him as salesman if he cannot even give away half-price licence fees.

The government's initial response to the Convergence Review in November 2012 included the extension by regulation of the 50 per cent licence fee rebate for commercial television broadcasters, explicit Australian content requirement for commercial broadcasters' multichannels and the retention of the 55 per cent local content transmission quota for the commercial broadcasters' primary channels but greater flexibility to broadcast subquota content on multichannels. It would see no fourth commercial television network.

These bills will enact these changes in legislation, as well as repeal a statutory review provision relating to the Australian content and captioning of television programs. The government has also introduced some additional provisions recommended in the Convergence Review, relating to the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and the Special Broadcasting Service—both of which are very, very important to people in my area. I certainly know how much work was done to bring SBS television to Wagga Wagga. It came in 1986, thanks to the great work of the late Doug Pitman, his late wife Dorothy and Brian Favero, who was chairman of the committee that brought SBS to Wagga Wagga. SBS gave those people a temporary licence to broadcast, a temporary tower was built on Willans Hill and the station officially started up on 14 July 1988. Some great work was done there. It is important. SBS is obviously important to not just people in my community but also people right throughout Australia—as it should be.

These changes—as part of this legislation with the ABC and SBS—include alterations to both their charters to reflect the internet based services both broadcasters currently provide, which include live streaming of TV and radio, catch-up TV, the provision of news which repurposes as text and audio and video used for broadcasting and text commentary. It also amends the ABC Act of 1983 to make the ABC or its proscribed subsidiaries the only broadcaster which can be engaged in Commonwealth funded international broadcasting services. This comes in the wake of the Australian Network calamity—and I call it a calamity—of 2010, when the tender for international broadcasting was bungled when the ABC and Sky News Australia both submitted bids to the tender process but the Labor government scrapped the tender and awarded the contract to the ABC indefinitely based on occurrence leaks which were deemed to compromise the process. It was just completely ridiculous and so much in line with so much else that this government has done since being elected in 2007. It just seems to muck up everything it touches.

We need to remember it was the minister proposing this legislation who also oversaw that particular process, a process on which the Auditor-General issued a scathing report. It cast the government in poor light and stated:

… the manner and circumstances in which this high-profile tender process was conducted brought into question the government's ability to deliver such a sensitive process fairly and effectively.

Furthermore, despite the Tender Evaluation Board's repeated recommendation to accept the Sky News Australia bid over that of the ABC—including in its final report to the minister after amended tenders had been received—Senator Conroy still decided to conduct a negotiation process with both
tenders to further test the financial reliability of each tenderer, given the duration of the proposed contract. Ultimately, the process was terminated more than a year after the tender was announced and the contract was awarded to the ABC.

This legislation also makes an amendment to the SBS Act of 1991 to require of the minister that at least one non-executive director be an Indigenous person. This follows the establishment within SBS of the national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander free-to-air television channel. The permanent reduction of the annual licence fees payable by the commercial television broadcasters by 50 per cent will amount to a reduction in fees of about $140 million a year. This amount has already been factored into the 2012-13 forward estimates, as updated in the Mid-year Economic and Fiscal Outlook. There we have Labor once again jumping to conclusions and being quite presumptuous.

A reduction in the annual licence fees paid by commercial television broadcasters has been provided on a year-to-year basis since 2009-10. In 2009-10 the commercial television licence fee schedules were altered by regulation in a way which had the effect of reducing fees by 33 per cent in the 2010 calendar year and by half in the 2011 calendar year. Fees were then again reduced by 50 per cent in 2012. The buyer is now sceptical of the half-price licence fee, because this government does everything by subterfuge, plotting, planning and backroom deals. Again, it is another knee-jerk response and ill-conceived policy that, like with so much this government does, it wants to rush through the parliament. They forget all tenets of democracy and all tenets of listening to what the people on the ground are actually saying, as we saw yesterday when those television executives were absolutely verbally in that review hearing.

Let us remember this policy is from the same minister who, whilst speaking at the Columbia Institute for Tele-Information conference in New York in September 2012, declared he had 'unfettered legal power' over telecommunications regulations such that if he wanted to he could make Australian telecommunication company executives:

… wear red underpants on their head.

I did not see too many red underpants on the heads of the TV executives yesterday, but I know that the minister is very red-faced about the reaction to the complete fallout that has happened. Again, it is another example of what a shambolic, divided and dysfunctional government we have in this country. People, let me tell you, are quite fed up. This is the same minister—now the third in charge in the government—who used expletives while answering questions at the National Press Club on 13 December 2011, which was being broadcast live on the ABC. It is beyond the pale.

In regards to the abolition of the reach rule, the coalition supports deferring any decision on this as recommended by the joint select committee inquiry into the proposal. This rule prevents any one commercial television network from broadcasting to more than three-quarters of the population. The joint select committee established to look into the proposed changes to this rule, along with the outsourcing of news content and whether the Australian Communications and Media Authority should direct commercial broadcasters to broadcast corrections on air, was given only four hours—just four hours!—to consider evidence. It was requested that they deliver a report on their findings the next day. Again, I say that it is indecent haste. The mind just boggles as to why Labor wants to rush this through in this last sitting week before a seven-week period before the May budget.
In a converged media landscape, it is clear the relevance of the 75 per cent reach rule needs to be considered and reconsidered. It needs to be considered very carefully. Currently, regional free-to-air broadcasters are at a disadvantage as the major networks are able to compete with over-the-top offerings by streaming content online. Regional commercial broadcasters need to be able to compete against content providers who access 100 per cent of the population with unregulated content via the internet or internet protocol television.

I will just conclude by reiterating the importance of local content on stations, particularly in news, local content on free-to-air stations and Australian content so that we do not get swamped with too much coverage that we do not particularly need or want.

Mr NEVILLE (Hinkler—The Nationals Deputy Whip) (18:14): I too rise today to speak on the Broadcasting Legislation Amendment (Convergence Review and Other Measures) Bill 2013 and the Television Licence Fees Amendment Bill 2013. As honourable members are aware, these are part of a package of six bills, others of which we will debate, I assume, tonight or tomorrow—that is, if the minister does not pull them in the meantime. In all my time in this parliament, one of the things I have tried to associate myself with since I came into this place has been the media—print media and electronic media. I take some pride in the fact that it was my concern, especially for regional Australia, that saw the improvement in the cross-media laws in such a way that we did not end up with unfettered media barons throughout this country, but at the same time we freed up, through the two-out-of-three rule, an opportunity for media companies to develop some scale. I will touch briefly later on the 75 per cent rule, which is now the subject of a special joint select committee looking into whether that should be lifted or not.

Having said that and also having been associated with new rules for radio, I saw a lot of parallels with this rushed treatment of television. We certainly had a lot of time to consider the cross-media laws when they came in and a goodly amount of time to consider alterations to regional radio. When we did that, however, there was an element of rush towards the end in trying to tidy up a few downstream effects, which I think has not served regional radio well since—and I am the first to admit that. Having been through that process, I saw the minister's attitude over the last fortnight, especially his bringing these six bills in and telling us last week that, if they were not completed by this Thursday, he might wipe the lot of them and that we could take it from him that there would be no bartering.

I would have thought that for the media of this country—and particularly, as we are now talking about television, the electronic media—at a time when it is going into a whole new phase of new applications that are going to revolutionise the way we do business and the way we are entertained by electronic media, the government would be looking around to get the very best laws in place. It would be picking the brains of external experts. It would be picking the brains of the opposition—dare I say it, the shadow minister at the table, who himself, both as a lawyer and as an operator, has been associated with the media. He has himself conducted inquiries into the media—namely, into Channel 10. When we have that sort of expertise in the parliament and we are looking at the landscape of broadcasting over perhaps the next 10 or 15 years, a respectful and bipartisan approach might have had a lot to commend it and might have provided us with one of the best systems of electronic media in the world. But, no, we were rushed
into this process. The speakers list for today was only being drawn up in the middle of the day, which in itself is quite bewildering.

This idea that it had to be rushed through brought an extraordinary backlash from right across the Australian media. It is a long time since we have had the head of News Ltd, the head of Channel 9, the head of Channel 7 and the new head of Channel 10 all in town at the one time. It is not because they are just watching their own corners but rather that they are appalled at the indecent haste and the amateurish way that this whole package was put together. Some of the measures that the minister was proposing were quite reasonable, but he packaged them up with six measures, and some of them are not reasonable. They are not even vaguely reasonable.

I will just deal briefly with the Television Licence Fees Amendment Bill 2013. That proposes to take the licence fees for commercial television operators down to 50 per cent, or 4.5 per cent of revenue. As the previous speaker said, that has been a progressive thing that has gone on in the last three years: 33 per cent, 50 and 50. It is strange that such a generous reduction, which comes to about $140 million, against the background of the other things that the minister is proposing, has got the proprietors of the major television networks almost ambivalent as to whether they would like to accept it or not if the price of doing that is some of the scuttlebutt that the minister wants to impose on them. You really have to ask yourself questions when, as I said, the heads of these networks are questioning whether it is worthwhile accepting this package and when you see some of the other things that the minister proposes, not least of which will be about the freedom of the press, which we will deal with separately in another debate.

Some of the things in the current bill arise out of the minister's 2012 Convergence Review. That review talked about the 50 per cent licence fee rebate; content requirements, especially around the multichannels, because, as you know, each television station now has at least three channels—the ABC has five; and the 55 per cent local content requirement for the operators' primary channels. It also proposed that there be no fourth channel. There is a bit of a push around Australia for a fourth channel. I do not think, in the current economic conditions, that would be wise—also given the upheaval the media industry is going through. One of the things which came out in evidence at the inquiry into the possibility of lifting the 75 per cent reach rule was that there is a struggle on at present to maintain two regional news services in country Australia—two services from the three groups of channels. If there is a problem there now with three, how much worse could it become with four? Could we end up, should that fourth channel be extended into regional Australia as well, having not four channels but, by virtue of the amount of revenue available, only two? In that respect, I think the minister not accepting a fourth channel was probably a good move.

Coming out of the Convergence Review, we also looked at things like changes to SBS to do with streaming, catch-up, texting and so on. I think that was also appropriate. We also looked, under the Special Broadcasting Services Act, at introducing an Indigenous non-executive director to the SBS board. I think that is appropriate too, especially given the emphasis that one particular SBS channel now has on Indigenous affairs. That is a sensible measure.

But the measure which I think bewilders all coalition members is the attempt to enshrine in legislation that the ABC can be the one and only tenderer for the Australia
Network services. As honourable members will know, the Australia Network is our face to the world. I am a great supporter of the ABC and I am sure, over the time the ABC has been doing this work and judiciously buying programs from the other networks, that that has served us well. But I do not think you can say that that is the only way we can do it. The fact that it took the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy nearly a year to dodge and weave around the tender process and then, despite another operator clearly winning it, award it to the ABC—that made no sense to me. This takes that inefficiency and that prejudice—whether it be the minister's or the government's—another step. If this were to pass, it would enshrine it so that no one except the ABC can ever provide the service. I think that is an insult to our commercial broadcasters and, in a way, I do not think it does the ABC itself any favours.

The 75 per cent reach rule is, as I said, the subject of a separate inquiry. No doubt we will get a chance to speak about that later, but I will touch on it briefly now. It is a matter of contention among the commercial TV operators. Some favour it; some do not. Some point out that it would have a number of unintended consequences, one of which, on the evidence of Kerry Stokes, would be to give him an unfair advantage in the west. Another consequence would be that it would require the rescrambling of the South Australian market. That is not to say that these things are insurmountable. They are not. But to rush this through in four days and to try to plumb all those potential unintended consequences is almost impossible. The minister's push to do this would have left us with an absolute hotchpotch of measures. If the 75 per cent reach rule change had gone through in the form being proposed, we could have ended up with a very difficult situation.

Another unintended consequence would be whether or not—and I touched on this earlier in my address—there would be enough financial gravitas in the regional markets to sustain three sets of commercial regional news services. That is something which country Australia would like, but when it does happen we want it to be sustainable. Those are my views. There are some good measures there; there are others which are just plainly silly. But the way they have been presented to this parliament is nothing short of a disgrace.

Mr STEPHEN JONES (Throsby) (18:29): It is a great pleasure to follow the member for Hinkler. Whilst clearly I do not and cannot agree with everything that the member for Hinkler said, I think his contribution to this debate was thoughtful, and I wholehearted endorse some of his comments, particularly when it comes to regional media and regional news services. I too represent a regional electorate where we cherish very much the contribution of our regional broadcasters to cultural life, ensuring citizens are well informed about what is going on and telling local stories about our area. Your contribution, sir, was in complete contrast to many of the others I have heard in this debate—where you could be forgiven for thinking that we were debating the 'red underpants on the head bill 2013'. Frankly, that was the most bizarre claim that was made in this debate. You might say that is just what happens here in Canberra. Unfortunately, it is not. There have been a lot of overheated misrepresentations made in this debate.

I want to focus on two issues that I do not think have had sufficient attention. They are the victims of misreporting and the victims of media consolidation and takeover. On the victims of misreporting, we have heard a lot said about freedom of speech and the rights and needs of media corporations. I will stand
and fight to the last breath in my body for a free press in this country. I have visited countries where they have a less than free press. The quality of the reporting and of the journalism in those countries is a poor reflection on the institutions which support the absence of free press in their countries. I stand with those who say it is an essential part of the Australian political and democratic landscape that we have a vibrant, free, democratic press which is able to speak without fear or favour—to comment on the affairs of the day whether their comments do or do not find favour with the government of the day. It is an important part of the Australian media and political landscape. Often when people come to Australia and witness one of our press conferences, they cannot believe the vigour with which journalists question and interrogate political leaders in this country—something that would never occur at a press conference in their country. That is an important part of the Australian political and journalistic culture.

I will defend that to the end, to the last breath in my body. But with equal vigour I will defend the rights of victims of misreporting. It is quite unfortunate that they have not yet had a voice in this debate. The victims of misreporting, who find their lives turned upside down because a journalist or a broadcaster—perhaps through no fault of their own—has not accurately reported affairs as they relate to those people. They find their lives turned upside down because of misreporting or an error in reporting.

I have heard some say in this debate—indeed, including the member for Wentworth—that they have redress through the existing law. If you feel that you have been defamed or been a victim of misreporting, it is no answer to say you can initiate a defamation action. For the vast majority of citizens, that simply lies beyond their reach. It is costly and long running—it can take literally years from the time when a statement is made and a report is published to when a matter gets before a court and is determined by the court. Leave aside the cost—you can be up for over $10,000 just to initiate an action in a jurisdiction. This is simply beyond the recourse of most citizens.

One of the propositions within the bundle of bills that have been the subject of discussion over the last week is to provide a non-judicial right of redress for a victim of misreporting. This needs to be given serious consideration. We have seen evidence of the failure of the Press Council to provide an adequate non-judicial remedy for a victim of misreporting and we have heard stories over the last week of the Press Council simply failing to provide an adequate form of redress for a victim of misreporting. The proposition and the idea behind some of the measures within these bills is to ensure a non-judicial avenue by which victims of misreporting can have their grievances heard and perhaps have their misreporting remedied by a retraction of equal size and prominence to that of the misreporting in the original publication.

The second issue I want to take up goes to jobs within the media and the very deep concern that I have about the impact of media consolidation, takeovers by another means—takeovers of a company or part of a company by another company. The simple concern that I have is what this does to jobs, particularly journalistic jobs, within the Australian media industry. Has anyone known a situation where one media company has taken over another media company and that has led to the creation of more journalist jobs? The answer quite simply is no. We are already seeing rapid rationalisation within the media in this country. Within the last 12 months alone, in the print media, we have seen News Ltd axe 60 journalistic jobs from its company and Fairfax axe over 1,900 jobs,
the vast majority of them journalistic jobs, from its business.

Nobody can point to an example where we have seen consolidation of media in this country that has led to the creation of more journalistic jobs.

I know that when the media are reporting on this legislation they must do it from a dispassionate perspective. They cannot take their own self-interest into account when they are reporting on the impacts of this legislation. But I do say, particularly to members of the gallery who are close at hand, bear in mind the impact of job losses in the journalistic trade through the mergers and acquisitions that could occur in the media landscape. This is not just of concern to people who are employed as journalists but also of concern to people who have an interest in a diversity of journalistic voices contributing to our great Australian media.

I think these are two aspects of the current legislation and the current package of reforms that have not received adequate attention in the debate. We should be spending at least as much time talking about the victims of misreporting and their rights as we are talking about the rights of media bosses. We should also be talking about the importance of ensuring that we continue to have a viable employment base for what remains of the thousands of men and women who make their living as journalists in this country and ensuring that we do not further decrease the number of men and women who are paid to be working journalists in this country.

I will leave my contribution to this debate and finish on this point: it is perhaps not unexpected, but it is unfortunate, that in what has been a very heated debate some of the important aspects of the legislation and what is being proposed have not had sufficient attention. Perhaps more time attended to the rollout process may have remedied that.

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House and Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) (18:39): I am very pleased to be able to sum up the debate on the Broadcasting Legislation Amendment (Convergence Review and Other Measures) Bill 2013. It responds to matters raised in the convergence review primarily in relation to Australian content and public broadcasting. The bill addresses the need for ongoing support for the broadcast of Australian content by legislating the 55 per cent Australian content quota on core or primary channels of free-to-air commercial television broadcasters. It also imposes a new Australian content transmission quota on these broadcasters that applies on core or primary channels.

The bill also provides increased flexibility to broadcasters in meeting Australian content obligations to assist them to respond to competitive market pressures. The bill also caps the number of commercial television broadcasting licences that use broadcasting services band spectrum at existing levels. The cap will ensure the remaining capacity in the television broadcasting services bands remains available for other types of broadcasting services including community broadcasting, narrowcasting and datacasting services.

The bill introduces amendments to the charters of the ABC and SBS to recognise their roles as providers of digital media content. The bill also implements the government's decision that the ABC should have the sole responsibility and be funded by government to provide international broadcasting services on an ongoing basis. These amendments recognise that Australia's international broadcasting service is an important public diplomacy platform which
should be provided by Australia's national broadcaster.

Finally, the bill requires the minister to have regard to the need to ensure that the SBS board includes at least one Indigenous director, strengthening the SBS contribution to the communications needs of Indigenous communities.

The Television Licence Fees Amendment Bill 2013 introduces amendments to the Television Licence Fees Act 1964 to provide a new annual licence fee scale for commercial television broadcasting licensees. These amendments will reduce the annual licence fees payable by commercial television broadcasters by 50 per cent to a maximum of 4.5 per cent of gross earnings. The reduction in licence fees provided for in this bill will enable commercial television broadcasters to continue to innovate and thrive in Australia's rapidly changing media landscape. I commend the bills to the House.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Consideration in Detail

Bill—by leave—taken as a whole.

Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth) (18:43): by leave—I move opposition amendments (1) and (2) as circulated in my name together.

The purpose of these amendments is, as I foreshadowed in my speech on the second reading debate, to delete the new section 31AA in the Australian Broadcasting Corporation Act, which has the intent of and the effect of making the ABC the only eligible party or entity with which the Commonwealth can contract to deliver international broadcasting services.

We entirely respect the viewpoint that the ABC is an appropriate body to deliver the Australia Network. It is not an unorthodox view to conclude that it is the most appropriate entity to deliver an international broadcasting service. But it is surely remarkable that, having held a tender only 18 or so months ago for the delivery of the Australia Network, where it invited other parties to tender—including Sky, of course, which notoriously won the tender twice but then did not get the job because it did not suit the Prime Minister—and having acknowledged the appropriateness of having a tender, the government is now not simply giving the job of delivering the Australia Network to the ABC but seeking to remove the possibility forever, or at least until such time as the parliament would change this law it is hoping to enact in the next few days, of a government being able to make this important job of acting as Australia's international broadcaster contestable.

As I said earlier today, you have the very real proposition that a future Managing Director of the ABC, and a future minister, may be in a discussion about this where the minister says to the Managing Director of the ABC, 'Look, I think you're asking for far too much money for this; we don't think this is a reasonable price you are offering'—and then has no ability to put the matter to tender, no ability to make it contestable. This flies in the face of every conceivable element of good practice because, where you can introduce contestability, you should. If nothing else, it would keep the ABC on its toes and would ensure that it would always have, in the back of its mind, the thought that, if it started to pad out the contract, or sought too much money, or was not efficient in delivering the services, the matter could go out to tender and another entity, a private sector broadcaster, could compete with it.

In summary, we make no criticisms of the ABC as a public broadcaster that has done a good job and is delivering Australia's public diplomacy vehicle, its international broadcasting services—the Australia
Network. We do not suggest it is an inappropriate broadcaster to deliver that service in the future. But the idea of removing any possibility of making this contestable seems utterly unreasonable, impractical, undesirable and thoroughly bad policy. I suppose we should not be surprised: it is consistent with all the bad policy and poor management we have seen from the government.

It indicates, if I may say, the chaotic dysfunctionality of the government—the fact that only 18 months ago, as I said, the government actually held a tender, so it clearly thought it was appropriate to make this matter contestable. And then when the result of the tender was not what the Prime Minister sought, the tender was scuttled and the ABC was given the contract. Future governments, not dysfunctional like this one—businesslike governments, reasonable governments, competent governments, like the one we hope to form following the election—will want to preserve that possibly of contestability. It may not always take advantage of it, it may not necessarily hold a tender, but you would want to have the ability to do so. This bill removes that possibility, and so our amendment, appropriately, is designed to delete section 31AA from the bill and leave the Commonwealth with that ability to have a tender and that discipline of contestability to ensure that the ABC, in making whatever proposal it makes to be the international broadcaster, does so on keen and competitive terms. I commend the amendments to the House.

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House and Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) (18:49): I appreciate the fact that I was able to have a discussion with the shadow minister earlier today about this very issue. I informed him at that time that the government would be opposing these amendments that have been put forward.

There are very strong public policy reasons for Australia's national broadcaster to provide the Australia Network service. The Australia Network is an important public diplomacy platform, as is the case with comparable operators such as the UK's BBC World Service, and it should be provided by the national broadcaster. You do not outsource this important service. The delivery of the Australia Network is subject to a funding agreement between the ABC and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to ensure that this service is delivered in line with the national interest.

The shadow minister has suggested that he concurs that, in normal circumstances, there are good public policy reasons for the ABC to perform this role, but he seems to be concerned that circumstances may arise where the ABC was imposing an unrealistically high charge on the government for delivering this service. The problem with the shadow minister's proposition is that it fails to take into account the structure of funding for the ABC as a government body. If it were the case that the ABC was seeking to gain extra revenue by overcharging by an amount on what could reasonably be expected to be an appropriate charge for delivering the service internationally, then the recourse to the government, as the funder of the public broadcaster would be immediate, clear and easy to implement.

It stands very clearly, in my view, that the only argument you can have for the shadow minister's amendment is not indeed the one that he puts forward about price gouging, if you like, in the way that the ABC puts itself forward but one that says the ABC should not register its concerns. So this is really just a Foxtel amendment the opposition has to
make a show of moving. There is an argument that you might want a private tenderer to do it, but that is not the case. So I oppose the amendments put forward.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Cheeseman): The question is that the amendment be agreed to. There being more than one voice calling for a division, a division is required and in accordance with standing order 133(b) the division is deferred until 8 pm. The debate on this item is therefore deferred until that time.

Mr BANDT (Melbourne) (18:53): by leave—I move amendments (1) and (2), circulated in my name, together:

(1) Schedule 1, item 5, page 5 (line 10), omit "1,095", substitute "1,460".

(2) Schedule 1, item 5, page 5 (line 17), omit "1,460", substitute "2,920".

These amendments go to the simple point of increasing Australian content on commercial television. In the Television Licence Fees Amendment Bill we are providing the TV broadcasters with a 50 per cent reduction in their licence fees. This recognises, as we appreciate, the significant commercial pressure faced by the commercial TV industry. But this gift of public spectrum comes in return for the Australian Content Standard, the stated objective of which is to promote:

... the role of broadcasting services in developing and reflecting a sense of Australian identity, character and cultural diversity, by supporting the community's continued access to television programs produced under Australian creative control.

When looking at the latest ACMA compliance results it is clear that free-to-air networks are far exceeding the required 55 per cent broadcast of Australian program hours on their main channels. In fact, they are each broadcasting between 60 and 67 per cent. Yet, the proposed regulation for Australian content on the multi-channels is comparatively very low.

The proposed regulation will only require the networks to screen local content for 12 per cent of the local broadcast hours across their multi-channels. This legislation allows the content hours to be spread across the multi-channels and includes repeats and sports. That is not the best way to protect Australian content producers—the writers, the artists, the technical expertise. That is why the Greens are proposing that we double Australian content. There needs to be a safety net that adequately protects the Australian public from cheap overseas imports, which according to Screen Australia typically cost around 75 per cent less per hour than the Australian equivalents. A recent Screen Australia study found that nine in 10 Australians believe it is important to have a film and television industry producing local content and that the most important benefit was to ensure that we are not overrun by cheap Hollywood imports. Those surveyed agreed that Australian content brings us together as a community and as a nation. Australian content is important for the strength of our democracy. Australian content enables us to express ourselves as Australians.

