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SITTING DAYS—2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
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<td>February</td>
<td>7, 8, 9, 13, 14,15,16, 27, 28, 29</td>
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<td>March</td>
<td>1, 13, 14, 15, 19, 20, 21, 22</td>
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<td>May</td>
<td>8, 9, 10, 21, 22, 23, 24, 28, 29, 30, 31</td>
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<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>18, 19, 20, 21, 25, 26, 27, 28</td>
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<td>August</td>
<td>14, 15, 16, 20, 21, 22, 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>10, 11, 12, 13, 17, 18, 19, 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>9, 10, 11, 29, 30, 31,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>1, 26, 27, 28, 29</td>
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<table>
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<th>Location</th>
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<td>SYDNEY</td>
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Her Excellency Ms Quentin Bryce, Companion of the Order of Australia

House of Representatives Office holders

Speaker—Hon. Peter Neil Slipper MP
Deputy Speaker—Ms Anna Elizabeth Burke MP
Second Deputy Speaker—Hon. Bruce Craig Scott MP

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

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

Party Leaders and Whips

Australian Labor Party

Leader—Hon. Julia Eileen Gillard MP
Deputy Leader—Hon. Wayne Maxwell Swan MP
Chief Government Whip—Hon. Joel Andrew Fitzgibbon MP
Government Whips—Ms 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

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## Members of the House of Representatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Party</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abbott, Hon. Anthony John</td>
<td>Warringah, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adams, Hon. Dick Godfrey Harry</td>
<td>Lyons, TAS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Albanese, Hon. Anthony Norman</td>
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<td>Alexander, John Gilbert</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Menzies, VIC</td>
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<td>Paterson, NSW</td>
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<td>Bandt, Adam Paul</td>
<td>Melbourne, VIC</td>
<td>AG</td>
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<td>Billson, Hon. Bruce Fredrick</td>
<td>Dunkley, VIC</td>
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<td>Bird, Sharon Leah</td>
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<td>Bishop, Hon. Bronwyn Kathleen</td>
<td>Mackellar, NSW</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Curtin, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
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<td>Wakefield, SA</td>
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<td>Corangamite, VIC</td>
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<td>Dawson, QLD</td>
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<td>Moncrieff, QLD</td>
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<td>Charlton, NSW</td>
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<td>O'Connor, WA</td>
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<td>Isaacs, VIC</td>
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<td>Dutton, Hon. Peter Craig</td>
<td>Dickson, QLD</td>
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<td>Elliot, Hon. Maria Justine</td>
<td>Richmond, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
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<td>Ellis, Hon. Katherine Margaret</td>
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<td>Rankin, QLD</td>
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<td>Leichhardt, QLD</td>
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<td>Ferguson, Hon. Laurie Donald Thomas</td>
<td>Werriwa, NSW</td>
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<td>Batman, VIC</td>
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<td>Hunter, NSW</td>
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<td>Members</td>
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<td>Party</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Lalor, VIC</td>
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<td>Brand, WA</td>
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<td>Newcastle, NSW</td>
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<td>Griggs, Natasha Louise</td>
<td>Solomon, NT</td>
<td>CLP</td>
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<td>Durack, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
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<td>Hall, Jill</td>
<td>Shortland, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
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<td>Cowper, NSW</td>
<td>Nats</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hawke, Alexander George</td>
<td>Mitchell, NSW</td>
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<td>Hockey, Hon. Joseph Benedict</td>
<td>North Sydney, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hunt, Hon. Gregory Andrew</td>
<td>Flinders, VIC</td>
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<td>Husic, Edham Nreddin</td>
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<td>ALP</td>
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<td>Swan, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
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<td>Scullin, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
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<td>Jensen, Dennis Geoffrey</td>
<td>Tangney, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
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<td>Throsby, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
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<td>Kennedy, QLD</td>
<td>Ind</td>
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<td>Keenan, Michael Fayat</td>
<td>Stirling, WA</td>
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<td>Kelly, Hon. Michael Joseph, AM</td>
<td>Eden-Monaro, NSW</td>
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<td>Hughes, NSW</td>
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<td>Ballarat, VIC</td>
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<td>Bowman, QLD</td>
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<td>ALP</td>
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<td>Jagajaja, VIC</td>
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<td>LP</td>
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<td>ALP</td>
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<td>Members</td>
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<td>Party</td>
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<td>Lyne, NSW</td>
<td>Ind</td>
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<td>ALP</td>
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<td>Flynn, QLD</td>
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<td>O'Neill, Deborah Mary</td>
<td>Robertson, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
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<td>Sturt, SA</td>
<td>LP</td>
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<td>Grey, SA</td>
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<td>Canning, WA</td>
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<td>Rishworth, Amanda Louise</td>
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<td>Berowra, NSW</td>
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<td>Barker, SA</td>
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<td>Murray, VIC</td>
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<td>Vamvakinou, Maria</td>
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<td>Van Manen, Albertus Johannes</td>
<td>Forde, QLD</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Members of the House of Representatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Party</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vasta, Ross Xavier</td>
<td>Bonner, QLD</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washer, Malcolm James</td>
<td>Moore, WA</td>
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<td>Wilkie, Andrew Damien</td>
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<td>Windsor, Anthony Harold Curties</td>
<td>New England, NSW</td>
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<td>Wyatt, Kenneth George</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zappia, Tony</td>
<td>Makin, SA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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

### Heads of Parliamentary Departments
- Clerk of the Senate—R Laing
- Clerk of the House of Representatives—B Wright
- Acting Secretary, Department of Parliamentary Services—R Grove
### GILLARD MINISTRY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Minister</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prime Minister</td>
<td>The Hon Julia Gillard MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on Digital Productivity</td>
<td>The Hon Stephen Conroy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Social Inclusion</td>
<td>The Hon Mark Butler MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on Mental Health Reform</td>
<td>The Hon Mark Butler MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for the Public Service and Integrity</td>
<td>The Hon Gary Gray AO MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on the Centenary of ANZAC</td>
<td>The Hon Warren Snowdon MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cabinet Secretary</td>
<td>The Hon Mark Dreyfus QC MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister</td>
<td>The Hon Jan MLCucas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treasurer (Deputy Prime Minister)</td>
<td>The Hon Wayne Swan MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation</td>
<td>The Hon Bill Shorten MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Treasurer</td>
<td>The Hon David Bradbury MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer</td>
<td>The Hon Bernie Ripoll MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Science and Research</td>
<td>The Hon Chris Evans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Leader of the Government in the Senate)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Industry and Innovation</td>
<td>The Hon Greg Combet AM MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Small Business</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Minister Assisting for Industry and Innovation</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Kate Lundy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Industry and Innovation</td>
<td>The Hon Mark Dreyfus QC MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Higher Education and Skills</td>
<td>The Hon Sharon Bird MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy</td>
<td>The Hon Stephen Conroy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local</td>
<td>The Hon Simon Crean MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for the Arts</td>
<td>The Hon Simon Crean MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Sport</td>
<td>The Hon Kate Lundy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Defence (Deputy Leader of the House)</td>
<td>The Hon Stephen Smith MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Defence Materiel</td>
<td>The Hon Jason Clare MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Veterans’ Affairs</td>
<td>The Hon Warren Snowdon MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Defence Science and Personnel</td>
<td>The Hon Warren Snowdon MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Defence</td>
<td>The Hon Dr Mike Kelly AM MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Defence</td>
<td>Senator the Hon David Feeney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Immigration and Citizenship</td>
<td>The Hon Chris Bowen MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Multicultural Affairs</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Kate Lundy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Infrastructure and Transport (Leader of the House)</td>
<td>The Hon Anthony Albanese MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure and Transport</td>
<td>The Hon Catherine King MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attorney-General</td>
<td>The Hon Nicola Roxon MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Emergency Management</td>
<td>The Hon Nicola Roxon MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister Assisting on Queensland Floods Recovery</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Joe Ludwig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Home Affairs</td>
<td>The Hon Jason Clare MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Justice</td>
<td>The Hon Jason Clare MP</td>
</tr>
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<td>Title</td>
<td>Minister</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs</td>
<td>The Hon Jenny Macklin MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Disability Reform</td>
<td>The Hon Jenny Macklin MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Housing</td>
<td>The Hon Brendan O'Connor MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Homelessness</td>
<td>The Hon Brendan O'Connor MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Community Services</td>
<td>The Hon Julie Collins MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for the Status of Women</td>
<td>The Hon Julie Collins MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Carers</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Jan McLucas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Foreign Affairs</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Bob Carr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Trade and Competitiveness</td>
<td>The Hon Dr Craig Emerson MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Trade</td>
<td>The Hon Justine Elliot MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Pacific Island Affairs</td>
<td>The Hon Richard Marles MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Affairs</td>
<td>The Hon Richard Marles MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities</td>
<td>The Hon Tony Burke MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Sustainability and Urban Water</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Don Farrell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Finance and Deregulation</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Penny Wong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Minister of State</td>
<td>The Hon Gary Gray AO MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister Assisting for Deregulation</td>
<td>The Hon David Bradbury MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth</td>
<td>The Hon Peter Garrett AM MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations</td>
<td>The Hon Bill Shorten MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Early Childhood and Childcare</td>
<td>The Hon Kate Ellis MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Employment Participation</td>
<td>The Hon Kate Ellis MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Indigenous Employment and Economic Development</td>
<td>The Hon Julie Collins MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for School Education and Workplace Relations</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Jacinta Collins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Joe Ludwig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry</td>
<td>The Hon Sid Sidebottom MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Resources and Energy</td>
<td>The Hon Martin Ferguson AM MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Tourism</td>
<td>The Hon Greg Combet AM MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency</td>
<td>The Hon Mark Dreyfus QC MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency</td>
<td>The Hon Catherine King MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Health</td>
<td>The Hon Tanya Plibersek MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Mental Health and Ageing</td>
<td>The Hon Mark Butler MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Indigenous Health</td>
<td>The Hon Warren Snowden MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Health and Ageing</td>
<td>The Hon Catherine King MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Human Services</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Kim Carr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Shadow Minister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leader of the Opposition</strong></td>
<td>The Hon Tony Abbott MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary Assisting the Leader of the Opposition</td>
<td>Senator Cory Bernardi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs</strong></td>
<td>The Hon Julie Bishop MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Minister for Trade</strong></td>
<td>The Hon Julie Bishop MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Deputy Leader of the Opposition)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance</td>
<td>The Hon Teresa Gambaro MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Minister for Infrastructure and Transport</strong></td>
<td>The Hon Warren Truss MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Leader of The Nationals)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Roads and Regional Transport</td>
<td>Mr Darren Chester MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations</strong></td>
<td>Senator the Hon Eric Abetz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Leader of the Opposition in the Senate)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Employment Participation</td>
<td>The Hon Sussan Ley MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Attorney-General</strong></td>
<td>Senator the Hon George Brandis SC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Minister for the Arts</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Justice, Customs and Border Protection</td>
<td>Mr Michael Keenan MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary to the Shadow Attorney-General</td>
<td>Senator Gary Humphries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Treasurer</strong></td>
<td>The Hon Joe Hockey MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Senator Mathias Cormann</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and Superannuation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Tax Reform</td>
<td>The Hon Tony Smith MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Deputy Chairman, Coalition Policy Development Committee)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Minister for Education, Apprenticeships and Training</strong></td>
<td>The Hon Christopher Pyne MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Manager of Opposition Business in the House)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Childcare and Early Childhood Learning</td>
<td>The Hon Sussan Ley MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Universities and Research</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Brett Mason</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Youth and Sport</td>
<td>Mr Luke Hartsuyker MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Deputy Manager of Opposition Business in the House)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Education</td>
<td>Senator Fiona Nash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Minister for Indigenous Affairs</strong></td>
<td>Senator the Hon Nigel Scullion</td>
</tr>
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<td>(Deputy Leader of the Nationals)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Indigenous Development and Employment</td>
<td>Senator Marise Payne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>**Shadow Minister for Regional Development, Local Government and Water</td>
<td>Senator Barnaby Joyce</td>
</tr>
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<td>(Leader of the Nationals in the Senate)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Regional Development</td>
<td>The Hon Bob Baldwin MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Northern and Remote Australia</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Ian Macdonald</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Shadow Minister</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Local Government</td>
<td>Mr Don Randall MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for the Murray-Darling Basin</td>
<td>Senator Simon Birmingham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Finance, Deregulation and Debt Reduction</td>
<td>The Hon Andrew Robb AO MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Chairman, Coalition Policy Development Committee)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Special Minister of State</td>
<td>The Hon Bronwyn Bishop MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for COAG</td>
<td>Senator Mari se Payne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Chairman, Scrutiny of Government Waste Committee)</td>
<td>(Mr Jamie Briggs MP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Energy and Resources</td>
<td>The Hon Ian Macfarlane MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Tourism</td>
<td>The Hon Bob Baldwin MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Defence</td>
<td>Senator the Hon David Johnston</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Defence Science, Technology and Personnel</td>
<td>Mr Stuart Robert MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Veterans' Affairs and Shadow Minister</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Michael Ronaldson</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assisting the Leader of the Opposition on the Centenary of ANZAC</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Materiel</td>
<td>Senator Gary Humphries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for the Defence Force and Defence Support</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Ian Macdonald</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Communications and Broadband</td>
<td>The Hon Malcolm Turnbull MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Regional Communications</td>
<td>Mr Luke Hartsuyker MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Health and Ageing</td>
<td>The Hon Peter Dutton MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Mental Health</td>
<td>Senator Concetta Fierravanti-Wells</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Primary Healthcare</td>
<td>Dr Andrew Southcott MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Health Services and Indigenous Health</td>
<td>Dr Andrew Laming MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Families, Housing and Human Services</td>
<td>The Hon Kevin Andrews MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Seniors</td>
<td>The Hon Bronwyn Bishop MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Disabilities, Carers and the Voluntary Sector</td>
<td>Senator Mitch Fifield</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Manager of Opposition Business in the Senate)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Housing</td>
<td>Senator Marise Payne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Supporting Families</td>
<td>Senator Cory Bernardi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for the Status of Women</td>
<td>Senator Michaelia Cash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Climate Action, Environment and Heritage</td>
<td>The Hon Greg Hunt MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Environment</td>
<td>Senator Simon Birmingham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Productivity and Population</td>
<td>Mr Scott Morrison MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Immigration and Citizenship</td>
<td>The Hon Teresa Gambaro MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Citizenship and Settlement</td>
<td>Senator Michaelia Cash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Immigration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Innovation, Industry, and Science</td>
<td>Mrs Sophie Mirabella MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Innovation, Industry, and Science</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Richard Colbeck</td>
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<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Shadow Minister</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Agriculture and Food Security</td>
<td>The Hon John Cobb MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Fisheries and Forestry</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Small Business, Competition Policy</td>
<td>The Hon Bruce Billson MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Fair Competition</td>
<td>Senator Scott Ryan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CONTENTS

THURSDAY, 10 MAY 2012

Chamber
MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS—
Afghanistan ............................................................................................................ 4487

BILLS—
Parliamentary Counsel and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2012—
First Reading ........................................................................................................... 4494
Second Reading ...................................................................................................... 4494
Tax Laws Amendment (Medicare Levy and Medicare Levy Surcharge) Bill 2012—
First Reading ........................................................................................................... 4496
Second Reading ...................................................................................................... 4496

BUSINESS—
Rearrangement ...................................................................................................... 4496

COMMITTEES—
Treaties Committee—
Report .................................................................................................................... 4496
Law Enforcement Committee—
Report ..................................................................................................................... 4497
Publications Committee—
Report .................................................................................................................... 4499

BILLS—
Migration Legislation Amendment (Student Visas) Bill 2012—
Second Reading ...................................................................................................... 4499
Third Reading .......................................................................................................... 4521
Paid Parental Leave and Other Legislation Amendment (Dad and Partner Pay and
Other Measures) Bill 2012—
Second Reading ...................................................................................................... 4522

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS—
Brisbane Roar ......................................................................................................... 4553
Goss, Mr Matt ......................................................................................................... 4553
Collinsville Power Station ..................................................................................... 4554
Budget ..................................................................................................................... 4554
Bradfield Electorate: North Shore ......................................................................... 4555
Human Rights: Vietnam ......................................................................................... 4555
Regeling, Mr Harold ............................................................................................... 4555
Forde Electorate: Grey Light Disco ....................................................................... 4555
Pensions and Benefits ........................................................................................... 4556
Dudas, Ms Anna: Memorial Benefit Concert ....................................................... 4556
Qantas ..................................................................................................................... 4557

CONDOLENCES—
Bowen, Hon. Lionel Frost, AC—
Report from Federation Chamber ......................................................................... 4557
Adams, Senator Judith Anne—
Report from Federation Chamber ......................................................................... 4557
CONTENTS—continued

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE—
  Budget .................................................................................................................. 4557
  Economy ............................................................................................................... 4558
  Budget .................................................................................................................. 4559
DISTINGUISHED VISITORS ................................................................................. 4560
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE—
  Budget .................................................................................................................. 4560
  Budget .................................................................................................................. 4561
  Far North Queensland Infrastructure ................................................................. 4562
  Budget .................................................................................................................. 4563
  Member for Dobell .............................................................................................. 4564
  Budget .................................................................................................................. 4564
  Member for Dobell .............................................................................................. 4565
  Economy ............................................................................................................... 4566
DISTINGUISHED VISITORS ................................................................................. 4567
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE—
  Member for Dobell .............................................................................................. 4567
  Pacific Highway .................................................................................................. 4568
  Member for Dobell .............................................................................................. 4569
  National Disability Insurance Scheme ............................................................ 4569
  Member for Dobell .............................................................................................. 4570
  Carbon Pricing .................................................................................................... 4571
  Member for Dobell .............................................................................................. 4571
MOTIONS—
  Member for Dobell .............................................................................................. 4572
BUSINESS—
  Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders ................................................ 4579
COMMITTEES—
  Selection of Bills Committee—
    Report ............................................................................................................... 4580
MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE—
  Budget ............................................................................................................... 4580
COMMITTEES—
  Appointment ....................................................................................................... 4601
BILLS—
  Family Assistance and Other Legislation Amendment (Schoolkids Bonus Budget
    Measures) Bill 2012—
    Returned from Senate ...................................................................................... 4601
  Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 1) 2012—
    Report from Federation Chamber .................................................................. 4602
    Third Reading .................................................................................................... 4602
  Paid Parental Leave and Other Legislation Amendment (Dad and Partner Pay and
    Other Measures) Bill 2012—
    Second Reading ................................................................................................ 4602
BUSINESS—
  Rearrangement .................................................................................................... 4608
PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS—
Careers in Agriculture ................................................................. 4609
World Plumbing Day ............................................................... 4609
Wild Rivers (Environmental Management) Bill 2011 ......................... 4609
Wind Turbines .............................................................................. 4610
BUSINESS—
Rearrangement ........................................................................ 4611
BILLS—
Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2012-2013—
Second Reading ........................................................................ 4611
NOTICES .......................................................................................... 4617
Federation Chamber
CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS—
Anzac Day ..................................................................................... 4618
Origin Alliance .............................................................................. 4619
Budget ............................................................................................ 4620
Trade Training Centres .............................................................. 4620
Vietnam .......................................................................................... 4621
Westfield Fountain Gate Shopping Centre ................................... 4622
Vesak Day ....................................................................................... 4623
Trade Training Centres .............................................................. 4623
Gilmore Electorate: Work Experience ........................................... 4624
Shortland Electorate: Proposed Bottle Shop ................................ 4625
BILLS—
Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 1) 2012—
Second Reading ........................................................................ 4626
COMMITTEES—
Social Policy and Legal Affairs Committee—
Report .......................................................................................... 4638
BUSINESS—
Rearrangement ........................................................................ 4642
COMMITTEES—
Law Enforcement Committee—
Report .......................................................................................... 4642
Infrastructure and Communications Committee—
Report .......................................................................................... 4645
BUSINESS—
Rearrangement ........................................................................ 4650
COMMITTEES—
Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Joint Committee—
Report .......................................................................................... 4650
Health and Ageing Committee—
Report .......................................................................................... 4657
ADJOURNMENT—
Parkes Electorate: Toomelah ...................................................... 4660
Shortland Electorate: Proposed Bottle Shop ................................ 4661
CONTENTS—continued

Marfan Association Victoria................................................................. 4661
Australian Broadcasting Corporation............................................... 4661
Mining................................................................................................. 4663
Employment....................................................................................... 4663
Budget................................................................................................. 4664
Budget................................................................................................. 4665
Carbon Pricing................................................................................... 4665
Canberra German Community........................................................... 4666

Questions In Writing
Flannery Centre—(Question No. 873).................................................... 4669
Coptic Christians in Egypt—(Question No. 874).................................... 4670
Prime Minister and Cabinet: Credit Card Breaches—(Question No. 904) 4671
Thursday, 10 May 2012

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke) took the chair at 09:00, made an acknowledgement of country and read prayers.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Afghanistan

Mr STEPHEN SMITH (Perth—Minister for Defence and Deputy Leader of the House) (09:01): The government is committed to providing regular reports and updates on Afghanistan, including to the parliament.