In 2000, the Productivity Commission stated on Australian content and drama in particular:

If availability of these programs to Australian audiences declined, a loss of social and cultural benefits to the community would be likely. Australian drama can be effective in providing information and education as well as entertainment, for example, by canvassing contemporary community issues and concerns. Documentaries have a direct role in providing information and education.

These are the fundamental cultural objectives of the Content Standard.
With the free-to-air networks so highly protected, the Australian public must not be short-changed by a safety net that iscrippingly low, given that the free-to-air networks enjoy new opportunities forlong-term growth once this transitional phase has passed.

These bills give us the opportunity not only to protect but to strengthen Australian content on commercial television. From the Greens perspective, given the now significant reduction in licence fees that will be afforded to the commercial TV networks upon passage of these bills, increasing local content in the manner prescribed in the amendments, an increase from 1,095 to 1,460 minimum hours of Australian programs in one section, and from 1,460 to 2,920 in another, is an acceptable amendment. I commend the amendments to the House.

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House and Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) (18:57): The government does not support these amendments. We are very supportive of increasing the amount of Australian content on commercial television channels other than the broadcaster's primary or main channel. However, the government also recognises that increased local content requirements will result in increased costs for broadcasters. So the new requirements will be phased in over time in accordance with industry consultation that has already been undertaken.

The government's bill already imposes an Australian content quota on commercial television broadcasters of 55 per cent between 6 am and midnight on their primary channels, as well as separate quotas on multi-channels during these times. This is an important reform. I am very much a supporter of increasing Australian content, and this bill does just that. But it is a matter of striking the right balance and of making sure that the change is affordable and achievable. I believe the government's bill has the balance right, and I commend the bill to the House. I again indicate that the government will not be supporting these amendments.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Cheeseman): The question is that the amendments be agreed to. There being more than one voice calling for a division, in accordance with standing order 133(b) the division is deferred until 8 pm. The debate on this item is therefore deferred until that time.

Television Licence Fees Amendment Bill 2013
Second Reading
Debate resumed on the motion:
That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House and Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) (19:00): I gave some comments on this legislation when summing up the previous bill. These two pieces of legislation—the Broadcasting Legislation Amendment (Convergence Review and Other Measures) Bill 2013 and the Television Licence Fees Amendment Bill 2013—essentially stand together, which is why we have had a cognate debate. I thank all members for their contributions to the debate. It is my understanding that this will be one that will go through with the unanimous support of the House, and I thank all those who have contributed.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Third Reading

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House and Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) (19:01): by leave—I move:
That this bill be now read a third time.
Question agreed to.
Bill read a third time.

**Broadcasting Legislation Amendment (News Media Diversity) Bill 2013**

**Second Reading**

Debate resumed on the motion:
That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth) (19:02):
At this moment, this chaotic and dysfunctional government, this government devoid of any purpose but a desire to survive, is turning this parliament into a farce. It is currently doing a dirty deal with various of the Independents to change the nature of the Public Interest Media Advocate. Who knows—it could be somebody selected from the member for Kennedy's electorate. Or it could, perhaps, be the member for Fisher; he is part of the discussions. It could be a panel. Nobody knows.

A little while ago, we thought we were going to deal with the four bills relating to the Public Interest Media Advocate together; we were going to debate them in a cognate way, because they all link together. They establish the Public Interest Media Advocate, and then they deal with the Public Interest Media Advocate's jurisdiction, his control over media acquisitions and his supervision of the content of newspapers via his oversight of the standards of the press council and so forth. But now we have learned, just in the last few minutes, of a dramatic change. The Leader of the House wants us to consider the Public Interest Media Advocate bill in isolation, at the very end—as the last bill on the program. And the reason for that is: he does not know what it is going to say. He is still negotiating its contents. He is still doing his deals with the crossbenchers. Not only has Senator Conroy demanded that the parliament pass this legislation without due process, without due consideration, without any opportunity for interested parties to present their cases before committees and without any opportunity for proper debate; now, in what can only be described as the most absurd farce this wretched government has dragged this parliament into, we are being asked to consider a bill, and pass it, which refers again and again to the Public Interest Media Advocate. Again and again, it runs through the bill: 'The PIMA does this,' 'The PIMA does that,' 'The PIMA has this responsibility,' 'The PIMA must use his or her best endeavours,' 'If the PIMA accepts the variation,' and 'Before making a decision the PIMA must'—it goes on and on and on. That is what this bill is all about.

Yet we do not know what the PIMA is going to be, because the PIMA is defined as the Public Interest Media Advocate as established in the Public Interest Media Advocate Act 2013. Well, the Public Interest Media Advocate Bill 2013, which is the foundation of this whole exercise, is a work in progress. The Leader of the House does not know what it involves. The minister on the other side of the table does not know what the Public Interest Media Advocate will be. Who knows? Is this policy making on the run—legislation on the run? What sort of government is this? It is asking parliament to pass a law which vests enormous power in a public official, of which the identity, the nature, the term, the qualifications, the duties and even the number—we do not know whether the public interest advocate might not be a troika: three people; that is one of the things that has been put to them by the crossbenchers—all of that detail, is unknown. This is completely and utterly absurd.

I never thought the government would reach this low. But every time you think the
government have plumbed the depths of absurdity and dysfunctionality, they find a new depth to which they can sink, and that is what they are doing tonight.

Now what are we debating? What is this Public Interest Media Advocate? Who is it? Who is she? Are there three? Are there five? Are they appointed for life? Do they have to be residents of a particular electorate? Are they appointed for three years or four years? What are their qualifications? We have no idea. And we have no idea because the government have no idea.

They have no concept of what they are doing and yet this is the work of a minister, Senator Conroy, the man famous for saying he is so powerful he can force business executives to wear red underpants on their heads. This is the work of a minister who said, only few days ago, that this whole package was non-negotiable and said: 'There will be no bartering.' I will tell you what: there is plenty of bartering going on tonight. Who knows what is being offered in return, because the Prime Minister realises that this is a test of confidence. In the House today, she was not prepared to say that the failure of these bills would be a vote of no confidence, but she knows her backbench are staring at oblivion ahead of them in the election. They know that they are being dug into a deeper and deeper hole by the incompetence of this crew.

You have to wonder whether there is not a sort of Manchurian candidate element, and I am not referring to the member for Griffith and his famous skills in Chinese. But we know that on the weekend before last there was a meeting at the Lodge at which Senator Conroy persuaded the Prime Minister that this media reform package—never has 'reform' been used as ill-advisedly as on this occasion—should be brought in with the demand that it be passed in four days. So it was presented to the cabinet as a fait accompli. It was decided at the Lodge by this group.

One of those present was the Leader of the House, the member for Grayndler, and I wonder whether there was not a bit of a Manchurian candidate element there. I wonder, given his notorious affection for the member for Griffith and his even more notorious lack of affection for Senator Conroy, whether he did not rub his hands in a Mr Burns imitation, welcoming this opportunity to create even more disaster for his boss. Who knows? The fact of the matter is this: we as legislators should be doing our work in a responsible way. Let's reflect on this: the government is asking us to pass a law, this bill, which gives a person, an official, called the Public Interest Media Advocate, enormous powers over media acquisitions. Basically, the Public Interest Media Advocate can determine whether a media takeover can go ahead on the basis of concepts as wafty as public interest and public benefit—completely undefined.

From a legal point of view, it is a hopeless proposition that will only lead to uncertainty and political influence peddling, because we all know there is nothing more political than media acquisition. Why did the Hawke and Keating government allow Rupert Murdoch's News Ltd to buy the Herald and Weekly Times in 1986 and create the concentration of daily newspaper ownership that they now keep complaining about? It was their creation—the whole transaction was written and directed by the Labor Party, and Paul Keating subsequently said it was done in order to pay back Fairfax for their unfavourable coverage of the Labor government. If you ever want proof that you should not allow wafty concepts like public interest to come into legislation like this, there you have it.
We have no idea who the Public Interest Media Advocate is. We do not know who is going to appoint them or how they are going to be appointed—that is all up in the air. All members—and I appeal to all members of this House: government members, crossbenchers and, of course, all our colleagues on the coalition side—should be ashamed that the government have presented this bill here. The government should be ashamed. If they do not have their ducks in a row, if they cannot deliver on their promise of no bartering with the crossbenchers and if they have to do a deal with the crossbenchers on the identity of the Public Interest Media Advocate, common sense dictates that we should move on to another matter of business. Then, if and when they finally reach some resolution, let them bring it back in and we can have a debate about who and what the Public Interest Media Advocate would be. Having determined that and having settled that, you can discuss the powers this Public Interest Media Advocate should have.

We know that the government have been infuriated by their treatment within newspapers, in particular within News Ltd newspapers. I said in this House only yesterday that they have taken a beating in the press, they have taken a beating on the ABC, they have taken a beating on the commercial broadcasters, and they have taken a beating in every pub, club, street corner, coffee shop and workplace around Australia, and they have taken that beating because they have been such a hopeless government and because they do things like this. This militant idiocy is serial incompetence. How can you seriously ask the parliament to consider a law giving enormous power to an official without knowing who that official will be and how that official will be appointed? That is what we are being asked to do tonight. That is the depth of the absurdity.

For the purpose of the remainder of my remarks, let's assume that the Public Interest Media Advocate is a government official appointed in the manner that was originally proposed, before the non-bartering communications minister started doing his dirty deals with the crossbenchers. Let's assume that it is still what they had before. What the government is saying is that, in order to protect diversity—which presumably means competition—you need to have a new official.

The reality is that we have a high degree of concentration in the metropolitan daily newspaper market; we know that. It was created by the Labor Party, or enabled by the Labor Party. But we also know that in the intervening nearly 30 years there have been enormous technological changes. The arrival of the internet and social media and all these other platforms has resulted in a vastly enhanced range of information sources. The Murdoch share of the newspaper market is as big as it was in 1986, when they bought the Herald and Weekly Times. But the newspaper share of the overall media and news information pie is much smaller and is getting smaller every day. That is a fact.

So, diversity is on the increase; it is improving. We are seeing more variety. People are much less dependent on any one source of information. I am not sure that I am enamoured of this neologism, but there is a new expression—multisourcing—which is the phenomenon that I think we all experience. We are getting our news and information from a combination of Twitter, Facebook and some online sources—the ABC, commercial radio, online newspapers and blogs and of course, from time to time, even hard copy. All of that has dramatically changed the way news is being looked at. So
you would have to say that if you were concerned about concentration in the Australian media you would be comforted, really, by the technological changes we are experiencing at the moment. That, of course, is why the government's claim that this is all about protecting diversity is such humbug. It has no credibility.

Having created the lack of diversity, at least in the metropolitan newspaper market, they are now, just as we are seeing more diversity, trying to insert this new official. And you also have to ask yourself: if you are concerned about monopolies being created, or a substantial lessening of competition, doesn't the ACCC do that already? Isn't the ACCC there to regulate competition laws? And didn't the ACCC recently stop Kerry Stokes buying a greater share in Fox? That was the system working. The laws are there. It is a remarkable thing—but I suppose we should not be surprised, given the events of the last hour or so—that here you have, for the first time in our peacetime history, the government creating a public official answerable to the government who would have an involvement in, oversight of and influence over the content of newspapers.

It is remarkable, isn't it, that there has been no effort to deliver a regulatory impact statement. A regulatory impact statement should be produced with every piece of legislation. This is, on any view, a very big deal. The RIS requires a number of things to be done. One of them is to ask: 'What exactly are you trying to achieve? What are the objects? What is the mischief? What is the problem we are trying to address?' We have asked the Prime Minister several times now in question time: 'Give us an example of the problem you are seeking to address. What has gone wrong? What requires you to take this new step?' And of course she has not been able to provide any such evidence. No, she does not have any explanation for it. And then the RIS would ask: 'What are the impacts on the industry? What are the costs and benefits associated with this additional regulation?''

I remember when the Rudd government was elected they were going to cut red tape. They were also going to do a cost-benefit analysis of major infrastructure projects. There were a lot of things they were going to do, and of course there were a few things they were not going to do, too, such as a carbon tax. So, keeping promises has never been a strong suit. But this is a classic case of where there should have been a careful, sober, objective analysis of what the problem is, what the options are for dealing with it, how this proposal measures up. But we see none of that. We see this hectic rush to get the legislation passed, and no-one is given any explanation for why it is so urgent. We recall—I think it was about 18 months ago, or perhaps a little longer—when the phone hacking scandal emerged in the United Kingdom. The Prime Minister leapt on that and said, in her best effort to appear chilling, that News Limited had hard questions to answer. And of course News Limited's response was to ask, 'What are those questions?' She could not nominate any of those questions. What she was trying to do, of course, was to take advantage of the disgraceful and indeed criminal conduct by employees of news in the United Kingdom and somehow or other taint the organisation here with the responsibility for that.

But it has to be said that the phone hacking offences that were committed in the United Kingdom were serious breaches of British criminal law. Whatever criticisms can be made of the police over there in the past, the fact is that people are being arrested, people are being charged, people will be brought to trial and perhaps several of them will spend time in jail as a consequence. The criminal justice system is working there—
and it is perhaps somewhat overdue. But there has been no counterpart to that in this country. We have had no evidence of any atrocities of that kind. The only offence the News Limited papers seem to have committed is not running headlines every day saying what a fabulous job the Prime Minister is doing! Well, they actually had a piece in the Telegraph today saying much the same thing—but it was a satirical column. It is very difficult to expect a government to be happy with the media, but to seek to regulate it simply because you are unhappy with the headlines and the treatment is really the stuff of authoritarianism. That is why the various proprietors and chief executives and editors have been so critical.

Just looking at some of the feedback on this public interest test in terms of media acquisitions, I note that Graeme Samuel, the former chairman of the ACCC, who obviously knows a great deal about competition law, said:

The public interest is extremely difficult to define and has a tendency to morph into a political interest. It would give those in government greater control over the media.

And he is quite right. I note also—and Free TV, which is the industry body of the free-to-air television stations made this point, and it is a very powerful one—that they pointed to the uncertainty and subjectivity of the public interest test as introducing, as I have said earlier, a very high degree of complexity, as well as an increased likelihood of contested results. They said:

For example in the UK, consideration of the BSkyB/ITV case took more than three years to resolve, including references to both the Competition Appeal Tribunal and Court of Appeal. It has been observed that one of the problems with the public interest test in the UK is that too much discretion is given to regulators, which leads to contested decisions. Again, this leads to uncertainty for industry.

In my youth, I used to practice in the area of broadcasting law and I have been involved in a professional way with many of the big media takeovers in Australia. I represented Kerry Packer when he sold the Nine Network to Alan Bond. I represented him when he bought it back. I was involved in restructuring Network Ten. I sold Network Ten on behalf of Westpac, who owned it after it had gone into receivership. And there were many other transactions involving Fairfax and so forth. This is an area of practice I am very familiar with—media acquisitions.

I can say without any shadow of doubt that they are always intensely controversial and intensely political. The best practice is to keep the politicians out of it because what would-be proprietors will always do, if they need a political approval—and it does not matter who is in government—is offer fine headlines, good coverage and good return for some sort of governmental approval. We are better off not creating that temptation if we can possibly avoid it.

That is why, in this industry of all industries, the merger rules should be absolutely black and white. There are some very clear ownership limitations in the Broadcasting Services Act. They have changed over the years but they are very clear, black and white rules about overlapping ownership and concentration of ownership. The laws relating to competition in the Competition and Consumer Act are, again, very well understood. They are litigated from time to time but there is a huge body of law and jurisprudence around them and people are familiar with it.

To introduce this into the media landscape is simply designed to ensure a highly political process, because the way it is proposed to work is that, if the Public Interest Media Advocate thinks there is any
diminution in voices—that is to say, any acquisition, by definition, is going to result in some diminution of voices because one media outlet is going to buy an asset, a competitor, a rival or whatever—the Public Interest Media Advocate then has to weigh up whether that is in the public interest or of public benefit, a completely and utterly undefinable term. That inevitably will result in a highly intense political argument.

I cast my mind back to the Fairfax takeover in 1991. Earlier in the year I had assembled the Toorang group with Conrad Black, Kerry Packer and other colourful individuals on one side and Tony O'Reilly on the other. Everyone was running down trying to get okays from Canberra because, of course, there was a political element because there were foreign ownership considerations on both sides. You cannot get around that, and the Foreign Acquisitions and Takeovers Act is there for the long term.

This law would add an entirely additional political element. It would give the politicians more discretion. You can say, yes, there will be this regulator who will act completely independently but that regulator will be appointed by government and government will expect him or her to do the right thing. All of those temptations will be there. As I said right at the outset of my remarks, in this new depth of absurdity, even for this government, we do not even know who this all-powerful official or officials will be. At the present time we have no idea, nor does the government, what the identity of the Public Interest Media Advocate will be.

Honourable members could quite legitimately take very different approaches to this bill, depending on whom that Public Interest Media Advocate could be. Some members might be attracted to it, depending on how the Public Interest Media Advocate is appointed. And so the logical thing, of course, is to deal with it at the outset.

It is hard to understand why the government is rushing into this in the way it is. It is very difficult to see where the urgency arises. Kerry Stokes, the Chairman of Seven West, spoke for a lot of people when he said, 'I can only recall legislation passed in this haste in the wake of 9/11.' That was a time when we all felt, with more than a little justification, in Australia and in the Western world generally, that we were under almost existential threat. That was a time of war and there was enormous anxiety, and legislation was rushed through. But where is the urgency here? What is the imperative? What is the reason for this? Some people have speculated that the Prime Minister is just looking for a distraction, but I am not quite sure what it is a distraction from. Is she trying to distract people from her other failures and so create a dysfunctional mess that is so great that it distracts people from the other dysfunctional messes? Is Senator Conroy smarting under the realisation that the NBN project is going to miss its targets yet again and, under its current rate of construction, it could take over a century to complete the build?

Mr Irons interjecting—

Mr TURNBULL: They would no doubt have to lift their pace, as the member reminds me. What is the distraction? What is the explanation? We have none. As I said, we have been told that there will be no bartering, but what we know is going on now behind closed doors is just that.

This is a bad law. There is no justification for involving the government any more than it is already in media acquisitions. We have adequate laws to deal with competition. If there are threats to diversity, the competition laws can deal with them. And we can be comforted by the reality that diversity is
increasing, not diminishing, thanks to technology. The idea of having a new official overseeing the content of newspapers, which is the subject of another bill, is disgraceful. The idea that we would for the first time in our peacetime history have the government involved in the content of newspapers is surely a shocking step and one that, were it ever to be contemplated, should be taken with great care and after due consideration.

But tonight we are the victims of a tragic farce. We are here, as I have said, considering a law which will place a government official, an entity, a public interest media advocate, a PIMA, in charge of media acquisitions, and we do not know what that PIMA will be. We do not know who the person will be, who will appoint that person or what their term will be. We know nothing, because the PIMA Bill itself is the one that is being negotiated, with bartering and backroom deals going on with the Independents. Surely this is a government that has sunk very low before, but this must be its lowest moment. This is the moment when it has not only made a farce of its own efforts but sought to make a farce and, in doing so, dishonour this parliament, insult this parliament, insult the intelligence and responsibility of this parliament and, of course, the millions of Australians whom we all represent.

**Mr Wyatt** (Hasluck) (19:31): I rise today to speak to the Broadcasting Legislation Amendment (New Media Diversity) Bill 2013. I unreservedly agree with the comments made by the member for Wentworth. This bill forms part of a package of media reform legislation that the government is trying to ram through the parliament in a desperate last-ditch effort before it runs out of time before the election. Plain and simple, it is an election ploy. If it is not an election ploy then it has to be a means to control the media. Not only the way in which the government is trying to push through this legislation raises questions—and I will move onto that in a moment; the very content of these bills raises serious concerns about our collective direction, as a nation, if these bills are successful.

There is no doubt that the proposals before us today are the most onerous regulation of the press in peacetime history. This bill presents a bleak future for our nation and for the freedom of media outlets. This package of bills removes the independence of media from government both in terms of ownership decisions and in terms of self-regulation. We have all seen the grandstanding by both the media and this Labor government over the last week with regard to media reform. We have seen ultimatums being thrown out and we have seen the media respond in a very colourful way. However, it is vital that we look past this grandstanding and give effective debate to the reality of this situation. The point is that these bills are effectively trying to restrict Australian media's ability to do its job—that is, to inform Australians about current affairs. In Australia, we are fortunate to have a media that is independent of all levels of government and that acts as a watchdog to the ultimate benefit of the public.

It has been a longstanding unofficial title that the media is the fourth estate of our democracy—an estate that brings to the mind of the Australian public those factors that they need to be aware of. It exposes those who involve themselves in behaviours that are not acceptable to the society in which we live—and we have certainly seen that over the last 12 months with the exposure of some Labor individuals and the practices that have prevailed at various levels. Although times may have changed since Edmund Burke first
coined the phrase 'fourth estate', the purpose and role of media in Australia has not.

In our democracy, media performs the critical role of keeping the public informed about government activities. By virtue of its independence, media has been able to comment on the performance of governments and oppositions, to hold them accountable for their actions, to question their actions and to create the public debate that causes the public pressure that needs to be brought to bear on particular issues which impact on the lives of ordinary Australians—families, communities, states and territories.

The independence of the media has granted journalists the ability to criticise or applaud based on the virtues of an action or situation. The bills that this Labor government is attempting to pass today remove the media's independence from government. The bills that this Labor government is attempting to pass today place the final say on ownership decisions and media content into the hands of a government-appointed regulator. These bills grant a government regulator, the Public Interest Media Advocate, with the ability to evaluate the standards and codes of conduct in relation to privacy, fairness and accuracy. These bills place a public officer in charge of private media in a move that equates to government control.

Anybody who holds an office that is funded from a government source is inadvertently under the influence of their minister or their respective line of authority. As a member of the Joint Committee on Human Rights, I am well aware that article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights guarantees freedom of expression for all Australians on all issues. It accords them the opportunity to challenge that within their society with which they are not happy. Therefore I will continually argue that our media should be free from the constraints of governments.

Clearly, this proposed Public Interest Media Advocate will have the capacity to determine media standards. Not only this, but the scope of the Public Interest Media Advocate is so vague that it will be open to the interpretation of the government of the day, with ultimate control resting with the minister and the Prime Minister. To make matters more serious yet, media outlets will have no right of redress for decisions made by the Public Interest Media Advocate. Decisions of the Public Interest Media Advocate are binding and media outlets will face potentially high costs if they withdraw complaints.

All of these measures are designed with the intent to minimise opportunities for media outlets to question the judgement of the government and will no doubt strike fear into the heart of journalists. By all means, while we may not always like or agree with the coverage of politics in the media, those of us on this side of the chamber accept that the media perform an important function of informing Australians about the activities of this place within a democracy. It is simply not possible to expect a government controlled regulator of a free press to adequately keep a government accountable for its decisions.

This Labor government has only demonstrated once more that it is dysfunctional and in chaos. Trying to push through this legislation without proper scrutiny is a slap across the face to the many individuals within the media who believe they are performing a critical role in our democracy. This package of legislation was only revealed last week, with the government having the intention of pushing it through the parliament as quickly as possible. This government has been talking about making
changes for two years now, but has left it until the eleventh hour to take any action, expecting that all stakeholders will simply fall in line on these controversial changes. Not even the government's own members were given the opportunity to properly scrutinise this legislation.

Now the Prime Minister and her cronies are attempting to force feed all members of this parliament, leaving no room for disagreement. The minister has been playing tough cop all week, telling the parliament that it could take it or leave it and that there was no flexibility to negotiate this legislation. When it became clear yesterday and today that this package did not have the support of Independent MPs, the government did a quick shuffle, backtracking from its tough cop stance.

We have to ask why the government is so concerned that it feels it necessary to push these reforms through without adequate opportunity to scrutinise the legislation. This is a growing trend for this government, which seems to believe that it does not need to allow scrutiny of the bills that it brings before the parliament. Once again it would seem that this government is more concerned about its own survival than it is about the greater good of governance of our country. The government is the only beneficiary of these reforms. This is most definitely detrimental to the quality of content in our media and most definitely detrimental to the national interest.

This government does not have a good track record when it comes to legislative reform. We need only look as far as the carbon tax and the mining tax to see two examples of mismanagement of government programs and ineffective legislation. This government does not have a good track record when it comes to administering new programs.

Ironically, this is not something that has escaped the notice of media. Seven West Media Chairman, Kerry Stokes, has said: 'I can only recall legislation being pushed in this haste in the wake of 9/11. My submission is you shouldn't be doing any of this.' Fairfax Media CEO, Greg Hywood, said, 'To be plain, the impression, voiced almost universally over the weekend, is that the process is at least unseemingly rushed and the bills mirror that state of affairs.' Network Ten's Hamish McLennan said, 'The implications for regional Australia are great and that we shouldn't rush the changes through.'

The Public Interest Media Advocate will require all media voices to register with the government. This alone creates confusion as to what the definition of 'media voice' will be. Where will the line between a personal online blog discussing current affairs and an online media outlet containing discussion of public affairs be drawn? Surely personal opinion will be a huge part of decisions made by the Public Interest Media Advocate and the so-called public interest will be open to enormous interpretation. This bill will require all media voices to consult before any changes to ownership are made. All changes will need to be approved by the so-called Public Interest Media Advocate.

These changes are wide-reaching and significant, yet industry and stakeholder input into developing these reforms has been minimal. Now that these reforms have been announced, the government seems determined not to consider the impact on the sector. It would seem that this government is so tied up in its own agenda that it is not interested in having a discussion with the media about the changes it intends to enforce. Fairfax Media CEO Greg Hywood has said:

The practical application of this legislation is that it sets up a model where a minister of the
government can pick up the phone to his own appointee and say 'fix it'. 'Fix it' being 'get the media off our backs' ... It is our strong view the fact that a government feels it is not getting a fair go from one or other media outlet is a very poor reason to regulate, in fact it is the worst reason. We believe (we) feel that the introduction of a government-appointed regulator to oversee print and digital newsgathering journalism will have seriously dangerous consequences for good government.

This Labor government is trying to have the entire debate of media reform caught up in media diversity.

Media diversity is a challenge that we need to face. It is a complicated and serious challenge that we should consider. It is a challenge that is caught up in the emergence of new media and a diversity of media platforms. It is also a challenge that is caught up in the emergence of shared content, for example with the collaboration of News Limited and Network Ten's Meet the Press. But this is not a challenge that is unpacked or solved by these bills. In fact this legislation barely scratches the surface of dealing with media diversity and instead presents a heavy-handed approach that benefits no stakeholders.

Media diversity is not a challenge that should have a bandaid solution applied to it without adequate consultation or discussion. It is an ongoing challenge that requires the investment of time, discussion and industry input. It is a challenge that needs serious consideration, not the half-baked attempt that this government has presented in this legislation. It is for this reason that I must add my voice in opposition to these bills today.

Mr McCormack (Riverina) (19:44): I rise to speak about the media reform bills and note that, as I understand it, as I stand here there are various backroom deals going on to allow these bills to be passed. I just attended a function in parliament at which the member for New England was scurrying around looking for somebody. Perhaps it was the Leader of the House. At the moment there is a lot of movement and colour going on around here but no-one seems to know why there is such indecent haste to get this particular legislation through.

The Leader of the House is still not quite sure what these bills will say because he is still negotiating the legislation with the Independents. The Public Interest Media Advocate Bill—one of the six planks of this legislation—is still a work in progress. There is no act, yet one of these bills refers to the PIMA Act. It is shameful policy on the run.

The member for Wentworth said in his speech that he never thought the government could plumb these depths, but that is precisely what this Labor government is doing tonight. We have no idea who or what the PIMA is, because the government itself has no idea. The Prime Minister realises that this is a test of confidence. Indeed it is.

When I was the editor of the Daily Advertiser at Wagga Wagga we ran a line across the editorial which read:

This is true liberty, when free-born men, having to advise the public, may speak free. That particular line—a quote from Milton—had been on the newspaper since the paper's first edition way back on 10 October 1868. It was still there, and run in every single edition, certainly until I left in February 2002. When we think about that particular quote we realise that it is so true. When we have a democracy in which people can 'speak free' we have true democracy. When people are able to say what they think—within the parameters of common decency and defamation—that is to be desired.

I have an editor near my electorate of the Riverina, Tertia Butcher, who emailed me this week—she comes from Africa—saying
that she felt that the media censorship laws were far greater here than what they were where she comes from. She feared that if this sort of legislation passes—even though we are still not quite aware of what it all entails—we could have more draconian laws than some African countries. This government's claim that it is doing this in the name of regulation is nonsense.

The media is already very well regulated. The court of public opinion will always tell a news organisation whether it has crossed the line. The court of public opinion, certainly in this day and age of social media, will determine whether a radio station loses advertising. The public will vigorously lobby companies to stop advertising. We saw that last year, when Alan Jones said what he said. We all know about that; we do not have to go into that again. When the broadcaster Alan Jones went a tad too far the court of public opinion certainly let his radio station know that that was transgressing, that it was a bridge too far. People voted with their feet, and people should be able to continue to do that without needing a public interest advocate.

I interjected in question time yesterday—when the question was about who it might be—that the public advocate might be Bob Brown. Who would know who this Labor government might put as the public interest advocate—the guardian of journalism, the person who is going to decide who has done the wrong thing!

I find it interesting that the member for Lyne would be doing these backroom deals at the moment to get this legislation through, when it was the member for Lyne who, in 2010, gave that rambling 17-minute speech about letting the sunshine in, kumbaya, 'beauty in its ugliness', and all those lines. He was getting on his high moral horse about how things should be run and yet, as I understand it, he is doing backroom deals with Labor to try to get this legislation through. In fairness to the member for Lyne, he said that he would not back it. I hope he keeps his word, because this is an attack on the media. It is an attack on free speech. It cannot be seen as anything else. Why Labor would want to do this in an election year is unfathomable; but why Labor would want to do it in the first place is unconscionable.

As for some of the other bits of legislation involved in this, the government's claim that they are protecting diversity is sheer humbug. It was the Labor Party in government which led to a concentration of media ownership in the Australian newspaper market with the sale of the Herald and Weekly Times to Rupert Murdoch in 1987. Keeping promises has never been a strong suit of this government. Phone hacking was a serious breach of British law, but are we seeing the John McTernan influence on the Prime Minister? I know that the government in Britain at the moment—the Tory government, as Labor would call them—are bringing in certain public interest tests for their media, but we have always known that the British media does go that bridge too far. We have always known that the British media are quite different to the Australian media.

The Australian media are responsible. The Australian media are accountable. I can see you smiling, Deputy Speaker Lyons, but it is true. Certainly we might not always like what is written about us—we have all in this place had articles written about us that were not quite accurate—but there is always the ability to pick up the phone and ring the editor and say, 'Look, that's not quite right.' And, by and large, newspaper editors respond with corrections or clarifications. I see you shaking your head, Deputy Speaker Lyons. There is another way that we can address those problems and it is called the
Press Council. It has operated very effectively. Even the newspaper in my home town has had rulings against it by the Press Council in matters relating to local government coverage. And, in good faith, the newspaper reported those particular findings in a prominent space so that the readers knew that the Press Council had found against it. The readers knew that the Press Council had done its job—and that is the way it ought to be.

ACMA does the same job with respect to broadcasters.

I do not know how often, when I am driving around my large electorate, I hear on the community radio bands, and certainly on the commercial radio bands, people being urged to ring the radio station in the first instance if they think that the radio station has aired something that was not quite right. Then they will put them in touch with the relevant authority to see that that particular problem or issue is resolved. Television stations are also subject to defamation laws with their news coverage and they are subject to content discretion with their TV programming.

For the government to say that this is necessary is just rubbish, and we all know it. We all know this is an attack on News Limited. We all know Labor does not like the coverage it is receiving. The only offence the News Limited papers have really committed in this country is to write headlines about how great a job the Prime Minister is doing, because we know she is not. We know that Labor is not governing properly. But I must say that the coverage has been balanced. The Fairfax papers always seem to find a way to report that Labor is doing a reasonable job, and indeed some of the policies that Labor have put forward could be construed as being half decent, but it is just the delivery. I can see the member for Makin smiling. Some of your party's policies are quite decent, but it is just the way you put them into practicality, the way you implement them, that is making everybody sick and tired of the way Labor is governing.

This legislation is important. We cannot put in place measures which are going to muzzle our media. It has never been on. As the member for Wentworth has said repeatedly, there has been absolutely no media watchdog like this that government has wanted to put in place in our peacetime. It is not needed. It has not been needed in the past and it is not needed now. With those remarks, I will sit down so that I can allow the member for Hughes to make some very pertinent comments on this legislation.

Mr CRAIG KELLY (Hughes) (19:55): I rise to speak on the Broadcasting Legislation Amendment (News Media Diversity) Bill 2013. I have a copy of the bill here. It has 74 pages and there are another 52 pages in the explanatory memorandum. I wonder how many members of the government that will come into this chamber shortly and vote for this nonsense have actually read either of these documents. For, if they did, they would see that the bill makes reference to the Public Interest Media Advocate over and over and over again. The only problem is that who the Public Interest Media Advocate is, how they will be selected and what terms they will have are all in a separate bill, which was due to be debated and voted on at the same time. What we have here tonight in our federal parliament is an absolute farce of procedure. We have a government that is completely out of control, that does not have a clue what it is doing and that is making it up minute by minute. Is it any wonder that the country is in such a mess? Is it any wonder that our national debt is heading north of $260 billion? If the government cannot organise this parliament to run here tonight in an
efficient manner, where we are actually voting on legislation that ties together, what hope have they got?

The SPEAKER: Just for the record, we are speaking on individual bills, not the package. It is not a cognate debate, so I do refer you to the actual bill before the chair.

Mr CRAIG KELLY: Correct, and that is the concern. We are voting on and speaking on separately the broadcasting legislation amendment bill 2013, which has reference throughout it to the Public Interest Media Advocate. But the detail of that Public Interest Media Advocate is in a separate bill that we were originally, less than half an hour ago, meant to debate and vote on together. Now we understand there are some backroom deals going on somewhere else in Parliament House, trying to stitch up the votes of Independents. The procedure is an utter and complete farce.

Looking at the provisions of the bill, what is the mischief, what is the evil, that these bills are meant to remedy? No-one from the government side has been able to identify this. We already have the ACCC, which has a substantial lessening of competition test for mergers. The ACCC investigates mergers in this country. The process is working; it is working reasonably well. We have already seen the ACCC bar the Seven Group from bidding for Consolidated Media Holdings. We have already seen the ACCC active in the media, finding where there will be a substantial lessening of competition and blocking those mergers. This is simply an overlap of legislation.

But the real concern is that, with decisions that this public media advocate makes, there can be no appeal. They become the judge and jury. Under the ACCC process, there is a process of appeals where, if a company disagrees with what the ACCC have done because it does not like the ACCC’s verdict in blocking its merger, it has the right to take that decision through our courts. This bill does not include that right to take a decision through the courts.

We know the reason for this bill. It is simply that this government desires to suppress any opinion that does not align with its policies. It is simply the government deciding to silence any criticism of its policies. That is what this bill is all about.

Secondly, what is the rush? Why are we rushing these bills through parliament tonight? These bills were introduced only a few days ago, on the last sitting day of last week. What is the rush to get these through parliament? Why are the government and the minister seeking to trample on the parliamentary processes and rush through this legislation—legislation that, for the first time in our nation's history outside of wartime, attempts to put controls on the media? Are we facing an invasion? Is that the reason? Have hostile foreign troops landed on our shores? Is that the reason for the urgency of this legislation? What national emergency has arisen that has caused this government to abandon all due process and rush this legislation through our parliament?

We know these proposed media laws are all about pressuring a free press to prop up a completely dysfunctional government. This mad rush that we are seeing here tonight, this dysfunctional process, is just one example of the bad judgment of this Prime Minister and this government, which continues to make it up as it goes along. Two centuries ago, the great and wise Adam Smith, in his book *The Wealth of Nations*, left us a warning. Smith wrote:

The proposal of any new law or regulation of commerce which comes from this order, ought always to be listened to with great precaution, and ought never to be adopted till after having been long and carefully examined, not only with the
most scrupulous, but with the most suspicious attention. It comes from an order of men, whose interest is never exactly the same with that of the public, who have generally an interest to deceive and even to oppress the public, and who accordingly have upon many occasions, both deceived and oppressed it.

Adam Smith was a great visionary. But, when he warned about an order ‘whose interest is never exactly the same with that of the public, who have generally an interest to deceive and even to oppress the public, and who accordingly have upon many occasions, both deceived and oppressed it,’ even Adam Smith in his wildest dreams could not have imagined how accurately his words could be applied to this Labor government. One only has to look at its long and shameful record.

I would hope that tonight someone on the opposition benches will step forward, show some leadership and call this farce for what it is. Any one of these government members could call off this farce. The process is a farce, the legislation is a farce and it is damaging to our nation. This legislation should be rejected, and I hope at least one member on the other side will show some courage and come and sit with us to reject this legislation here tonight.

The SPEAKER: Before calling the next speaker in this debate, I will deal with the division that was called after 6.30 pm. I took the view that the deferred division should not be proceeded with until the member speaking at 8 pm had completed his speech, and so I did not interrupt the member. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for a later hour.

Broadcasting Legislation Amendment (Convergence Review and Other Measures) Bill 2013

Consideration in Detail

The SPEAKER (20:04): In accordance with standing order 133(b), I shall now proceed to put the question on the motion moved by the honourable member for Wentworth on which a division was called for and deferred in accordance with standing orders. No further debate is allowed. The question is that the amendments moved by the member for Wentworth be agreed to.

The House divided [20:09]

(The Speaker—Ms Anna Burke)

Ayes .................71
Noes .................75
Majority............4

AYES

Abbott, AJ
Andrews, KJ
Baldwin, RC
Bishop, BK
Briggs, JE
Buchholz, S
Christensen, GR
Cobb, JK
Crook, AJ
Entsch, WG
Frydenberg, JA
Gash, J
Haase, BW
Hawke, AG
Hunt, GA
Jensen, DG
Keenan, M
Laming, A
Macfarlane, IE
Markus, LE
McCormack, MF
Morrison, SJ
Neville, PC
O’Dwyer, KM
Pyne, CM
Randall, DJ
Robert, SR
Ruddock, PM
Scott, BC
Simpkins, LXL

Alexander, JG
Andrews, KL
Billson, BF
Bishop, JI
Broadbent, RE
Chester, D
Ciobo, SM
Coulton, M (teller)
Dutton, PC
Fletcher, PW
Gambaro, T
Griggs, NL
Hartsuyker, L
Hockey, JB
Irons, SJ
Jones, ET
Kelly, C
Ley, SP
Marino, NB
Matheson, RG
Mirabella, S
Moylan, JE
O’Dowd, KD
Prentice, J
Ramsey, RE
Robb, AJ
Roy, WB
Schultz, AJ
Secker, PD (teller)
Smith, ADH
AYES

Somlyay, AM  Stone, SN  Truss, WE  Turnbull, MB  Vasta, RX  Wyatt, KG

Southcott, AJ  Tehan, DT  Tudge, AE  Van Manen, AJ  Washer, MJ

NOES


PAIRS

Forrest, JA  Fitzgibbon, JA

Question negatived.

The SPEAKER: In accordance with standing order 133(b) I shall now proceed to put the question on the motion moved earlier by the honourable member for Melbourne, on which a division was called for and deferred in accordance with the standing order. No further debate is allowed. The question is that the member for Melbourne's amendment be agreed to.

A division having been called and the bells having been rung—

The SPEAKER: As there are fewer than five members on the side for the ayes, I declare the question resolved in the negative in accordance with standing order 127. The names of those members who are in the minority will be recorded in the Votes and Proceedings.

Question negatived, Mr Bandt, Mr Wilkie and Mr Slipper voting yes.

Bill agreed to.

Third Reading

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House and Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) (20:17): by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

Insurance Contracts Amendment Bill 2013

Report from Federation Chamber

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

Bill agreed to.

Third Reading

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House and Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) (20:18): by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.
Bill read a third time.

Foreign Affairs Portfolio
Miscellaneous Measures Bill 2013

Report from Federation Chamber

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

Bill agreed to.

Third Reading

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House and Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) (20:19): by leave—I move:
That this bill be now read a third time.
Question agreed to.

Broadcasting Legislation Amendment (News Media Diversity) Bill 2013

Second Reading

Debate resumed on the motion:
That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr PYNE (Sturt—Manager of Opposition Business) (20:20): I was not planning on speaking at this stage of the debate on the Broadcasting Legislation Amendment (News Media Diversity) Bill 2013, but, given some of the confusion about the chaos that this government has created tonight—

The SPEAKER: Order! The Manager of Opposition Business will not put that to the chamber. There were procedural matters before the House.

Mr PYNE: It is not just the chaos of the last 20 minutes, Speaker; it is the chaos that has infected this parliament over the government's attempts to muzzle the media through these media regulations they are introducing into the parliament and proposing to pass in the House tonight. That is the chaos to which I am referring.

The government have so lost their way that they are now in the parliament tonight planning to gag a debate about freedom of speech.

The government have sunk so low that not only are they introducing bills that they intend to pass tonight that muzzle a free press in this country and introduce the most draconian media laws in the history of the Commonwealth outside wartime but they are also planning tonight to gag that debate, to apply the guillotine to stop the debate on the government's media regulation. I know it is amazing and surprising that the government could have sunk so low, could have become so unscrupulous, that they would actually be seeking to gag a debate about freedom of speech, but that is the plan of the government tonight in this House.

Why would the government have sunk so low that it would be planning on gagging a debate on freedom of speech in this parliament? I will tell you why. Because everything the Prime Minister and the government do is about hour-by-hour survival. These media laws were dreamt up by the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy. They were shanghaied through the cabinet process. We know that half the members of the cabinet were not even present when the debate was held. Many of them did not even know the debate was going to be held. The Minister for Foreign Affairs has made it clear that he did not even know there was going to be a debate in cabinet about these media laws. The minister opposite, the Minister for Health, was stuck with me on a plane in Sydney. The Cabinet Secretary was stuck with me on the same plane. The Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth was stuck with me on the same plane in Sydney. None of them made the cabinet debate. We know from the reports of that cabinet—because the
government leaks like a sieve—that members of the cabinet did not even have briefing notes. They had an oral briefing from the minister for communications. They were not given the opportunity to examine what the government was proposing because all this Prime Minister wanted to do, in the dying days of this government, was introduce another grand distraction to keep the member for Griffith at bay for another week or two. But I doubt that will occur, because these media laws will be the final rock upon which this prime ministership breaks. This will be the final rock into which the Prime Minister sails the Labor Party ship before the next election.

Who could have believed the number of enemies this government has made over the last two and a half years, whether it is live cattle exporters, right through to, now, the media industry in this country, by trying to introduce the most draconian measures to regulate the press outside wartime in Australia? We know that the Prime Minister shanghaied the cabinet last Tuesday to introduce these laws. We know that the caucus did not get any opportunity to debate these changes or the process by which the minister for communications decided to introduce these laws.

And to the members opposite who are being so voluble in attacking me during my contribution, at least I have the decency to stand up here at the dispatch box and argue my case. Not one member of the Labor back bench is prepared to defend these laws. The members of the Labor back bench and front bench were pulled from the speakers list today so that these bills would go through the parliament tonight, to try again for another day to stave off the inevitable replacement of the Prime Minister by the member for Griffith, or the member for Hotham, or the member for Isaacs, or anyone other than this Prime Minister the Labor Party will cling to like a drowning sailor to try to save this disastrous failing government.

Mr Dreyfus: We can hear you; you don't have to shout!

Mr PYNE: Well, why don't you speak, Rumpole! Why isn't any member of the Labor Party—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member will use the proper titles of those opposite.

Mr PYNE: I will. I challenge all the members of the Labor Party to come into the chamber tonight and defend this grotesque invasion of freedom of speech in this country.

Not only was the caucus railroaded but the committee process for the biggest change to media regulation in this country was limited to a one-day hearing in Canberra this week. There was no proper process and no proper investigation. We know that the government have gotten these things wrong time and time again. They need to go through the proper committee process if they are going to get the legislation right. They are chattering away on the other side of the dispatch box like a couple of twittering birds in a nest. Get up and defend the government's media regulation rather than coming in here like a coward and interrupting other members while they are speaking. If you want to speak, speak.

The final denouement of this legislation is to railroad these bills through the parliament tonight with a grubby deal with the crossbenchers in this hung parliament. All week the crossbenchers have come out and paraded themselves in front of the media doing their dance of a thousand veils for the press about how they were going to vote against this legislation or how, in order to vote for it, they needed extra inducements in this place for their electorates. They paraded themselves for the press gallery. They did
their dance of a thousand veils, but, in the end, what did I predict on Monday morning? I predicted they would roll over and vote for the Prime Minister's legislation. And there is one reason: not one of the crossbenchers wants an election. Only the member for Kennedy and the member for Denison would be re-elected right now if there were an election, and they know it. They have much more support in their electorates than the member for Lyne, the member for New England, the member for Melbourne, the member for Fisher or the member for Dobell. So they have done a grubby deal with the government to stave off an election—

Mr Stephen Jones: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order. We might be approaching 'cracker night' in Canberra, but this is ridiculous. Is he going to be relevant to the legislation before the House? When is he going to be relevant?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The speaker will refer to the legislation before the House.

Mr Pyne: Mr Deputy Speaker Lyons, you might want to talk to the Leader of the House about the arrangements between the opposition and the government, because it has been made very clear to us in the opposition that because of the chaotic nature of the treatment of these bills in the parliament tonight members of the opposition have been told that they can speak to all of these bills in a cognate debate, in spite of the fact that we will be voting on them separately. So I am speaking to the bills, Mr Deputy Speaker, because I am talking about freedom of speech.

One of the most important attributes of a successful democracy is the freedom of the press. We have not always been grateful for the press coverage we have had as politicians in this country. Both sides of parliament have had their fair share of opprobrium from the free press. But the free press is one of the most important structures in our democracy. The press—whether it is Fairfax, Seven, Nine, Ten or News Limited—are united against this attack on their freedom to publish without reservation, without fear or favour. The Daily Telegraph had a two-page spread today about what the newspapers will look like in the future under the Public Interest Media Advocate. They had a satire of what the press would look like if this legislation were passed, and it made for very sad reading. I read it, and I could have been reading Pravda; I could have been reading a North Korean newspaper. And that is the future for this country if the Labor government get their way: if they suborn the cabinet, if they ignore the caucus, if they demean the committee process and if they gag the parliament.

If this legislation passes tonight and then passes the Senate, the future for this country is in the hands of the committee of public safety, otherwise known as the Public Interest Media Advocate. In fact, the grubby deal this government has done with the crossbenchers is not to have a government-only-appointed public interest media advocate; it is to have a panel. It is sounding even more like the committee of public safety. It will be a panel of three, just like the committee of public safety, who will decide who is appointed the new media tsar, the PIMA, who will determine the content of publications in this country, and who will determine the public interest.

I know that former senator Bob Brown is looking for a job. He is the kind of person that the Labor Party would want to have as the Public Interest Media Advocate. He, too, hates News Limited, just as the minister for communications and the Prime Minister do.

The Prime Minister has been threatening News Limited for months. She hates the
press coverage she gets. She hates the truth that the press talk about this government and this Prime Minister. She has been threatening News Limited for months. Last year she said that News Limited had questions to answer. Yet she is yet to put one of those questions to the parliament. She has yet to even argue in favour of her media regulation. We have not had the UK phone hacking scandal that Britain saw last year; we have had nothing even approaching it. She has not been able to detail one question that News Limited is supposed to have been able to answer. She has not been able to describe what mischief this legislation is designed to deal with or to remove. All she has done is to come in here with her hate and her bile and her viciousness towards the free press and say, 'Before this government falls, let's introduce media regulation so we can muzzle the free press.'

I know there are good Labor people on that side of the House. They are few and far between, but I know they are there. And why are they going along with this extraordinary legislation? Why are they supporting legislation that would make Lenin proud? Lenin, when he was in control of the Soviet Union in 1920, said: 'Why should freedom of speech and freedom of the press be allowed? Why should a government which is doing what it believes to be right allow itself to be criticised?' It would not allow opposition by lethal weapons. Ideas are much more fatal things than guns. Why should any man be allowed to buy a printing press and disseminate pernicious opinion calculated to embarrass the government? And I see the member for Werriwa is nodding. Thank you, the member for Werriwa.

Mr Laurie Ferguson interjecting—

Mr PYNE: The member for Werriwa is nodding—he agrees with Vladimir Lenin in 1920! He cannot understand why the government did not act sooner: 'Why didn't the government act sooner?'

But I can tell you one thing: the opposition will oppose this legislation root and branch. We will fight it right through to the election day. It will not just be that we will abolish the carbon tax and the mining tax; we will bring back integrity and transparency to government, respect the parliament and have a Prime Minister who leads by example in his treatment of the parliament and the press. We will repeal this legislation. We will do everything we have to do to bring back a free press in this country. And the government will wear this around their necks like a millstone, right through to 8 o'clock on election night when the results are finally announced and far too many members, amongst them good members, on the Labor side will lose their seats, because of one thing—because of their inane desire to support, their obsession with supporting, Julia Gillard as Prime Minister through to the election.

You are laughing at that, Member for Reid, but you have not supported the Prime Minister for a very long time. I know you think that is terribly funny. But, unfortunately, you are being tarred with the same brush as every other one of your colleagues.