I will update the parliament generally on Afghanistan following my attendance with the Prime Minister at the NATO/International Security Assistance Force, or ISAF, Leaders' Summit in Chicago at the end of this month. The summit follows on from the recent meeting in Brussels of NATO/ISAF foreign and defence ministers which I attended together with Foreign Minister Carr.

Today, I update the House on a range of issues relating to Australia’s detainee management in Afghanistan, in keeping with my commitment to provide regular reports to the Australian people on detainee management and to be open and transparent on these matters.

In line with the commitment to transparency, since I announced Australia’s detainee management framework in Afghanistan in December 2010, I have provided regular updates including three specific updates in February, October and November last year and six separate statements to parliament on Afghanistan in March, May, July, October and November of last year and February of this year, which included reference to detainee management.

This update also follows my announcement on 1 February this year and my subsequent statement to parliament on 9 February outlining that the Australian Defence Force had deployed a highly trained team of interrogators to Afghanistan, and that interrogation operations had commenced.

Governance

In developing our detainee management framework, we have worked to ensure it is robust and reflects best international practice and governance arrangements.

Australia’s detainee management framework is underpinned by the deployment of professional ADF personnel trained in the laws of armed conflict and appropriate detainee handling, rigorous recording and reporting requirements, and the high priority Australia places on addressing all allegations of mistreatment reported to Australian officials, including ADF members.

After capture, detainees are held at a purpose-built screening facility—the Initial Screening Area, or the ISA as it is known—at the Multi-National Base Tarin Kowt in Oruzgan province.

I again visited the Initial Screening Area, the ISA, during my April visit to Oruzgan province. I was again briefed by staff from the Detainee Management Team and the interrogation unit. That brief, of course, for the first time. They are making an important contribution to our mission in Afghanistan.

Again the opportunity was given to show accompanying Australian media this facility, again reflecting our commitment to transparency in respect of these matters.

Detainee management is complex, and implementing a strong detainee management framework in Afghanistan requires constant attention.
I continue to receive ongoing and regular advice from the Department of Defence on the implementation of Australia’s detainee management framework and any issues that may arise in the course of operations.

This includes being able to respond to changes to ISAF’s detention policy, engaging with international and Afghan human rights organisations, learning from past lessons and experience, and working with our Afghan partners towards transition of security responsibility, including detainee management.

To ensure we meet our own Australian high standards and continue to improve our systems, the ADF’s detainee management processes in Afghanistan are subject to regular audits.

Since the introduction of Australia’s detainee management framework in Afghanistan on 1 August 2010 following the Dutch withdrawal from Oruzgan, two comprehensive audits have been undertaken, with two more audits planned for this year.

The first of the 2012 audits is currently underway.

With the recent introduction of an interrogation capability, future audits will include reviewing the interrogation capability and processes.

These audits are essential to verify that a strong governance framework remains in place and that we are able to address any issues that might arise.

The last detainee management audit undertaken late last year found that all detention activities conducted at the Australian Defence Force ISA facility in Tarin Kowt over the period of the audit were in compliance with Australian policy, and in compliance with Australia's international and domestic legal obligations and requirements of the International Security Assistance Force.

The outcomes of these audits have been and will continue to be shared with relevant Australian government agencies.

Monitoring

As part of our detainee management framework, we monitor all detainees transferred from ADF custody to Afghan or United States custody.

Australia's monitoring regime includes an Interagency Detainee Monitoring Team, the IDMT, which is led by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

The Interagency Detainee Monitoring Team visits each detainee shortly after transfer and approximately every four weeks after the initial visit. We continue to monitor detainees up until sentencing or release. This reflects the practice of our International Security Assistance Force partners.

Between 1 August 2010 and 7 May this year, the monitoring team has conducted 95 monitoring visits. This includes: 48 visits to the National Directorate of Security, or the NDS, facility in Tarin Kowt, the Afghan facility; 14 visits to the Tarin Kowt central prison; and 33 visits to the detention facility in Parwan, currently managed by the United States. These visits are very important: they are an essential mechanism to ensure detainees apprehended by Australian forces are being treated appropriately after they have been transferred into the custody of others. To date, our monitoring of ADF apprehended detainees in Oruzgan and Parwan has not identified serious issues of concern that would warrant consideration of the suspension in transfers.

Number of detainees apprehended

During the period 1 August 2010 to 7 May 2012, the ADF has detained 1,355 suspected insurgents. Of these, 106 detainees have
been transferred to the Afghan authorities at the National Directorate of Security in Tarin Kot and 70 detainees have been transferred to US authorities at the Detention Facility in Parwan.

Since the commencement of interrogation operations in February this year, approximately 20 per cent of detainees apprehended by the ADF have undergone interrogation. Of these, six detainees have subsequently been transferred to US custody in Parwan and three detainees have subsequently been transferred to Afghan custody in Oruzgan.

The size and composition of the interrogation capability is sufficient to support the requirement of our forces operating in Afghanistan.

**Allegations of mistreatment**

Australia takes all allegations of detainee mistreatment seriously. I have provided regular updates on complaints and allegations of mistreatment the ADF has received against it since August 2010.

During the period 1 August 2010 to 7 May this year, there have been 91 allegations of mistreatment against Australian forces. Of these, 83 related to treatment or an incident at the point of capture. To date, 79 of these allegations have been considered and have been assessed as unsubstantiated. Twelve allegations remain under investigation.

Once reported, allegations are promptly assessed or investigated. This process may include taking witness statements, examining any medical evidence, as well as reviewing records and closed circuit television (CCTV) footage.

Allegations and the outcomes of any assessments are reported to the International Security Assistance Force and key human rights organisations.

**CCTV**

Australia's Initial Screening Area (ISA) was designed to be closed circuit TV (CCTV) monitored 24 hours a day to ensure the humane treatment of detainees in our custody, and to protect the ADF personnel working within the ISA from erroneous allegations. I have previously reported to the House on the temporary loss of CCTV footage at the ISA.

CCTV footage can be reviewed as part of the ADF's process for assessing allegations. It is an integral part of Australia's governance measures for detention operations within the ISA.

**Juveniles and children**

Under Australia's detainee management policy, the ADF may apprehend juveniles suspected of insurgent activity who pose a threat to international security assistance forces and the security of the local population. Juveniles are categorised as people between the ages of 15 and 17.

All juveniles apprehended by the ADF while on operations in Afghanistan are treated humanely, with dignity and respect, and in accordance with all of Australia's obligations under domestic and international law.

There are some circumstances where children under the age of 15 may be detained by the ADF in Afghanistan. In all cases, children under the age of 15 are treated in accordance with the international Convention on the Rights of the Child.

**Detainee management issues**

On occasion some issues do arise with respect to the implementation of our detainee operations. In accordance with the government's commitment to transparency, I now update the House on these issues.
Allegations of procedural misconduct

In February 2011, I advised in a public update on detainee management that in late January 2011 the Australian Defence Force Investigative Service (ADFIS) had initiated an investigation into allegations made by a Defence member that previous members of the Detainee Management Team in Afghanistan, responsible for managing the ADF Initial Screening Area, the ISA, at Tarin Kowt, may not have complied with procedures relating to the management and administrative processing of detainees.

As I have advised the House on a number of occasions since, that matter remained under consideration throughout 2011. I committed to advising on the outcomes of that investigation in due course. I am now in a position to do so.

Following the ADFIS investigation and subsequent referral of a brief of evidence to the Director of Military Prosecutions, three members of the previous Detainee Management Team have been charged with disciplinary offences relating to falsification of service documents relating to detainees.

There is no allegation or evidence to suggest that the detainees were mistreated by the Detainee Management Team.

As this matter is now the subject to disciplinary proceedings, I am not proposing to comment further at this stage. Once these proceedings are complete, I will provide a further update to the House on this matter.

Review of questioning techniques

The ADF is conducting a review into aspects of the questioning techniques used during the initial screening of detainees in Afghanistan during 2010 and 2011.

During 2010 and 2011, the ADF was limited to conducting tactical questioning and debriefing of detainees apprehended in Afghanistan.

The Chief of the Defence Force, the CDF, has advised that a recent review of records from this period has identified the possible use of unauthorised questioning techniques when interviewing detainees in the ISA during this period.

The irregularities identified during the possible use of unauthorised questioning techniques are limited to inappropriate language and do not include—do not include—any alleged physical mistreatment of detainees in the ISA by ADF personnel.

Again, once this review is complete, I will provide a further update to the House.

Detention facility in Parwan

The final matter I wish to advise the House on relates to the United States run Detention Facility in Parwan.

Australia's detainee transfer arrangements include the ability for those insurgents assessed as posing a serious and continued threat to Australian or ISAF forces, and the Afghan people, to be transferred to the Detention Facility in Parwan.

The United States and Afghanistan signed an agreement on 9 March this year to commence the transfer of the Detention Facility in Parwan to Afghan control. It has always been Australia's understanding, and expectation, that the Detention Facility in Parwan would transition to Afghan control at an appropriate time.

This is a positive development for the Afghan government and the Afghan authorities and is a step towards the transition of security across Afghanistan.

There are currently 56 detainees apprehended by the ADF in the Detention Facility in Parwan who would be included in the memorandum signed by the United States and Afghan governments.

Australia has a detainee transfer arrangement with the Afghan government
which includes assurances that detainees apprehended by the ADF and held in Afghan custody will be treated humanely. The arrangement also provides access for Australian officials to monitor the welfare of ADF transferred detainees.

These detainees have been regularly monitored by the Interagency Detainee Monitoring Team and, to date, no major concerns have been identified with their treatment.

I discussed the transition of the Detention Facility in Parwan with my Afghan counterpart, Minister Wardak, in Brussels recently, and with the Afghan Minister for Foreign Affairs, Minister Rassoul, in Kabul recently. I asked for, and was given, assurances that as the Detention Facility in Parwan transitions to Afghan control, Afghanistan would ensure continued access for Australian officials to monitor detainees transferred to the Detention Facility in Parwan by the ADF. Summary

I will continue to provide regular updates to Parliament and the Australian people on ADF detention operations in Afghanistan, as well as on the broader aspects of Australia's engagement in Afghanistan.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I table a paper, tabled in conjunction with my ministerial statement and I ask leave of the House to move a motion to enable the honourable member for Fadden to speak for 14 minutes.

Leave granted.

Mr STEPHEN SMITH: I move:

That so much of the standing and sessional orders be suspended as would prevent Mr Robert speaking for a period not exceeding 14 minutes.

Question agreed to.

Mr ROBERT (Fadden) (09:15): I thank the minister for his commitment to keeping the parliament informed, which he dutifully did on no fewer than six occasions last year and continues doing this year in the same way. I will address my brief response to the minister in terms of the ISAF leaders' summit, the issue of detainee management, and some questions on capability for future operations in Afghanistan. I look forward to the minister's response from his recent round of discussions and meetings in Brussels with the Prime Minister and of course from the leaders' summit in Chicago, and the minister has indicated he will provide an update to the House following the Chicago round of talks about where combat operations are going in Afghanistan.

The coalition is particularly interested in the withdrawal timetable, noting the minister and the government's pledge that this will be a metrics based, commanders' judgment driven exercise. I think that it is fair to say that there remains some ambiguity on the timelines in terms of Australian withdrawal. The Prime Minister's comments on 16 April that Afghan President Hamid Karzai would announce within the next few months plans to transition Oruzgan to Afghan troop control and that it would take from 12 to 18 months is a clear statement as the Prime Minister has indicated that the bulk of the Mentoring Task Force and the enablers that attach with it would cease their training activities by literally Christmas 2013. The PM further stated at the time:

We will no longer be conducting routine frontline operations with the Afghan National Security Forces. The Australian-led Provincial Reconstruction Team will have completed its work and the majority of our troops will have returned home. We will no longer be conducting routine front-line operations with the Afghan National Security Force. The Australian led Provincial Reconstruction Team will have completed its work.

I think she actually meant the Mentoring Task Force because, if we are pulling the Provincial Reconstruction Team out, we will
be doing no reconstruction at all. Having suggested that she is talking about the MTF and all our troops coming home, it is a fair statement that the Prime Minister is anticipating the cessation of all mentoring and task force related activities within our forward operating bases by the end of 2013.

The coalition looks forward to seeing the metrics that support that decision and of course our routine discussions yearly with Commander JTF 633 and Commander CTU to fully understand the basis of that decision. There is no indication that what the PM has said is not correct or that she has not been fully informed by the military hierarchy and those in command. We also note that the US withdrawal and their timeline is driving much of the timeline and much of the tone.

It is important to note that we will continue to offer the strongest bipartisan support for combat operations in Afghanistan. We reiterate, as we have done with every ministerial response, that it is not a blank cheque. Decisions must be made in the national interest and our men and women must return home from a successful fight. We will come home when the job is done—nothing more, nothing less.

I thank the minister for his update on detainee management. It is pleasing to see the primary interrogation capability now in Afghanistan and it is pleasing to see it is now an operational capability with full oversight. I am pleased that the minister has taken the media to actually see the facility and has shown them around, I am sure, with as much access as they require. It is good to note the protocols surrounding a primary interrogation capability in terms of CCTV and that full medical and psychological support are indeed in place and also, within the wider ISAF contingent, that a senior Australian officer is providing oversight for it.

The minister, though, gave no indication of the average time held by detainees within our system, noting that, as the primary interrogation capability was deployed into Afghanistan last year, the maximum time for holding detainees was also extended in line with our ISAF partners. It would be good to understand exactly how many people have now been detained for that longer time period that our ISAF partners have been enjoying for some years.

I note the level of complaints and the numbers that the minister has highlighted and I note that none of the complaints have been found to be substantiated even though the number of complainants is high. That would seem to indicate that those we have detained have misjudged their environment, misjudged the manner in which they were detained or, frankly, are struggling to tell the truth. Noting that most combatants caught on the battlefield will try anything to secure their release, perhaps it is understandable. The important thing to note from the minister’s statement is that we are better than this as a nation. As a nation we take complaints seriously. They are investigated under law with all due and proper process, as they should be, and they are publicly reported, as they should be, to the minister’s credit.

I note the issue of the ADFIS investigation with respect to the administration irregularities in detainee management. The minister has stated quite publicly that there was no issue in terms of maltreatment of detainees. It was simply an issue, in simple terms, of ‘paperwork’. Notwithstanding that, these issues have been investigated and we accept the fact that some degree of administrative law is being dealt out.

We also note the current investigation from 2010-11 into the earlier years of
detainee management in terms of tactical questioning and whether that tactical questioning may have inadvertently crossed over into very low levels of interrogation in its technique, and we look forward to being provided with an update as that investigation proceeds. We note, though, that the allegations seem to be limited to the use of some particularly nasty words as opposed to going to any particular physical maltreatment of detainees. I will conclude my response in terms of capability for Afghanistan by saying that, regardless of the drawdown and the timeline of the MTF withdrawal, the Provincial Reconstruction Team, in both civilian and perhaps military guise, will remain in theatre for some time, as will the kinetic activity within the Special Operations Task Group as well as some enablers and some trainers, especially within the artillery training school and, if the minister sees fit to join the British forces with 'Sandhurst in the sand,' then, Minister, I think we should rename that 'Duntroon in the desert'. Cognisant of that extended capability, we may find ourselves with boots on the ground in Afghanistan for many, many years to come—albeit with numbers small and specialised in terms of what they do. I note that, with the budget being handed down two days ago, the minister has stated that operational capability will not be impacted. I agree that it would appear that no uniformed personnel numbers have been cut and no units have been cut from the order of battle. But to suggest that operational capability for the future has not been impacted does not, I believe, stand true.

$5.45 billion has been stripped from the budget over the forward estimates. The defence budget as a percentage of GDP is now around 1.6 per cent—the lowest since 1938 when it was 1.55 per cent. We are in the Asia-Pacific century and our Asian-Pacific neighbours, many of them to the north, have defence spending well above 2.5 per cent of GDP. This puts us currently at something like 80th highest in the world in terms of defence spending. They are the biggest cuts since the Korean War finished. Since 2008 this brings the total to $18 billion in cuts. This will have a capability impact in the future. The 2009 white paper, barely a few years old, would seem—by the government's own admission, with their announcement of a new one just last week—to be now discredited and Force 2030 perhaps a pipedream.

In terms of procurement: procurement next financial year is 18 per cent reduced from this financial year. That level stays the same to 2013-14 and then, in the final two out-years, procurement is set to rise a staggering 38 per cent. I do not believe industry—or, frankly, DMO—can cope with a 38 per cent increase in procurement in two years. This will impact future capability. It may well impact future operations despite the best endeavours of Defence and its senior staff.

Considering that we will remain a substantial and lethal kinetic force in the Middle East, as well as a training and oversight force, it is imperative that we provide our men and women with the highest possible training, resources, equipment and capability for them to do their job. I implore the minister, as the days and weeks and months go on, to do everything he can to realise greater efficiency and put more dollars and cents into our fighting force.

Mr STEPHEN SMITH (Perth—Minister for Defence and Deputy Leader of the House) (09:25): on indulgence—The member for Fadden raised a question about statistics on the time that detainees have been kept. I am very happy to get that information from the Chief of the Defence Force and relay it to him privately, but I indicated that
very many of the matters that he raised will be the subject of a further report by me, post Chicago.

On capability matters: just for the information of the member and the House, this morning I have announced, in terms of capability, that the government will acquire, at a cost of $1.4 billion, 10 C-27 tactical military airlift aircraft for the purposes of completing our Air Force aircraft capability to lift, complementing our C-17s, of which we have purchased two additional ones, and our C-130J airlift capability.

Mr ROBERT (Fadden) (09:26): on indulgence—Considering the 10 C-27Js are available because of a cancellation and, therefore, available at a very good price and option, may I commend the minister for a quick and sound decision. It is a very good capability. The loss of the Caribou was quite a loss in terms of short take-off and landing. The C-27J will add significant capability to our arsenal. So while, in the last few days, Minister, there has been a barrage of marginal decisions, may I say, Sir, this is a very good one.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): No more indulgence for people talking about defence is going to be granted.

BILLS

Parliamentary Counsel and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2012

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Ms Roxon.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Ms ROXON (Gellibrand—Attorney-General and Minister for Emergency Management) (09:27): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Parliamentary Counsel and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2012 amends the Parliamentary Counsel Act 1970, the Acts Publication Act 1905 and the Legislative Instruments Act 2003 to enable the functions of the Office of Legislative Drafting and Publishing in the Attorney-General's Department to be transferred to the Office of Parliamentary Counsel.

The bill is part of a range of measures being conducted to facilitate the transfer of these functions.

As many would be aware, there are currently two Commonwealth offices responsible for drafting laws:

- The Office of Parliamentary Counsel is an independent agency, within my portfolio, which is responsible for drafting all government bills.
- The Office of Legislative Drafting and Publishing is a division within my department, which has responsibility for drafting a range of legislative instruments, as well as ensuring the compilation and publication of all laws, predominantly through the Federal Register of Legislative Instruments.

These two separate offices were originally established to deal with the increasing demands on the Commonwealth for drafting resources, as the need for greater federal regulation grew, government responsibilities expanded, and government policies became increasingly complex.

Given the specialist and discrete nature of this work, it is important that the role of the Commonwealth drafter remain independent.

However it is common practice across other Australian jurisdictions, for the one office to draft both bills and subordinate legislation.

These days, regulations commonly contain major elements of substantive law,
and are a vital part of the Commonwealth's statute book.

And with the volume of legislation rapidly increasing year by year, it is becoming imperative that Commonwealth legislation be drafted as consistently, clearly and effectively as possible.

The Commonwealth drafting offices were already working cooperatively to improve the consistency of bills and subordinate legislation presented to the parliament. However, practical differences in their administrative systems and drafting standards have created a range of inconsistencies and difficulties.

It was for this reason that the Strategic Review of Small and Medium Agencies in the Attorney-General's Portfolio, conducted by Mr Stephen Skehill, recommended to government that the Office of Parliamentary Counsel take on the functions of the Office of Legislative Drafting and Publishing. This change will significantly improve the efficient and effective management of the Commonwealth's legislative drafting resources.

The bill will confer on the Office of Parliamentary Counsel and the First Parliamentary Counsel all the functions formerly undertaken by the Office of Legislative Drafting and Publishing and the secretary of my department with regard to subordinate legislation, compilations and publishing.

This includes:
- drafting subordinate legislation
- preparation of compilations, reprints and information about Commonwealth laws
- making arrangements to print and publish Commonwealth laws
- preparation and publishing of government notices gazettes
- provision of assistance to foreign countries in the drafting, printing, publishing of their laws
- maintenance of the Federal Register of Legislative Instruments
- and generally, promoting the legal effectiveness and clarity of legislative instruments, wherever possible.

By conferring all of the functions on one Commonwealth drafting office, the bill will facilitate the introduction of a consistent approach for drafting bills and legislative instruments and, more broadly, maximise the use and flexibility of Commonwealth drafting resources.

It will also ensure the most efficient use of specialised information technology arrangements for the drafting of both acts and subordinate legislation.

These additional responsibilities and functions accepted by the Office of Parliamentary Counsel, along with the movement of experienced and highly skilled staff from the Office of Legislative Drafting and Publishing, will result in clearer and more consistent Commonwealth laws overall.

This, in turn, will make Commonwealth laws clearer and easier to understand.

May I also take this opportunity to note for the House and those particularly interested in the history of drafting in the Commonwealth that I have recently launched the 100-year history of the Office of Parliamentary Counsel. For those interested in all things parliamentary it is actually quite a fascinating read.

I commend it and this bill to the House.

Debate adjourned.
Tax Laws Amendment (Medicare Levy and Medicare Levy Surcharge) Bill 2012

First Reading
Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Bradbury.
Bill read a first time.

Second Reading
Mr BRADBURY (Lindsay—Assistant Treasurer and Minister Assisting for Deregulation) (09:32): I move:
That this bill be now read a second time.

This bill increases the Medicare levy and Medicare levy surcharge low-income thresholds for individuals and families in line with increases in the consumer price index. These changes will ensure that low-income individuals and families that are currently exempt from the Medicare levy and the Medicare levy surcharge will continue to be exempt when their incomes have risen in line with the consumer price index.

The bill also increases the Medicare levy low-income threshold for pensioners below age pension age. This will ensure that individuals in this cohort do not pay the Medicare levy when they do not have an income tax liability.

These increases will apply to the 2011-12 year.

Full details of the measures in this bill are contained in the explanatory memorandum.

Debate adjourned.

BUSINESS
Rearrangement
Mr BRADBURY (Lindsay—Assistant Treasurer and Minister Assisting for Deregulation) (09:34): I move:
That notice No. 2, government business, be postponed until a later hour this day.

Question agreed to.

COMMITTEES
Treaties Committee
Report
Mr KELVIN THOMSON (Wills) (09:34): On behalf of the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties, I present the committee's report entitled Report 124: Treaties tabled on 22 November 2011 and 7 February 2012.

Ordered that the report be made a parliamentary paper.

Mr KELVIN THOMSON: by leave—The committee's report No. 124 contains the committee's views on a series of treaties which were tabled on 22 November 2011 and 7 February this year. One of the more important treaties covered in this report was the Agreement between the European Union and Australia on the Processing and Transfer of Passenger Name Record (PNR) Data by Air Carriers to the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service, done at Brussels on 29 September 2011.

The agreement provides the legal basis required by the European Union under its data protection laws to allow the transfer of passenger name record data to Australia. Passenger day record data is passenger information processed in the EU by air carriers, including passengers travel requirements, date of reservation, date of intended travel, name, contact details and payment information. Negotiation of such an agreement with the EU is a prerequisite for the release of EU held personal information to other jurisdictions and reflects the high standard of protection for personal information held in the European Union.

The agreement between Australia and the EU is of high importance in terms of strengthening customs and border protection measures. Analysis of this and other data plays a critical role in the identification of
possible persons of interest in the context of combating transnational crimes. Without such an agreement passenger name record data processed in the EU could not be provided to Customs and Border Protection without breaching EU law, and failure to furnish such information might expose an information gap that could be exploited by people wishing to enter Australia without detection. The committee recognises the need for balance between providing information to government agencies and personal privacy. The agreement has been scrutinised in this area—most notably, by the European Parliament—and the committee is satisfied that a suitable balance has been found.

The Treaties Committee has approved another two treaties—the Amendments to MARPOL Annex VI on Regulations for the Prevention of Air Pollution from Ships by Inclusion of New Regulations on Energy Efficiency for Ships, which is Resolution MEPC.203(62) adopted at London on 15 July 2011; and the Protocol Amending the Agreement between the Government of Australia and the Government of the Republic of India for the Avoidance of Double Taxation and the Prevention of Fiscal Evasion with Respect to Taxes on Income, which was adopted in New Delhi on 16 December 2010. As well, the committee has approved a minor treaty action—the Amendment to Annex III of the Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent to Search for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade, which was done at Rotterdam on 10 September 1998.

The committee has concluded that all the treaties covered in report 124 should be supported with binding action.

On behalf of the committee I want to place on record my appreciation for the hard work of the Treaties Committee secretariat in dealing with the substantial workload arising from these and the numerous other treaties which have come before the committee for consideration during the life of this parliament. I commend the report to the House.

Law Enforcement Committee Report

Mr HAYES (Fowler) (09:38): I present the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Law Enforcement's report on its examination of the annual reports of the Australian Crime Commission and the Australian Federal Police.

Ordered that the report be made a parliamentary paper.

Mr HAYES: by leave—The Parliamentary Joint Committee on Law Enforcement has a statutory duty to examine the annual reports of the ACC and the AFP. The committee has had a longstanding responsibility to examine the annual report of the Australian Crime Commission. However, this was only the second opportunity for the committee to examine the annual report of the AFP since the committee's jurisdiction was widened in 2010. The committee held public hearings with both the Australian Crime Commission and the Australian Federal Police and appreciates the ongoing level of engagement with committee proceedings demonstrated by both agencies. The committee congratulates the Australian Crime Commission and Australian Federal Police on another successful year in law enforcement.

The committee recognises that close cooperation between law enforcement agencies across the various jurisdictions is fundamental to the effective combating of crime. Therefore, the committee was interested to gauge the nature of this
relationship through the annual reports review process.

In terms of initiatives which provide for greater cooperation, the ACC has established a presence in each state and territory, which enables the respective police agencies to be briefed on the ACC’s capability whilst also improving the flow of information to the ACC itself, which is very important for the establishment and maintenance of its criminal intelligence databases. The Australian Federal Police also places great emphasis on its relationships with its counterparts. Part of the AFP’s efforts to refocus its attentions on the reinvigoration of investigation and operational capabilities in 2010-11 went to improving the relationships with various national and international counterparts. As chair of the committee, I have very much noticed the change in the focus of the AFP. The committee notes that it is certainly being seen to be working in considerable partnership with each of the state and territory law enforcement agencies. As a result of those partnerships, significant inroads have been made into the detection and prosecution of serious and organised crime.

The importance of cooperation is also reflected in the nature of crime investigations, with joint investigations becoming increasingly common. Fifty-four per cent of serious and organised crime investigations were conducted under a formalised joint agency agreement established on January 2012. The remaining 46 per cent comprised joint investigations but without formal agreement. The committee recognises that cooperation in the fight against serious and organised crime has taken on a heightened importance given that Australia has become a more attractive target for international criminal groups as it is no longer isolated from or immune to world trends.

Whilst considering trends and changes in criminal activity, the annual reports examination process also provided the committee with an opportunity to consider the efficiency of internal agency procedures. One area of particular interest to the committee is the timeliness of complaint handling by the Australian Federal Police. The committee appreciates that the AFP has taken measures to improve the time it takes to deal with complaints since the committee reported on the matter in its last annual report examination. However, the Ombudsman’s most recent report noted a continued deterioration in timeliness in this respect. The committee is concerned about the deterioration in the average time taken for complaints to be handled and recommends that the AFP’s annual report include the average number of days taken to resolve cases for each category of complaint. The addition of this information will enable the committee to monitor the timeliness of complaint resolution. The committee appreciates the advances made by the Australian Crime Commission and Australian Federal Police over the past year, and I am therefore very happy to commend the committee’s report to the House. In closing, could I also pay regard to the very hardworking secretariat of this joint committee. Under the guidance of the then secretary, Mr Jon Bell, and the senior research officer, Bill Bannear, I think significant inroads were made into the committee’s ability to investigate into—but, more importantly, work in cooperation with—these two very fine law enforcement organisations. Both Mr Bell and Mr Bannear have, since this report has been published, taken on other roles. I wish them well and I thank them for the commitment and dedication that they offered whilst they were working for the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Law Enforcement. I note that
you, Madam Deputy Speaker Grierson, are also a member of that committee. I thank you for your role in that. I commend the report to the House.

Publications Committee

Report

Mr HAYES (Fowler) (09:46): I present the report from the Publications Committee sitting in conference with the Publications Committee of the Senate. Copies of the report are being placed on the table.

Report—by leave—agreed to.

BILLS

Migration Legislation Amendment (Student Visas) Bill 2012

Second Reading

Debate resumed on the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mrs ELLIOT (Richmond—Parliamentary Secretary for Trade) (09:44): The current bill before the House is the Migration Legislation Amendment (Student Visas) Bill 2012. The main purpose of this bill is to cease the current arrangement whereby student visas can be cancelled by education providers. The situation the way it is has been giving education providers quite extraordinary powers in relation to international students. This bill responds to the Strategic review of the student visa program 2011 by the Hon. Michael Knight and it also responds to many concerns that were raised in the 2011 ANAO report Management of student visas.

The Knight review was commissioned by this government in 2010, and a principal focus of the review is on improved integrity measures in the student visa program. The review recommended that the automatic cancellation of student visas be abolished and that a 'more targeted and strategic analysis of noncompliance' be designed to replace it.

Student visa holders are subject to a number of visa conditions. One of these conditions, condition 8202, is that international students maintain course progress and class attendance. This condition is of course seen as evidence of the students' genuine engagement in their study programs. It is currently the responsibility of the course providers to monitor progress and attendance in class under the provisions of the national code, a legal instrument under the Education Services for Overseas Students Act. Providers are, at a minimum, required to intervene to assist an international student who has failed more than 50 per cent of the units attempted in any one study period or who is at risk of failing between 70 and 80 per cent of total course contact hours.

Under the current regime, students not achieving satisfactory course progress must be reported by the provider to the Department of Industry, Innovation, Science Research and Tertiary Education as having breached condition 8202. A provider must give a student 20 working days notice of the breach so that they can access complaints or appeals processes. The provider must then notify the student visa holder of the breach under section 20 of the ESOS Act. It is this notification that triggers the application of the automatic cancellation provisions under the Migration Act. The student is then required to attend an office of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship within 28 days of the date of the notice to make any submissions in relation to the breach.

Should the student not comply, their student visa is automatically cancelled under the Migration Act by operation of the law at the end of the 28th day of notice. Also, any family dependent visa holders also have their
visas cancelled. Once cancelled, a student visa cannot be reapplied for for up to three years. So this current regime gives the education providers a great deal of power and say over international students, and in fact their dependents, in the role that they play in this reporting regime.

The Knight review and the ANAO have recommended the abolition of the automatic cancellation processes, arguing that increases over recent years have been driven in part by the emergence of some providers who implement automatic cancellation mechanisms, sometimes carelessly and sometimes, unfortunately, maliciously. Moreover, the automatic cancellation regime can of course be very detrimental to international students who are genuinely struggling and require assistance and monitoring rather than a cancellation of their visa.

In addition, it is important to note there has been some adverse commentary from the Federal Court, with the majority of automatic cancellations made between May 2001 and December 2009 having been overturned, affecting some 19,000 cases. This clearly indicates, according to both the ANAO and the Knight review, some systematic flaws and vulnerabilities. Australians quite rightly expect that there should be consequences, and there should, for those who do not abide by the conditions of their visas, but the automatic cancellation provision makes no allowance for the severity of the breach or the exceptional circumstances of the individual student. This lack of discretion also often imposes somewhat unnecessary administrative costs upon the government, the students and the education providers. It is also very resource intensive, directing the resources away from investigation and the pursuing of more serious student visa breaches. And the current regime creates a great deal of uncertainty and complexity for student-visa holders. There is no discretion for a decision maker to distinguish between a genuine student who may be struggling academically and a student who is clearly and deliberately in breach of their conditions when indeed action needs to be taken.

This bill would amend the Education Services for Overseas Students Act to remove the requirement section 20 for a registered education provider to send a notice to a student visa-holder who breaches condition 8202 of their student visa. It is intended that on the day the amendments in this bill commence, registered education providers will no longer be required or be able to send a notice under section 20 of the ESOS Act. As a consequence, student visas will no longer be subject to automatic cancellation under the Migration Act.

This bill proposes that a student-visa holder who is in breach of a visa condition by not achieving satisfactory course progress or attendance will now be considered under the existing discretionary cancellation framework within the Migration Act. A provider will still be required to report a breach of a prescribed condition of the student visa under section 19 of the ESOS Act, and then the breach will be considered by the department for investment and possible compliance action. The bill will also make the necessary consequential amendments to the ESOS Act to require an education provider to give particulars of any change in contact details of a student-visa holder within 14 days after the provider becomes aware of the change.

These amendments would ensure a smooth transition from the automatic system that we have in place now to a far more discretionary system—a discretionary cancellation regime. Of course, it will occur without compromising the integrity of our immigration system in relation to student
visas. The bill will maximise the likelihood that student-visa holders will receive information and notification about their immigration status and assist in the conduct of any subsequent immigration compliance activity. So it is very beneficial.

International students will no longer have their visas automatically cancelled, should these amendments be passed, providing a much fairer, merits based cancellation process. Integrity and compliance resources can then be put to much more targeted activities in high-risk areas. These measures are designed, of course, not only from an immigration perspective but also to support our international education sector, which is vitally important. Indeed, we have great educational resources here within Australia. The education industry is one of our leading export industries—one that we are very proud of—because of the great educational resources we can offer. It is also very important in supporting our bilateral ties with many key partner countries. Under this government we have made many advances in supporting the international education sector. Indeed, this bill is one of the many positive moves that we have made to ensure that we have a very strong and robust international education sector. The student-visa changes that we have made support that whilst maintaining strength in the regulation of our immigration system. In conclusion, I commend the bill to the House.

Mr RANDALL (Canning) (09:56): I am very pleased to speak on the Migration Legislation Amendment (Student Visas) Bill 2012 because this bill seeks to amend two pieces of legislation: the Migration Act and the Education Services for overseas Students Act 2000. In 2010, this government appointed Michael Knight to review the student visa program. On 20 June 2011, the report was completed and presented to the government. Almost a year later we are now at the point where we are looking at implementing the recommendations, because on 22 September 2011 Minister Chris Evans and Minister Chris Bowen announced the government's response and accepted all of the 41 recommendations of Michael Knight's report.

Interestingly, a Senate committee is currently reporting on this bill. The committee is due to report on 18 June this year. It is a bit surprising that the House could not work in with the Senate committee's report so that you could have a complete assessment of this situation rather than jumping the gun and, in effect, ignoring what the Senate committee will come down with after we pass this legislation today. Except for a few issues, the coalition will not be opposing this bill; however, it would have been nice to have seen the recommendations from the Senate committee.

This bill has been introduced to enact 24 of the Knight recommendations to remove the automatic cancellation regime that is currently in place for students holding visas who breach academic and attendance or progress requirements. Currently, under section 137J of the Migration Act the automatic cancellation of student visas is triggered when a student receives a notice of a breach. The student has 28 days to comply with the notice or attend a departmental office to make a submission about these breaches. If these things fail to happen, the visa is cancelled and the student excluded from applying for further visas for up to three years. In addition, any family or dependents would have their visas cancelled also.

This bill proposes that instead of applying these blanket rules a case of noncompliance would be examined in the context of the minister's discretionary powers. The discretionary powers of the minister is an
area that the coalition has some concern about, because it takes away, in effect, some of the more established processes for looking at breaches. Any discretionary powers in the minister's hands, in some respects, are reasonably fraught with difficulty. When Minister Evans was the migration minister, he made it clear that he did not want to involve himself in ministerial interventions to the same extent as had been the case previously for that reason: he saw them as a bit risky. But this bill is going to give greater discretionary powers to the minister, which is a problem because, when you see the numbers that I will reveal shortly, you will understand that a huge amount of bureaucratic support will be required to provide the minister with any clear discretionary powers to intervene on individual visas. Under the shambolic migration regime that the Gillard government are running, the migration department's bill has blown out by well over $1 billion in this budget alone. Since Labor have been in government—that is, since 2007—billions and billions of dollars have been assigned to cleaning up the mess that they created by going away from the coalition's solutions, which had been working very well. If you recall, of those people who came by boat, there were only four people in detention, and there was a transparent and orderly migration system in this country.

The coalition do not oppose this bill, but we should not be in the position of having to clean up the government's mess. Also, the bill needs further clarification as to how the minister will define whether a student visa breach has been made. I hope that the minister or his representative will clarify how he is going to come to these decisions under discretionary powers. The circumstances under which possible compliance action will be taken are not at this stage clear. Whilst an education provider will be still be required to report a visa violation, it is not clear what mechanism or circumstance will trigger an investigation or prove severe enough to prompt visa cancellation. These questions are hanging out there now. They have not been addressed, I understand, in any of the explanatory memoranda which accompany this bill. I hope that we have not opened the door for the use of ad hoc discretionary powers by the minister, which, as I said, could be fraught with danger.

Student migration, particularly in the area of education, is a very important income source for Australia. I understand that more than $4 billion annually comes from students who come to this country from overseas to study. There is an outstanding opportunity for us not only to gain this sort of income but also to prove that Australia is a valuable and high class destination for overseas students to come and study in. Many of us would be aware of the number of subcontinental students in Melbourne. If you catch a taxi in Melbourne, there is a good chance that you will meet one of them as they earn a few dollars to support themselves while they are trying to study. The previous minister for migration, Senator Evans, made some errors in both his comments and the moves that he made on the question of subcontinental students to the extent that the source of students coming to Australian universities from the subcontinent started to dry up. He then had to go and do a rescue mission in India to try to tell them that we still loved the Indians, that we wanted more of them to come to Australia to study, that we wanted them to feel safe and free to study here and that we did not have any problems with them coming in the numbers that they were coming in before. So there again we saw a shambolic approach from the government to a very good income source for Australia.
In 2011 the Auditor-General found that there were more than 250,000 students who had failed to comply with visa requirements and been issued with a non-compliance notice, an NCN. This is equivalent to the entire number—250,000—of student visas granted in 2010-11. None of the NCNs had been dealt with. In the first three months of 2011, more than 30,000 new NCNs were issued each month. The Knight review found that around 35 per cent belonged to the higher risk categories. So this area certainly needs a fair bit of policing.

The changes to the current legislation will mean that an administrative backlog of more than 350,000 NCNs created by Labor's shambolic mismanagement will be wiped out; in other words, they will not even have a decent look at them. Drawing a line in the sand in this way allows them not to have to deal with the backlog of 350,000 that they already have. This is an administrative mess. Also, DIAC's visa cancellations, when they were challenged in the courts, were upheld only for a five-month period between May 2001 and December 2009. More than 19,000 students were affected, and many of these left Australia prior to the cancellations being overturned.