Mr Murphy: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I have been verballed by the member for Sturt, and it has nothing to do with the legislation before the chair. I would ask you to rule in my favour.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott): Member for Reid, that is not a point of order in this chamber.

Mr PYNE: In closing, can I say how sad I am to be standing in the House of Representatives to defend free speech in 2013. I never thought that, in the 20 years that I have been in parliament—or in the
years I hope to be in parliament yet—that I would be called upon to defend freedom of speech in this country. It shows the nadir that this government and this Prime Minister have reached. And they will reap the whirlwind of their yesterdays on 14 September.

Mr STEPHEN JONES (Throsby) (20:35): It is a good thing that this debate is occurring in Canberra, a town where firecrackers are still legal. We have had all the pomp and ceremony of cracker night. The previous speaker went off like a catherine-wheel. Occasionally, that diatribe was relevant to the legislation before the House—very, very rarely, though. I have to say that it strikes people on this side of the House as passing strange that we have been subjected to a 15-minute tirade on freedom of speech from the only political party in this country which has sought to outlaw another political party because it did not like what they stood for. The only political party in this country which has ever sought to ban the existence of another political party is the Liberal Party of Australia. Their great hero, Robert Menzies, was the only Prime Minister of this country to have taken a bill into this House and had it pass through this House which had the effect of banning another political party because the government did not like what that political party stood for. And yet we hear this 15-minute diatribe, this hypocritical diatribe, from the member for Sturt. They may well say, 'Well, that was almost 60 years ago, and we have reformed.' You might accept that if you did not have a memory of the absolute disgrace of members on that side of the House, many of them still on the front bench, who sat in cabinet under the former Prime Minister John Howard and issued gag order after gag order, suppression after suppression, when members of the media sought access to government documents under the freedom of information laws. Where was the member for Sturt? We know he was not in cabinet because he was not a favourite of the then Prime Minister John Howard, so he cannot be personally held liable for sticking his hand up for the gag orders and the suppression of freedom of information requests from members of the media. But where were they when members of the press and members of the public were seeking to exercise their rights under the freedom of information laws? Where were the speeches? Where was the great tirade in defence of freedom of speech? It was nowhere to be seen. That exposes the member for Sturt's confected outrage for what it is.

The freedom of information laws were modernised, brought up to date and reformed under this government because this government has a commitment to openness. This government has a commitment to ensuring that members of the public, including members of the press gallery, have access to those documents, as they should under our freedom of information laws. That those poor people who are sitting in their living rooms tonight had to listen to the hypocritical tirade from the member for Sturt, the member who stands in the shoes of the people who sought to outlaw another political party because they did not agree with its views, is nothing short of a disgrace.

In the 15 minutes that we heard from the member for Sturt on the issue of media reform in this country, not once did we hear a defence of people who may have been victims of misreporting by the media. I am a great defender of the freedom of press in this country, and with my last breath I will defend us having a free and independent news media in this country. It is absolutely essential to the fabric of our democracy in this country that we have a free and independent press. I know that every
member in the Labor Party, every member on this side of the House, has a fundamental conviction to that principle. There must be a voice in the parliament for the people who have been victims of misreporting. Those people have had their lives ruined because a journalist got it wrong, a media outlet got it wrong or somebody was not able to adequately check their facts before publishing something in one of our news outlets. The victims of misreporting have had their lives turned upside down. In other countries we have seen absolutely tragic consequences of that.

Where are the voices from members on the other side of the House for the little people, for the victims? We have heard plenty of voices on the other side of the House for the media bosses, but where are the voices for the victims? We stand for the victims. We say that there should be some remedy available for them and not just for the millionaires. One of the best clients of defamation barristers in this country is the member for Wentworth. The thing that sets the member for Wentworth aside from the majority of other Australian citizens is that he has the means available to him. If he believes that he has been defamed by the media, he has the means available to him to pursue action, but the ordinary Australian who feels that they have been defamed or they have been a victim of misreporting does not have that access. They cannot put $10,000 on the table and hire the best QC in Sydney, Melbourne or any other capital city around this country. They cannot put $10,000 on the table and seek to have their rights exercised. Even if they could, what remedy is there? The average defamation case in this country takes two years to conclude.

Mr STEPHEN JONES: The member for Wentworth and the member for Kooyong over there say to the little person in this country who seeks a remedy, 'It's okay. You can take action in defamation.' For the vast majority of Australians, that is no remedy at all. All we seek through this part of the legislation is to ensure that we have a robust press council in this country that lives by its codes and implements its codes and that the media proprietors in this country cannot stand over that press council.

Talking about standing over an independent body, what do members on the other side of the House have to say about the circumstance where, in a media outlet—and I do not say that every journalist in that media outlet would agree with this course of events, because I am sure that most of them would be appalled by it—a rogue media proprietor said, 'I will withdraw from the press council if you have adverse findings against me'? That is not a fair and independent system. That is a system where Caesar judges Caesar. That is a situation where the average punter has no redress whatsoever. I stand here as a voice for the average punter who believes they should have redress if they are the victim of misreporting.

I go to something else about the bills and the debate before the House. One of the provisions within this package of legislation goes to the issue of convergence within the media. It should be a matter of concern to all Australians that we do not have a diminution of voices in the media landscape. If you are a defender of a free press, then you must also be a defender of a diverse press. They go hand in hand. And if you are a defender of a free press and a diverse press, then you must, in the next breath, also be defender of ensuring that we have a plentiful number of journalists in this country who are working for a free press and a diverse press.
I ask you: when was the last time we saw a merger of two media operations, the takeover of one media company by another media company, that led to the employment of more journalists? When have we seen the takeover of one newspaper by another newspaper and the employment of more journalists or more subeditors or more editorial staff? The answer, quite simply, is never, because the second victim of a takeover by one media company of another media outlet is the journalists. We know that because, as the media landscape is rapidly converging and as we are seeing a rationalisation in the media landscape, we are seeing journalists losing their jobs—not in their tens, not in their dozens but in their thousands.

Mr Frydenberg interjecting—

Mr STEPHEN JONES: I expect to see the member for Kooyong stand up and defend the good men and women who are journalists in this country, and the job security they deserve, because I am sure he has had a lot to say during my speech. I expect to hear a full-throated defence of the journalists of this country and a proposition that will see that there are more job opportunities for journalists in this country, not fewer, because we have never seen an example where one newspaper has been bought out by another newspaper or one TV station has been bought out by another TV station and more journalists have been employed. What we have seen is a sacking of journalists, a sacking of editorial staff, a sacking of employees and a diminution in the number of people who are employed in the free media.

So, if the member for Sturt is fair dinkum in his passionate defence of a free media in this country and of freedom of the press, he will also be passionate in his defence of a proposition that says we need a public interest test. We need to ensure that if one company is taken over by another company we will not see a diminution in the vibrancy of voices, in the number of journalists that are employed. Somebody has to stick up for the journalists, because we have seen not dozens, not hundreds but thousands of journalistic jobs lost. Over 500 editorial staff have been lost from News Limited in 2012 alone.

Mr Lyons: Fairfax as well.

Mr STEPHEN JONES: And I hear the member for Bass talk about the tragedy of the loss of journalistic and editorial staff from the Examiner, an excellent regional newspaper in his electorate and in northern Tasmania. It would be no surprise to the member for Bass, as it is not a surprise to me, that Fairfax has sacked over 1,900 staff.

Mr Frydenberg interjecting—

Mr STEPHEN JONES: I ask you—and I ask the member for Kooyong, because I am sure he is going to be on his feet in a moment; he has had a hell of a lot to say in interjections—how can a convergence of the media lead to the employment of more paid journalists in this country? I am sure he is going to be able to explain to the House how the taking over of one media company by another media company is going to lead to more journalists being employed. The facts are against him. History is against him—over 1,900 editorial jobs lost from Fairfax in the last 18 months, including from the local Fairfax newspaper in my town, the Illawarra Mercury, a fine newspaper. The subeditorial work is now being performed in New Zealand. I take nothing away from the excellent editorial staff and journalists in New Zealand, but I would rather see those people employed in Wollongong. I would rather see those staff working for a Fairfax outlet in New South Wales.

We have heard a 15-minute hypocritical tirade from the member for Sturt about
freedom of speech, overlooking the fact that it is his party that sought to impose gag orders on people who held different views from that of the former government. His is the party that sought to have suppression orders preventing the full operation of the freedom of information laws. His is the party that has had nothing to say for the victims of misreporting. It is his party that says: 'If you feel like you have been a victim of misreporting, put $10,000 on the table and then hire the best QC you can; good luck, son.' We do not all have the means to do that. There are no voices for the victims, no voices for the journalists but plenty of voices for the big end of town, once again. Let us see some balance in this debate. Let us see some genuine debate, some genuine balance and ensure that at the end of this sitting we have a good bill that we can send to the Senate to ensure that we get better laws and that we will continue to defend— (Time expired)

Mr MURPHY (Reid) (20:50): I join with the member for Throsby in putting this in perspective. These broadcasting legislation amendment bills arise from the convergence review, which was established in 2010. The Finkelstein inquiry was commissioned in 2011, and I had to listen to the humbug from the member for Sturt and the humbug from earlier speakers on the other side of the House about a threat to free speech. What is proposed on the other side of the House is a vote for the big media proprietors at the expense of the public interest and the citizens of Australia who are worried about concentration of media ownership in our country. That is a national disgrace. I have been participating in this debate ever since I arrived in this place almost 15 years ago. You would be aware of it, Mr Deputy Speaker Scott, because you would have heard me speaking about the threats to concentration of media ownership over many, many years in this place.

What we are not hearing from the opposition tonight is the massive concentration of media ownership that was visited on Australia when John Howard allowed media proprietors to own all of the traditional media. Remember, when Paul Keating was Prime Minister he said: 'If you want to be prince of print or queen of the screen, that's it. You can't have print media, electronic media and all this new media, because this massive concentration of media ownership in Australia presents such a threat to the public interest and to the future of our democracy.' Keating was strong. We were strong on this side of the House.

From what we have heard day in and day out, with great respect to the member for Wentworth, I can only say they are apologists for the big media companies. They are doing the bidding of the big media companies. When people go to polling booths on election day, in most cases they vote for a political party or they vote for a leader. In a very small number of cases they vote for a local member. They do not vote for Rupert Murdoch. They do not vote for a big media proprietor, and that is the truth. What we are talking about here tonight is critical to the future of the public interest and our democracy because if these laws do not go through our House and are not approved by the Senate and signed off by the Governor-General, this will send a message that we are exporting our democracy to the big, powerful media players.

It was very humbling yesterday when Kerry Stokes, a very prominent media player but nowhere near as powerful as Rupert Murdoch and News Limited in our country, appeared before our committee. We were talking about the potential abolition of the 75 per cent reach rule for free-to-air television.
networks in regional Australia. He made it unambiguous to our committee that, were that to take place, he could absolutely dominate the media in Western Australia. He accepted the proposition that that was not good for the public interest, that that was not good for the future of our democracy. I salute Kerry Stokes, proprietor of the Seven Network, for having the honesty to say that before a parliamentary committee. We did not hear it from Kim Williams, the Chief Executive Officer of News Limited, representing the biggest media organisation in our country, when he appeared before Senator Doug Cameron's committee in the Senate. No, no, because when would you ever expect a News Limited representative to say, 'If we're allowed to have more of the media, that will not be good for the public interest and that's not good for our democracy'?

I would hope that the Murdoch family would take a leaf out of the book of Kerry Stokes, who had the decency and humility to lay bare and admit before the parliamentary committee that I am a member of that, if the 75 per cent reach rule is abolished, he potentially could have far too much power over our democracy, particularly as it relates to the politics of Western Australia.

Can I take you back to where we are tonight, because we are discussing these bills following the last three years of the outcome of the Finkelstein inquiry and the convergence inquiry. I want to remind the House that over this period of time more than 1,800 submissions were received in relation to these inquiries. Not surprisingly, most of these submissions call for media reform. We all support media reform. We understand we are living in a different age today than we were 30 or 40 years ago. Also not surprisingly, the content of submissions from media companies reflects their commercial objectives and of course makes no reference to the concerns of the public interest, which is dear to my heart because the public interest is critical to the future of our democracy.

As I said, I have been in this place for nearly 15 years. During this time, the matter of media ownership has arisen and I have made many speeches speaking out against concentration of media ownership, even against the position of my own party. During this time I have also spoken many times in my party room about the need to oppose further concentration of media in our country. During this time I have also spoken out in the media expressing my grave concerns for the public interest and the future of our precious democracy were media ownership to be further concentrated in our country. During this time I have also written many letters to editors of newspapers—mostly Fairfax because I did not have much luck when I started writing letters to News Limited newspapers—about the serious risk to our democracy if media ownership were further concentrated in our country. I do not believe that anyone spoke more forcefully in this place against the Howard government's reform of our media ownership laws and the reforms which led to very serious concentration of media ownership in Australia.

I want to remind the House that the reforms by the Howard government allowed media proprietors to own all of the traditional media—newspapers, television stations, radio stations—and, of course, also to have the potential to extend their reach in this new digital age. I spoke very, very strongly about that. I said it was not in the public interest and I made it quite clear that it was not good for the future of our democracy. I say tonight: enough is enough. We cannot keep caving in to the powerful media proprietors.
I ask tonight: who is running our democracy? Who is running Australia? I would like to think that the people who cast their vote in 2010 got the government that they got—even though those on the other side do not like it. It is Prime Minister Gillard and the Labor government who are running our country, not Rupert Murdoch or any other powerful media proprietor. I think if you asked most fair-minded Australians they would say the same thing. When they go to the polling booths on election day, they do not see a list of names of media proprietors for whom they should cast their vote. They look for a candidate. They look for a party to express who they want to represent them in this place.

In recent times, we have witnessed what can happen when a media company becomes too powerful. Obviously, I am referring to the News of the World telephone hacking scandal in the United Kingdom. And, of course, who owned the News of the World newspaper? Mr Rupert Murdoch. Obviously, we never want to see what happened in the United Kingdom happen here in Australia. I think it is important to record, as I stand here tonight, that, following the revelations of the Murdoch News of the World phone-hacking scandal, there are more than 200 criminal investigations taking place in the UK. These arise from very serious charges against people who, amongst other things, have no regard whatsoever for people’s privacy, no regard for their reputations, no regard for their right to have a private life and no conscience about trashing their reputation and their character. The great body of the criminal investigation arose from the reprehensible behaviour and conduct of people employed by Mr Murdoch. I am referring to those who are employed by News International in the UK.

In Australia, the Murdoch media is very, very powerful. In relation to our print media, I am grateful to the Parliamentary Library, which has provided to me, inter alia, the latest information on the extent of print media alone, which is owned and controlled by News Limited. For the benefit of the House, I will just read some of that. News Limited owns 147 newspapers in Australia, and of those 104 are suburban publications, including 17 in which News Limited has a 50 per cent interest. News Limited’s daily and Sunday newspapers account for more than 69 per cent of the total circulation of all daily and Sunday newspapers. Audit Bureau of Circulations figures for metropolitan newspapers as at the end of December 2012 indicate that, if a Monday to Friday sales calculation were used, Murdoch papers would represent around 80 per cent of sales, or if just the national newspapers were being considered then Murdoch titles would represent 70 per cent of all sales in Australia. News Limited’s daily and Sunday newspapers account for more than 69 per cent of the total circulation of all daily and Sunday newspapers, excluding suburban and regional newspapers published in Australia.

It is a national disgrace that we hear the alternative government, the opposition, defending the position of the most powerful media proprietor in not only Australia but, indeed, the world. They are critical of us. They support the hysterical criticism that has been visited on us by Mr Murdoch’s chief executive in Australia, Mr Kim Williams, who thinks that what we are trying to do is an assault on free press. What do you think I think the Murdoch media has done to free speech in Australia? Is it any wonder that there are some nervous nellies here tonight on all sides of politics, who are afraid to take on a very, very powerful media proprietor? Well, I say that the people of Australia do not vote for Rupert Murdoch and News Limited. It is a national disgrace that we should be afraid of a very, very powerful
media company. This goes to the heart of our democracy. This goes to the heart of the public interest. I will not accept any lectures from Mr Kim Williams, who is an agent of Mr Murdoch, telling us that what we are doing is not in the public interest and that somehow it is in the political interest. It is not in the political interest. (Time expired)

Mr RIPOLL (Oxley—Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer) (21:06): Tonight I think is a test for this parliament. It is a test for people of goodwill to look objectively at what the government is proposing in terms of fair and decent reforms. The time frames are tight. The questions are not so difficult, and the answers are easy enough. What we are proposing is a light touch approach. What we are proposing is an ability for this parliament to continue the good processes which, through the years, have needed to take place in terms of media and media reform, in terms of press, in terms of ownership issues and in terms of a whole range of issues in order to keep pace with what is happening in our media environment.

Not one of the things that have been put on the table by this government is an attack on any freedoms or any rights or any part of democracy. They are about getting things right and balanced. While we have heard a lot of rhetoric, scaremongering, scandalous accusations and incredible talk from the other side about what these laws represent, they represent none of the things that the opposition have been putting forward. The issues that have been debated tonight—and the legislation, which needs to be supported by this parliament—have been issues out in the public for many years. They are not so much issues that relate to us as members of parliament and politicians—it is not so much if at all about us, and that is the debate that the other side are trying to turn it into. Rather, they are about ordinary people. The issues relate to the right that any democracy has to a free press.

That is exactly the point of these bills: we want a free press, a press not controlled by just certain individuals, a free press in which journalists can report on issues of the day as they are. This is about individuals within media organisations. This is about content being king, so that owners and dictators within the media world do not get to decide what the news is rather than reporting the news. They will not get to make up the news rather than telling it as it actually happens.

We hear that there are many different voices now. There is no doubt that many different voices exist in the new world, the new space, of available media now. There is new social media. Every single person can be a reporter in a particular way and people can take personal responsibility, and they should, for the things that they say, whether on Facebook or Twitter or through other mechanisms—whether even simply emails. Through different forms of communication technology, we can see the different voices making themselves heard. But there is no question about the concentration of media in this country, and that concentration is growing.

Part of our reforms reflect some of that change in a positive way. The 75 per cent reach rule, for example, is glaringly out of date today and needs to be changed. Technically, there would today be a number of media organisations that are more than likely in breach of those rules. Those rules need to be modernised to reflect what is taking place in the media world.

The serious inquiries and reviews that have been held, such as the convergence inquiry or the Finkelstein review—which received over 1,800 submissions—have left no doubt that that the public, the community, wants a public interest test. They want to
ensure that there is freedom of the press and that there are free voices out there to report to them what is happening in the world, in their own backyards and what is happening in this place, not what some say is happening. For me, these reforms are about modernising more than anything else. They are about catching up. They are about recognising that we live in a different environment.

I do not think that there would be one person in this place who has not had an issue with the media at one stage in their career, maybe outside of this place. We all can accept that that is the case. The resulting outcome is usually very unpleasant, as any member in here could tell you. There are a number of things that we can do, but most of the time the advice is to take it on the chin and just wear it. Right or wrong, it does not matter. You just have to wear it in the end. That always left this thought in my mind: if an elected member of parliament, a person who is regarded as having some authority, some influence, some power and some capacity does not have a framework, an ability, a mechanism or a vehicle to deal with things that might be said about them in the media, then how much of a go does an ordinary Australian get? The answer to that question is none.

This is not about members of parliament, politicians or business people. It is about ordinary people, who expect to be treated fairly and decently. It is about people such as mums and dads; people who go through the courts system and are accused of a range of things only to be found to be innocent; sports personalities who may have committed some transgression and had their lives turned upside down through what takes place in the media. There are an endless number of stories. It is not about us. It is about ordinary people. It is about everybody who expects something out of our media in this country.

I agree with all the calls about freedom. But I agree with them because we are enhancing that freedom. We are providing a better framework; a better model; a better mechanism to ensure that the press is freer. There are lots of analogies that you could use and lots of different ways in which you might be able to portray this. But sometimes you have to protect those who claim to want to be free. If the media truly wants to be free of influence and free in their task, role and responsibility of reporting, then they ought to have a proper framework in which to do that so that they are not controlled by their bosses or by their owners. Their first responsibility should be to the news, to the facts, to the public and to the public interest, not to their masters. That is what these reforms are about: they will make sure that there is a balance.

The litany of examples of transgressions in the media is endless. We have heard about the really big ones already, particularly those from the UK—the phone-hacking scandals. And there are many others. There have been some here in Australia as well. There ought to be a balance here, like in all things.

What has happened here is not surprising. It shows that having this debate is almost an impossibility in any form that you bring it forward. Unless there is goodwill and unless there is an opposition, regardless of who the opposition might be, that has some capacity to say, 'Yes, we have to deal with this in some form; we've actually got to work through these things, as they've been around for a while,' this is almost an impossible debate to have.

When the opposition was in government, this side of the House stood up for freedom of the press and individual journalists. We stood up for people being able to speak freely. But I have to tell you that there is a big difference between simply having
freedom and meeting your responsibilities in having that freedom. That is what this framework is about: trying to provide that balance and freedom that the opposition scream at us about every day in this place. Where are the voices of the journalists who could benefit—who could be freer to report and meet their obligations and responsibilities to the public?

Mr Danby: They're too scared.

Mr RIPOLL: Perhaps they are too scared, as I hear somebody interject. Perhaps they are too scared. I cannot judge that. I can only judge from what I have seen reported in the media over the last few years—the hysterical front pages. I would say they were humorous. I do not know that anyone could take too seriously the comparison of anybody in this parliament—or anyone in this country—to Mugabe, Stalin or anyone like that. But we will take that on the chin; maybe that was just done in jest as a bit of humour.

But I am not sure that that is what the media is talking about when they say they want to be free. Is that what they want freedom for? Is that the freedom they are talking about? Is it so that we can have these ridiculous front pages? Is that news, is that reporting or is that some sort of joke on the Australian public? Is it a joke on the democracy of this country? Is it a joke on this parliament—on all of us? Is that what we expect from our press? I do not think it is, and I do not think journalists expect that either.

All fair, decent, hardworking journalists who believe in their profession—who actually believe in what they do—see some good, some benefit, from this legislation. And there are a few voices amongst journalists saying: 'Hang on; let's have a closer look at this. This really is a light touch. This actually is about self-regulation—about empowering people to self-regulate.' Sometimes you need to provide those powers for that to take place, whether it is having a public interest media advocate, enhancing self-regulation or doing a range of things, including trying to enhance Australian content, and helping to pay for it. This government is prepared to put money on the table and reduce the fees of media outlets.

We have heard from a range of members, particularly the member for Lowe, in relation to media ownership and the need for diversity. I agree with him. I agree that we need diversity and that there needs to be a balance. And the voice about that is coming from the media as well.

But the two points I want to make are in terms of what you will hear loudest. The shrill, screaming, ridiculous sounds that the opposition are making are typical. We have nearly 23 million people in this country but whenever the opportunity arises for the opposition to stand up for somebody, they always stand up for the big end of town, the big media voices—

Mr Danby: Singing for their supper.

Mr RIPOLL: They are singing for their supper. Those opposition always stand up for the big media owners—the big media bosses. You never, ever hear them in this place speaking up for ordinary people—the little guy in the street.

Mr Frydenberg: We are made up of small business owners.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott): Order! The member for Kooyong!

Mr RIPOLL: Mr Deputy Speaker, if I could have some freedom of speech in this place without being interrupted by the rude opposition, that would be much appreciated. I seek your protection in this area, through
the powers that you have been given by this parliament.

The responsibility that we have in this place is not to media owners—we do not have a responsibility to them—and it is not to the media bosses. We do not have any responsibility to them. We have a responsibility to the people who elected us and to the Australian national interest. We have a responsibility to the greater good of preserving democracy and freedom of speech. And that is what we are doing. That is what we are putting forward.

People talk about the public interest and the public interest test and how all these things link up. I do not see too much public interest in some of the reporting—or what is called reporting—that goes on in this country. There is no public interest test internally, but there should be an opportunity for people who are in some way aggrieved, maligned or otherwise falsely accused. People need to have some balance. There ought to be some mechanism available for people to redress the wrongs that are done to them.

It is well and good for the big end of town to come to an inquiry in this place and talk about, for example, their privacy. I do not see privacy being a really big question mark when the media do reporting or tell some of their stories. Privacy does not seem to come into it then to too much of an extent.

But maybe we ought to do a little bit more about that. Maybe the media is right. Maybe the big bosses are right when they talk about their privacy and perhaps we should apply the same principles. So, if there is anything to be said about media reform in this country the first thing to say is that it is needed. People give you these simple lines like, 'If it ain't broke don't fix it.' All that says to me is that people either (a) are lazy, or (b) do not have any ideas. The reality is that we can always improve, we can always move forward. When it comes to media in this country we can definitely improve.

What I want to see tomorrow is journalists standing up and taking on their own profession and saying: 'We have a profession. This is an honourable trade and it is something we ought to be standing up for.' Freedom of the press is not about freedom for owners, editors and media bosses; it is about freedom for individual journalists to report the facts. So, I feel very moved, as a lot of people do, to say that we need media reform. In the public interest, through inquiries, time and a change in the public's attitude, something ought to be done. And we should not be frightened of it.