The ANAO concluded that a number of DIAC's key administrative structures and processes were not sufficiently robust to effectively meet the challenges involved in achieving the government's objective of balancing industry growth and program integrity in the student visa program. This is not a conclusion reached by the opposition; this a conclusion reached by the ANAO, the Auditor-General's Office. We believe on this side of the House, and we demonstrated it in government, that we upheld the integrity of our migration program completely; we did not allow it to become shambolic in a whole range of areas. We all know about these areas. There was the blow-out, and, in a question on notice, shadow minister Morrison this week indicated that the government had expected that by the end of June something like 5,500 people would come here by boat, yet by May that number of people has already arrived. So, with two months to go, the government's figures are wrong again. That demonstrates the problem that this government have created for themselves by walking away from a solution which gave integrity to our borders and to our migration system. The ANAO also noted problems with the enforceability of mandatory visa conditions relating to students maintaining satisfactory course progress and attendance and the working rights allowance of 20 hours per week. The ANAO suggested that this requires careful review. This has brought a certain amount of media attention. For example, on 1 June 2011 an article in the Australian says:

The Gillard government is struggling to manage the international visa program, failing to keep track of hundreds of thousands of potential visa breaches.

The article, by Miranda Rout goes on:

The Australian National Audit Office has found the Department of Immigration's key administrative structures and processes "were not sufficiently robust" to ensure the "integrity" of the program, while student numbers have soared.

It goes on to say that the audit found the department was 'struggling to cope'—in other words, another blowout because it is lacking in resources. It said further that Auditor-General, Ian McPhee found:

... it was "not feasible" for the department actively to monitor if all 400,000 students had breached their visas—including whether they had worked more than 20 hours a week.

In an article on 23 March this year the Adelaide Advertiser said, under the heading 'Student Visas Rule Change': 'Currently course providers have to intervene to help international students who have failed more
than half of their subjects who have not attended at least 70 per cent of their classes.' We know that is one of the benchmarks of breaches. So they have failed more than half their subjects—in other words, they have come here for a lifestyle and an opportunity to get a visa but they have not done the work at school or have not turned up. It goes on: 'The review found this system gave education providers extraordinary power over students. Some providers use the system carelessly or maliciously.'

Based on an electorate-wide survey in my electorate, one of the biggest concerns for Canning voters is the protection of borders. They know that the integrity of the migration system has been reduced since the Gillard-Rudd government have been in power. This is another example of an out-of-control program run by this government. In a recent article in which the MRT was involved, we were told that those assessing whether entrants are legitimate humanitarian entrants were told to start pushing through the visas more quickly to reduce the backlog. When they cancelled them and went to the MRT, the MRT was overturning previous assessments without a clear basis for having done so.

We also found out that allegations of fraud have come out of the office in Islamabad. There are a whole range of issues in terms of migration. We are helping the government in this area to clean up the student visa program because it is actually a positive program for Australia if run properly. But we know that there are going to be resourcing issues, as has already been pointed out by the Auditor-General. In trying to support the government to help clean up their mess, we hope that they get on with it so that they do not reduce the clear opportunity for students to come to Australia to study properly in some of our great educational institutions. (Time expired)
leader in education services that it is today. The university attracts students from more than 140 countries around the world, has campuses overseas and, as at December 2010, had over 27,000 international students enrolled at its onshore and offshore campuses. So the University of Wollongong is in itself making a major contribution to that $19.1 billion export income to the Australian economy—not only that but the University of Wollongong is a also a major driver of regional development in the Illawarra. Whatever we can do in this place to sustain and develop these services and the regulation of international education, and in turn the facilities offered by the University of Wollongong, is good for the transformation of the Illawarra economy. By way of background to this bill, in December 2010, the government appointed the Hon. Michael Knight AO to conduct the first strategic review of the student visa program to enhance the quality, integrity and competitiveness of the student visa program. I might observe that the Knight review has received almost universal support across all of the major stakeholders and commentators on this issue. One noted political journalist and commentator of long standing described this as 'picture-perfect policy development and reporting process' and something that should be adopted in other areas of policy development in this particularly troubled area.

A principal focus of the Knight review report is on improved integrity measures in the student visa program. To this end, the Knight review recommended that the automatic cancellation of student visas be abolished and replaced with a more targeted and strategic analysis of noncompliance.

Student visa holders are subject to a number of visa conditions that reflect the intention of the student visa program. Key to the integrity of the program is visa condition 8202, that requires international students to maintain course progress and attendance in class. The ability of a student visa holder to maintain course progress and attendance is considered an indicator of their genuine engagement in studies. Of course, under the previous government, there was obviously a lack of quality control in this area. There were many, many instances where it was quite obvious that people had accessed the student visa program and were purportedly enrolled in courses with poor quality control and poor attendance control, and it was quite clear that these were being used essentially as a visa shop to enable these students to gain entrance into Australia for other purposes. So to hear the member for Canning, as I just did, make observations about the quality controls under this government and this minister does beggar belief when it was under their watch that this program really did get out of control.

Providers are now required to monitor the course progress of their international students and their attendance in class under the provisions of the national code, and that is a legal instrument under the Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000. While providers are required to define their own policies in relation to course progress or attendance, at a minimum they must intervene to assist an international student who has failed more than 50 per cent of the units attempted in any one study period, or who is at risk of failing to attend between 70 and 80 per cent of total course contact hours—and this goes to the very heart of the quality standards that are necessary to maintain the reputation and the integrity of not only the international education system but the visa program as well.

Where a provider assesses the international student as not achieving satisfactory course progress or attendance, they must report them for a breach of
condition 8202. Under the current regime, an education provider is required under section 19 of the ESOS Act to report breaches of student visa condition 8202 to the Secretary of the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science, Research and Tertiary Education. The provider must give the student 20 working days notice in which to access the complaints and appeals processes. The provider is then required to notify the student visa holder of the breach under section 20 of the act. It is this notification that triggers the application of automatic cancellation provisions under the Migration Act.

The notice requires the student visa holder to attend an office of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship within 28 days of the date of the notice to make submissions about the breach. If the student visa holder does not comply with the notice, their visa is automatically cancelled under the Migration Act by operation of the law at the end of the 28th day after the notice is given. Consequentially, any family dependant visa holders would also have their visas cancelled. International students whose visas are automatically cancelled are subject to an exclusion period for applying for further visas for up to three years.

Both the Knight review and the ANAO report have recommended the abolition of the automatic cancellation regime. The Knight review found that the automatic cancellation regime gives education providers extraordinary power over international students. It argued that the increase in automatic cancellations in recent years has been driven, in part, by the emergence of some providers who will use automatic cancellation mechanisms carelessly or even maliciously. It also found that the process is deleterious for some genuine international students who require help and monitoring rather than having their visas cancelled. Further, it found that the regime was hindering the effective use of compliance resources. In short, it was found that this was an inefficient and inappropriate way to deal with the matter at heart.

This factor was echoed in the ANAO report, which noted systematic flaws and vulnerabilities in the regime. The ANAO has also shared the views of the Knight review in respect of resource-intensive processes that the regime requires, whereby integrity and compliance units must respond to every education provider report rather than pursue targeted areas of compliance concern.

The Australian community expects that there be consequences if a student visa holder breaches a condition of their visa. However, the automatic cancellation provisions fail to account properly for the severity of the breach that has actually occurred. The lack of discretion imposes unnecessary administrative costs on international students, education providers and the government.

It creates uncertainty and complexity for student visa holders. The regime provides no discretion for a decision maker to distinguish between a genuine student visa holder who may be struggling academically and one who deliberately breaches the conditions of their student visa. Critically, the automatic cancellation regime directs government resources away from pursuing more egregious student visa breaches. That is the purpose of the legislation.

So the measures in this bill will amend the ESOS Act to remove the requirement under section 20 for a registered education provider to send a notice to a student visa holder who breaches condition 8202 of their student visa. It is intended that on or after the day the amendments in this bill commence registered education providers will no longer be required, or able, to send a notice under section 20 of the act. As a consequence,
student visas will no longer be subject to automatic cancellation under the Migration Act. Instead, a student visa holder who breaches a visa condition by not achieving satisfactory course progress or not achieving satisfactory course attendance will be considered under the existing discretionary cancellation framework in the Migration Act. Under this framework, the education provider would still be required to report a breach of a prescribed condition of a student visa under section 19 of the ESOS Act. Details of the reported breach would be considered by DIAC for possible compliance action.

The absence of automatic cancellation will not mean that such breaches will be taken any less seriously. In addition to following up on breaches of attendance and course progress, DIAC will be able to better prioritise other reports that may indicate serious noncompliance, including where international students fail to even commence their course. DIAC will be working with the Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education to develop targeted reports to assist in identifying all types of breaches associated with the student visa program and targeting those that represent the highest risk. This bill will also make necessary consequential amendments to the ESOS Act to require an education provider to give particulars of any change in contact details or other prescribed details of student visa holders within 14 days after the provider becomes aware of those changes.

Upon the passage of this legislation, student visa holders will no longer have their visas automatically cancelled. These changes will provide for a fairer, merits-based cancellation process and will allow integrity and compliance resources to be more targeted to areas of high risk, and this is something that I am sure the Australian community would expect of any government.

I conclude by making the observation that there were many important recommendations that have been made in the Knight review. They go to other international education providers within my electorate. I have in mind one provider of high school education, St Paul's International College at Moss Vale. It has been in existence for several decades and provides an excellent service. It is well supported and respected in the community. I see the Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth at the table now. He knows through his own responsibilities—of course, he is very familiar with the Southern Highlands region—what an excellent school it is. So I encourage the minister—and I have met with representatives of St Paul's, with the minister and with officers of the minister on numerous occasions—to pursue the other recommendations that have been made within the Knight review posthaste to ensure that this school can continue to offer an excellent service, be a great employer of teachers in the Southern Highlands and provide a quality Australian education experience for all of the students that are coming to that excellent school, particularly from China, Korea and South-East Asia, so that they can take home with them when they have completed their studies a wonderful experience of Australia into the future. I commend the legislation to the House and I again congratulate the minister for his response to this important review.

Mrs PRENTICE (Ryan) (10:26): I rise today to speak on the Migration Legislation Amendment (Student Visas) Bill 2012, which could have very significant effects on the University of Queensland in the division of Ryan, which I represent. I have spoken previously in the House about the benefits of foreign students in Australia and associated issues, and it is an area I continue to support
to ensure that the many foreign students in my electorate of Ryan and the University of Queensland, and the concerns of foreign students who attend that university, are appropriately considered by this parliament.

Today's amendment bill is a measure to enact recommendation 24 from the Michael Knight review into the student visa program. Mr Knight recommended:

Automatic cancellation of student visas should be abolished and replaced by a system in which information conveyed by SCVs—student course variations—is used as an input into a more targeted and strategic analysis of non-compliance.

Practically speaking, today's measure will amend the Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000 and the Migration Act 1958, which will abolish the automatic cancellation of a student's visa due to substandard course attendance or academic progress. This would then allow the Department of Immigration and Citizenship to address each case on its own merits, rather than a one-size-fits-all policy that has the possibility of discrimination as well as the unnecessary cancellation of a student's visa.

In this way, the government is implementing a more directed and strategic approach to visa conditions and non-compliance. I note that this is an approach with which I broadly agree; however, there are some concerning aspects which I believe need to be looked at and which I hope will be canvassed when the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee releases its report on 18 June 2012.

As I have previously commented in this chamber, foreign students provide a very significant contribution to the Australian economy. Between 2004-05 and 2008-09, the number of granted student visas rose from 170,000 to more than 320,000 enrolled in courses in Australia. Unfortunately, following this peak came a sharp decline in student visa applications to Australia, and this government failed to act decisively to support this sector. As is one of the ongoing features of this Labor government, they dithered and dallied, with the Knight review in 2011 following the Baird review from 2009. After receiving the report on 30 June 2011 last year, the government finally responded in September to say that they agreed to implement all 41 of Knight's recommendations. And now, in 2012, we are finally seeing legislative action.

The effects of such a decline are quite significant. The Sydney Morning Herald reported in February 2011 that the number of international students choosing Australia for their degree course had fallen. Student visa applications from outside Australia decreased by 32 per cent over the last six months of 2010 compared with 2009, when they had already fallen 22 per cent compared to the same period in 2008. This drop in international student levels can have serious effects. Monash University—Australia's largest—has announced that it would lay off 300 staff to cover the budget shortfall caused by the reduction in international students at that institution.

Estimates by Access Economics also showed the impact of a five per cent increase, or decrease, in international student activity. The effect of a five per cent decrease is significant. It reduces the total value added contribution by more than $600 million. As seen through the Monash example, however, the most telling effect of a decline in international students is its impact on local employment rates, with a five per cent decrease resulting in an employment fall from 126,240 full-time equivalent workers to just 119,900—a loss of more than 6,000 FTE workers.
This is a serious issue. Education export from Australia is by no means a small industry. The benefits of international students are vast. Tourism Research Australia has suggested that for every two formal students one friend or relative visited Australia throughout the duration of their studies. These travellers contribute an estimated $314.7 million to the economy comprising $179.7 million in labour income and $135 million in gross operating surplus.

On aggregate, at its peak in 2009, foreign students provided approximately $18 billion in revenue to the Australian economy making it the nation's third largest export industry. It is clear that international students contribute enormously to Australia as a whole, but the effects are also evident when broken down to a state-by-state level.

Indeed, at the University of Queensland alone, their student load in 2009 comprised 31,757 domestic students and 8,826 international students, with the latter representing 22 per cent of the entire student load. It is clear to see that international students at the University of Queensland most definitely encompass a serious revenue earner especially considering that a university typically receives more from an international student than they receive from an Australian student. As the Knight review acknowledges, all of the Group of Eight universities 'are now dependent upon recruiting international students'.

Fundamentally, providing places to foreign students not only allows a university to increase its international profile and attract international talent but also allows for an added revenue base through which a university can provide more resources for both Australian and international students. At times, the high number of international students has raised eyebrows in Australia. However, we must recognise that the ongoing transition to integrate foreign students more and more into our tertiary education system is the reason we are here today—to listen to the universities sector and the wider Australian public about how to progress.

More importantly, as a result of the very high number of internationals, in Queensland international students and their friends and visitors contribute approximately $1.7 billion to the state's economy. Comparing this to the gross state product of $214 billion international student flow-on effects account for 0.81 per cent of GSP. Of this, $1.2 billion is in the direct form of employee wages with the remainder representing a return to capital investors. International student activity in Queensland contributes close to 17,500 full-time equivalent workers including almost 14,000 jobs in my hometown of Brisbane alone. This equates to $970.4 million in direct wages and $416.8 million as returns to capital investors with the sector contributing $4.15 billion to Brisbane's economy.

When broken down to a local level, the contribution and importance of international students becomes particularly clear. The Brisbane City Council joins with many of the consuls and other institutions providing education services and holds a function welcoming international students once a year to emphasise how much we appreciate these students contributing to our city and to our local economy.

On top of their very important contribution, both culturally and economically, to this country there is a very specific gap in the legislation which needs to be fixed to support the sector. Under section 137J of the Migration Act automatic cancellation is triggered if a student receives at least one of two notices of breach. Education providers are required to monitor the progress of an international student and
provide a breach when a student has failed more than 50 per cent of units attempted in one study period or intervene when a student is at risk of failing to attend 70 to 80 per cent of total contact hours.

If such a breach were issued, the education provider contacted the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science, Research and Tertiary Education regarding what is known as an 8202 breach. A student then has 28 days to comply with the issues outlined in the breach and, if a reply does not occur, their visa is automatically cancelled.

The practical problem that arises from this legislation is that, in 2011, the Auditor-General discovered that more than 250,000 students had been issued with non-compliance notices, none of which had been dealt with. In the first three months of 2011 more than 30,000 non-compliance notices were issued each month, contributing further to the administrative backlog. I understand the backlog now stands at approximately 350,000 non-compliance notices.

The legislation today will help contribute to solving this backlog by transferring the reporting of breach notices directly to the Department of Immigration and Citizenship thereby giving them a much more proactive role in analysing breach notices. DIAC would evaluate under the existing framework for possible compliance actions. It would seek to address the situation where, between May 2001 and December 2009, 19,000 students left Australia before their automatic cancellation was reviewed and, ultimately, overturned.

To better facilitate this process this legislation also requires education providers to refer any new or changed contact details of its students, including mobile numbers and email addresses, to the department of immigration within 14 days of coming across such information. Such a change would enable the department to liaise more effectively with a student found to be non-compliant.

However, the Senate committee, as at 7 May 2012, received 18 submissions regarding today's amendment bill. In particular, I note submission No. 11 by Universities Australia and their contention that today's move will increase compliance costs by all universities across Australia and place too high a burden on their administrative costs, and that this move 'takes away from the core business of teaching and learning'. Universities Australia note in their submission that details often change or are updated, especially in the initial stages of a student's entry to Australia, where a student arrives in Australia and later updates their residential address. The suggestion by Universities Australia that all contact details be updated with the department when and if an education provider submits a non-compliance notice does, at face value, sound reasonable, and I encourage the Senate committee to seriously investigate this option.

The government's regulatory impact statement ignores the possible impact of this imposition of administrative costs borne by education providers and is something the coalition is concerned about. Further, there are other aspects that relate to the specific changes to the new compliance regime and its technical implementation about which further details are required. I do look forward to the government's actions regarding recommendations 23, 25 and 26 concerning the area of non-compliance issues which provide more discretion by immigration officers regarding other areas where non-compliance notices arise.

I have long supported the international student sector in Australia. The full implementation of the Knight review's
recommendations will take considerable time, but I place on record my commitment to ensuring a fair outcome for both international students and the universities that support them. While I support the general thrust of today's bill, it is absolutely imperative that this bill is passed in a way that addresses the concerns which I have outlined, including faster resolution and greater discretion in addressing non-compliance notices as well as the regulatory impact this bill will place on university administrations.

Mr LAURIE FERGUSON (Werriwa) (10:38): As noted by earlier speakers, the Migration Legislation Amendment (Student Visas) Bill 2012 essentially results from the Knight review, the 41 recommendations made therein and, more particularly, the analysis that the current compulsory notification of breaches by students with regard to attendance and progress in courses, in conjunction with automatic cancellation of visas, meant that there was a significant backlog of cases. The member for Canning talked of 250,000 that had not been finalised. It led to a situation where it gave enormous power to some providers who in a number of cases, it is claimed, used it as a disciplinary procedure against students who might have criticised course content or college performance. This essentially led to a situation where some people who might have been better helped by counselling and other assistance were cancelled. That inquiry received 200 submissions and its report with its 41 recommendations was released on 22 September 2011.

Australia has produced a few political charlatans. Jock Garden, who started on the Bolshevik council of world revolution and eventually forged Eddie Ward's signatures in his ministerial office, finished up by producing Zodiac magazines on horse tipping. TJ Ley started off going to different Protestant denominations each Sunday for political purposes and finished up in Broadmoor's mental asylum after murdering six people.

But the member for Canning's performance today indicates he is a bullet performer as a charlatan in regard to debates. First he came in here complaining about the time it had taken the government to respond to this report and then he—

Mr Turnbull: Mr Deputy Speaker, on a point of order: the honourable member's comparison of my colleague the member for Canning with 'Lemonade' Ley and Jock Garden is abusive and he should withdraw that. Ley was a murderer; 'Jock' Garden was a crook, as he has said. I was wondering where these remarks were heading, but he should withdraw and apologise.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Lyons): The point is taken. I ask the member to withdraw.

Mr LAURIE FERGUSON: Okay.

Mr Turnbull: No, Mr Deputy Speaker, my only point of order is that it really is
offending the sensibilities of the House if he says 'chutz'-pah when the right pronunciation is 'hutz'-pah. In fact, it is a 'hutz'-pah to say 'chutz'-pah!

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I thank the member for his advice.

Mr LAURIE FERGUSON: He came in here decrying a shambolic mess and a crisis. The crisis in this sector of immigration was clearly created by the previous government. Peter Mares on Inside Story made this comment:
They—
that is, the previous government's actions—led to an explosion of private colleges offering sometimes dubious vocational courses that promised the shortest route to permanent residency. They not only devalued the reputation of Australia's education system and distorted the migration intake, they also created a perception in the community that international students were manipulative and devious—despite the fact that the vast majority were simply playing the game by the rules drawn up by the the Australian government.