I am not sure how anyone could be scared. If you have had a look at the front pages in the last few days, there is not much left that can be done in terms of attacking an individual minister or a government with any single word or insult that can be thrown at anyone. I am not sure how creative people can be in finding anything new and more horrific for tomorrow, but I am sure they will. But that is not the central point of what I am trying—

Mr Frydenberg: Sticks and stones!

Mr RIPOLL: Sticks and stones—I will take the interjection—might be fine for somebody of the capacity of the member opposite, but not everybody in society has that capacity. We have a responsibility, and so does the media, to protect them.

Mr Danby: And so does the member for Kooyong.

Mr RIPOLL: So does the member for Kooyong—or absolutely! So we have a responsibility. If we really are going to talk about a free press we ought to do something about it. (Time expired)
Ms O’NEILL (Robertson) (21:21): It is with some considerable pleasure that I rise this evening to speak on the Broadcasting Legislation Amendment (News Media Diversity) Bill 2013. I am a former teacher. One of the things that teachers really need to do at the beginning of the year with their students is to create an environment in which trust can grow and an environment where the notion of rights is very carefully debated and considered.

In the many years that I was teaching I was very pleased to learn wonderful things from my colleagues. Amongst my colleagues was a man by the name of Bruce Helyard, who I taught with at a school called Corpus Christi Senior High School on the Central Coast. In one year 11 introduction session, I happened to be team teaching with Mr Helyard when he spoke to the students about how the course might progress. I have never forgotten that at the very bottom of a list of outlines of the ways in which we might behave was the sense that, 'Any right I claim as my own I extend to the other people in this room.' I think that it is a very important premise. Some people are not more equal than others. We need to make sure that the variety of voices which were heard in that classroom are, in fact, replicated in our community in a much more significant and a broader way.

At the heart of this piece of legislation is a determination by this government to put a line in the sand and say that there will be no further shrinking of the range of voices, of the different perspectives, that need to go on the public record every day if we are to live in a healthy and functional democracy. A diversity of views is essential. Despite all the shouting and outrage that we saw from the Manager of Opposition Business in his speech, the reality is that at the heart of this is a sense that diversity of voices is essential for us if we are to get a reasonable perspective of the things that are going on in our community.

This particular piece of legislation is a response to the fact that there are fewer and fewer organisations owning or controlling the sources of news and commentary in this country. I speak to people in my community, and many of them bemoan the fact that the newspapers to which they used to turn for fact and very balanced reporting have been moving further and further to a state where they are called 'opinion papers'.

Mr Danby: Propaganda rags.

Ms O’NEILL: 'Propaganda rags' I hear from my colleague, and that is a very unfortunate name to be throwing about in the context of our current media structures. We do need to ensure that we maintain media diversity. In division 9 in the first schedule of the broadcasting legislation amendment bill, there is a list of news media voices. It is a big country, and there are many, many stories to tell, and there are a range of people who can tell them. But we have only got a page and a bit here of listed television broadcast services and we have got a pretty short list of radio broadcasting services. We have an incredible concentration of ownership of these voices. This is a threat to the rights of ordinary citizens to have a range of stories told. This is a threat to our country to tell our stories to and about ourselves as we progress the history of this great nation. Two critical existing mechanisms that we have to address the risk of concentration are competition law and foreign ownership restrictions. But these alone are not adequate tools to really help us deal with the need to maintain media diversity.

In Australia the reality is, in the time since I have been a reader—happily, quite a long time now—I have seen a number of newspapers fall by the wayside. We find ourselves in a situation here in 2013 in which
two newspaper companies which deliver their services online account for 86 per cent of the Australian newspaper market. Let's just pause for a moment, without the hysteria, to let that fact resonate. There are two companies delivering their newspaper services online that own 86 per cent of Australia's newspaper market.

A point of comparison around the world would be helpful if we are going to analyse what that actually means. It sounds bad, and it is probably even worse than it might sound when you look at the reality in the US, where the top two newspaper companies, which are very successful companies, only take up 14 per cent of the market. If we want to compare ourselves with somewhere else, let us turn to a country that is often considered to be quite similar to us in culture, another Commonwealth country with a smaller market size, Canada. If we look at the top two newspapers there, we find that they take up just 54 per cent of the Canadian market. That is quite a chunk still, but it is a lot less than the 86 per cent owned by two Australian companies.

One might be able to argue that, with the diversity of ways in which information can move around in our community now, because we have all this new media, we have a chance to free ourselves of the dual vision that is offered by those two online service providers. But the reality is that eight out of nine of the most popular news media websites are owned or run by traditional Australian media outlets. Where do you go if you are an Australian who wants a range of views? The answer is that you have not got very much to choose from at all. As I was preparing to come into the House this morning, I heard it put on radio that, across the broad spectrum of media, there is incredible resistance to this range of bills. The comeback was: 'How broad is the spectrum?', when there is a concentration such that 86 per cent of the Australian newspaper market is held by two prospective deliverers.

Mr Simpkins: Radio, TV, online—

The SPEAKER: The member for Robertson has the call. Nobody else does.

Mr Simpkins: She needs help.

The SPEAKER: You are not helping at all, actually; you are being quite rude. The member has the call.

Ms O'NEILL: I appreciate the encouragement from the member for Cowan, who has been very vociferous in this debate, and I appreciate his right to free speech. I wonder in terms of free reportage what will actually be able to be covered tomorrow. We know that there will probably be only two perspectives, and I think a richer Australia would have many, many more than a concentrated dual perspective on what is happening in this nation right now. I am sure that the member for Cowan, in all sincerity, understands what happens when power gets concentrated in too few hands.

ADJOURNMENT

The SPEAKER (21:30): Order! It being 9.30 pm, I propose the question:

That the House do now adjourn.

Mr KELVIN THOMSON (Wills—Parliamentary Secretary for Trade) (21:30): Speaker, I require that the question be put immediately without debate.

A division having been called and the bells having been rung—

The SPEAKER: The division has been withdrawn. The question is that the House do now adjourn.

International Development Assistance

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (21:32): Last Thursday, 14 March 2013, I had a visit from Cowan delegates from the Roadtrip to End Poverty. I thank Shenae Hunter, Jade
Contarino, Nasreen Lang and Rebecca Miller for coming to see me. I appreciate their keen interest in foreign aid.

I would say clearly that I support foreign aid, and I hope that this country will soon be able to reach the goal of 0.5 per cent of GDP. I support foreign aid that makes a difference and that goes to making improvements in the capacities of communities. I do not believe that all of our foreign aid is effective. By example, in 2012 the Australian reported that World Vision was working with a group that has 'deep links' with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine group, a proscribed terrorist agency.

It is also notable that some NGOs that receive aid funding had been actively lobbying against the Labor's now abandoned decision to prioritise a budget surplus ahead of increasing aid funding. They are within their rights to lobby for the government to increase government aid spending, but, when there is a perception that they use that money to lobby in Australia, that is not providing faith in the effectiveness of the aid. I also understand that the Australian Conservation Foundation uses aid funding to run programs to promote grassroots engagement on climate change policy and to support the Labor government's introduction of the carbon tax.

I referred before to capacity development. It has also been noted that in some cases aid funded NGOs are engaged to undermine the objectives of Australia's aid program to promote sustainable economic development. There is unwillingness to accept that the use and development of natural resources in developing countries helps those countries to move from subsistence economies to manufacturing and eventually to service based economies.

It should be remembered that AusAID recipient organisations cannot be engaged in political activity that is primarily isolated to partisan activities. It is a fairly narrow definition of political activity, meaning they can be engaged in political campaigns so long as they do not involve directly endorsing parties in Australia or abroad. I do wonder whether aid funding is being used for political activity in this country.

As I said on the day of their visit, in all my doorknocking I have not once been asked about foreign aid. Yet, despite that, I do support the concept of foreign aid, and I and the coalition support the goal of 0.5 per cent of GDP. What I would, however, like to do is to remind all those who visited parliament last Thursday that it was this Labor government that cut foreign aid by $3 billion in the 2011-12 budget. It was this Labor government that ensured that goal of 0.5 per cent of GDP going to foreign aid would not be achieved by 2015.

I know that it is fashionable for many that support foreign aid to always see the coalition as somehow being against foreign aid. Those same people vote Green or Labor because they falsely believe that those parties are the friends of foreign aid. As we know, anyone who follows the Green how-to-vote card will end up voting Labor. Those that support the 0.5 per cent of GDP ambition should ask themselves: which side of politics stopped that goal being achieved? Who was responsible? The answer is that it was this Labor government that cut foreign aid. It was this Labor government, which was maintained by the support of the Greens and was the recipient of so many Green preferences, that cut foreign aid. That is the fact of the matter.

I therefore call upon those that lobby so hard on this issue to hold to account Labor and the Greens. They failed you, and if you wish to be taken seriously then you should do this. But the sad truth is that it seems there is no interest in holding those
responsible to account. It is far easier, it seems, to start talking about a 0.7 per cent goal, the next goal, glossing over the betrayal of the left side of politics and instead talking about getting the coalition to commit to that goal, and to be negative about us. It is far easier to do that than it is to speak of the reality of what the Labor Party has done to you.

I actually expect that the vast majority will continue to support the left, blinded by a political dogma that falsely supposes that compassion exists only on the left and is oblivious as to who made the cuts that trashed the 0.5 per cent of GDP.

In spite of that, I reiterate that I support the 0.5 per cent of GDP goal. I do support it, but I would take this opportunity to speak of the certainty with regard to poverty. The certainty is that, through a strong economy, jobs are created and poverty can be alleviated. That is why capacity building in economic growth and education are the areas that must particularly be targeted. To achieve maximum effect in this area, we need governance to also be addressed. I often wonder what could be done in these countries where poverty exists and those living with poverty are held down by the decisions of self-serving governments. So I say yes to foreign aid, but keep every dollar away from political activity particularly here, and concentrate on building strong economies and better education. These are outcomes for effective taxpayer funded foreign aid.

Crime

Dr LEIGH (Fraser) (21:38): The issue of reducing crime and incarceration is one that is close to my heart. Shayne Neumann, the member for Blair, and I moved a motion in 2011 in this House aimed at reducing crime and incarceration. The motion pointed out that over recent decades Australia has invested in prison building at an astonishing rate. The national imprisonment rate in 1991 was 117 prisoners per 100,000 adults. By 2007 it had risen to 167 prisoners per 100,000 adults. Over the same period, a period which began with the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody in 1991, the level of Indigenous incarceration went up from 1,739 prisoners per 100,000 adults to 2,248 prisoners out of every 100,000 Indigenous adults. In Western Australia, four per cent of all Indigenous adults are currently in jail. Even adjusting for the age structure of the Indigenous population, Indigenous Australians are still 14 times more likely to be jailed than non-Indigenous people. By their mid-20s, 40 per cent of Indigenous men have been charged by police with a crime.

It was my pleasure, with the support of the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education, to host a lunchtime event in Parliament House on 26 February with UCLA professor Mark Kleiman. Professor Kleiman is the author of When Brute Force Fails: How to Have Less Crime and Less Punishment. The event brought together a range of criminologists and social policy researchers from the ACT and beyond. I would like to acknowledge Don Weatherburn from the New South Wales Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, who bought Professor Kleiman to Australia. I would also like to acknowledge Michael Thorn and Glenis Thomas from FARE for their support of the event.

Professor Kleiman's clear message is that punishment is always a cost and never a benefit. He points out that too much emphasis among policy makers over recent decades has been on the duration of the sentence and the severity of the punishment and not enough on the issues of certainty and swiftness. Particularly when you are dealing with young men who are living day to day,
the notion that increasing sentences from 10 to 20 years will have a major impact on behaviour does not take into account the population with which we are dealing. Policies such as Western Australia’s three strikes law simply do not take into account the importance of certainty versus severity.

I commend many of those policy makers who are thinking rigorously about this issue, including the federal Attorney-General, who happens to be in the chamber at the moment; Western Australian MLA Paul Papalia; New South Wales Attorney General Greg Smith; South Australian Attorney-General John Rau; and ACT Attorney-General Simon Corbell.

I think it is high time that we took the lessons from economist Thomas Schelling, who has pointed out that the perfect threat is one that you do not carry out. We could make greater use of GPS monitoring to ensure that offenders are monitored but not incarcerated, because the cost of incarceration is now nearly $300 a day—the price of a nice hotel room in the CBD. We might make better use of curfews, a punishment which not only hurts offenders but also ensures, when the young man looks at his watch at nine o’clock at night and says he has to go home from the party, that other partygoers get the message too. We need to have more evidence based policy making in criminal justice. Mark Kleiman talked about Project HOPE, Hawaii’s Opportunity Program with Enforcement. In Australia we have the New South Wales Drug Court trial as almost the sole randomised controlled trial of a criminal justice program.

We know it is important to raise the evidence bar. There is clear evidence that jails are expensive and that they are unhealthy. The drivers of increased incarceration have not been greater crime in Australia—in fact, crime on many indicators has fallen—but rather changes in the law, tougher bail conditions, mandatory non-parole periods and longer sentences. It is not beyond the wit of parliamentarians on both sides of politics to find solutions to reduce crime and reduce punishment. I thank Professor Kleiman and those who brought him here for adding to the quality of the debate. (Time expired)

Boothby Electorate: South Road

Dr SOUTHCOTT (Boothby) (21:43): I stand to raise the issue of upgrading South Road in this chamber and the incompetence of the South Australian state Labor government. The state government will not be releasing the South Road planning study. This is a complex planning study involving the stretch of road from Regency Park to the Gallipoli underpass. The planning study was meant to be completed and released in December 2012. The South Australian public have a right to understand the proposals that are there, even if the state government is unable to fund them due to its economic mismanagement. The RAA, the peak motoring organisation in South Australia has called on the state government to release this planning study. The planning study was done with federal money and I echo that call.

The soon to be completed South Road Superway and the Southern Expressway duplication are only going to funnel more traffic along the middle stretch of South Road that is yet to be upgraded. This is the stretch between Darlington and Regency Park. There is still no funding or time frames for this stretch of upgrade to be completed. This will have an important impact on other arterial roads. A properly upgraded north-south corridor along South Road has the potential to reduce the traffic burden along many of the other arterial roads during peak time. Adelaide used to be known as ‘20-
minute city'. However, that has long since passed.

The latest RAA traffic survey shows that Belair and Unley Road is the worst of the major roads surveyed. According to the report, people living in Torrens Park travelling to and from the CBD now spend an extra three working days—that is, 24 hours in total—compared with a decade ago. This is incredible, considering it is only a six-kilometre commute from Torrens Park to the centre of the CBD. The average speed between Eynesbury Avenue in Kingswood and Cross Road along Belair Road was just nine kilometres per hour during the morning rush.

Upgrading South Road will reduce the burden on other major arterial roads, like Belair, Unley Road, Goodwood Road, Morphett Road, Marion Road and Brighton Road, all of which run through my electorate, during those peak periods. That is why I am currently running a petition across South Australia highlighting the need to complete the north-south corridor, including a grade separation at the South Road-Sturt Road intersection within my electorate, which was promised by the Labor Party in 2006 and in 2007 and has not been delivered. The petition is available from my office or can be downloaded from my website.

**Erdi, Dr Les OAM**

Mr DANBY (Melbourne Ports) (21:45): I rise to note the passing of a great Australian and my dear friend, Mr Les Erdi OAM, who died on 27 January 2013—and in whose seat I often sit in the old synagogue where he and I both worshipped. Les stood just over five feet, but, to me and to many people who knew him, he was a hundred feet tall.

Les came from Budapest, from a very typical acculturated Hungarian Jewish background, with his wife, Eva. They settled in Melbourne and, from the beginning, made a great contribution. With his sometimes impenetrable Hungarian English he became a great friend of the Myers family, of all people. But Les was one of those great, post-Shoah giants of the Australian Jewish community who came to this great country and who made it greater. Together with his beloved wife, Eva, he was the life force in Melbourne of many key philanthropies, a businessman of great acumen and a great Australian patriot who was committed to our pluralist way of life.

It is interesting that, at this very moment, we have in this country Zsolt Nemeth, Hungarian Secretary of State. Australia's gain was Hungary's loss—that is all I can say to the visiting Hungarian Secretary of State—when our friend Les came to this country. He had many friends in this House who will mourn his passing. He was on first-name terms with political leaders on both sides of the political spectrum, in state and federal politics. At one of the memorial services I attended I met both the former Premier of Victoria Steve Bracks and another great migrant business success: Mr Frank Costa, the very well-known patron—I was going to say of the Geelong Football Club, but one could almost say of Geelong.

Les literally helped build Melbourne and Australia. He claimed to me that he had built 65 major buildings in Australia since the Second World War. And here is a man who came to Australia with nothing. He was the only public living figure I knew of to have had a public building or square named after him in the city of Melbourne while he was still alive. It is the square at the end of the Sandridge railway bridge, which I attended when it was opened by the then Mayor of Melbourne, John So.

Les had the vision to preserve the Sandridge railway bridge, which links South Bank with the city of Melbourne. He insisted
that it include these incredible moving sculptures, which go up and down the bridge on any normal day. That bridge also contains the display of tens of national groups who make up the pluralist society of Melbourne and Australia. That was also endowed by him.

One of his greatest achievements was his restoration of the Grand Hotel in Spencer Street—that grand Victorian headquarters of the former railway administration in Victoria. It is an extraordinary building that, when Jeff Kennett, then Premier of Victoria, almost suggested it to him as a project, was black with the dust of endless trains that go past that corner of Spencer and Flinders streets. I urge any of you who visit Melbourne, on your way to the football, which is now in that area behind it, to have a look at this magnificent building, which he restored and which you can stay at in its grand corridors. You can stay in the hotel, or three levels of it are also apartments. It has the most magnificent staircases. It is almost like that song from Fiddler on the Roof—one going up and one going down, just for show. He opened it probably at the height of his building pride, with then Premier Jeff Kennett in his efforts to restore Melbourne in that period when Mr Kennett was Premier.

Mr Erdi was also the leading donor behind the now very successful Jewish Film Festival. He was responsible for the Ageing in Place units at the Emmy Monash Home for the Aged—(Time expired)

Refugees

Mr Ruddock (Berowra) (21:51): Members who know me well know that I have a very strong and personal interest in the plight of refugees, and that is longstanding, long before I ever held any role in relation to immigration and multicultural affairs. In my electorate about one-third of the population is overseas born. Amongst them people from India and China are significant, but there are also many who have come through refugee and humanitarian programs and are from places like Iran, Afghanistan and South Sudan. Many of them have family in perilous situations abroad and seek, under the special humanitarian program, to be able to sponsor relatives.

In 2007-08 there was an expectation that there were some 5,000 special humanitarian visas available. Now, in 2011-12, there are just 714. This is very significant because those who are seeking to sponsor relatives find that they are likely to have to wait, in bona fide cases, very long periods of time before their claims are going to be processed to finality.

In my electorate I have contact with many local individuals, genuine refugees, who, with the support of their local churches and communities, want to be able to make Australia home for their relatives. Their applications in some cases have awaited processing for some years. They are now being told—in the case of an Iranian man recently granted a protection visa—that his wife and children can expect a five- to nine-year waiting period. Why is this the case? I think it is well understood by many people who have settled in Australia—and they say it around Western Sydney—that they came the right way and they cannot understand why priority is being given to those people who have money enough to pay people smugglers and come here without lawful authority, and their claims are dealt with in priority.

There are some particular aspects of government policy that, if addressed, would in my view in part help to address this situation. One of the things that has troubled me enormously has been the fact that we now have a situation where almost anybody who arrives in Australia by boat, without
lawful authority, will in fact succeed in a protection visa application. It was not always the case. I think what needs to be understood is why this has changed. It has changed because of deliberate decisions of the government in relation to the way in which decisions are made.

There was an interesting report in the Australian yesterday stating that three-quarters of boat people who appeal their failed asylum claims to the Refugee Review Tribunal are rewarded with permanent residency in Australia. Three-quarters—it suggests that immigration department officials experienced in making decisions as to who is or is not a refugee get it wrong in three-quarters of the cases they are dealing with. It is a preposterous proposition. I believe the reason the tribunal makes the decisions in the numbers of cases it does is that it is easier to say yes than it is to say no, because the department took the decision—or was, I believe, directed by a minister—not to appeal decisions to positively grant a visa to a formerly rejected asylum seeker. The consequence of that is that, when the person who has been rejected appeals the decision and is likely to succeed and the department will never in turn appeal that decision, it is easier for the decision maker to give way and therefore avoid embarrassment. So we have a situation now where 503 departmental decisions from a total of 670 cases heard since July 2012 have been rejected. They join more than 3,200 others, since 2008. If the government changed its policy on this matter—(Time expired)

Werriwa Electorate: Beautiful Minds

Mr LAURIE FERGUSON (Werriwa) (21:56): I am pleased tonight to speak about a locally based group in my electorate, Beautiful Minds, formed in 2004 with its name deriving from a 2001 movie starring Russell Crowe. The president, Sandra McDonald, became involved in this area when her son Shane developed a mental illness 10 years ago, at the age of 20. This initiated her drive to do something in our area.

The group is primarily about advocacy and fundraising for mental health in the Macarthur region. It is a community group built essentially around volunteers. It recognises the need for more to be done to help those in south-west Sydney with mental illness. It raises awareness and provides education to make mental illness an accepted illness. It is supported by the Schizophrenia Fellowship of New South Wales. In March 2008 they opened a mental health recovery centre in Campbelltown with the assistance of that organisation. That recovery centre is called Harmony House.

The group's stated vision is a society in which people with mental illness are valued and assisted in living fulfilling lives. On 10 March my wife, Maureen, and I attended a mad hatters event at the Ingleburn RSL Club, which was a major fundraiser for the group. The compere there was Captain Pat, from local radio station 96.1. I have to say that I had been to another function in the fortnight before that at which I had seen a decline from 300 attendees to about 150, and it was symptomatic of the reality that if you do not revive and refresh events they decline and people lose interest. So I have to say that this event on 10 March, which was strongly supported by the Ingleburn RSL Club and a number of other local groups, was a tremendous success both from the point of view of making money and for conviviality. A lot of work was done in regard to this event, helped by Hurlstone Agricultural College, one of New South Wales's major selective government schools, and the Campbelltown Performing Arts School. The children there provided strong support to the event.
The group is supported by a number of other organisations locally: Westpac of Ingleburn, the Storage King of Ingleburn, the RSL and so on. The group has really raised this issue to prominence in the local community. It conducts a recovery centre, Harmony House, which provides intensive support to people suffering from mental illness, and a recover program called Day to Day Living.

That program is aimed at developing day-to-day living skills and social skills and at increasing self-confidence, self-esteem and independence. Activities offered at the centre include arts, crafts, movies, outings, sports etc. It is one of many services provided by the Schizophrenia Fellowship of New South Wales and funded partially by the Department of Health and Ageing, DoHA.

Beautiful Minds runs street stalls, raffles, and an annual fundraiser, the Beautiful Minds High Tea, which I cited earlier. In 2012 it raised $70,000 for a revamp of the recovery gardens at the Waratah Adult Mental Health Unit, behind the Campbelltown Hospital. In 2011 and 2012, it was the major mayoral charity and gained the proceeds from the annual Menangle trotting night, which is a major social event—and, as I say, rather than having balls et cetera, out in Campbelltown they conduct this charity race-meet.

It is worth noting that one in five Australian adults will experience a mental illness at some stage in their lives. Young adults between 18 and 24 years of age have the highest prevalence of mental illness. Statistics from the ABS for 2007 note these facts. Recent decades have seen less use of residential mental institutions and increased use of community mental health services—and this is the flavour of this organisation's activities. People with a mental illness may use a variety of services to help improve their ability to work or care for themselves. Two-thirds of people with a mental disorder had not used services for their mental health problems for the 12 months before that survey. People aged 16 to 34 were less likely to have used services for their mental health problems.

I want to summarise by saying that Sandra McDonald, the committee and the volunteers are the people who get off their backsides to make sure that this event occurs every year and that there are volunteers out there in the local community, and to raise the profile of this issue. They essentially do very worthwhile community activities for our area.

Bowman Electorate: Redlands

Mr LAMING (Bowman) (22:01): I will say a few words at this late hour in this great chamber about the people of Bowman and the city of Redlands—a city of 130,000 people who live in outer metropolitan Brisbane on that wonderful Moreton Bay fringe framed by North Stradbroke Island and hugged by a koala corridor; a city settled in the mid-1800s by German, English and Irish families who set up a market garden that would look after the colony, and that dreamed in the 1850s of being a capital and actually laid down the footprint for a great city which never eventuated but went on to have Finnish and Dutch migrant groups in that area and, eventually, significant intra-Queensland migration to a place where people can live close to Brisbane and still have a fabulous connection to Moreton Bay. I give that preface for the obvious reason that these people are quintessentially Australian.