What the Howard government did was abandon the previous practice where people came to this country, sought qualifications and then got on a plane back to New Delhi or Beijing to apply with the rest of the world to come here as qualified skilled migrants. They said that if you had a degree from Australia you could remain here. They also liberalised very radically the number of courses where you could stay here, so we had a situation where every second hairdresser in the Beijing thought they had is to live in Australia and every second chef in Chittagong had the same privileges—they could live here in forever on the basis of courses conducted in many cases by private colleges that were very questionable.

People have talked about the growth, and we note that in 1997-98 there were 108,000 visas issued but by 2009-10 there were 269,268. I do not for a moment criticise international education as a major industry for this country. The member for Canning talked about $4 billion. Deloitte, whose testimony I would prefer, put it at $10 billion. Either way, as the member for Throsby noted, it is the fourth biggest export earner in this country. Is it any wonder that we are successful? The nature of our country, the lifestyle it provides for people, the freedoms and the fact that eight of the top 100 universities in the world in the 2011 QS World University Ratings are in Australia and 25 of the top 700 demonstrate that we are at the top end of the market and that indisputably people gain a good education through this country. Of course it does have major flow-on effects with regard to employing people. Through alumni associations we have influence on future ministers and future leaders in other countries. There are many values that can be gained by international education.

However, when you undermine it in a total pursuit of the dollar, you have very big impacts on immigration. It is worth noting that in response to a question that I put on notice recently to the minister, we see these figures for rejections of people trying to come in on student visas, 570 to 575: from November to November 2010-11, in Dakar there were 512 rejections out of 1,974; in New Delhi there were 4,456 rejections out of 8,912 applications; in Colombo there were 199 rejections out of 1,489; in China there were 2,126 out of 2,802.

Mr Schultz: What about Ireland?

Mr LAURIE FERGUSON: They probably have a reasonable pass rate. The situation is that even with those applications of people coming to this country, there is a significant rate of rejection on the basis of country assessment, visa subclass, English proficiency, finances, medicals, letter of
offer and confirmation of enrolment. The requirements are there.

It is important to note that when people constantly harangue the Australian public about a maximum of 13,750 refugees coming here a year, whether by plane, by boat or by offshore decision-making, the numbers that possibly can undermine Australia's immigration system coming through the student category if it is not properly policed is very significant. As the member said earlier, 250,000 were basically in the noncompliance cancellation group. Obviously, because we are reforming this today—and both sides of politics know that it is needed—many people in that cancellation stream should not have been cancelled, but of course a significant number would be.

I also note that the member for Canning talked of our minister being required to go to India and crawl and lick shoes in respect of the acceptability of Australia and how we welcome migrants. Because of the previous government's measures, people were perceiving the education visa category not as a way of getting an education but as a way of permanently living in Australia. We reached a stage when this government looked at measures to avoid that kind of analysis and to toughen up and a number of the students became concerned that their pathway might be terminated. They of course became very intense about that and we had very histrionic reporting in the Indian media. It is interesting to note that at least three of the murders that were cited as indicative of Australian racism at that time—the very vicious throat-cutting of a woman in Westmead in Sydney, the deaths of workers in the Riverina, and the unfortunate death of a young child in Melbourne—in retrospect were allegedly committed by Indian nationals. Part of this huge surge of Indian reporting about racism and hostility by the Australian people in retrospect was, as I say, very sensationalistic.

We got to that point because the previous government basically said, 'All doors are open. We do not care about proper policing of the immigration system. We do not care what people are going to do long term. We do not care about their qualifications. We do not care if they should be coming here to study. We are driven by the industry. We want the bucks.' When we see people opposite alleging that we have a mess, they know truthfully that they created this mess. That is why the current government had to insist upon the recertification of private colleges in this sector, because once you go from TAFE provision, once you go from the more reliable mainstream colleges, you get the shonks coming into this industry, the people who want the quick buck. This government had to make sure that all of those colleges are recertified because of the free-for-all created by the previous government.

You would think this was coming from over there, the way they talk about refugees and being tough on immigration. This current government went out there and reduced by half the number of jobs and the number of occupations that qualified people to live here. We got rid of all the questionable categories and the Australian people asked themselves, 'Do we really need to have people in these sometimes low-order jobs coming here through immigration? Why can't we, the Australian people, provide those jobs?'

Equally, this government—not those people opposite who are talking about a mess—went out there and said that in future people will be here for two years provisionally for work and they will be inspected in the workplace to see whether they measure up. When the member for
Canning talks about a shambolic regime, a mess, a crisis, we know that it was those opposite who said that they did not care about making sure that there is a proper system here, that they did not care about policing it, that they are totally obsessed with the fact that it is a big export earner. Quite frankly, the reality here is that when we get rid of the rhetoric from those opposite about people coming here and distorting our immigration system, this is a far bigger danger area than whether 3,000 people come here by boat a year. Now that this government has been forced to crack down and do something about the mess they have created, the reality is that down the track we are going have a very significant number of these people when they see the doors are closed, when they see the dream has disappeared, coming before the refugee processing system of this country and claiming that they are not able to return to their countries overseas because of human rights abuses. The numbers involved in this are going to be far greater than any number of people coming here by boat or plane.

Essentially, the situation in this bill, as I say, is that for the regime in future in this area it has been found that the numbers proven through immediate cancellation are too great for the system to control, whatever the nature of this government. I heard the previous speaker make the point that she thought there would be a call for greater resources through these new changes. It has already been exposed that under Labor and Liberal and the way the situation was liberalised with regards to student access to this country, the system had already broken down through this automatic cancellation process. We stress that one of the outcomes of this legislation is going to be that you can see whether there are some countries where, despite the heavy numbers of rejections I mentioned earlier, a higher proportion of students in this or that category, this or that study, are basically failing to comply. We are going to be able to target resources, in a very real sense, to make sure that the limited resources we have for actually monitoring the system are devoted to the areas where the problems arise, rather than having the across-the-board, widespread cancellation process which has led to the system being broken down.

I commend this legislation, and I note that the quibbling from those opposite is extremely hypocritical. We might be able to have a reasonable debate about refugee policy in this country, or the arrival of boats and whether they are precipitated by events in other countries or policies in this country. But for them to come in here today and—in an area where there has been a dereliction of duty in regard to this country's national interest as to immigration—and allege that the problems in recent years were not manufactured by their own previous policies is absolutely preposterous.

Dr JENSEN (Tangney) (10:53): I have to say that I am disappointed with some of the comments the member made. They sounded somewhat xenophobic. I find that interesting when Australia has control of the student visa process, whereas we do not have control of the boat arrivals, thanks to the member's government's policy in that regard.

Having said that, I rise to speak in support of the Migration Legislation Amendment (Student Visas) Bill 2012 which seeks to replace the current system of automatic visa cancellation for international students, in the event of academic underperformance, with an improved system that will allow each case of underperformance to be carefully assessed on individual merit.
With more than 39 internationally recognised tertiary institutions facilitating over a quarter of a million full fee paying students from around the world, Australia, since the early 1980s, has established its reputation as a major provider of tertiary education in the global education market.

Once families across the world would dream of sending their children abroad for a top education at Harvard, Yale, Oxford or Cambridge. And, while the prestige of those institutions has not diminished, it is with great pride that we witness a rise in the teaching standards of our own institutions to the heights of worldwide recognition, with the Australian National University, the University of Melbourne and indeed the University of Western Australia consistently ranking in the world's top 20 and 50 universities over the past decade. Not only is Australia's emerging prominence in education a great accomplishment for international students, as it delivers them an excellent education at an affordable cost, it also remains our third most lucrative export industry, responsible for generating $18.6 billion in revenue for our national economy.

My own electorate of Tangney is home to one of Australia's key academic institutions. Murdoch University educates more than 2,000 international students from more than 90 countries.

I rise to support this bill because of my personal commitment to promoting individual merit and because it offers international students a fair go. As the Migration Regulations 1994 and the Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000 stand, student visa condition 8202 means an international student's visa is subject to automatic cancellation in the event of a failure to meet course requirements. This is—and, until amended, will remain—a harsh measure that precludes international students from having fair and adequate time to adjust to a foreign education system and being able to perform to the best of their potential. This bill seeks to abolish this automatic cancellation system for holders of student visas who happen to be underperforming academically for whatever reason. The amendments will not only give students a chance to be counselled and perform better in future semesters, but also continue to benefit Australia's national economy by allowing our institutions to supply international places where there is significant demand.

Having been a university student myself, I have not forgotten the struggles and challenges of on-campus life. From having to work the irregular hours of shift work to many a sleepless night researching and writing, most of us can relate to the pressures inherent in the pursuit of a tertiary education, irrespective of field or faculty. I can only imagine how much harder it must be at times for international students from culturally diverse backgrounds not only to cope with the pressures of being a student but to learn to adapt to a whole new cultural atmosphere and adjust to an education system vastly different from what they would have been accustomed to in their home countries. No doubt, the challenges of adjusting to a new environment can potentially amplify the pressure on international students, ultimately impeding their academic performance. It would be naive to simply write these individuals off, construing their underperformance as evidence of a lack of intellectual ability. It would be even more naive to worsen their circumstances by imposing an automatic cancellation of their visa.

We must also bear in mind that initial failure does not automatically imply permanent failure. People can change, adapt and improve. Consider that the father of the assembly line, Henry Ford, went broke...
before he was able to successfully form the Ford Motor Company. Billionaire entrepreneur Bill Gates dropped out of Harvard and failed in his initial attempt at business with cofounder Paul Allen and yet eventually created Microsoft. Walt Disney was once terminated on grounds of 'lacking imagination and good ideas', for goodness sake! The list of individuals throughout history who found themselves embroiled in some degree of early failure is quite literally endless. Scientists Isaac Newton, Charles Darwin and Thomas Edison, and statesmen Winston Churchill and Abraham Lincoln all experienced different failures at early stages of their lives, before emerging triumphant in their respective fields.

This fact stands as clear demonstration that we can never assume an individual necessarily lacks the aptitude for learning, intuition and development just because they happen to have experienced some early hiccups. In recognising this, the government charged Michael Knight with reviewing the student visa system in December 2010. Forty-one recommendations were made to improve the visa program. This amendment bill seeks to legislate 24 of those recommendations and quite rightfully determines that the breach of visa condition 8202 is not an inadequate indicator of a student's lacking commitment towards their studies. The Knight review also predicted that automatic cancellations could lead to some providers employing this measure ruthlessly, thereby bringing Australia's international education reputation into disrepute. It also found that the automatic cancellation process had become a subject of widespread criticism by the Federal Court. Between 2001 and 2009 around 19,000 cases were appealed and subsequently overturned. While it is appropriate to expect legal consequences in the event of a breach of visa conditions, we must at the same time uphold the ideals of individual merit and 'fair go' for all.

To this end, it is imperative to carefully assess the circumstances surrounding a given student's lack of performance. The present system provides no discretion to differentiate between committed students whose academic struggles can be improved with better support and assistance and those who seriously lack the aptitude to learn and are occupying a place that could rightfully be allocated to a worthier student. According to most recent statistics from Australian Education International, as at March 2012 there were 351,878 enrolled full-fee-paying international students in Australia on a student visa. This represents an 8.5 per cent decline since this time last year.

This decline coincides with the Auditor-General's report over the last year which found that more than 250,000 students had failed to comply with one or more of these requirements and had been issued with automatic non-compliance notices. None of these NCNs have been dealt with. In the first three months of 2011 alone, more than 30,000 new NCNs were issued each month. In view of this, it is not surprising that each of the 18 submissions from across the education industry made to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee has offered wholehearted support for the amendments of this bill.

In the submission received from the Australian National Audit Office, the Auditor-General found:

... the ANAO concluded that the system of automatic cancellation was highly vulnerable to legal challenge. Automatic cancellations of student visas made between May 2001 and December 2009 were subsequently overturned, for all but five months of that period, by court decisions. The ANAO assessed that the complexity of the visa cancellation regime made it liable to procedural vulnerabilities, which
would likely see it continue to be tested in the courts.

The Department of Immigration and Citizenship itself registers its support for the bill, saying:

The amendments in this Bill are intended to benefit genuine international students in Australia and the international education industry more broadly. Under the discretionary cancellation framework that is intended to replace the automatic regime, students who are reported for a breach of condition 8202 will have the opportunity to explain the circumstances of their case and for departmental officers to make an assessment of whether a cancellation is warranted.

For genuine students, the abolition of automatic cancellation may allow changes in course or extra tuition as opposed to cancellation and exclusion from Australia.

Further, Universities Australia, in its submission says:

Universities Australia supports the amendments in the proposed Bill. In our view, these cancellations were ineffective.

The Migration Institute of Australia submitted that:

It is essential that Australia continue to review what is onerous, cumbersome and discouraging about the current student visa system as compared to traditional higher education competitor countries such as the UK, the US, Canada and New Zealand. International education is a hugely important export industry that is intrinsically tied to foreign relations and diplomacy, multiculturalism and transcultural exchange, and population growth and workforce skills and labour needs.

Based on the overall congruity of the Knight review and the unanimous support with which the 18 distinguished bodies across the education industry have supported this bill by making submissions to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee, this bill holds strong merit. Pending the final report from the Senate committee due on 18 June this year, the coalition and I render our support for this bill in the name of promoting individual opportunity and individual meritocracy in a fair and equitable manner to deliver a fairer system of student visa assessment.

Mr HAWKE (Mitchell) (11:05): I want to add my voice to the member for Tangney’s remarks in relation to this matter, including his detailed examination of the educational requirements and outcomes of students in this industry.

In examining the Migration Legislation Amendment (Student Visas) Bill 2012 I think it is important for the House to note that there has been a series of administrative failures in relation to the management of student visas and breaches of this system that has led us to this point today where we have this legislation in the House. I want to record, of course, as I have many times previously on such matters, that I am a big supporter of the Australian student visa industry and, indeed, the idea of Australia being an education exporter to the world. It is one of our most important industries. Recently it became our third-largest export industry—that is, education. Education is a fine thing for Australia to have as its third-largest export industry.

Recently I had the opportunity to visit Japan and lead a trade, foreign affairs and other related delegation of MPs. In meeting many of the people who are quite senior, whether they be Japanese foreign affairs, industry or Diet members, many of them had been educated at the ANU in Australia. I think that is a perfect example of what I am talking about. Australia ought to provide world-class education, have the ability to educate people from our region here and see them succeed and always have that connection with intelligent people in countries in our region.
We know of course that this industry at its peak was generating about $18.6 billion for the national economy. It was just behind the coal and the iron ore industries. That is how big it was and yet it had so little attention in terms of the great success story of universities and private colleges and all of the people that contribute to this sector.

In recent years we have seen a series of changes from this government following some changes that have come up. We have seen some overreactions, in my view. We have seen other matters such as the strong dollar, that have led to competition for students overseas and Australia losing its market edge in relation to education, which has led to a big drop in the number of overseas students studying here.

Integrally related to this question is the migration program. It is imperative, from the coalition’s perspective, that we have a strong immigration system that is well managed and administered. That is why this bill is important. It is important, in my view, that we improve the administrative and regulatory arrangements in immigration so that the industry and the sector can get on with their job and do the wonderful work that they do for our region, for Australia and for Australia’s reputation internationally. That is why I am quite disappointed at the government’s ongoing failure to manage the legislative program properly.

In this bill they are proposing a big new compliance regime, which is different from the current arrangements. Many members are saying that is to the benefit of the sector, which I accept is as a reasonable argument. But if you are going to propose a new compliance regime it would be preferable for the details to be provided. Many of the details—the thresholds, the definitions and the trigger points that would accompany the new compliance regime—are still very much the subject of question. We know that the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee is due to report on 18 June. It would be preferable to have the report from that debate today so that we could understand exactly what those details might be and make adequate observations about what is going on with this legislation.

Of course, with an administrative backlog of 18,000 non-compliance notices, the current system cannot possibly be sustained. The department cannot handle the mandatory notices and it is very difficult to see how any resources or regime could be put in place to deal with the current mandatory non-compliance regime. The coalition supports a more risk-oriented approach, which seems an appropriate way to deal with the serious issues that can arise through a migration-based system. I think it is a difficult task, and I accept that the government is attempting to do something about it, but we do need to see more detail. If we had that Senate report we would be able to make a better informed decision about how good this is going to be for the sector. There is no doubt that in recent years the sector has been suffering—sometimes as a result of government delay and sometimes as a result of external factors.

In good faith we are not going to be opposing this bill in this place, even though we have not seen all the detail. I think that is a pretty good position for the coalition to adopt given the outcome of the Knight review. Speaking of the Knight review, I would like to make a couple of observations about how it relates to this bill. I welcome the idea that selected private colleges and TAFEs will eventually benefit from easier student visa processing arrangements, especially those colleges which have been around for some time. I know many of them in Sydney that are well established, highly regulated and have been in operation for some time. They are highly regulated at the state level and they are highly regulated at
the federal level. Their compliance is quite severe and it is a difficult and ongoing burden for their operations. Some people say that is very appropriate because we need to make sure that these places are legitimate. But when a college has been in operation for some time, has a record of success and achievement, is always compliant and continues to be compliant, it can be argued that the administrative burden of that compliance should be reduced and that minimal effort should be put into compliance rather than monitoring and just looking for the risk. That is the concept of this legislation—risk-based assessment—and I welcome that development. I think it is clear that there are providers—and that is what Knight is talking about—who can be released.

We know that our main markets for foreign students—India and China—are treated as high-risk countries, and that makes it harder for students to obtain visas, particularly Indians. The rejection rates are around 60 per cent. Streamlined arrangements are welcome in this regard, and that is why we are not going to oppose the intent of this bill or the passage of it. Streamlining these things is a good thing, and focusing on the risks, rather than the administration, is a superior model of the government's choosing. However, there will be some close attention to the detail. Sometimes the government falls down in a range of matters—and detail does matter. We have good intention, we have a good chance to improve the arrangements for this sector, yet the detail continues to be a little bit ephemeral. We do not want to create a bureaucratic trail; we do not want to create a constant whirl around of bureaucracy. Whether it is student visas, work visas, holiday visas or protection visas—any element of our visa program—it is very important that we continue to make sure administration is appropriate and not burdensome.

As I have said before, I am a very strong supporter of this sector. Their record of achievement in the last decade speaks for itself. They have risen to become the third largest export industry in Australia. There have been some troubled times recently. It is incumbent on government to continue to improve the arrangements in the migration program so that this sector is able to succeed. It is vital for Australia and its international reputation. I welcome moves such as this that are designed to remove the focus on everybody and focus on the risks that arise in the migration program in relation to student visas.

I also welcome the Senate committee report. I wish it was available to us today so that we could understand a little bit more the government's intentions in this space and how it will benefit the sector and enable us to make a more informed decision. In lieu of that, the coalition is more than happy to support you but we do seek improvements in this sector in the future.

Mr BOWEN (McMahon—Minister for Immigration and Citizenship) (11:14): I thank members for their contribution to the debate on the Migration Legislation Amendment (Student Visas) Bill 2012. This bill amends the Migration Act and the Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000 to cease the automatic cancellation regime for student visa holders who breach the academic progress or attendance requirements of their visa.

As several honourable members have pointed out, the international education sector is particularly important to Australia. It is our third largest export market now and one of which we can be justly proud. I am
very pleased with the progress in implementing the recommendations of the Knight review, and I will come to that more in a few moments. This has been a very important area of reform for this government and it has been an important priority both for me and for Minister Evans.

This bill responds to the Knight review but also, importantly, to the concerns raised in the 2011 Australian National Audit Office report Management of student visas. Both the Knight review and the ANAO have recommended the abolition of the automatic cancellation regime. It has been criticised for giving extraordinary powers to education providers over international students. It is detrimental to genuine international students who are experiencing difficulty through no fault of their own and who require help and monitoring rather than having their visas automatically cancelled.

Importantly, this bill enhances the ability of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship to focus on those clear issues of integrity where there has been a breach of a student visa and it has been wilful or intentional and egregious. It removes the necessity for the department of immigration to process visa cancellations which are not warranted, for which they have no discretion, and which create uncertainty and complexity for student visa holders.

The bill does not represent a softening in the treatment of student visa holders who breach the conditions of their visas. Rather, it enables the government to prioritise and pursue more serious breaches of the student visa program, including not only nonattendance in class and failure to maintain progress but also where people—and this does happen—come to Australia on a student visa but never start their course and in all probability never intended to. It will send a much stronger message to all users of the student visa program about the government's commitment to program integrity, and I believe the approach will strengthen community and stakeholder confidence in the program. As the Hon. Michael Knight found in his report, the automatic cancellation regime is:

… patently not working as a compliance and integrity tool and is in fact hindering the effective use of available student compliance resources.

I noted that the member for Cook, the shadow minister, in his contribution was critical of the backlog and indicated it was a matter of the resourcing and competence of the government. I would point out that the matter of the backlog and compliance was first raised in 2001 and a significant backlog was noted by the Australian National Audit Office in 2006, when there were 80,000 non-compliance notices on the backlog. I think this shows that this is a systemic problem, not a problem of mismanagement. A rigid framework which is disproportionate to the seriousness of the issue and fails to prioritise the most egregious breaches of the student visa regime is one which will inevitably lead to backlogs, and of course, the more international students who are in the nation at any one time, the greater the backlogs will be. I am certainly not critical of the Howard government or accusing it of mismanagement in terms of the backlog of 80,000; I am pointing out that there is a systemic issue and it is not correct for the shadow minister to assert that this is a matter of incompetence on the part of the government or the department.

Further, the regime has attracted continued adverse commentary from the courts. The majority of automatic cancellations made between May 2001 and December 2009 were invalidated as a result of decisions by the Federal Court. In fact, the department's cancellations were only upheld for a five-month period in this time. This
highlights the ineffectiveness of the regime. In other words, the result was not cancellation, but the department had to, because it has no discretion under the act, go through the process of cancelling the visas in the first place.

I will make a couple more comments about the contributions of honourable members. Firstly, the coalition has indicated that it reserves the right to respond to the Senate report. That is a perfectly appropriate approach to take. The approach I have always taken is to take sensible suggestions from a Senate committee or any other committee into consideration. If there are sensible suggestions made, the government will remain open-minded about those and will take a flexible approach. I point out, however, that this is an important reform and one that I think is overdue and should have happened several years ago—perhaps when it was first raised way back in 2001 or when it was raised in 2006. Nevertheless, we will continue to work with the Senate inquiry, will provide any information that the Senate committee calls for and will respond accordingly.

Some honourable members opposite have said that this is the first of the Knight recommendations to be implemented and have criticised the government for being too slow in implementing the Knight review. I hate to disappoint honourable members, but they appear uninformed. This is the first legislative response because it is the first reform which has needed a legislative response; the others have been implemented administratively or via regulation. I think that is important for the House to note.

I do thank all honourable members for their contributions. I think the debate has indicated a bipartisan recognition that the international education sector is very important for Australia. I think the Knight review recommendations have been broadly welcomed across all sectors of the international education industry. We are currently conducting a fundamental review of assessment levels for the non-university sector, as recommended by the Knight review. Progress on that is good, and I look forward to updating the community and, at an appropriate point, the House on the implementation of those recommendations as well. I commend this important bill to the House.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Third Reading

Mr BOWEN (McMahon—Minister for Immigration and Citizenship) (11:22): by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.
Paid Parental Leave and Other Legislation Amendment (Dad and Partner Pay and Other Measures) Bill 2012

Second Reading

Debate resumed on the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

to which the following amendment was moved:

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

(1) notes that the Government's paid parental leave scheme is too short, does not provide superannuation and does not maintain the income of the majority of Australian mothers; and

(2) calls on the Government to immediately adopt the Coalition's better, fairer paid parental leave scheme."

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Lyons): The question now is that the words proposed to be omitted stand part of the question.

Dr STONE (Murray) (11:23): I rise to speak on the Paid Parental Leave and Other Legislation Amendment (Dad and Partner Pay and Other Measures) Bill 2012 and the amendments that have been moved in this House. The bill makes changes to the Paid Parental Leave Act. Paid parental leave is not welfare. It is not a right that can easily be legislated away. It is a right that all women, and in fact parents, should have access to in a country like ours, which has the capacity to support families financially when they need to leave the workforce when babies are born.

Public servants and higher-paid professional families have had access to paid parental leave for decades, but part-time workers and low-paid employees have not had access to paid parental leave in the past. So the coalition put on the table its paid parental leave mandated scheme for all families some time ago, and the government of the day, the Rudd Labor government, legislated to put a mandated paid parental leave scheme into place in Australia for the first time. I applaud those moves but I have been disappointed since day one because the paid parental leave scheme put in place by Labor was the leanest, meanest scheme that could possibly be managed and still bear the name of paid parent leave.

We have a situation where only the minimum wage is paid to the mother or, now, with these changes, to the father or partner. We do not have superannuation offered during the 18-weeks-only period of benefit. Everyone knows that at least 26 weeks of support is necessary particularly for a mother—but for either parent or a partner—following the birth of the baby. For the mother, breast feeding and other essential nurturing takes a minimum of 26 weeks to be optimal for the child. But in the Australian scheme, as introduced by the Labor government, we only saw 18 weeks of benefit to the full-time caring parent and at the minimum wage.

Sadly, when you have a mortgage and bills to pay, the bank will not suddenly reduce your mortgage payments because your partner has had a baby. Your payments have been geared to your usual income, but here you come with just the minimum wage to replace it with and to pay the outgoings to keep your household intact during parental leave.

So the paid parental leave scheme, as it stands, leaves a very great deal to be desired. It needs to be extended. It needs to be more generous in the payments made to the parent, but it is important that we add fathers and partners to the measures. Therefore, I am supportive of those particular changes.

The two weeks pay for eligible fathers and partners will, as I said, only be at the rate of
the national minimum wage, which is currently $590 a week before tax. That is in line with the existing parental leave pay. To be eligible, the dad or partner would need to satisfy the work test. That is appropriate. They will need to have worked continuously for at least 10 of the previous 13 months, with a break of no more than eight weeks between two consecutive work days. They would need to have undertaken at least 330 hours of paid work during the 10-month period. They need to satisfy the income test that, under Labor, is $150,000. That is based on the dad or partner's adjusted taxable income in the previous financial year before the nominated start date for dad and partner pay or the date of the claim, whichever is earlier. They need to satisfy the Australian residency test and they need to be providing the care, whether this be primary or joint care, for a child born or adopted on or after 1 January next year. And they should not be working during the period that the person receives the parental payment. These are all common sense, and they obviously need to be spelled out in the legislation.

The legislation also includes refining the provisions which permit keeping-in-touch days and clarifying the operation of a number of other provisions, including debt-recovery provisions, notice provisions and provisions relating to the delegation of the secretary's powers under the act.

I am aware that some people still wonder why women in particular need to have paid parental leave: surely, their grandmothers and great grandmothers did not receive such support and they were able to raise their children in a reasonable way. That is how the argument goes. I want to remind the Australian population that women in Australia still suffer a huge gap in payment for same work undertaken. This gender pay gap is not diminishing; it is in fact growing. It is unconscionable to think that a female law graduate can be paid up to $7,000 or $8,000 less than a male graduate who may not have even achieved the same sorts of outcomes in his degree as the woman did and that the pay gap often grows, particularly in professions such as the law. It is not the case that there is a gender pay gap only for the lower-paid professions; it is the case right across the board. That is unconscionable.

There is also a problem in our society with women when they retire having substantially less superannuation—some 40 per cent less—than men do. That is why embedded within the coalition's paid parental leave scheme was ongoing superannuation support. How can we still have before us a paid parental leave scheme—the Labor Party's Paid Parental Leave scheme, which is still not amended—so women have no superannuation embedded in their leave? In Australia women have had to stop-start their work because of childbearing or caring for the disabled or other relatives; they have had to leave the workplace. They make an enormous contribution in unpaid or voluntary work for the society at large and their superannuation is, as I say, on average 40 per cent less than men's is, yet here is a mandated government paid parental leave scheme which does not pay superannuation to those women, who are already at an enormous disadvantage economically.

Women in Australia are more likely than men to face a long retirement alone—they are more likely not to be in a partnered situation—and women are much more likely than are men to end their days totally dependent on welfare. Welfare in Australia does not give you much chance to keep above the poverty line. Women are more likely to be in rental accommodation or to have difficulty finding any accommodation, because they simply do not have the superannuation given their life experience: their biological circumstances where they
have been the child bearers and have had to
leave work or where they have carried the
biggest burden in caring for the disabled or
older members of their family.

This legislation is still not fair. Paid
parental leave is, as I say, not welfare; it is
the right of families to receive payment
while they undertake the broader public good
of producing the next generations. But
embedded and mandated in paid parental
leave should be superannuation payment,
and I am most concerned that this
opportunity to amend the legislation has not
included a provision of superannuation.

This legislation could have expanded the
18 weeks of support to at least 26 weeks of
support. There could also have been
amendments by this government to increase
payments beyond the minimum wage.
According to the Productivity Commission's
report on paid parental leave, at least 37
nations around the world introduced a paid
parental leave scheme prior to the launch of
Labor's minimum wage scheme. The
schemes of 35 of those 37 nations were
based on full or part replacement of the
person's wage. Australia is the only country
with a paid parental leave scheme that is so
miserable as to have payments based entirely
on the minimum wage.

So this scheme is not fair. It does not
include superannuation and it is not long
enough. Women have to scuttle back to the
workplace before their babies have had
enough time to be with them. At least we are
now acknowledging that fathers and partners
are part of the parenting process. I believe
that, until fathers have the same
acknowledgement as mothers do that they
are critical to the baby's development,
women will continue to be discriminated
against in the workplace when they are
applying for positions on the basis that they,
rather than men, are most likely to leave
work or to ask for part-time work or flexible
hours. Parenting needs to be understood as
the role of either men or women. It would be
excellent to think that some men could take
paid parental leave while their wives or
female partners with the newborn were also
taking it so that the baby could have the
benefit of having two full-time carers to look
after them in those early days. Other siblings
also in the family could especially benefit.

I am, of course, strongly supportive of our
amendments. I think that Labor must revisit
their Paid Parental Leave scheme. It is
administratively clumsy, and Labor through
their amendments are trying to address some
of the clumsiness. But Labor failed
miserably to take up a great opportunity at
the time of the introduction of their Paid
Parental Leave scheme. It was the first
mandated scheme in Australia. It should
have been world's best or at least equal to
world's best; it was not. It was too short, too
cheap, too mean and there was no
superannuation in it. These amendments go a
little way to addressing some of those
problems but not nearly far enough.

The unions in particular should be
ashamed to have clapped and cheered when
Labor's PPL—Paid Parental Leave scheme—
was introduced and to have said, 'This is
magnificent.' It was not; it was just a first toe
in the water. Why should Australian women
have to accept a first toe in the water for a
mandated scheme when there was enormous
international experience in administering
such schemes and their outcomes? We only
had to pick off the shelf another country's
example of a world's-best scheme; what we
got instead was cheap and nasty.

Australian women are still discriminated
against in employment on the basis that they
may need time off to have their children.
That is unconscionable. It substantially
affects the productivity of our nation. It is
well understood that more of our women should be able to return to the workplace at an appropriate time after their babies are born and have access to affordable and appropriate childcare, including in-home care, which is not a luxury at all; for many families it is cheaper to have in-home care than to spend $100-plus per day in a family day-care centre.

It is essential that Australia address all of these things. We have a long way to go, and unfortunately this bill does not do much more. Perhaps we will have to wait for a coalition government to introduce an appropriate scheme which will do right by the families bringing forward new generations of Australians.

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (11:37): I speak in support of the Paid Parental Leave and Other Legislation Amendment (Dad and Partner Pay and Other Measures) Bill 2012. We have just heard 13 minutes of diatribe and drivel from the member for Murray. She talked about women waiting—well, women waited for 11½ years under the coalition government, and where was the member for Murray's private member's bill in relation to paid parental leave? Where was the cabinet decision? Where was the bill of the Howard coalition government to bring in a paid parental leave scheme? I did not see one of those for 11½ years. I did not see any agitation from the coalition on the back bench in relation to this. I do not recall any media statements about it. And I do not recall any pronouncements from John Howard, former Liberal Prime Minister.

What did they do about caring for families? They talk about being mean. The first thing the Howard coalition government did was to get rid of the Commonwealth dental scheme. In this budget we are seeing another $500 million going into the Commonwealth dental scheme. The next thing they did was to take $1 billion out of child care. That is the first thing the coalition did when they got in. And the member for Murray criticised us for not having superannuation in this legislation or our Paid Parental Leave scheme. The coalition has never cast a vote in this House in favour of superannuation. In fact, when it came to the minerals resource rent tax, one of the aspects of which was to provide for an increase in superannuation for Australian men and women from nine per cent to 12 per cent—a not insignificant amount—the coalition in this place voted against it. Forty-three thousand people in my electorate of Blair in south-east Queensland will get that increase, and I daresay a comparable number of people in the member for Murray's electorate will get it, but they should know that she who comes in here and talks about superannuation for women voted against that superannuation when she came into this place. We even saw it yesterday.

The coalition say they are a party for families and family values and they talk about forgotten families, but they forgot about families for 11½ years and they forgot about them yesterday. They forgot about them when they voted against the schoolkids bonus yesterday, which is $410 per child at primary school and $820 for a child at high school. They forgot about those; they forgot about the 11,000 families in my electorate and the 2,100 families that were not getting education tax refund. They forgot about the 19,400 kids in my electorate. Even now, they are forgetting about families when they go on about this piece of legislation. Did they do this legislation we have before the House today? Was there a private member's bill in 11½ years in relation to helping dads and recognising their important role in child care and in looking after their newborn babies? Did they do that? No. Do not come into this place and criticise us about that. We have
150,000 people in this country who have made applications under the Paid Parental Leave scheme. That is 150,000 people who would not have got the benefits if we had not won the 2007 federal election. We got there again in 2010 and, because of that, we have a Paid Parental Leave scheme in this country. But the member for Murray criticised us saying that it was mean. It was mean for 11½ years for Australian women not to have the benefit of a Paid Parental Leave scheme, and for 11½ years it was mean for the coalition not to assist dads to take up their role and not to recognise the contemporaneous role that families have with dads helping out with their kids.

We are providing support for stay-at-home mums to care for their babies through the Paid Parental Leave scheme. In the vital early months of a child's life there is important social, cognitive, developmental and physical growth. We are also helping mums and dads to balance family life and helping employers to retain skilled staff. That is what it is about. It is helping economic development and economic productivity. So, under this legislation, on 1 January 2013 we are extending extra support to parents, with a two-week dad and partner pay. The first claims that dads and partners can make is on 1 October 2012. I would like to think that this is important. I would like to think that it is also important to provide for families financially. That is why we have done this; that is why we have seen measures taken in the budget. We have seen increases in superannuation and increases in child support, doubling what the Howard coalition funded in terms of child support—that is what we have done. We have also provided extra funding for a dental scheme in this country, and we have extended family tax benefit A from 16-year-olds to 19-year-olds who remain in school or its equivalent. The coalition did none of those types of things when they were in power, so do not come into this place and lecture us about support for women and support for dads and partners when you did not do it. Do not criticise us for doing it and do not criticise us when you are going to bring in a scheme that will help millionaires and put a tax on business. That is form for the coalition. They did not support us with the company tax cuts we wanted to bring in, and they want to lump a big tax on business to pay for their extravagant and harmful Paid Parental Leave scheme when it harms business. Business employs men and women who are mums and dads.

This is an important scheme we are bringing in, and it goes along with what we have said in terms of assistance for families. It is important, as well, because you have to see this in the context of what we have done in terms of the childcare rebate. Under the Howard coalition government, there was a 30 per cent child care rebate, $4,354 per child, where you had to pay and then wait until you lodged your tax return—for some people that was about 18 months down the track. What we have done is increase that childcare rebate to 50 per cent—$7,500, a 73 per cent increase—to help families and not forget them, and now we are bringing in this type of legislation which aligns with the Paid Parental Leave scheme.

So this is the fulfilment of an election commitment. It is good for new dads, it is good for new mums and it is good for babies. I am a parent; my wife and I are blessed with two daughters who are now adults and at university. But I recall how important it was to be there not just for their births but in the few weeks afterwards. Dads and partners will be eligible whether they are full-time, part-time, casual, seasonal, contract or self-employed workers. It is important to design this scheme right, and we have. We have done it on the recommendation of the
Productivity Commission. We have done it because we want to make sure that mums and dads find balance in their budgets and balance in their lives. It is very tiring, particularly for mums after they have had a baby, to care for that child. It is extremely difficult if the child has colic, reflux or other ailments. Sometimes young kids get throat infections or sometimes they are challenged with physical or mental disabilities. So it is very hard for them and it is important that they be supported.

It is good that we are doing this. It is important that we are allowing partners and fathers to help also. It is important to make sure that we allow the partners and the fathers to do this, and at the same time do not impose a tax on their employers—the tradesmen, the small business operators and those who work on farms or in big business as well. So there are tests in relation to this; we do not just hand out this money without some test. There needs to be a residence test and an income test: you have to be an Australian resident and you have to be not working during the time that the person receives the payment. You have to satisfy the income test—you must be earning $150,000 or less, based on adjusted income in the financial year ending before the nominated start date for partner or dad pay or before the date of claim, whichever is the earlier.

We believe, and it is quite common, that people who are on very high salaries are able, because of their skills, talents, abilities and resources, to negotiate agreements between themselves and their employers—if they are an accountant, a doctor or a lawyer for example—which encompass a paid parental leave scheme as well. So we have designed this scheme for middle- and low-income earners, which we think is important.

It is going to be important for my electorate. The average income in my electorate is $57,000 a year, so there will be many people in my electorate who will gain the benefit of this. We know how important it is because we have about 1,000 people in my electorate who have signed up for the paid parental leave scheme since it was brought in. They will benefit by this.

There has to be a work test, and we have made it clear that the person must have been working continuously for at least 10 of the 13 months prior to the nominated start date with no breaks of more than eight weeks between any two consecutive work days. And they have to undertake at least 230 hours of paid work during the 10 months—on average, around one day a week. So, I think that the tests are important. We do not want the system rorted; we want to make sure that dads and partners who are nominated actually are in the workforce.

I do note also that we are providing additional support for families. With your permission, Mr Acting Deputy Speaker, I would like to nominate just one area where I do think it helps dads as well. I was pleased to see in the budget the extension of another $55.7 million to invest in preparing Australia's most vulnerable children to start school. A two-year home interaction program for parents and youngsters, known as HIPPY, helps parents—mums and dads—and carers to take an active role in their child's education. The kids are quite young, well before school age, and it provides access to tutoring, practical learning activities and materials.

Recently I was in Grandchester at the model steam train day, and the HIPPY program was there. It is run by the Australian Red Cross in Ipswich in partnership with the Brotherhood of St Laurence, which received the funding under the 2008 budget. The local coordinator of that—HIPPY West Ipswich—is Alana Wahl. She was there with her
husband and her kids, and there were dozens and dozens of people there. I thank the Grandchester Model Live Steam Association for allowing that to happen. I talked to many families, migrants, mums and dads—just ordinary people—and military personnel from the RAAF base at Amberley, who appreciated the extra parenting support. They appreciated the help with those young kids. It is not just in actually preparing them for school but also the community that forms around these organisations is very important. It provides levels of support and sharing of clothes and ideas in relation to care of children.

Families came from a whole range of backgrounds; some itinerant, some Indigenous and some from overseas. I know how important it is. I recall talking to a number of them who said that any support for them as young parents—and most of them were quite young, in their twenties or early thirties—is warmly received and welcomed. They know how important child care is, and I certainly got that information. There was not one person I spoke to who was staying at home full time looking after their children; they had to work to make ends meet.

There were kids everywhere at that day, and I know how important HIPPY is. It was further funded in this budget. This budget does provide a lot of help; the help with the schoolkids bonus is particularly important and the supplementary help to job seekers, people with students and people who are doing it tough on Newstart is also important. But this particular legislation is particularly helpful, I think.