They live in this outer metropolitan urban environment, where they have simple but fairly understandable expectations: that they can travel to work and that they can enjoy an environment that is relatively untouched and unaffected by urban growth. But they also
expect to be able to afford to live there, and
the hand that has been dealt them in the last
five years, by the government that we have
today, has been nothing but bad news for that
small corner of Australia.

In June this year we will see the people of
Australia having power bills that have
doubled since this Labor government was
elected. No-one can look in the eyes of a
pensioner and say that that is justified—that
they have to find that kind of money for
basic essentials of living.

We have school halls in which, while they
were celebrated with plaques and opening
ceremonies, we have sound and lighting that
cost over $120,000. This is money that could
have been invested in our schools in literacy
and numeracy but instead was used to pay
for sound systems that subsequently had no
backup. In one school, a $10,000 home
entertainment system of domestic quality
was put in, only to break down and have to
be replaced—for which it was demanded that
the school pay another $10,000.

In our hospital system, trying to get a
budget under control, we have now had a
federal government, for the first time in
history, actually go back to hospital boards
and say, 'We will take back the money that
we gave you for this year's budget to pay
nurses and doctors.' In my own Bayside area
we have lost $1.4 million in this economic
cycle. In mental health we have lost $1.4
million in our community. That does not
even include the $12 million ripped out of
PA Hospital and Logan. It does not even
include the $400,000 ripped out of dental
care this year for my community. It is
unprecedented for any government to reach
into this economic cycle of this financial
year and remove money that had been
provided to run our hospital system.

The year 2007 in my community of
Redlands will be remembered for the
moment that broadband rollout stopped in
our community, and there has not been a
fibre laid since that election day—no; it has
been left in suspended animation under the
pretext of the ACCC choosing points of
interconnect. We know that that is a hideous
misrepresentation. The ACCC demanded
that NBN Co. identify 120 points of
interconnect, mostly Telstra exchanges. But
they were chosen by NBN Co. I have said
before in this place that, by the end of the
next three years, senior Labor members in
this place will have over 80 per cent of their
areas covered by the NBN. If you are a
Labor minnow, it will be around 60 per cent.
And if you are a coalition MP it will be
around eight per cent of your area receiving
NBN as a result of the NBN Co. after three
years. That has been shameful pork-
barrelling by an organisation from which all
of us expected much better. There will not be
a single fibre of broadband laid in the
Redlands area for the next three years.

My people love fishing—they love to be
able to wet a line and have access to the bay.
They have already struggled with years of
political molestation around the laws of
fishing, and with prevention from being able
to do something simple like taking your
family to go and fish. They have large areas
of Moreton Bay locked up. They are now
watching very carefully the marine park
zoning approaches by this government, to
make sure those are based firmly on
evidence—that is all that anyone can ask,
and we will be insisting that that occurs.

Turning from our schools to our hospitals
to our small business families: they set up
Green Loans to invest thousands of dollars in
the dream of a new business, only to have it
vaporised by an SMS message from the
minister's department. That is a great
tragedy. There were people who bought into
the business of laying pink batts in ceilings,
only to see that one also destroyed; $70-
million-turnover businesses became nothing as a result of the damage done by this government. We have heard of competitive neutrality, but nothing can really justify the damage that has been done by this government to the people of Redlands in the last five years.

Kingston Electorate: Small Business

Ms RISHWORTH (Kingston) (22:06): I would like to speak tonight, importantly, about the 13,500 small businesses in the southern Adelaide region in my electorate. These businesses—small businesses but also micro-businesses—do play an essential part in our local economy and local employment. They are in a variety of industries, from construction, agriculture, real estate, production of a range of food products or wine to a whole range of other services. These services and products are so critical to employment in our local community.

We need to acknowledge, though, that these small businesses need help at times. They need help at times with ideas, assistance or generation of information, or they may need information about the latest things going on. That is why the Southern Success Business Enterprise Centre has been so critical in providing a whole range of services to small and micro businesses in my local area, including low-cost practical business advice, counselling, referral and support. It is very important that this support is given to our local small businesses. I was very pleased that, since 2007, when I was a candidate, the Labor opposition pledged money to assist small business enterprise centres to help provide a whole lot of services to small business. I am very pleased that this support has continued with the recent announcement that the federal government will provide a $200,000 grant to the Southern Success Business Enterprise Centre. This announcement was widely welcomed by businesses and microbusinesses in my local area.

I will talk about what the Southern Success BEC has done recently. It has provided nearly 6,000 services to more than 2,000 clients since it began, whether that be mentoring or support services or just getting information out there. That has been critical and important. The general manager of the Southern Success BEC, Alan Edmond, said that he is thrilled to see that the hard work of this centre is recognised by the government and that the funding will enable them to continue to provide critical support for local business.

That is not the only service that is providing support to businesses in my electorate. One of the critical things giving support to businesses in my electorate, as we roll out the National Broadband Network, is connectivity to the rest of the world. Indeed, with the rollout and connection in Willunga as a test site, we see that local businesses are finding this critically important to allow them to expand their business. One of those businesses is Oz Feathers. This organisation makes handmade fabric feather banners—they are the ones that might be six metres tall that you see advertising a business or something on the side of the road. This is a very small business. The flags are used for businesses, community events or private use. Linda Sanders, the creative director of Oz Feathers, states that since they have been connected to the NBN they have been able to interact with interstate and international contacts. Their reputation has grown and orders have increased, with requests now coming in from customers all over the world. The NBN has ensured that this very small business operating from Willunga is on a level playing field around the world and is able to compete around the world. This has been critically important. We also heard some anecdotal evidence from Oz feathers
about how, with their former internet connection, they would start to download a file, go away, make a cup of tea, have morning tea and then come back to it. Once again, the NBN has been critically important.

I believe that small and micro business are critically important to the southern suburbs of Adelaide. I am proud that this government is working to ensure that small business and microbusiness get the support they need now and into the future, both with the infrastructure and the services that they need.

**Coffs Harbour Southern Cross University Campus**

Mr HARTSUYKER (Cowper) (22:11): We must support our regional universities. Today I would like to draw the attention of members in this House to Southern Cross University's Coffs Harbour campus and the importance of that campus to the local government area and the North Coast region. The Coffs Harbour SCU campus is important from a number of viewpoints. Firstly, it is part of the Coffs Harbour campus, which comprises a TAFE and a senior high school; secondly, the SCU campus provides educational opportunities for students in the local area, across Australia and around the world; thirdly, the campus has developed strong ties with the local community; and, fourthly, it is an important contributor to our local and regional economies.

The SCU Coffs Harbour campus offers a variety of undergraduate and postgraduate degrees, including early childhood, primary and secondary education, nursing, psychology, business and information technology, tourism, arts, social science and creative writing. The National Marine Science Centre is another key operation of the university in Coffs Harbour. It began operation as a joint facility with the University of New England in 2002 before SCU took over full operation of the site in 2010. SCU Coffs Harbour currently has 1,600 students. Delivering educational opportunities is all about providing access to the courses that students are seeking. The ongoing growth of the Coffs Harbour campus demonstrates they are successfully doing that. The campus is different from many other education campuses in that it is quite unique, having the combination of a TAFE and a senior high school. It is known as the Coffs Harbour Education Campus, or CHEC. It is a unique partnership that works very well.

In Coffs Harbour we can effectively have students completing their secondary studies at Coffs Harbour Senior College, completing a diploma at TAFE and then articulating on to a university degree. This has a lot of attraction to many students who perhaps would not have sought a university course without the pathway from senior high through to TAFE and then education at a university. The Coffs Harbour campus has recently sought to build on its competitive advantage through two new initiatives which have been developed with the aim of increasing opportunities for students in the Mid North Coast region. The SCU college has been established to provide pathways to university for those who might never have previously thought they could achieve a university qualification.

Working closely with the institute of TAFE, SCU offers a number of associate degrees and is developing learning centres in other regional locations, including Grafton. Associate degrees are being offered in allied health, business and arts, with science planned for 2014. Another new initiative, aimed at the region's brightest high school students, is the head start program. Designed for high-achieving students in years 11 and 12, it gives them the opportunity to do a unit of university study while still at school. Introduced in 2012, this has become a highly
popular program, providing direct entry into SCU.

Southern Cross University is also a research-intensive university. At the Coffs Harbour campus, researchers are involved in a range of projects to further enhance the economic and social development of the region. For example, SCU has established the Regional Initiative for Social Innovation and Research, looking at social media as a mechanism for reducing the effects of social isolation and comparing the experience of asbestos sufferers in regional areas with those in metropolitan areas. It is also working with CSIRO on a project investigating how the use of the internet in social housing can help residents form online communities and re-engage with the broader community, education and employment.

Researchers are also working with the Coffs Harbour City Council on economic development strategies, which are expected to have flow-on benefits for all regional areas. And speaking of economic development, members should not underestimate the importance of SCU to the local economy. In fact, a report released this week by the Regional Universities Network revealed that the Coffs Harbour SCU campus contributes $36.1 million to Coffs Harbour's gross regional product, $23 million in household income and just over 300 full-time jobs. With this money having a multiplying effect through the community, it goes to show the importance of this university to our local region.

The SCU campus has resulted in increased university attendance and an increase in the number of people with university qualifications. The proportion of university qualified people increased from 13.1 per cent to 15.6 per cent in the local government area between 2006 and 2011. The university campus is a great asset to our local community. Our regional universities need to be supported to allow students the opportunity to gain a university education in the local area and save them the requirement of having to travel far at great expense. (Time expired)

Secondary Breast Cancer
Royal Australian Regiment Association

Ms O'NEILL (Robertson) (22:16): I would like to speak on two matters in the time that is allocated for this adjournment speech this evening. Firstly, I would like to put on the record here in the House that a friendship group was formed just last week. I would like to acknowledge the member for Brisbane for becoming the deputy chair and assisting me with engaging, in the very first instance, our sisters across both chambers of this place in raising awareness about secondary breast cancer. In recent years there have been significant developments in the community's understanding and support of research into primary breast cancer, sometimes called early breast cancer. Our focus in this particular group is to look at secondary breast cancer, which is sometimes called secondary tumours, metastatic disease, stage 4 breast cancer or advanced breast cancer. These are all different terms that are used to describe the return of a breast cancer.

It is a systemic disease, and it does affect other parts of the body. Commonly it develops when some of the cancer cells from the original cancer in the breast travel to other parts of the body through the blood or the lymphatic system and develop into a new sort of cancer. It is still known as breast cancer, even if it can occur in a different part of the body. The current situation for people who have secondary breast cancer, though, is less than you might hope it would be. The reality is that even the best treatment for secondary breast cancer does not always
remove the disease and the terrible outcome for too many women, both younger and older women. The opportunities we have to raise awareness about this issue and to support the development of research and funding of appropriate medical treatment to extend and enhance the lives of these women is something that we are dedicated to doing, and I wanted to put that on the record.

Secondly, on a serious note, but marked by a very happy and enjoyable occasion, I was privileged on 27 February at the Ettalong Beach War Memorial Club to attend the Long Hai Dinner in honour of the 8th Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment Association. I have never been to a dinner such as this before, and it was an extremely memorable occasion. On this occasion, which used to happen every five years and now happens every three years, they remember their fallen comrades with great honour. It is a very sensitive and very generous recalling of the lives lived, the times shared and the freedom fought for. Happily, the event was enabled with a $3,000 grant from the federal government. In a letter sent by Minister Snowdon in December last year, the organising group, from my local area, was very pleased to receive the $3,000 that enabled that event to take place.

Special guests were Kevin Sullivan, who gave the loyal toast; Major General Adrian Clunies-Ross, who was the major of the battalion; and Michael Jeffery, the former Governor-General. I would like to place on record the names of the fallen who were remembered on that occasion: Private Noel Clare, Private Warren Groves, Private Eric Gould, Private Victor Wagstaff, Sergeant Douglas Baker, Private Barry Munday, Private Philip Richter, Private Timo Pesonen, Private Larry MacLennon, Private Garry West, Sergeant William Hoban, Corporal Robert Jackson, Corporal James Barrett, Lieutenant Corporal John Bressington, Private Stephen O'Dal, Private Daryl Poulson, Private John McQuat, Private Phillip Earle, Lieutenant Corporal Phillip Goody and Sergeant Alan Ahearn. On that evening, we were gathering to remember the fallen, and I was really touched by the way in which the men spoke about these fallen comrades being in their presence. Each of them mentioned the name, told a short story about the loss of that person and said, 'Tonight I dined and drank with—' and identified each of their fallen comrades. They carry the memory in their hearts, and very much did honour to the notion we have of 'lest we forget'.

**Bennelong Electorate**

Mr ALEXANDER (Bennelong) (22:22): Prior to my election as the member for Bennelong I travelled across the 58 square kilometres, knocking on more than 9,000 doors and meeting with as many Bennelong residents as possible. Throughout this period I had one simple message, 'I am here to listen, to listen some more and then to listen again.' While the title after my name may have changed, my core responsibility to the electorate has not. Over the past 2½ years I have continued to visit homes, shops, schools and community gatherings across Bennelong, and I am still listening. The difference now is that I am able to use my parliamentary position to discuss the matters of concern to local residents with my parliamentary colleagues and local, state, business and community representatives. Recently I wrote about this to the local community and I listed a range of issues on which I have extended the listening campaign to include serving and delivering for Bennelong residents.

Bennelong became famous in the 1990s as the home of the 'Bennelong funnel' created by aircraft descending into Sydney Airport.
all lining up above the same houses in East Ryde, Marsfield and Gladesville. Through my role on the Sydney Airport Community Forum, I have reinforced the commitment to the principles of noise sharing and have had noise-monitoring terminals installed in two different locations to provide solid data on the noise levels endured by Bennelong residents. I also identified and stopped Airservices Australia testing of a new flight path system, which was to occur without the required consultation with the local community.

Traffic congestion is the biggest threat to the quality of life for residents and productivity for businesses in the local region, with Bennelong home to five of the top 10 most congested roads in New South Wales. To address this, I formed and chair a committee that partners with the New South Wales government to develop policies to reduce the suffocation of our major cities. This committee met again just several hours ago and is determined to support genuine long-term planning for a sustainable reduction in local traffic congestion. Of course, this should be strongly supported by improved public transport and road infrastructure. Unfortunately New South Wales suffers from a massive infrastructure deficit after 16 years of broken promises under the previous Labor state government.

The North West Rail Link, which would have taken thousands of cars off Bennelong roads, first announced at a cost of $360 million in 1998, must now finally be built by the new state coalition government, yet the rapid increase in property values has put the construction cost over $8.5 billion, leaving little money for anything else.

The Chatswood to Parramatta rail link was also announced in 1998 at a cost of $1 billion. Half of it did get built by Labor for the princely sum of $2.4 billion. The construction of the remaining link, which would help those in the western suburbs of Sydney access the booming centre of Macquarie Business Park and Macquarie University, was announced as an iron-clad promise by Prime Minister Gillard at the last election for yet another $2.1 billion. Yet, just like so many Labor leaders before her, it is clear for all to see that not a penny has been spent, not a sod of soil has been turned. It appears, Prime Minister, the people of Bennelong never actually believed that you would keep this promise.

Other local initiatives have included the Bennelong Table Tennis Schools Program, which has put table tennis tables in every school in the region in order to promote cultural integration and a healthy activity for students; the Bennelong Village Businesses Campaign, which encourages residents to support their local small businesses; and, ongoing work on improving the access to quality and affordable health care. All these policy initiatives will need to be based on one simple truth: that this country needs a strong economy, where debt is reduced, budgets are balanced and government acts more like a regular household striving to live within their means. Through these strong economic foundations, to be built by a future coalition government, the Bennelong community will prosper and I will continue to honour my pledge to keep on listening, serving and delivering for the local community.

Geelong Region

Mr CHEESEMAN (Corangamite) (22:26): The most important job I have and my Labor colleagues have is supporting and creating jobs across our economy. Since being elected in 2007, in my part of the world, in Geelong, Labor has been busy working with our private sector employers to help support jobs. Principally, we have
invested in Ford, keeping them manufacturing motor vehicles; we have invested in Shell, keeping them producing petroleum; and, obviously we have helped to support Alcoa, particularly given the high Australian dollar.

About three weeks ago I was very pleased to hear of Labor's next chapter in helping to support manufacturing jobs in the Australian economy, particularly within my federal seat of Corangamite. Labor's $1 billion manufacturing statement is about building on these investments. Once fully implemented, this will ensure that large projects must give Australian businesses a fair chance to win work. In fact, any project over $500 million needs to provide work opportunities for local manufacturers. It is estimated that this initiative alone will create $16 billion of work for Australian manufacturing companies.

We have also put in place protections to ensure that we do not have products unfairly dumped on the Australian economy at below production costs. We are also supporting work to ensure that governments will be required to buy Australian made product, when that is possible. We have been investing significantly within my electorate to ensure that we build the skills we need as a nation and as a local economy. That is why the federal Labor has invested some $21 million to support the development of carbon fibre and also to support the delivery of training in our economy. This is in stark contrast to what the state Liberals have done in Victoria where they have ripped millions of dollars out of our TAFE training system. Unfortunately, they have also written to the Commonwealth government asking that the Geelong region specifically be opened up to more 457 visa workers.

In Geelong, we have an unemployment rate higher than the state average. We have high-skilled employees who have not been able to secure work in our local economy, yet we have the state Liberal government wanting to open up further 457 visa employment opportunities to overseas workers. We have a perfect storm situation, as identified by Minister O'Connor a number of weeks ago, when cuts were made to TAFE training, denying young people the opportunity to access the skills required to gain ongoing local work. We also have the state Liberal government wanting to open up more opportunities for 457 visa workers within the Geelong region.

Through the course of this week, I have called on the new state Liberal Premier, Mr Napthine, to confirm whether he supports the position adopted by his predecessor, which was to open up more 457 visa workers within the Geelong economy. To date, he has failed to rule out whether he supports the previous Premier's position or he is going to take a different course of action.

The SPEAKER (22:31): It being 10.30 pm, the debate is interrupted.

House adjourned at 22:31

NOTICES

The following notices were given:

Mr Crean to present a Bill for an Act to provide for a Council for purposes.

Mr Crean to present a Bill for an Act to deal with consequential and transitional matters in connection with the Australia Council Act 2013, and for related purposes.

Mr Dreyfus to present a Bill for an Act to make amendments consequential on the enactment of the Court Security Act 2013, and for related purposes.

Mr Dreyfus to present a Bill for an Act to enhance the security of persons and premises connected with courts, and for related purposes.
Mr Dreyfus to present a Bill for an Act to amend the Marriage Act 1961 in relation to celebrants, and for other purposes.

Mr Dreyfus to present a Bill for an Act to amend the law relating to social security, and for related purposes.

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

Mr Garrett to present a Bill for an Act to amend the Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act 2000, and for related purposes.

Mr M. J. Ferguson to present a Bill for an Act to amend the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2006, and for related purposes.

Dr Emerson to present a Bill for an Act to amend the Export Finance and Insurance Corporation Act 1991, and for related purposes.

Mr Combet to present a Bill for an Act to amend the law in relation to measurement, and for related purposes.

Mr Shorten to present a Bill for an Act to establish the Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency, and for related purposes.

Mr Shorten to present a Bill for an Act to amend the law relating to corporations, and for other purposes.

Mr Snowdon to present a Bill for an Act to amend the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004 and other legislation, and for related purposes.

Mr Clare to present a Bill for an Act to assist in the prevention of organised crime, and for other purposes.

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

Mr Ripoll to present a Bill for an Act to amend the law relating to corporations and the financial sector, and for other purposes.

Ms Bird to present a Bill for an Act to provide for student identifiers and access to transcripts relating to vocational education and training, and for related purposes.

Mr Christensen to move:
That this House:

(1) notes that:

(a) the Australian sugar industry is one of the world’s most efficient and innovative producers and exporters of sugar and the leader in the adoption of sustainable farming practices;

(b) Australia is the third largest exporter of sugar in the world;

(c) there are some 6000 cane growers in Australia with more than 4000 farms growing sugar that operate along Australia’s eastern seaboard; and

(d) the sugar industry directly and indirectly supports 40,000 jobs in Australia, underpinning the economic stability of many coastal communities, and is the social fabric that has woven itself through the development of coastal townships up and down the coast; and

(2) expresses concern about claims that sugar is ‘toxic’; and

(3) rejects calls for a tax based on the content of sugar in a particular food product.

Mr Christensen to move:
That this House:

(1) recognises:

(a) dyslexia as a learning disability which, according to the World Federation of Neurology, is ‘manifested by difficulty in learning to read despite conventional instruction, adequate intelligence and socio-cultural opportunity’;

(b) the Irlen Syndrome, also known as, Scotopic Sensitivity Syndrome as a specific type of visual perceptual dyslexia; and

(c) that school students with dyslexia learn differently to their fellow students;
(2) supports the concept of compulsory teacher training to ensure educators have:

(a) an awareness of dyslexia and the impact dyslexia has on students;

(b) the ability to recognise the symptoms of dyslexia; and

(c) the ability to utilise a range of multi-sensory learning methods to engage with students with dyslexia;

(3) supports the:

(a) concept of compulsory training of pre-service teachers in dyslexia and Irlen Syndrome as well as training in multi-sensory teaching methods for children who learn differently; and

(b) ability of teachers to be able to inform parents directly about concerns they have of their children exhibiting symptoms of dyslexia or Irlen Syndrome;

(4) requests the Government make changes to National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) to allow school students with dyslexia or Irlen Syndrome to have their NAPLAN test read to them;

(5) supports the concept of modified homework for school students with dyslexia to reflect their particular learning difficulties; and

(6) recognises that dyslexia would be a significant barrier to learning a second language and supports the ability of school students to opt out of Languages other than English classes.
The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms O’Neill) took the chair at 16:01.

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

Water

Mr McCormack (Riverina) (16:01): I was visited yesterday by Ric Bull and Sara Hourigan, from Water for Rivers, which is delivering water savings with community, commercial and environmental benefits. Unfortunately, Water for Rivers is now winding up. It is a public company established in 2003 by the Australian, New South Wales and Victorian governments with the objective of recovering water, principally through water savings projects in those aforementioned states.

Underpinning each of these projects was the goal of leaving a regional legacy of water use efficiency and increased agricultural productivity, and they have achieved much. Water savings targets set for Water for Rivers have been exceeded by a full 11 per cent, or a total of 313 gigalitres of water saved, all within the anticipated time frame and within budget. Eighty per cent of water recovered by Water for Rivers has been through regional projects and investments. As a result, there is now an acknowledged legacy of infrastructure capable of improving the sustainability of regional farms and communities in the context of a future with less water.

Water for Rivers projects have yielded an average recovery cost of water of about $1,400 per megalitre, a figure on par with and in some cases under that of direct water purchase costs. Smarter use of water using real-time technology, epitomised by the Murrumbidgee Computer Aided River Management project, can ultimately and will ultimately deliver better solutions and outcomes for the Murray-Darling Basin, with environmental watering targets met sustainably rather than through water purchase alone. We know that unfortunately, for every $5 the Labor government has spent on water buybacks, it has only spent a dollar on water savings infrastructure, and shame on it for that.

In February 2011, the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, Tony Burke, said that the government would move to change current taxation arrangements—they were current at the time and they still are, unfortunately—for irrigators who took up water efficiency investment grants to allow more strategic infrastructure investment. I have taken this up with the Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government, and I know that that particular piece of legislation, that amendment that is so desperately needed, is at the moment being debated and still being worked through, but it is more than two years on and it really needs to happen. The irrigators desperately, desperately need it. Certainly in my area at the moment we are seeing the effects of environmental water flows: inundation levels which residents say will cause man-made flooding, cut off access to their land and cause infrastructure damage.

This is not needed. We could have and should have had good water policy. I am glad that the coalition in government will cap buybacks at 1,500 gigalitres. With the recovery already done, that will only mean 249 more gigalitres. We need better water policy and we need it now. (Time expired)
Road Safety

Mr MURPHY (Reid) (16:04): Reports from the United States show that electronic stability control reduces the risk of single-vehicle crashes by about 40 per cent and crashes of four-wheel-drive and sports utility vehicles by 67 per cent. These figures correspond to a very large number of lives saved and serious injuries avoided. Translating the 40 per cent reduction in single-vehicle crashes to the 2011 annual road toll of 1,291 people killed shows that up to 516 fewer people would have perished on our roads in that year.

Given that the average time of Australian vehicles on the road is 15 years, it will take time before the majority of vehicles have electronic stability control. Although the automotive industry introduced the technology in 1995, inaction by the Howard government delayed this important advance by as much as 16 years.