This legislation adds credibility to what we have said we would do. It is a dedicated payment delivering on our commitment, and beginning in January next year. It builds on the historic announcement—the reform this federal Labor government brought in—when we finally decided that we would join the rest of the world in 2011. It was about time: it took a government of this persuasion, a Labor government, to do it. It has taken a Labor government to bring in so many of the reforms which I have announced today. It took a Labor government to do them. The coalition did not have the wit, the wisdom or the will to do any of that during their 11½ years, and it took a Labor government to bring forward this legislation, which I know dads and partners will appreciate in years to come.

I look forward to the 150,000 people signing up for and getting paid parental leave increasing in years to come. This is a great reform: it builds on superannuation, the age pension, age care reform and Medicare. It goes to show that when it comes to social needs and the family values of Australians it is a federal Labor government, and only a federal Labor government, that cares for what the coalition often calls 'the forgotten families of Australia'.

Ms GAMBARO (Brisbane) (11:51): It is always interesting to follow the member for Blair. In fact, I thought I was standing up to speak on an appropriation bill rather than the Paid Parental Leave and Other Legislation Amendment (Dad and Partner Pay and Other Measures) Bill 2012. What didn't he cover in that speech he just gave? But we are here to talk about the specific bill today, which is the Paid Parental Leave and Other Legislation Amendment (Dad and Partner Pay and Other Measures) Bill 2012. Today's amendments streamline and correct many of the original functions in the Paid Parental Leave Act passed in June 2010. However, these amendments do not go far enough, and the coalition is seeking to propose further amendments that will ease the regulatory burden that the Paid Parental Leave scheme creates for Australian business.
The member for Blair, in his very far-reaching speech, spoke about all the things that the Labor government had done for families, but I notice he is very selective. He does not talk about the $12 million that has been cut from occasional day care, particularly centres like the Kitchener Road centre in my electorate of Brisbane, which will close down as a result of that. Not only is that reducing the flexibility of families, but many, many families require occasional care for study or things like having an operation, and that has absolutely devastated the families in my electorate that rely on that occasional day care centre. The member for Blair spoke about many far-ranging things, including the thresholds and childcare rebates, but from I remember quite clearly that those thresholds for childcare rebates have been tightened up under this government. So it is very interesting to see the selective quotation of all the wonderful things that this government has done, but what it is doing, essentially, is reducing the flexibility of families in my electorate, particularly by totally cutting the occasional care that has been offered to them.

The bill that we are talking about today amends the PPL Act. The minimum period of time in which an employer may not request a 'keeping in touch' day will be extended from 14 to 42 days, and that is an important amendment. It will allow employees to perform permissible paid work during the period of leave for the purposes of 'keeping in touch' with their employer. In the cases where an employee is eligible for paid parental leave, this is a very important change. As a mother of two children, I know only too well how important it is to have an uninterrupted six-week period for a parent to be with their child. One of the most important things about this is allowing the mother time to physically recover. Not every baby has the same patterns of sleep, breast and management, and sometimes there are issues when a family brings a newborn baby home. There are some health issues, colic issues and all sorts of settling-in issues. That is a very important aspect, particularly physical recovery. No birth is the same. We have multiple births. We have different births taking place and different periods of recovery according to individuals. So that is a welcome move. Most importantly, employees themselves may still request a 'keep in touch' day after a minimum period of 14 days. What that does is again allow that very much needed flexibility in the PPL arrangements and allow employees to maintain contact with their employer if they wish to do so.

To further increase flexibility in leave arrangements, the bill amends the restrictions on when an employee may begin leave. Currently, a pregnant employee is able to begin her period of leave six weeks prior to birth but no earlier. These amendments will allow employees to begin unpaid parental leave more than six weeks before the expected date of birth if they come to an agreement with their employer, and that is a very important thing.

Moreover, there is a provision in the Paid Parental Leave Act that considers Commonwealth employees to be employed by the specific government agency, rather than by the Commonwealth at large. This creates confusion for workers who are employed by two agencies in the 12 months before the birth as to whether such a Commonwealth worker is eligible under the work test. The coalition agrees to the amendment that employees will be regarded as employed by the Commonwealth as a whole, eliminating any possible discrepancies.

The bill also extends the Paid Parental Leave scheme by introducing a two-week
paternity leave payment. The new payment will be implemented from January 2013. The PPL will now be extended by introducing a new payment called ‘dad and partner pay’ for eligible working fathers and partners, and this is a good thing. Dad and partner pay will be available to eligible fathers and partners, including adopting parents and parents in same-sex couples, who are caring for a child born or adopted from 1 January 2013.

The coalition seeks to propose a further amendment to this bill that eases some of the regulatory and compliance burden related to the requirement that businesses act as the de facto pay clerk for the scheme. Let me tell you as someone who has run a small business that this is exactly what businesses do not need: more compliance. There is enough compliance out there day in, day out for the business that I was running to employ someone full time just to deal with the compliance aspects of running a small business. Then this is being heaped on the hundreds of thousands of small businesses out there in this country that will have more and more compliance put on them yet again by this government. They talk about reducing compliance, but all this does is increase the mountain of compliance that already exists.

The member for Dunkley has previously proposed to the House the Paid Parental Leave (Reduction of Compliance Burden for Employers) Amendment Bill 2010, and we seek similar amendments again. We propose that the government provide employers with the opt-in action of acting as the government’s pay clerk for PPL payments to employees and have the Centrelink Family Assistance Office as the default option for administering payments to eligible employees. In the government’s current legislation, the Centrelink Family Assistance Office administered payments for the first six months. After this time, it was the obligation of the employer to forward on payments received from Centrelink to eligible employees. On top of that, I understand that from 30 June this year the Centrelink Family Assistance Office will cease to administer PPL payments, and from 1 July all employers will have to bear the additional administrative burden of serving as the government’s pay clerk. The government failed to offer any compelling reasons for forcing this on employers, and the coalition is still waiting for one. At the time, peak business bodies all protested at the proposed change, and once again this government is doing what it does best: it does not listen. It refuses to listen to small business.

It is very poor planning by the Labor government to implement a new government program—rushing it through again, as they always do—and at the same time expect businesses to administer it. Australia already has a network set up to administer welfare payments to Australians, and I am sure the members opposite would have heard of it: it is called Centrelink. It would have been a much better alternative, and frankly it is absolute madness by this Labor government not to use the Family Assistance Office in this case. I have heard from very large employers that they have largely been able to absorb this function in acting as the de facto pay clerk for the scheme. However, this issue raises enormous compliance costs for the small businesses in my electorate and in many electorates throughout Australia. Many employer organisations and members of the small business community have spoken to me about being forced to absorb this particular impost. They want to work constructively with the government to ensure that their expecting parents have a safe and secure fiscal position at a time of uncertainty. What they did not expect was that the government would then burden them.
with more red tape and more compliance, and that the Labor government's paid parental leave would impose more and more burdens on them.

On 8 November the government lumped into the entire Australian economy another significant and costly regulatory burden in the form of a carbon tax. Between 2008 and 2010 Labor passed 12,835 regulations and repealed a mere 58. To any person with any common sense it is clear that this tax-and-spend government is addicted to over-regulating the economy and does not take into consideration the concerns of small business around this great country of ours. Therefore, I call on the government to accept the coalition's amendment to help small business in this very, very small but highly significant and important way.

Originally, Labor designed an inadequate Paid Parental Leave scheme, which provided only 18 weeks of minimum wage from January 2011. As this Labor government so often does, it ignored the recommendations of the Productivity Commission. It is very good at getting Productivity Commission reports but it then ignores them. The legislation did not sufficiently provide for casual workers who are by definition unable to use accrued leave as a further substitution for time off work.

As the member for Murray quite accurately pointed out earlier in this debate, there is no provision for superannuation. I have also had representations from parents in my electorate who are sole providers. For example, there is a mum in my electorate who is the main breadwinner and earns $150,000, and there is absolutely no provision in this legislation when one person is the main breadwinner, and that is something that is clearly a flaw.

The coalition have a proud history of providing support to Australian families. We reformed the family tax system in 2000 to expand access to Family Tax Benefit for Australian families, and in 2004 there was a Baby Bonus scheme implemented to help families when they needed the money most. More than ever, with the rapidly increasing cost of living combined with the additional impost of the carbon tax, Australian families require a system in place that helps them to support and raise a child.

I again want to refer to what the member for Murray said in this debate earlier— that there are many different systems of support and we need to have an open mind. When a child is very young there are many different schemes available. I have used family day care and childcare centres, and I have also used a nanny agency. That does not mean that you use all the different schemes and not have flexibility. As your child grows their needs change, such as when they go to school. We need to have an open mind, particularly when we are looking at care in the home. It is not something that is only the privilege of the elite. There are many families in my electorate who are shift workers, including many nurses. There are also seven-day-a-week hospitality businesses that require the system to have some flexibility. I hope that this government will look at flexibility, particularly for families that have children requiring care sometimes seven days a week and at irregular times.

If the coalition are able to form government we will introduce a scheme that will provide payment to all full-time, part-time and casual workers, provided they are eligible under a minimum work test. The coalition have a scheme that will signal to the community that taking time out of the workforce to care for a new child is a normal part of the work-life cycle of parents. I really believe that as I am among the many thousands of women who have had to have time off when children have been ill. The
day we can honestly say to employers that we are taking time off because our children are ill and not feel adversely impacted by that will be a good day indeed. The coalition’s Paid Parental Leave scheme will provide primary carers with 26 weeks of paid parental leave at full replacement pay up to a maximum salary of $150,000 per annum. Our scheme will be fully funded and we will strike the right balance to help promote female workforce participation as a financial incentive for women to engage in paid work both prior to and after childbirth. This will have a positive impact on individuals, families and society.

Mr CHEESEMAN (Corangamite) (12:05): I rise to speak in support of the Paid Parental Leave and Other Legislation Amendment (Dad and Partner Pay and Other Measures) Bill 2012. This legislation will improve and expand Labor's fantastic Paid Parental Leave scheme by providing dads and same-sex partners with two weeks' leave at the minimum wage following the birth or adoption of their child. Labor is doing this for, of course, a very clear and deliberate reason. Dads and partners should be provided with the same opportunity to bond with their new child.

As a father I very much enjoyed taking time off at the birth of both of my children, Isaac and Noah, and I know that many parents until now have been able to enjoy that same privilege, that same opportunity. Of course, it was not just to enable me to bond with my new children. Importantly, it also provided me with the opportunity to provide care for my wife who, with the births of both Isaac and Noah, needed to have caesarean sections. It enabled me to provide care and support for her as she was recovering from both those operations. I think it is an extremely important reform that we put in place the opportunity for parents, both the mum and now the dad or partner, to be able to access parental leave. When raising children, particularly very early on whilst the mum is recovering from the birth of the child either in hospital or back at home, I think it is very important for the father or partner to be available to provide that support.

It is important that we reflect on some of the history around maternity leave and the extension of it to paternity and other forms of parental leave for both births and adoptions. I particularly want to pay tribute to the trade union movement, which has advocated for these reforms for decades. The trade union movement very much recognised the importance of new mums and dads being able to take time off not only to recover from the physical consequences of giving birth or having a caesarean section but also to provide the new mum and dad with the opportunity to bond with their children and get their children underway under the best possible arrangements.

Maternity leave was a concept first implemented in Australia in 1974 in the Australian Public Service and it has been extended beyond the Public Service in the decades since. Labor, in our first term and again in our second term, have very much strived to put in place the necessary reforms to provide all employees with the opportunities that had often been in place for unionised employees for many decades. We have legislated for those opportunities, both in terms of the period of time off and the size of the entitlement to be paid but also the practical arrangements that need to be maintained between the employee and the employer. I think they are very necessary.

I want to reflect on some of the comments made by the member for Brisbane about the compliance arrangements. She made the argument, albeit a weak argument, that this dramatically increases the burden on small
business in terms of red tape and paperwork. Having seen firsthand the paperwork associated with it, I want to make it very clear to those listening in the House today or via the broadcast that the paperwork burden is actually very manageable and very small and does not take a great deal of effort by either the employee or the employer. If you look at the efforts that this government has made in terms of red tape reduction, I think we have a first-class record of removing unnecessary red tape. Importantly, there is some necessary red tape or regulation to ensure proper operation of our laws. The level of paperwork associated with this is appropriate, it is not a great burden and it does not take an unnecessary amount of time. In contrast, if you look at the Howard government’s record, they turned every small business into a tax collection agency of the Commonwealth. If you reflect on the red tape burden associated with that, it is massive and it takes an enormous amount of the resources of small business.

These arrangements to extend Labor’s first-class parental leave arrangements are an absolutely appropriate reform. In the Greater Geelong region there have already been several thousand families that have accessed the reforms that this Labor government has put in place. I have no doubt that in the years to come there will be many more thousands of people who will access Labor’s paid parental leave arrangements. Those employees who have been accessing these arrangements are a group in society that has previously largely been missing out on the fantastic efforts that the trade union movement has been putting in place for many decades to improve the lives of working families. In getting around the electorate to childcare centres, kindergartens and schools, I know that working men and women across this nation are very pleased with the efforts that this government has put in a whole raft of ways to make their lives easier, right from the births of their children through to their children completing their education and obtaining their first job and then commencing that lifelong journey of work and looking after themselves, and also, hopefully, in the years to come being provided with the opportunity of having a family of their own.

I would also like to reflect for a moment on some of the more remarkable and significant quotes that have been made by various politicians. One comes to mind, and that of course was a quote from the current Leader of the Opposition. He suggested that Paid Parental Leave would happen over his dead body. They were the comments he made in respect of this scheme. I would also like to reflect on some other contributions that the Leader of the Opposition has made in more recent times about establishing or creating a paid nanny scheme. I think that very much shows just how out of touch the Leader of the Opposition really is with contemporary Australia. A paid nanny scheme is not what this country needs. It would be a very, very expensive level of care; a level of support provided to the very privileged few.

We in Australia have a first-class childcare system. This government has put an enormous amount of effort into making sure that we have a first-class world-leading standard set of childcare arrangements. We have put enormous effort into kinder reforms to ensure that kids get the necessary education required prior to starting primary school and we continue to deliver reform to support families right across the board. Indeed, the budget this week delivered the School Kids Bonus to again support families in delivering the resources those families need to be able to educate their kids—to be able to provide school uniforms and
schoolbooks and the like obviously to be able to provide a very successful education.

It is with some privilege and pleasure that I am able to rise today to speak on these provisions. I have a lot of young families in my electorate considering having children and I know that there will be many thousands of people over the next several years who will be able to access these provisions. I look forward to continuing Labor's great reform of supporting young families in every way that we can. I commend these arrangements to the parliament.

Mr RANDALL (Canning) (12:19): I am pleased also to speak on the Paid Parental Leave and Other Legislation Amendment (Dad and Partner Pay and Other Measures) Bill 2012—a very florid title for an interesting bill. The government introduced this bill, which will amend the Paid Parental Leave Act 2010, to extend the scheme to certain working fathers and partners to receive two weeks of 'dads and partner pay' at the rate of the national minimum wage, which is currently $590 a week before tax. This leave is in addition to the current 18 weeks of Paid Parental Leave available to eligible persons. The dad and partner pay leave would be implemented from 1 January 2013. It also amends the Fair Work Act 2009 to clarify unpaid parental leave arrangements in the event of a stillbirth or infant death, to enable early commencement of unpaid parental leave and enable employees who are on unpaid parental leave to perform permissible paid work for short periods—in other words, what are loosely called 'keeping in touch' days.

The coalition supports the bill. Yet we would like to see an amendment, which has been made by the shadow minister, so that employers have an opt-in option of acting as the government's pay clerk for Paid Parental Leave payments. The undue red tape—and I will address the member for Corangamite's comments in a moment—does put further and unnecessary burdens on small business. It should be Centrelink's Family Assistance Office that is the default administrator for making Paid Parental Leave payments to eligible employees.

It was only in September last year that I made a constituency statement on this very issue. The red tape burden was affecting employers significantly, and the example I used was the Mandurah Retirement Village. Its CEO, Mr Don Pember, told me that the Labor government's way of handling the payments was 'significantly affecting his business'. The retirement village now has to perform extra administrative work through the 'the double handling of payments by both Centrelink and the employer'. The member for Corangamite said, 'It is very manageable and very small.' It might be very manageable and very small but it is extra and, depending on how many people you have to deal with, it is extra work which should be done by the agency rather than the business.

You cannot have it both ways. Through this House this week came the School Kids Bonus from the budget. One of the justifications for having it paid in the way that it is going to be paid, and without any compliance, was that it was all too hard to keep the receipts and it was all too hard to administer from a parent's point of view, making it difficult for people to claim for it. That was one of the reasons that they had to do what they did in terms of handing it out in bulk rather than people applying for it, versus this measure, which requires businesses to involve themselves in a fair bit of red tape. You cannot have it both ways—compliance is not a problem for one set of payments and compliance is a problem for another set of payments—so let's just get real.
It is worth pointing out that the coalition's paid parental leave plan is much better and fairer. At just 18 weeks, Labor's scheme is too short and does not maintain the income of the majority of Australian mothers. Furthermore, Labor's scheme does not provide superannuation. Starting a family is expensive, and I recognise the financial stress that young families face. The coalition's paid parental leave scheme will provide mothers with 26 weeks of paid parental leave at full replacement wage—up to a maximum salary of $150,000 per annum—or the federal minimum wage, whichever is greater. This will bring Australia in line with paid parental leave practices in other countries, such as Germany, Singapore, Mexico—believe it or not—and Switzerland, to name just a few. No other country derives their rate of payment from the national minimum wage, as Labor does.

The coalition's plan will include superannuation payments at the mandatory rate of nine per cent, as it is at the moment. The coalition's paid parental leave scheme will allow two weeks of the 26 weeks to be dedicated paternity leave for fathers, paid at the father's replacement wage—up to a maximum of $150,000 per annum—or the federal minimum wage, whichever is greater, plus superannuation. This leave can be taken concurrently to the mother's leave to enable fathers and mothers to spend time together with their new child.

Currently, 26 per cent of previously employed Australian women return to work within six months of giving birth, often against their own preference. They do this because they need an income to contribute to cope with the rising costs of living—and, dare I say it, for such things as mortgages. When they do return to the workforce, they are often disproportionately employed in low-paying, casual positions. For many women, access to affordable and flexible child care impacts on their decision to resume work and on the capacity in which they resume. Unfortunately, Labor have a poor record of supporting families in this way. For example, last year Labor cut the childcare rebate from $8,179 to $7,500 and then froze indexation of the rebate. This added about $300 in additional childcare costs per year per child for these families. Labor also broke their promise to build 260 childcare and early childhood education centres on school sites and community land. Instead, they have built only 38 to date.

In my electorate of Canning, there are about 1,600 families with dependent children. In addition, more than 1,300 males and more than 1,900 females in my electorate provide unpaid child care. I am pleased to see that our leader, Tony Abbott, has committed a future coalition government to undertake a Productivity Commission review into child care, so that we can actually get some real figures rather than a political imperative. Improving access and affordability in child care is very much part of our positive plan to improve workforce participation and to strengthen the economy.

In relation to childcare affordability, a new survey, as reported in the Australian on 5 May this year, shows that 88 per cent of families believe the rising costs of child care will force them to reduce the amount they spend on child care. Many will turn to families for support while others will drop out of paid work. Currently up to 70,000 Australian women cannot access employment as they cannot find suitable child care. Others say that they will just delay having children. The number of parents who say that they will delay having more children because of the increased costs of child care has doubled to 70 per cent in just the last two years. Two years ago only 35 per cent said they would delay having
children. I therefore state that this government is not that concerned about supporting families in this area, particularly when you see how it has reduced childcare payments.

Under the Labor government's reforms, childcare centres are forced to decrease their ratio of babies to carers from various state-mandated levels to four to one. The cost of Labor's changes will not be felt until 2016, when childcare centres will have to hire one staff member for every five children aged 25 months to 35 months, and one carer for every 11 children aged three to school age.

What was most alarming about this survey was that one-third of parents said that they would place their children into unregulated childcare arrangements if these fees continued to rise. That is pretty scary. Putting your dear children into unregulated care arrangements is fraught with, dare I say, unintended consequences. The extra care the Gillard government is supposed to provide under its reforms to the industry will actually force more children into unregulated care. The rising costs will see that this is just a matter of course.