In the last few years, significant advances have led to the development of self-driven or autonomous vehicles that can safely manoeuvre in traffic. Mercedes Benz has announced that its 213 class will feature an autonomous driving system that uses cameras and radar to control the speed of the vehicle and the distance from the vehicle in front. As well, Audi announced plans to introduce an autonomous driving system dubbed 'traffic jam assistant' that will control vehicles at speeds of up to 60 kilometres per hour. There is no doubt that this equipment will improve rapidly and trials conducted over hundreds of thousands of kilometres show that autonomous systems are as safe, if not safer, than many human drivers. Moreover, autonomous systems are not prone to road rage or hangovers, cannot get drunk or tired, and neither are they aggressive, stupid, careless or inexperienced. Even simple systems such as GPS based speed control or speed control systems that use cameras to observe road conditions are now relatively inexpensive and could be fitted to all vehicles, particularly older ones operated by younger drivers. A trial conducted by the former New South Wales Roads and Traffic Authority found that the equipment was effective and practical. Of course, the present New South Wales Liberal-National party government has no intention of implementing a reform like this, given their laissez faire attitude towards other life and death matters like gun control. Ridiculously, Transport for New South Wales has labelled the technology 'a major risk to road users', as if the present situation is characterised by its safety.

It is now apparent that the new autonomous vehicle technology makes possible a great reduction in road crash fatalities and injuries. Given the very considerable benefits, I believe that the autonomous system should be required to be fitted to all vehicles as rapidly as possible.

National Disability Insurance Scheme

Mr CRAIG KELLY (Hughes) (16:07): I did have something prepared to discuss in the three minutes I have today, but something happened in question time that I just cannot let go. In response to a question today from the shadow minister for finance asking the Prime Minister how the government would sustainably pay for some important reforms, including the National Disability Insurance Scheme, the Prime Minister stated that the coalition opposes the NDIS. This is absolutely outrageous. The coalition has made it very clear that we support the NDIS. For the Prime Minister to use question time and our parliament, and disabled people, as political pawns in the NDIS debate is an absolute disgrace and she stands condemned. We cannot have a Prime Minister playing politics with disabled people in this country.
Let me make this abundantly clear: the current NDIS funding model that this parliament put in place is not sustainable. It provides no certainty and no surety to parents and carers across our nation. Currently, the funding is only $250 million a year when we know the NDIS needs funding of something like $10 billion. We are only 97.5 per cent short of the money that we need, and we have the Prime Minister coming into question time saying that the coalition opposes the NDIS. It is a disgrace. The Prime Minister stands condemned for her comments. Both sides of this parliament have responsibilities regarding how we are going to fund the NDIS. As I said, we are 97.5 per cent short of the funding that we need. The only way we are going to fix that is to grow the economy, to make sure the economy is strong, to take away the unnecessary taxes, to cut the waste.

We in the coalition want to work with the Labor Party and work with the Greens and proceed with the NDIS in a bipartisan spirit. The Prime Minister broke that spirit of bipartisanship today trying to play politics with the NDIS. She is playing politics with the most vulnerable and disabled people in our country. It is an absolute disgrace. I hope the good members on that side of the parliament, in their caucus, have a word to the Prime Minister and let us get back and tackle the NDIS in the bipartisan way that we should and not use it as a political tool.

Cunningham Electorate: Health

Ms BIRD (Cunningham—Parliamentary Secretary for Higher Education and Skills) (16:10): I want to report to the House on two important community health initiatives that occurred in my electorate in recent weeks. First of all, on Thursday, 7 March, I was very pleased to join with 17 other Illawarra political leaders at an event organised by Wollongong's Young Citizen of the Year, Jessica Sparks, who has an organisation called Sparking Life. Jess created Sparking Life, which is dedicated to increasing organ and tissue donation in Australia. She was the recipient of a double-lung transplant over three years ago, and I have known Jess for those intervening years. She is a great advocate for the importance of organ donation.

The event was a culmination of DonateLife Week, which happens around the nation. Seventeen of us came together from all political parties. There were me and the member for Throsby, Stephen Jones; state members Ryan Park, Noreen Hay, Anna Watson and Gareth Ward; Wollongong Lord Mayor, Gordon Bradbery; and Shellharbour Mayor, Marianne Saliba—just to give a taste of the coverage that was at that event. We all came together to hold up signs of commitment, a pledge, to talk to our families about the importance of organ donation so that, in those tragic circumstances where decisions have to be made, the conversations have already been had.

It is particularly important to recognise that at any one time there are about 1,600 people on a transplant waiting list and that just one decision to donate can save up to 10 lives. So it is a very important issue to raise. I am very pleased that I had my Medicare donor card, and I would encourage anyone who thinks that they are covered by some sort of driver's licence scheme or whatever not to muck around and to go to the Medicare site and sign up and have that conversation with your family. I am sure that all of us in this chamber heartily endorse that focus.

The second event was on 9 March—a couple of days later—where I was able to join the Illawarra Rotary Clubs for their launch of this year's Bowelscan campaign, a tremendous initiative that they have been running for 14 years. I want to particularly pay tribute to Alf
Harley, who is the local coordinator of the program—and it has of course spread nationwide. We know that, sadly, too many people die unnecessarily of bowel cancer. It is one of those diseases where, if it is detected early, the prognosis is so much better. The Bowelscan program has been running through Rotary since about 1982. In the 2012-13 federal budget, the government extended its own National Bowel Cancer Screening Program to Australians turning 60 and announced a program of increasing checks in the years ahead. I commend that program to all as well.

Mrs GRIGGS (Solomon) (16:13): I rise to once again bring to the attention of the House something that I found very interesting. In today's Northern Territory News, senior journalist Nigel Adlam uncovered new interruptions that threaten to create further delays to the delivery of the National Broadband Network in Darwin and Palmerston. Mr Adlam reported that: 'The roll-out of the National Broadband Network in the Territory could be delayed for several months.' He further claimed that the National Secretary of the Communications, Electrical and Plumbing Union, Peter Tighe, warned that, due to the skills shortage, the rollout of the National Broadband Network in Darwin could be delayed. Mr Tighe said that he expected that, due to the inability of the NBN contractors to compete with mining companies for skilled workers, households across Darwin and Palmerston would not be connected to the NBN until at least February 2014.

An honourable member: After the election.

Mrs GRIGGS: After the election. This is despite construction allegedly commencing in my electorate over 18 months ago, in September 2011. The average time for construction to connection estimated by the Labor government's own figures is meant to be 12 months. Something is wrong with these figures here. The delays that Mr Tighe forecasted would remain unless NBN Co. were to provide the rollout contracts to contractors that have the ability to 'bring in workers from overseas'.

What Mr Adlam has exposed today is only further chaos and instability plaguing the Gillard Labor government and the broader labour movement. It beggars belief that, in the same week the Prime Minister is parading a crackdown on 457s and the skilled migration program, the national secretary of one of her own unions is campaigning for skilled workers to be brought in from overseas. Go figure! I would be interested to know whether Minister Snowdon, a fellow Territorian, agrees with the calls for more 457 visas to roll out the NBN—or does he agree with the Prime Minister? The Gillard Labor government are in chaos. They cannot even agree with their own unions and their skilled migration policy.

The people of Darwin and Palmerston tell me that the instability and uncertainty wreaking havoc through the Gillard Labor government are resonating throughout the Solomon community. For the people of my electorate, 14 September cannot come soon enough. It is not fair that the mums and dads feel so insecure about their children's future because of the Gillard Labor government's instability and inability to govern. So, on 14 September, the people of my electorate have a clear choice: a vote for Labor will ensure that the Gillard Labor government will be returned, ensuring more waste, more debt and more deficit, or they have the choice of a coalition government, which will provide hope, reward and opportunity.

(Time expired)
Ballarat Electorate: Tourism

Ms KING (Ballarat—Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure and Transport and Parliamentary Secretary for Health and Ageing) (16:16): It is great to follow the member for Solomon, who was extolling the virtues of speeding up the rollout of the NBN in the Northern Territory, which I find somewhat unusual. In recent weeks I have had the opportunity to visit the—

Honourable members interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms O’Neill): Order! The member for Ballarat has the call.

Ms KING: I hope my clock starts again after that appalling interruption. In recent weeks I have had the opportunity to visit the many tourism attractions in my great region. Those have been highlighted particularly as I went recently to the reopening of Kryal Castle in my electorate. What has been highlighted in particular is the support from the government to the tourism sector across the Central Highlands and Goldfields regions of Victoria.

One of the immediate highlights, as I said, was the reinvention and reopening of Kryal Castle, which is just on the outskirts of Ballarat. With Minister Ferguson, I had the pleasure of attending the official opening of the Kryal Castle redevelopment. The government provided $110,000 under the T-QUAL grants program for the new entrance attraction at the castle, the Labyrinth of the Dragon Sorcerer. This walk-though high-tech special effects family attraction is the new gateway and first impression of the castle, which has again become a great family attraction. The smiles on all the faces at the opening—particularly those of the eager children, including my own son—were demonstration enough that the redevelopment has sealed a very bright future for that tourism venture.

I have also recently visited the terrific Ballarat Wildlife Park, where the government has invested another $110,000 in T-QUAL funding for the new Crocodile Billabong Experience. If you live in the southern states, it is the only place you can see a great croc. I am sure you can see a few more in your own electorate, Madam Deputy Speaker O’Neill, but certainly in Ballarat there are not a lot of crocodiles. But the Ballarat Wildlife Park is where anyone in the southern states can have a great experience viewing a very large croc and a gator. The very large croc in residence and the other occupants of the existing facility will have much larger, more appropriate accommodation. Again, this is a great tourism facility.

Just last Friday I was at our fantastic Sovereign Hill, where we announced just on a quarter of a million dollars under the Tourism Industry Regional Development Fund to make it easier for people with special needs to visit Sovereign Hill and to stay in the accommodation there. Again, it is a fantastic facility in my electorate and a great tourism icon for the entire country. I am delighted to be able to announce that funding. This is alongside some fantastic work that is being done at the Clunes Museum and interpretive centre—some $2.7 million being invested there. Obviously, besides Sovereign Hill, we have seen smaller-scale tourism facilities like the Greendale half church and also the Daylesford Spa Country Railway in my electorate and the Creswick Woollen Mills—all fantastic tourism facilities. I would encourage all members to come and visit my electorate if they have the opportunity. There are some terrific things happening in tourism, and many a day can be spent visiting each of those.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I thank the member. We will pack our bags for Ballarat.
Superannuation

Ms O’Dwyer (Higgins) (16:19): I rise today to speak about an issue that concerns so many of my constituents and on which I have received much correspondence, and that relates to their superannuation savings. Let me read for the record a letter I received from Daryl. Daryl says:

Dear Kelly,
Why is it that this country continues to penalise hard work, sacrifice and the occasional success? …
I am in my late 50s and therefore approaching retirement age. I have planned for my retirement, sacrificed and worked hard to save for my retirement so I will not have to rely on government handouts. I am therefore increasingly concerned that the incumbent government … continues to covet superannuation with growing evidence that superannuation and superannuation savings could be targeted again as soon as the May budget. This is of immense concern for those who have planned carefully, been thrifty and worked damn hard to build a reasonable fund balance. In some respects, one must question whether it was all worth it, or whether sacrifice, responsible savings and thrift should have given way to a more extravagant lifestyle in years past.

I received this correspondence from Angela, who says:

As I am facing retirement myself in the not too distant future I am deeply concerned about the proposal to tax the income of self-funded retirees in the name of addressing structural problems within the budget. The only structural problem that I can identify is the reckless and wasteful spending that has occurred over the last six years. Like many self-funded retirees, I have worked hard, saved and salary sacrificed in order to build-up enough superannuation to ensure that I could enjoy a reasonably comfortable retirement for as long as possible. With the exception of a small minority of wealthy people most self-funded retirees are not “wealthy” and should not be subject to an unfair tax impost. Apart from the activities of this government, inflation and rises in the cost of living pose the greatest threat to the financial security of self-funded retirees who are living on a fixed income. Many of them run out of money after a short period of time and qualify for a pension. For example, ten years ago $500,000 was considered adequate for a couple to retire on. Today, financial advisors are recommending that a couple would require at least $1 million in superannuation in order to retire comfortably. It has been estimated that $1 million in superannuation will deliver an annual income of approximately $55,000-$65,000. This might seem to be a reasonable income today however in ten years time an annual income of $55,000-$65,000 may be insufficient. To give you an example, when I started working 40 years ago, I earned the grand total of $35.00 per week. Today, $35.00 might buy you a weekly zone 1 train ticket if you are lucky.

I am concerned that self-funded retirees are viewed as a soft-target by this government and their hard-earned superannuation savings are considered to be a honey-pot ripe for the picking.

We too are concerned about this. The reckless spending of the government must stop and they must stop attacking the retirement savings of hardworking Australians.

Superannuation

Tasmania: West Coast

Mr Sidebottom (Braddon—Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry) (00:00): The member for Higgins can contact her constituents right now and tell them there is absolutely no substance to that terrible fear campaign that they have now launched, and she can also explain—

Ms O’Dwyer interjecting—

FEDERATION CHAMBER
Mr SIDEBOTTOM: I did not talk while you were talking; have some manners. She can also explain why the opposition will oppose and have opposed the superannuation guarantee for low-income earners. You can go and do that and keep yourself busy.

I would now like to talk about a very important announcement. On the west coast of Tasmania, which is a beautiful, rugged, majestic area of Tasmania—between Queenstown, which is a major mining area, and the port of Strahan, which is now a major tourism centre—a railway was built in the 1890s called the Abt railway. Very special engineering went into the Abt railway. It was very important for the movement of minerals out of the west coast. In time, as the mineral exploration and production dwindled, and they found other means to move those minerals, particularly road transport, the railway went into disuse and was in great need of infrastructure development if it was to be used again. Around 2002, it received substantial federal government funding to be rebuilt as a tourist railway icon. It now has an international reputation. It includes beautiful steam engines and it has a unique, special engineering mechanism to haul it.

Unfortunately, over 10 years, a lot of the infrastructure that was developed from 2002 has been found wanting. Also, there have been a number of natural disasters in the region and of course that has affected the infrastructure itself. So the Federal Group of hotels, which had the licence for the railway, recently announced that they were withdrawing from it.

It needed $6 million for the infrastructure upgrade in order for that railway to keep going. After much discussion and negotiations with my colleagues here in Canberra—thanks to the Prime Minister very much personally and also the Minister for Transport, Anthony Albanese—we were able to secure $6 million for that upgrade. We asked the state government to equally commit, and they have now committed $6 million of their own over four years for the operational grant, and we are now looking for an operator.

So we have a horse before the cart; we have hitched the cart up, we are just looking for someone to drive it. Congratulations to the West Coast—to the West Coast Council, the tourism council of Tasmania, the Cradle Coast Authority, Minister David O’Byrne and especially to the people of Tasmania, for supporting this fantastic cause. Now the Abt railway is still on track.

Hasluck Electorate: Ride to Conquer Cancer 2013

Mr WYATT (Hasluck) (16:25): My community is filled with passionate, committed individuals who enrich our collective lives through their dedicated work in local community organisations. One of these individuals in my community is Sue Hurt. Sue is one of the most inspiring people that you could meet. When I first met Sue, I was struck by her warm and friendly nature and her genuine passion for helping others. Quickly I came to understand that Sue is one of these individuals who always steps up to the plate when the need arises. In fact, a couple of years ago my parliamentary duties prevented me from attending a community event that I had organised to celebrate Australia's Biggest Morning Tea. Sue gladly stepped in to the event on my behalf; something I am still very grateful for.

There is rarely any challenge too big for Sue if it means helping others in need out. On Saturday night I was delighted to attend a community market called the 'twilight markets' which Sue herself organised. More than just a chance for local businesses to share wares—and there were some great local businesses at the markets—the twilight markets were an...
opportunity to raise awareness of the Cancer Council’s Ride to Conquer Cancer in October this year. More than 300 guests visited the market over the course of the evening, learning more about Sue and her team’s courageous efforts to ride 200 kilometres later this year. All the funds raised from the twilight markets will go towards the Western Australia Institute for Medical Research and will be used in the endeavour to identify genetic and environmental causes of chronic myeloid leukaemia.

Unfortunately in this case there is a personal story. In 2007, Sue was diagnosed with chronic myeloid leukaemia. It is a personal challenge that Sue has faced head-on. Organising the Ride to Conquer Cancer is just one of the many ways that Sue is encouraging others. Sue’s determination is impressive. She was recently telling me about her training for the Ride to Conquer Cancer, explaining that several times a week she rides long distances. She told me that sometimes she does not feel able to make the entire distance but, with a bit of encouragement from her husband, she is even more determined to make and achieve her goals.

I would like to take this chance to congratulate Sue on her fine efforts not just for the twilight markets and the Ride to Conquer Cancer, but for all of her community work. Sue is a true champion of the community and has been recognised by all levels of government for her achievements, including through my own ‘Hasluck heroes’ awards. Sue shares my passion for community, and it is through the work of Sue and others like her that we can indeed build an even stronger local community. I look forward to working with Sue over the coming months to support her in her efforts to prepare for the Ride to Conquer Cancer.

I encourage everyone to get behind this fantastic cause. Sue and her team, the ‘Living Well with CML’ team are preparing well and are doing wonders to raise awareness about chronic myeloid leukaemia. Anyone who would like to know more can read about it at the website at conquercancer.org.au. Thank you.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms K Livermore): I thank the member for Hasluck. That was inspirational. I give the call to the member for Richmond.

**Age Pension**

**Clean Energy Supplement**

Mrs ELLIOT (Richmond) (16:29): Thank you. I am very pleased to talk about how the federal Labor government is delivering for pensioners right across the country—particularly this week, as we are delivering to around 3.5 million Australian pensioners a boost in their household budgets through an increase in the pension and, of course, through the start of the new clean energy supplement. So that will make a big difference to pensioners right across the country. In my electorate of Richmond, we are going to see 32,200 local pensioners receiving the boost to their payments this month with that increase to the pension and the start of the new clean energy supplement. The facts are that from 20 March single pensioners on the maximum rate will receive an extra $35.80 per fortnight. Pensioner couples on the maximum rate will receive an increase of $54 per fortnight combined. Of course, as I said, this increase includes a new clean energy supplement, which will be paid fortnightly along with the pension from 20 March, and it is at a rate of $13.50 per fortnight for singles, and $20.40 per fortnight for couples combined.
When we look at the increases, total pension payments for people on the maximum rate will be $808.40 per fortnight for singles and $1218.80 per fortnight for couples combined. That is a major increase. I think the concern that people have, particularly in my electorate, is the fact that the Liberal and National parties have a plan to cut the age pension by slashing the clean energy supplement if they are elected, and, of course, this will have devastating impacts on the pensioners in my area and, indeed, right throughout the country. They are also going to be removing the increases to the tax-free threshold as well, which will make a very big difference. We increased that to $18,000 and they will be cutting back on that. So we really cannot risk having them. In our area, with the National Party elected people know that they would be cutting those pensions, and that means that every single pensioner would lose more than $350 a year, and every pensioner couple would lose more than $530 a year, which is a very significant amount.

It has been a Labor Party that has increased the pension. We had historic pension reforms in 2009 and we have our clean energy supplement as well, which will increase the pension. We are also reducing the deeming rates, which is very important. It has only been the federal Labor government that has consistently delivered for pensioners, and we will continue to do that, and we will continue to highlight the fact that the Liberal and National parties will be ripping away at those pension increases. It will make a very big difference to those pensioners, who need to have those increases. It is a continued attack on families and pensioners in my electorate. We will see the age pension being ripped away by the Liberal-Nationals. We will see the Schoolkids Bonus being taken away from families; they have made it very clear that they are going to rip that away from families as well. So the pensioners and also the families in my electorate know exactly what they will be getting with the National Party and how they will be ripping that money away from them right across the board. We have certainly worked hard to make sure that we continue to deliver for all of those areas in our electorate, particularly our pensioners—having over 32,000 pensioners is a huge amount.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms O’Neill): Order! In accordance with standing order 193, the time for members' constituency statements has concluded.

**BILLS**

**Insurance Contracts Amendment Bill 2013**

**Second Reading**

Debate resumed on the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

**Mr TONY SMITH (Casey) (16:32):** It is my pleasure to speak on the Insurance Contracts Amendment Bill 2013 on behalf the shadow Treasurer and member for North Sydney. The coalition is supporting this bill, which seeks to implement recommendations made by the coalition government's 2004 review into the Insurance Contracts Act 1984. The bill had its origins in recommendations made to the Howard government review of 2003-04 of the Insurance Contracts Act. The review panel's main conclusion was that the act was generally working satisfactorily to the benefit of insurers and the insured; however, the review panel found that some changes would be beneficial given the passage of time since the 1984 act, and given developments in the insurance market over time.
The changes foreshadowed by the review were put in an exposure draft bill by the Howard government in February 2007. With the change of government at the end of that year, the matter lay dormant until 2010, when the Labor government introduced the Insurance Contracts Amendment Bill of that year. The 2010 bill had the support of the coalition; however, it lapsed with the calling of the 2010 election, and it has now been reintroduced with minor changes. As I said at the outset, the coalition will again be supporting this bill; however, as the reforms in their current form may not have been examined in detail to determine whether they may add to the cost of living of consumers, reduce specific forms of cover or introduce greater complexity in the form and content of future policies, the bill should be referred to committee. The coalition has sought to do this in the Senate.

The bill has seven schedules and I will briefly go through each of them. The first schedule amends the 1984 act to ensure that a failure to comply with the duty of good faith within an insurance contract is a breach of the 1984 act. The duty of good faith is extended to third-party beneficiaries, but the duty only commences after the contract is entered into.

The bill also gives ASIC the power to commence or continue representative action on behalf of the insured where the party has suffered damage or where there has been a breach of the act. ASIC will be able to access the various remedies under the Corporations Act in relation to Australian financial service licence holders.

Bundled insurance contracts, bundled contracts that include insurance cover for compulsory workers compensation purposes and liability to employees at common law arising from employment related personal injury will be made exempt from the Insurance Contracts Act 1984. However, bundled contracts are to be unbundled where a contract of insurance includes elements of cover that are exempt from the 1984 act as well as elements of cover that are not exempt. Once unbundled, only the elements of cover that are exempt from the 1984 act will be treated as such, whereas before even the non-exempt elements of the bundle were treated as exempt by being part of such a bundle.

The second schedule deals with electronic communications and it amends the Electronic Transactions Act 1999 and the Insurance Contracts Act 1984 to allow electronic communication of documents and statutory notices. Electronic communication is, of course, increasingly used for these kinds of transactions, and barriers to its use are a significant cost and red-tape impost to both business and consumers.

Schedule 3 deals with the powers of ASIC and amends the Insurance Contracts Act to give ASIC a statutory right to intervene in any proceeding that relates to matters arising under the 1984 act and under part 3 of the Medical Indemnity (Prudential Supervision and Product Standards) Act 2003.

The fourth schedule deals with disclosure and misrepresentation, and it makes a number of changes to the duty-of-disclosure obligations placed on insurers. The test in section 21 of the 1984 act for whether an insurer has breached a duty is clarified by including a non-exclusive factor to which the court may have regard when determining whether a reasonable person in the circumstances could be expected to know a matter was relevant to the decision of the insurer, the factor involved and the nature and extent of the insurance cover under the contract.
Amendments to section 21A will prevent insurers from asking catch-all questions relating to the risk of the contract as a means of avoiding their duty. Insurers will be required to gain specific agreement on each individual request in relation to any risk in the proposed insurance contract. This will apply at both inception and renewal of the contract. However, on renewal, insurers may choose to seek updates to answers previously provided by the insured person rather than asking specific questions again.

Compliance by the insured with the duty of disclosure on renewal does not mean that a failure to comply with the duty on the original inception or previous renewal is negated. Insurers will be required to notify the insured before the contract of issuance is entered into that the duty-of-disclosure obligations continue until the time the policy is actually entered into. A form of words may be prescribed by regulation for use by insurers to inform persons of their duty of disclosure, and any person subject to the contract is under a duty not to misrepresent.

The fifth schedule deals with remedies for life insurance contracts, and it rectifies remedies in respect of bundled contracts which have been judged by the industry and the government as being inappropriate. These remedies apply to life insurance contracts involving a surrender value and death cover. Bundled contracts will now be able to be unbundled to apply the relevant remedies. The current law forces remedies to be applied to the contract as a whole, which restricts the options for both parties. Insurers will be able to change the expiry date of a life insurance contract where that date has been incorrectly stated by the insured. Also, the statutory framework in the ICA for cancellation of general insurance contracts will be extended to life insurance contracts.

Schedule 6 deals with third parties and inserts new definitions for third-party beneficiaries to ensure that individuals who have rights under a contract of issuance but who are not insured have access to particular rights and obligations currently held by the insured. Third parties with damages claims against an insured or third-party beneficiary who has died or cannot be found may recover directly against the insurer. ASIC will have powers to bring representative actions on behalf of third-party beneficiaries. Remedies for misrepresentation and nondisclosure are available in relation to life insurance contracts that are offered as part of a group scheme that is unrelated to superannuation and remedies are available with respect to any representation or nondisclosure that occurs between when the insured became a member of the superannuation or other group scheme and when the life insurance takes effect.

The last schedule deals with the allocation of moneys recovered when an insurer exercises a right of subrogation in relation to an insurance claim. On payment of a loss the insurer is subrogated to the rights and remedies of the insured in respect of the subject matter insured. In particular, the insurer may bring an action in the insured's name against any third party who has caused loss. Those seven schedules are outlined in great detail in the minister's second reading speech and in the explanatory memorandum.

As I have said, the coalition is supporting the bill and has supported the bill in the last parliament prior to it lapsing before the election. We do, however, note that its reintroduction, while welcome, is long overdue. Industry stakeholders have been waiting for this to be reintroduced for some time. They are happy with its provisions and the level of input they previously had into the process. They have been consulted at numerous stages now over a number of years, beginning in the final years of the Howard government. This bill is the result
of the Howard government's reform agenda on insurance contract regulation. Whilst Labor has dragged its heels in the last couple of years and allowed it to drift, the bill is now before us and the coalition is supporting it.

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (16:42): I speak in support of Insurance Contracts Amendment Bill 2013. Whilst the member for Casey has accurately gone through the schedules, he says that this particular piece of legislation arises out of the review back in 2004 by the panel consisting of Mr Alan Cameron AM and Ms Nancy Milne. It is a bit broader than that. In fact, or response in relation to insurance contracts also arises out of the natural disaster insurance review report which was commissioned to examine insurance for flood and other natural disasters following the 2010 and 2011 summer floods and also was in part a response to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs report In the Wake of Disasters—volume 1: The Operation of the Insurance Industry during Disaster Events, which was presented in parliament in February 2012. So it is broader than that.

I will not go through it schedule by schedule but I will deal with the issue of insurance and how it affects natural disaster. We live in a country of fires, floods and cyclones and other extreme weather events. Those recent natural disasters have been catastrophic not just nationally, not just interstate but in my electorate of Blair, which contains most of Ipswich and all the Somerset region, containing places like the Wivenhoe Dam, the Somerset Dam, Lockyer Creek, Bremer River and the Brisbane River. We have seen catastrophe and people having to interact with the insurance industry, from farmers to businessmen to householders from Mount Stanley and Mount Kilcoy to Karalee and Ebbw Vale and other places in and around Ipswich as well, from stormwater in Redbank Plains to floods in Churchill to terrible disasters from flooding in places like Basin Pocket, North Booval, East Ipswich and Bundamba.

It is not just my electorate that has been affected but in 2009 Victoria experienced the tragic Black Saturday bushfires and 2009 and 2011 fires affected Western Australia. The people of North Queensland, Madam Acting Deputy Speaker Littlemore, in our home state have suffered terribly with cyclones Larry, Yasi and Oswald, and we have seen flooding in Western Australia, New South Wales and regional Victoria. And of course there have been 17 major floods since 1840 in the Ipswich and Brisbane region of South-East Queensland. I am sure that many people would not have known places like Grantham, the Lockyer Valley and Ferndale in the Somerset region but have heard of them now.

In 2011 we saw about 186,000 insurance claims as a result of the floods and cyclone in Queensland, the floods in Victoria and the storms and fires in Western Australia. That is an enormous number of insurance claims. Australia has a very large and profitable insurance industry. The gross premiums are about $35 billion per annum and they have total assets of nearly $114 billion. The industry employs about 60,000 people. It pays out on average about $95 million per working day in claims. The big players are companies like Suncorp, IAG, QBE insurance and Allianz Australia. It is a pretty volatile market, of course, but there are high levels of competition.

The experience of my community during the floods was that they were brutalised by the floods and brutalised by the claims process they endured dealing with their insurance. Contracts of insurance are really a transfer of economic risk from an insured to an insurer. People do not quite understand that. A premium is paid in relation to it. We have very much
adopted the English law in relation to insurance. The main legislation came into Australia in 1986 with the Insurance Contracts Act, which we amended when we came to office. Under that Insurance Contracts Act, people must act with utmost good faith towards one another. Sadly, the insurance industry has had a real get-out-of-jail-free card in relation to those types of breaches. There are of course precontractual negotiations. Some of them can just be a phone call. Others can be correspondence through email. It is a very serious thing to mislead people, particularly in relation to material facts. As a litigation lawyer, I dealt with those kinds of things in private practice.

There are many changes in this bill. One in the first schedule is an amendment to the Insurance Contracts Act so that failure to comply with the duty of utmost good faith is a breach of the Insurance Contracts Act. That is something that the House of Representatives standing committee recommended that we do. We found during our inquiry that insurance companies not only were unaccountable in that regard but had their own insurance code of practice which they felt they could use to get out of jail free when a natural disaster took place. In other words, they had obligations which their clients felt they had contracted with the insurance company in terms of notification, processing of claims and getting back information. But then the insurance companies simply junked the code of practice via a provision that they had in 4.3 of that code of practice.

I admit that, subsequent to that, with pressure from a lot of people from both sides of the House, particularly Minister Shorten, the member for Maribyrnong, they did see the need for an amendment in that regard. I commend the Insurance Council of Australia for their review. They have engaged Ian Enright, an independent reviewer, to look at their code of practice. I met with him recently and discussed the issues that have affected my community. I raised the issue that is before us tonight, about the breach of utmost good faith, and the fact that we need this type of legislation as the insurance industry, by virtue of legislative omission, found itself in a very privileged position.

That standing committee of the House of Representatives recommended a number of changes in relation to the Insurance Contracts Act, and I am pleased that the government took them up. Those included a single definition of 'flood' for home building, home contents, small business, strata title and corporate insurance, and the provision of a key facts sheet, something that was intelligible, in simple and clear English, and did not require a doctorate of law to understand.

I have said before that during the 2011 flood—we were not flooded in Ipswich at my house, although it happened when I was a child—my wife actually asked me, 'Do we have flood insurance?' I looked at my own personal insurance contract and it mentioned 'flood' a number of times. Having had 20 years as a litigation lawyer with a law degree, I can read a contract pretty well. It took me a number of goes to read that I actually personally was not covered for flood insurance. When you are in a time of vulnerability, when your home, farm or business has been flooded, and you are having to deal with an insurance company and you do not understand all these things, the power imbalance is enormous. What we are trying to do with the legislation before us is to get a fairer insurance regime in this country to equalise the power imbalance. That is what we are trying to do. And we are trying to get ASIC involved. I am pleased that we are legislating to protect consumers from unfair terms in insurance contracts. I think those protections should have been for a long time enshrined in
our laws to cover these types of situations. Consumer protection legislation is vital. I am pleased it is being extended to general insurance contracts, which in the past have been excluded.

Australians should not really have to fight and fight and fight in this regard. I have seen on numerous occasions the Financial Ombudsman actually give decisions negative to constituents in Blair but then criticise the insurance company for the claims process handling that they undertook in relation to those particular people. I can think of a flower farmer and his wife who have just recently been involved in one of those cases. I can think of another case where a businessman and his wife in Ipswich were in a similar situation—denied a claim but then the insurance company was criticised by the Financial Ombudsman for the way in which the process was conducted by the insurance company. That is simply unacceptable. People should not be brutalised by a flood and then brutalised by the claims process handling by the insurance company—someone they have contracted with and engaged with in good faith. People need to know that when they pay their premiums they are going to get a fair go, and the insurance company should not hide behind unfair terms to leave people high and dry when it comes to claims.

There are many reforms in this particular piece of legislation. But I think that it needs to be seen in the context of what we are doing to fix flood insurance in this country. I was pleased recently to see the Prime Minister visit my electorate, and to see steps taken to reduce the cost of insurance across Queensland and elsewhere. It is particularly important because the insurance industry, as I outlined earlier, is a large employer, a large business and a large group of companies that deal with Australians every day. Most Australians do not get charged with criminal offences. Most Australians do not have car accidents. Most Australians do not get injured at work. But most Australians at some point in their life will have an insurance contract. In relation to the reform, the whole package needs to be seen: the single definition of flood, the product disclosure statement and the key facts statement. The amendments before this particular chamber tonight and the work we are doing in terms of flood mitigation and insurance affordability are absolutely critical. We have proposed establishing a national insurance affordability council, and we are working with the insurance industry. I am pleased to see press releases from the Insurance Council of Australia, which is not always favourable to us, welcoming the announcement that this government has undertaken $100 million in funding over two years for flood mitigation projects. The purpose of that is to deal with the insurance industry and reduce the cost of insurance. Reducing the cost of insurance, reducing the burden of the claims process handling is so critical.

In my electorate of Blair, I am pleased to announce $10 million to the Ipswich City Council for flood mitigation projects. That was a terrible experience for people from Rosewood to Redbank Plains, experiencing flood again and again. We saw floods in Ipswich not just in 1893 and in 1974 but in 2011 and in 2013. The floods have really terrorised the people. I was pleased to see that the flood work will be undertaken in places like Thagoona, $1.8 million; Rosewood, $2.8 million; and Redbank Plains, $3.9 million. Nine of the top 10 projects of the Ipswich City Council to reduce the impact of floods on the people of Ipswich will be proceeded with. This is what the Insurance Council of Australia have been calling for. This is what I have been calling for—in the *Queensland Times*, on River 94.9 radio—again and again, because, by legislation and by action, we can actually make an impact. The Insurance Council of Australia have been calling for a national insurance affordability council, and we are working with the insurance industry.
Council have talked about levies in country towns in Queensland and the prospect of levies reducing insurance premiums. Insurance premiums have gone up massively in my community. One of those projects I mentioned involves a levy. I have been to Thagoona many times. This is particularly important for my electorate. I think this is the sort of reform that we need to undertake.

I am pleased to speak on this bill. I am pleased about these legislative changes. I am pleased about the recent announcement. I am also pleased that the Queensland government is going to match the funding that we have put aside for an $80 million mitigation fund to better the situation in Queensland and elsewhere. I support this legislation that is before the chamber.

Mr MARLES (Corio—Parliamentary Secretary for Pacific Island Affairs and Parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Affairs) (16:56): I thank the members for Casey and Blair for the contributions that they have made to the debate on the Insurance Contracts Amendment Bill 2013. The measures in the bill modernise and streamline the operation of the Insurance Contracts Act 1984. The government has undertaken extensive consultation on these measures to ensure that the balance between the interests of insurers, the insured and the wider public is maintained. The measures will help ensure a better-functioning, more efficient insurance market that will ultimately benefit the entire Australian community.

Schedule 1 to the bill makes changes to the scope and application of the act. The changes provide that a failure to comply with the duty of utmost good faith is a breach of the act; that contracts of insurance that are entered into or proposed to be entered into for the purpose of workers compensation law continue to be exempt under the act; and that contracts of insurance that include elements of cover that are exempt from the act as well as cover that falls under the act are treated as exempt from the act only in respect of the exempt elements.

Schedule 2 to the bill makes technical changes to provisions in the act regarding the giving of notices, documents and information. These changes will apply to permit insurers to use electronic communication for the purposes of providing notices or documents that are required to be given in writing.

Schedule 3 to the bill provides ASIC with an additional power to intervene in matters arising under the act. The new power is similar to the existing power ASIC has to intervene in proceedings begun by other persons about matters arising under section 1330 of the Corporations Act. It also allows ASIC to be represented in the proceedings by a staff member, a delegate, a solicitor or counsel.

Schedule 4 to the bill changes the way the act deals with particular types of disclosure and misrepresentations, to clarify how the duty of disclosure test is applied. It amends the law to make the duty of disclosure apply on renewal of an eligible contract of insurance and remove the option for insurers to ask catch-all questions in relation to eligible contracts of insurance. It amends the law regarding circumstances in which an insurer must provide an insured with a reminder as to when their duty of disclosure obligations apply. In respect of life insurance contracts, it amends the law so insurers must give a potential life insured who is not the insured under the relevant contract of insurance notice of their duty of disclosure.

Schedule 5 to the bill changes the way the act deals with the remedies for life insurers in cases of misrepresentation and nondisclosure by insureds prior to their entering into life
insurance contracts. The changes provide insurers with additional flexibility when seeking remedies for misrepresentation and nondisclosure, by allowing the unbundling of life insurance contracts so that remedies can be applied to each separate type of cover provided within a bundled life insurance contract; by providing a new remedy for misrepresentation and nondisclosure which will apply to all types of life insurance cover, with the exception of death and surrender value cover; and by expanding the range of remedies available to a life insurer where a misrepresentation of an insured involves a misstatement of the date of birth of the insured under the contract.

Schedule 6 to the bill makes technical changes to the act so that individuals who have rights under a contract of insurance—that is, third-party beneficiaries—but who are not the insured have access to particular rights and obligations currently held by those insured.

Schedule 7 to the bill amends the act to provide improved rules for the division of any proceeds that are received from a recovery action when those proceeds are recovered from a third party by an insurer under a right of subrogation.

In conclusion, these measures are another significant step made by the Gillard government to improve Australia's insurance market. While the measures in the bill, by and large, are technical in nature, as a package they will operate to streamline and clarify requirements while ensuring appropriate consumer protections are maintained.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Ordered that this bill be reported to the House without amendment.

Foreign Affairs Portfolio Miscellaneous Measures Bill 2013
Second Reading

Debate resumed on the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Ms JULIE BISHOP (Curtin—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (17:01): I rise today to support the Foreign Affairs Portfolio Miscellaneous Measures Bill 2013. This bill will make two changes. While not major, they will do much to assist the Australian Secret Intelligence Service and its employees—our overseas intelligence operations.

In amending the Intelligence Services Act 2001, this bill will make it easier for ASIS employees to transfer to another Public Service agency, extending to them the same advantages given to other members of the Australian Public Service. Put more simply, we must protect the identity of ASIS officers, and usually they claim to be public servants in these circumstances. But, when they seek to transfer to another government agency, it becomes rather problematic that they do not transfer pursuant to the Public Service Act, as one would expect of a public servant. So, importantly, the changes proposed make it easier for the ASIS officials to meet their legal obligations not to disclose the nature of their relationship with the service, and they can then transfer between agencies, pursuant to section 26 of the Public Service Act. This mechanism makes sense. It still protects an ASIS employee and their identity, but it facilitates transfers which can only assist in their career development.

Those of us who have not served in such a capacity cannot truly imagine the sacrifices that are made by the men and women of our intelligence services. For most, it is not so much a job
but a way of life. But there are career opportunities that arise—it may be a promotion or more flexible or suitable work arrangements—and what the government can and should do is make it easier for them to do what our country asks of them. Should they choose to move between government agencies or departments, we can certainly make it easier for them to do so.

The bill will also amend the Work Health and Safety Act 2011 to enable the Director-General of ASIS, with the approval of the minister responsible for the Work Health and Safety Act, to make a declaration that specified provisions of the act do not apply or apply subject to modification in relation to work carried out for ASIS. In other words, it gives the director-general the authority to carve out or provide exemptions to ASIS employees from the application of the act. As it currently stands, the director-general is unable to make such a declaration. I do not think it takes too much imagination to think of situations in which our ASIS employees overseas would find it difficult for them to comply, to the letter, with the Work Health and Safety Act. So this amendment does give greater legal clarification to the operation of the provisions of that act.

Importantly, it will provide ASIS with the same level of legal certainty that is currently afforded to both the Australian Defence Force and the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation. My understanding is that the heads of both the ADF and ASIO have been able to make such declarations to carve out the application of the Work Health and Safety Act to their particular agencies. This will ensure that full compliance with the act does not jeopardise Australia's security or the protection of its interests. As the bill's explanatory memorandum makes clear:

… full compliance—
with the act—
could in some circumstances place people who work for the Director-General of ASIS at risk and prejudice national security.

So requiring ASIS employees to meet all the provisions of the Work Health and Safety Act while they are overseas could involve placing them at risk. No Australian should doubt the difficult circumstances in which ASIS operates overseas. Managing risk is a core part of its business. As stated by its director-general, Nick Warner, in July 2012—the first ever public address about ASIS:

We have to manage risk across the whole range of our activity, from keeping our own staff and agents safe, to ensuring the integrity of our operational work and the validation of our sources.

ASIS fulfils an important role in protecting Australia's security and her interests. The need for such an agency was conceived by Prime Minister Robert Menzies in the early years of his post-World War II prime ministership. He said he had:

… decided to establish a secret intelligence service which, when organised in due course, will operate in South East Asia and the Pacific areas adjacent to Australia.

Menzies noted at the time:

Recent developments in Asia and our 'near north' make this both a prudent and an urgent measure.

The service was established in 1952 as part of the Department of Defence. It is one of the six agencies that make up the Australian intelligence community. Of course, it has since evolved into a larger, geographically dispersed organisation helping to safeguard and advance our national interest on a much wider and broader front. Its contribution to our country is needed
as much today as when it was first established in the early days of Prime Minister Bob Menzies. Accordingly, the coalition is pleased to lend its support to this bill.

Mr MARLES (Corio—Parliamentary Secretary for Pacific Island Affairs and Parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Affairs) (17:06): I begin by acknowledging the contribution of the Deputy Leader of the Opposition in support of the Foreign Affairs Portfolio Miscellaneous Measures Bill 2013. I thank her also for her very supportive statements of the good work of Australia's officers in ASIS.

This bill amends the Intelligence Services Act 2001 and the Work Health and Safety Act 2011. The amendments to the Intelligence Services Act will create a mechanism for Australian Secret Intelligence Service employees to move to an Australian Public Service agency in the same way that Australian public servants can voluntarily transfer from one Australian Public Service agency to another under section 26 of the Public Service Act 1999. The proposed provisions provide a mechanism for the Director-General of ASIS and the Public Service Commissioner to agree to equivalent classification levels. The amendments to the Intelligence Services Act will better facilitate the protection of an ASIS employee's identity as an ASIS officer, and broaden the mobility opportunities for ASIS employees in the Australian Public Service.

ASIS employees are not Australian public servants; instead they are Commonwealth officers employed under the Intelligence Services Act. However, in order to protect their identities as ASIS officers under section 41 of the Intelligence Services Act, ASIS employees are typically identified as public servants. In the ordinary course, public servants were transferred to other Public Service agencies under the Public Service Act, and there is no obvious reason a public servant would not transfer under this section. The bill addresses this by allowing ASIS officers who are identified as public servants to act like public servants if they are transferred.

This bill also contains amendments to the Work Health and Safety Act. These amendments will enable the Director-General of ASIS, with the approval of the minister responsible for the Work Health and Safety Act, to make a declaration that specifies provisions of the Work Health and Safety Act do not apply, or apply subject to modifications, in relation to persons carrying out work for the director-general. The amendment does not represent a change in the policy underpinning the Work Health and Safety Act. Subsection 12C(1) of that act already specifically recognises:

Nothing in this Act requires or permits a person to take any action, or to refrain from taking any action, that would be, or could reasonably be expected to be, prejudicial to Australia's national security.

However, currently, there is no mechanism to modify the operation of the specific provisions of the act to people who perform work for the Director-General of ASIS. This is in contrast to the position of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation as the Australian Defence Force. Both of these agencies have mechanisms for modification of the Work Health and Safety Act under sections 12C and 12D of the act, respectively. Any modification of the act by the Director-General of ASIS will occur only with the agreement of the minister responsible for the Work Health and Safety Act. In administering ASIS and in the exercise of the power to make a declaration, the director-general must take into account the need to promote the objects of the Work Health and Safety Act to the greatest extent, consistent with the maintenance of Australia's national security. 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.

BUSINESS

Rearrangement

Mr PERRETT (Moreton) (17:10): I move:
That business intervening before order of the day No. 2, committee and delegation reports, be postponed until a later hour this day.
Question agreed to.

COMMITTEES

Economics Committee

Report

Debate resumed on the motion:
That the House take note of the report.

Ms O’Dwyer (Higgins) (17:10): I rise to take note of the Review of the Reserve Bank of Australia annual report 2012 (first report) specifically to highlight an issue that the committee was made aware of during the recent oversight hearing of the Reserve Bank, just the other month. It was at that time that the committee first had an opportunity to speak with the Governor of the Reserve Bank about an issue that had been raised in MYEFO—that is, the paying by the RBA of a half-a-billion-dollar dividend from the Reserve Bank Reserve Fund. This was the first opportunity we had to publicly scrutinise this dividend payment.

I was particularly interested in this dividend payment because less than two years ago the Reserve Bank described the Reserve Bank Reserve Fund as having a capital level of around $6.2 billion. At that time, in the annual report, it described it as:
… modestly below that which the Board regards as desirable in the long term …
Less than two years after that statement, we have seen a hit to the Reserve Bank Reserve Fund. That hit was just over $4 billion—in fact, it was well over $4 billion. This means that the bank’s capital is actually below $2 billion now.

This is quite concerning. Two billion dollars is not much of a reserve fund, particularly not in today’s times, and it is certainly well below the amount that the Reserve Bank itself said was adequate and desirable in the long term. So one would think that in fact every opportunity that the Reserve Bank got to put money back into the Reserve Bank Reserve Fund would be duly taken—but not so. When I queried the Reserve Bank governor about the government taking a $500 million dividend—that is half a billion dollars—from the Reserve Bank, I asked him whether his advice had been sought. He said that it did not quite work out that he was asked for approval, despite the fact that, under the law, he is required to have his advice asked for. He said that he provided his views to the Treasurer that he thought ripping $500 million out of the Reserve Bank Reserve Fund would not be a prudent course of action. I am paraphrasing him here; I am not quoting him directly, but he gave very clear evidence on the Hansard that it was not his recommendation for the government to be paid this half-a-billion-
dollar dividend and that in his mind the money ought better to go back into the Reserve Bank Reserve Fund.

I raise this because this is part of a pattern. Part of the pattern of this government's behaviour is its ripping out of dividend payments not only from the Reserve Bank and the Reserve Bank reserve funds but also from other government organisations. We have seen the same pattern in the case of both the Export Finance and Insurance Corporation and the Australian Reinsurance Pool Corporation, which paid a one-off special dividend in 2012-13 totalling not $10 million, not $20 million but $300 million. We have seen other money shuffles in the 2012-13 budget, where Medibank Private was required to pay $391 million in dividends this year—more than three times Medibank Private's latest profit of $126 million—which amounts to almost $250 for every policyholder. Why is the government ripping this money out? There is one very clear answer: the government has desperately sought to bolster its budget bottom line because its spending is out of control and is going to the wrong priorities. This government is spending more than $90 billion each and every year over and above what was spent during the last years of the coalition government.

But lest you think that that is the only money being ripped out of Medibank Private, I tell you that this government has in fact taken over $850.6 million out of Medibank Private over the three years since Medibank Private converted to for-profit status in 2009. This concerns us, and I am sure that it concerns every Australian. Ultimately, when the government rips this money out and has in addition to borrow money to cover its spending, it hurts current taxpayers, who end up having to foot the bill, and future taxpayers—the next generation of Australians—who will end up footing the bill for the government's incompetence, waste and mismanagement. This profit-stripping of Medibank Private must seriously weaken Medibank Private's balance sheet, and I think it is right for us to understand how Medibank Private has funded the payment of the dividend. Has it had to borrow money to fund the dividend? Has it had to maintain higher borrowings than it otherwise would have if the dividend payments had not been made? The government has not answered these legitimate questions, and it must answer them. When you consider the money which has been stripped out of Medibank Private and the Australian Reinsurance Pool Corporation, and when you consider the money has now been shipped out of the Reserve Bank reserve fund—half a billion dollars—you can only come to the following conclusions: this government does not know how to manage the budget; this government is not prudent with the finances of Australians; this government is reckless in its disregard for the future impost on taxpayers.

The government has sought to increase the taxes on private health insurance. We have seen them rip more than $4 billion out of private health insurance. One can only ask the following question when considering Medibank Private: if this money had not been stripped out of private health insurance, would it mean that people would not have to pay higher premiums on the whole? Who knows the answer to that question?

There will be a change come 14 September, and we hope it will be a change for the better in the form of a return to the responsible economic management that we saw under the former Treasurer, Peter Costello, and a coalition government which understood that you cannot spend—

Mr Perrett: How many times did he get a AAA rating from all three ratings agencies?
Ms O'DWYER: That is a very good point you raise about AAA credit ratings. Let me just put on the record for my friend on the other side that, after repaying $96 billion of Labor's debt, the Treasurer was able to restore Australia's AAA credit rating in 1986 and 1989. This is something that he was able to do after repaying $96 billion of Labor's debt.

Mr Perrett interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Vamvakinou): Order! The member for Moreton will cease interjecting.

Ms O'DWYER: Sorry; he was quite right to call my attention to that. Those dates were the dates when we dropped credit ratings. We were able to restore the balance sheet under the stewardship of Treasurer Peter Costello, after we had dropped our AAA credit rating in 1986 and 1989. Clearly I needed another coffee this afternoon before coming to speak in the chamber!

It is an important point that you raise: we need to ensure prudent, responsible economic management. This can only be delivered by a coalition government. It will be delivered under the leadership of Tony Abbott and the treasurership of Joe Hockey. The 14th of September cannot come soon enough for all Australians.

Federation Chamber adjourned at 17:21