Already parents are paying up to $50 more per week because of the mandated staff ratio changes. Roughly, the current costs of long-day care at a childcare centre, which many full-time working parents use, can be around $55 to $135 a day—and that is after the childcare benefit and the childcare rebate have been factored in.

We just heard the member for Corangamite again—and I hope he is in touch with his electorate, because he has a pretty wafer-thin margin—criticise the 'nanny option' of the Leader of the Opposition. It is actually quite a visionary option because it gives families the choice of keeping their child in their own home. An old fossil like me used that arrangement many years ago. We were keen to have our children cared for at home. When they are cared for in your own home, you do not have to put them in a car to travel to a childcare centre; you do not have all the problems quite often at childcare centres, with the swathe of sickness conditions—mumps, measles or colds—going through these childcare centres; their food is cooked at home and they are fed at home; and they are in an environment that they are familiar with. It is a choice that a lot of people would like to be able to make and have some assistance for. So we are the party of choice in health and education and we are going to be the party of choice when it comes to child care. It is actually quite a hit with families because having your own child cared for in your own home has a whole of upsides to it. In the Productivity Commission review that a coalition government would undertake, we would look at the individual circumstances that affect childcare arrangements. We know that the one-size-fits-all approach to child care does not work. Obviously, Australia needs a childcare system that offers the choice and flexibility that I have just alluded to.

When our children were young, we did not have any subsidies. We did not have the option. My wife needed to return to work early because we had a huge amount of pressure paying the mortgage and I was on a school teacher's salary. It was pretty tough trying to find somebody who we could employ to come into our home, but it was by far the better option. I visit many childcare centres in my electorate and most of them do a fantastic job, but we have heard a number of stories of some operators not necessarily abiding by their obligations. Parents then have to remove their children. I had a similar case with my daughter. We had taken her to a childcare centre and wondered why she was crying every day when we picked her
up. We realised that she was very unhappy there due to some of the care arrangements that were in place. We immediately found her a better option and, as parents, we felt really terrible at having done that to a child, knowing that they could not articulate the reason they were so unhappy. So this choice is something that is going to be very attractive to a whole range of people because it may well fit into their circumstances.

We need to look at a whole lot of other factors—for example, families who live in remote or regional areas. If you live in a remote or regional area, it may be very hard to get the care that you get in a larger town or a city. How about the shiftworkers or the single parent shiftworkers who need help for care? I will give you an example. At Perth airport at the moment they are putting in place child care. Fly-in fly-out workers need occasional child care at the airport because it is a central location for them. This flexibility needs to be understood by the government; the coalition have certainly understood it because Tony Abbott has factored it into his nanny option. Not everybody is traditional. Not everybody has the same working hours or has the support of an extended family. Many of us have been very lucky to have our parents—the great grandparents of Australia—fitting in to help when some emergency or some awkward situation comes up, to give care when you cannot get it at a childcare centre or anywhere else.

There are increasing calls for occasional, limited hours and family day care options. At present there are times, like public holidays, where families are being charged for child care when the child is not even there. The parents who have to pay on these occasions obviously feel aggrieved, but you can understand the childcare centre charging parents as they have ongoing costs. But the fact that the child is not there and parents are still getting hit with a fee is a bone of contention.

In Western Australia there have been reports that mining families will welcome the coalition arrangement because of the two-week on two-week off, the fly-out, the midnights—all those sorts of unusual circumstances. So, yes, we support these recommendations. We have made amendments. I want to put on record that choice and flexibility in child care is something that we would like to see factored into this bill and, given the opportunity in government, we will be doing it ourselves.

Mr CHAMPION (Wakefield) (12:34): This Paid Parental Leave and Other Legislation Amendment (Dad and Partner Pay and Other Measures) Bill 2012 is really all about family and work life balance. Probably the biggest issue in society in Australia, and around the world, is the fracturing of family life in the face of a new globalised, competitive economy and, in particular, the creation of what is often called more flexible work—casualised work, work at unpredictable hours—and the rise of the dual income family and other changes in our economy which are radically affecting our society.

Once upon a time there were predictable economic circumstances. Typically men worked and women stayed at home. There was some predictability to work life. You worked regular hours and there were penalty rates for antisocial hours and there was a great deal of regulation to protect family life. If you look at my home state of South Australia, for a long time shopping hours were regulated so that you shopped Monday to Friday. You shopped from eight to six. Then there was half a day on Saturday to shop in the morning. The idea behind that was that it gave shop assistants and everybody else some time for family. That
regulation has slowly been peeled back over time as a response to the fact that we are living in a different sort of society. We are living in a society now where, more than ever before, people work irregular hours. Often they work antisocial hours and hours that are not friendly to families. They do a lot of overtime. We have the rise of the dual income family.

People typically do this because they need to pay the bills and because the economy now places those demands on all of us. We heard the member for Canning talk about fly-in fly-out workers in the mines. It is interesting to note that fly-in fly-out workers have very high divorce rates because of the pressures that that lifestyle puts on relationships. So we know this is a massive issue. It is not one where there is necessarily much partisan divide in recognising that it is an issue, but often there is a somewhat partisan divide in our approaches to dealing with it.

These issues are not new to me. In my previous working life as an official with the shop assistants union I spent a lot of time implementing enterprise bargaining agreements which had extensions to paternity leave. First of all, there were extensions to the right to unpaid leave, which were obviously important and significant contributions we could make to family time. We extended the amount of time from 12 months to 18 months to sometimes the full two years by allowing people to use their paid leave at half rates and expanding the return-to-work options by allowing full-time workers to return to work on a part-time basis and the like, and we eventually extended some of those rights to men.

It is interesting to note that most of the evolution of maternity and paternity leave arrangements began with women, and there is this somewhat belated recognition by all involved that men often want to spend time with their children as well at these very important times in their family. I think a lot of men have a fear about being absent fathers, and that is something we need to acknowledge and prevent as far as we can. When we come to making these arrangements in the future, perhaps they will not be through amendments to the act but by being incorporated in the design of the act from the outset.

As I said before, my union was very involved in extending these leave arrangements through enterprise bargaining agreements. The Labor movement generally has been the voice of working people in trying to get some recognition for the family unit and of work-life balance in our system of employment, but at every turn we have heard people complain about paperwork, cost or other things. That is a predictable and persistent argument for opposing progress, and we should not pay too much attention to it because the same arguments were made about workers compensation, overtime, penalty rates and the original maternity leave act. They are predictable and unconvincing arguments.

The fact is that the Labor movement is a family oriented movement. We exist to protect people's working lives and, as part of that, their lives with their families, which is very important for us to acknowledge. That is why Labor have been at the forefront of the industrial fight for these conditions and that is why we are standing here today introducing this legislation. It is a very important role for the Labor movement to defend families in our community and to defend community life, because that is really at the heart of our movement.

The provisions in this bill are enabled by the fact that we have a strong economy. If you look at us in comparison with the rest of
the world, you would find that most other countries would give their right arm to be like us. We have low unemployment, low inflation and low interest rates, we have a predicted surplus and we have protected wages through our Fair Work Act. All of those things are important to families because there is nothing more important than having a job where you can have some predictability about your wages and having some predictability about prices; there is nothing more important than having low interest rates—obviously, most families are buying a home while they are raising children; and there is nothing more important than having a strong family budget, and I think that is what our most recent budget has set out to do.

These plans that we have in place extend paid parental leave to fathers and partners, with two weeks pay at the national minimum wage, the same weekly rate as the parental leave rate of some $590 before tax. That means eligible families can welcome a new child into the world while receiving up to 20 weeks in paid parental leave pay and in dad and partner pay. Those are all new entitlements that can be put in place to support families at the appropriate time. They can be combined with periods of paid leave, such as long service leave, annual leave and paid maternity leave, to stretch out a period where families can rely on income from that source rather than having to head back to work early, and I think that is a particularly important thing to do.

I heard the member for Canning talk about the plans of the opposition, and I must say that they all sounded like wishful thinking to me. It is not that they might not be desirable, and I acknowledge the generosity of the coalition’s scheme, but they sound like something that might have come out of the Socialist Left in Young Labor, to be frank. It is not that I would be criticising them, but, if you think about a very generous scheme funding people on incomes up to $150,000 a year out of increases in corporate taxation, I would think that sounds a bit like something on the Far Left of Australian politics. It is not necessarily a bad thing, but it seems to me particularly ambitious. I find it curious that the member for Canning should be up here complaining about the paperwork that our scheme might inflict on small businesses while he is advocating an increase in corporate taxation to pay for a very generous paid parental leave scheme. I find that quite odd. I find it nearly as odd as the fact that he talks about nannies being desirable. I think nearly every family would love to have a nanny—it sounds like Shangri-La—but you have to look at the costs of that and who might pay the costs. As those opposite have said, it will be out of the existing childcare budget. One predicts that in order for some people to get nannies others must lose benefits. The questions the Australian people must ask themselves are: how will that work; will they means-test child care; will they cut childcare places; will they cut the rebate? One expects answers out of the coalition about what they might do with these grandiose plans they put out there that sound very good but which I predict will fall down when they are examined more closely.

The legislation we have put down is right for the time. It is right for the economic circumstances that we face at this time. This government, as I said, has pretty good fundamentals for the economy—we have protected people's jobs and we have protected their wages at a time when the rest of the world is mired in unemployment and joblessness. There is no greater blight that you can inflict on a family than to make breadwinners unemployed. We have to be very careful that we chart a modest course in this country and not embark on grandiose schemes which sound good but which the
nation can ill afford at this time. There may well be some evolution of benefits over time, but I do not think that time is now.

The government's program supports families in a responsible way, it protects families in a responsible way and it is right for our nation—a welcome addition to the assistance this government gives to families and to the assistance and respect that the Labor movement has always had for the Australian family. With those words, I commend the bill to the House.

Mr MATHESON (Macarthur) (12:47): I rise to speak today on the Paid Parental Leave and Other Legislation Amendment (Dad and Partner Pay and Other Measures) Bill 2012. This bill seeks to refine and iron out a number of issues with the Paid Parental Leave Act 2010, including 'keeping in touch days', debt recovery, notices and delegation of the powers of the Secretary of the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. This bill also amends the Fair Work Act 2009 to clarify unpaid parental leave arrangements where there is a stillbirth or infant death. Other amendments to the Fair Work Act include provisions to enable the early commencement of unpaid parental leave and to enable employees who are on unpaid parental leave to perform permissible work paid for short periods for the purposes of keeping in touch.

I cherished my time with my two beautiful daughters when they were newborns. Being able to take leave and not worry about how to make ends meet would have been an added blessing to the joys of becoming a father. Balancing work and family is difficult at the best of times; however, the financial pressures of a mortgage and a new baby meant that my wife and I had to continue in the workforce while our two daughters were newborns. We were, however, fortunate to have the loving support of our parents, who cared for our daughters while we were at work.

The Paid Parental Leave Act 2010 has provided a basic level of Paid Parental Leave for working parents. I know my wife and I would have been overjoyed to have the opportunity to receive some financial assistance and leave to spend a significant amount of time with our daughters when they were little. Dad and partner pay provisions within this bill will give dads and working partners the opportunity to take paternal leave and still receive some income.

Fathers and working partners have traditionally borne a heavy burden of responsibility during the birth or adoption of a newborn child. They must provide for their new family as the main source of income and, once completing work, they must still spend quality time with their newborn—and their spouse, might I add. Being able to support your spouse through this incredibly rewarding challenge of being a new parent is so important for both the mother's wellbeing and the overall health of the family relationship.

I am also very encouraged that the government is finally acknowledging the contribution and the role of fathers by making these provisions for dad and partner pay within the Paid Parental Leave Act. These provisions will give fathers and partners of mums with newborns the opportunity to bond with their young child in those first critical months of development without having to dig into their annual leave or take unpaid leave. I have always firmly believed that fathers play an important role in the healthy development of their young child.

During the 2010 election the government committed to extending the Paid Parental Leave scheme by introducing a two-week
Thursday, 10 May 2012  HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  4541

paternity leave payment. I must say that while this government has a shocking record of delivering on its election promises—the carbon tax and the company tax spring to mind—I am glad that they have at least honoured this important issue.

Through this bill, dad and partner pay will be available to eligible fathers and partners, including adopting parents and parents in same-sex relationships, who are caring for a child born or adopted from 1 January 2013. Under this legislation, eligible fathers and partners will be able to receive two weeks of dad and partner pay at the rate of the national minimum wage; the same weekly rate as for the existing parental leave pay of $590 a week before tax. Eligibility for dad and partner pay will be the same as that of the income test, work test and residency requirements applied to the Paid Parental Leave scheme. Dads and partners will not have to undergo an additional assessment for eligibility for dad and partner pay if they have already made a secondary claim to receive parental leave pay. This is an important feature of the bill for fathers who have claimed parental leave pay as the primary carer of their newborn who could otherwise fail an additional work test or income test for dad and partner pay.

The Paid Parental Leave and Other Legislation Amendment (Dad and Partner Pay and other Measures) Bill 2012 also makes a number of amendments to the Paid Parental Leave Act 2010. These amendments have been introduced to address a number of uncertainties surrounding provisions for employees to return to work for up to 10 days in total during their Paid Parental Leave period, referred to as 'keeping in touch days'. The bill also seeks to clarify the operation of a number of provisions within the Paid Parental Leave Act 2010 which deal with debt recovery, notice and provisions relating to delegation of the secretary's powers.

Other important amendments to highlight are those that deal with changes to the Fair Work Act 2009. These amendments clarify unpaid parental leave arrangements where there is a stillborn or infant death. They also seek to enable early commencement of unpaid parental leave, allowing a parent to start unpaid parental leave more than six weeks before the expected date of a birth, where the employer agrees.

Another important amendment to the Fair Work Act made by this bill is the introduction of 'keeping in touch' provisions within the act. These provisions will allow parents who are on unpaid parental leave to perform permissible, paid work for short periods for the purposes of keeping in touch. Currently, if a parent accesses a 'keeping in touch' day at work, which is allowable through the government's Paid Parental Leave scheme, they will jeopardise their National Employment Standards entitlement of up to 12 months unpaid parental leave. This is because a national employment standard stipulates that entitlement to unpaid parental leave must be single, continuous unpaid leave for a period of up to 12 months. I am glad that the government has identified this grave oversight. This amendment will ensure that 'keeping in touch' arrangements within the Paid Parental Leave Act will align with the Fair Work Act, ensuring that no parents get caught out in this legislative muddle again.

While I am in support of this bill and we supported the government's Paid Parental Leave Act, the provisions in the coalition's paid parental leave package are far more generous and supportive of working Australian families. I am proud to be part of a team delivering a visionary approach to policies to assist Australian families. The coalition's alternative paid parental leave scheme would provide for up to 26 weeks leave, as opposed to the 18 weeks provided
for by the government. Those 26 weeks would be paid at the rate of the mother's or primary carer's current wage, or the federal minimum wage, whichever is greater, and would allow the father to take paid parental leave at the same time as the mother. The coalition's paid parental leave scheme would also include compulsory superannuation contributions, which are so important to securing the future of Australian families as they grow older. The coalition's paid parental leave plan would enhance child and maternal wellbeing by providing working mothers and fathers with real time and real money during the important period following childbirth.

This policy is in line with many paid parental leave provisions in other OECD nations. An interesting addition to this bill is that the payment of dad and partner pay will be administered and paid solely by the Department of Human Services' Families Assistance Office. This is very interesting to note, as the Paid Parental Leave scheme lumps employers with the administrative burden of paying clerk for the government's scheme. The administration of Paid Parental Leave may not be as cumbersome and difficult for some large organisations with their own human resource departments. However, for small business employers this impost comes with significant compliance costs and additional regulatory burdens that they could well do without.

It is absurd that the government is satisfied with administering one paid parental scheme but not the other. Why they will not allow Centrelink's Family Assistance Office to administer both the Paid Parental Leave scheme and the dads and partners leave scheme is a question that they continue to refuse to answer. The Family Assistance Office should be the default option for administrating Paid Parental Leave to eligible employees, both parental leave and dad and partner leave. The shadow minister for small business's amendment to enable all employers to opt in to administer the payment of these leave payments is a sensible one. I commend his amendment to the House.

This amendment would allow larger employers to continue to provide an ongoing relationship with employees who are taking parental leave and yet still balance this with the needs of small business employers who struggle with an already overregulated and suffocating red-tape bound business environment. This amendment would reduce the regulatory burden on businesses, both large and small, and reduce their already growing compliance costs at the hands of this government. While I firmly believe that working mums and dads would receive a better deal under the coalition's paid parental leave plan, I have no qualms in supporting this bill and commend it to the House.

Mr MITCHELL (McEwen) (12:56): I am pleased to speak on the Gillard Labor government's Paid Parental Leave and Other Legislation Amendment (Dad and Partner Pay and Other Measures) Bill 2012. On 1 January 2011, the Gillard government delivered historic reform for working women and families: Australia's first Paid Parental Leave scheme, which has seen over 600 families in my electorate of McEwen assisted. It is one of the largest intakes in this country, because we have an electorate that is growing very quickly, every day. The Paid Parental Leave scheme provides working parents with parental leave pay for up to 18 weeks at the minimum wage, which is currently $570 a week, before tax. Paid Parental Leave gives babies the best start in life and helps women remain connected to their workplace when they have a child, with this bill establishing 'keeping in touch' days to ensure parents can keep in touch with their employers while not at work.
Labor's Paid Parental Leave scheme is funded by the government and is paid through employers so that employers can stay in touch with their long-term employees while they are taking time off to care for the new baby. This was the approach recommended by the Productivity Commission after a very extensive inquiry. It also means that one parent has the financial security to take time off work to care for their baby at home during the vital early months of the baby's life, as well as giving working mums time to recover following the birth and bond with their child. Paid Parental Leave also assists with the challenges and realities of modern family life, helping parents balance work and family responsibilities.

This bill makes amendments to the Paid Parental Leave Act 2010 to include provisions that deal with debt recovery, 'keeping in touch' days, the provision of notices and the delegation of the secretary's powers under the act. The bill also amends the Fair Work Act 2009 to clarify unpaid parental leave arrangements where people have to deal with the tragic circumstances of a stillbirth or an infant death, to enable the early commencement of unpaid parental leave and to enable employees on unpaid parental leave to perform permissible paid work for short periods for the purposes of keeping in touch. The 'keeping in touch' days in the bill make changes to ensure employees on Paid Parental Leave are able to perform paid work for up to 10 days for the purposes of keeping in touch with their employer. This is a move that is vital in some circumstances, particularly in those of highly skilled workforces and highly specialised fields.

The bill makes amendments so that a 'keeping in touch' day that is taken at the request of the employer cannot occur within six weeks after the child's birth or, in the case of an adoption, the placement of the child. This will allow an adequate period of time after the birth of a child for the mother to recover physically and will give her an uninterrupted period of six weeks with her newborn child. The bill will also provide greater flexibility for pregnant employees prior to the birth of a child so that an employer and employee are able to agree on unpaid parental leave commencing earlier than six weeks prior to the expected date of birth. As well as increasing the flexibility of unpaid parental leave, the Fair Work Act will be amended to give parents the right to return to their employment, subject to four weeks notice, should there be a tragic stillbirth or infant death. This bill also gives me a chance to speak about the Gillard Labor government's Paid Parental Leave scheme, because many families—as I said, over 600 in McEwen—have embraced it, unlike those opposite, who have been dragged kicking and screaming to support Paid Parental Leave and are still in a mess on where they stand. Over 100,000 parents have applied for Paid Parental Leave since applications opened on 1 October last year, and half the mothers who have so far been beneficiaries of the scheme earned less than $42,000 in the year before their baby was born or adopted. This illustrates the importance of the scheme for women on low incomes, many of whom would not have been able to access Paid Parental Leave through their employer. The scheme will be extended on 1 January 2013 to provide further support for new parents, with two weeks of dad and partner pay. Dad and partner pay will give fathers and partners financial assistance to take time off work, helping them bond with their new child and be involved in their care from an early age.

The Gillard Labor government believes in supporting families and in giving every child
the best possible start in life. We understand the cost-of-living pressures on working families, and we are easing those pressures through initiatives such as the PPL scheme, tax cuts, family payments, fairer and more sustainable childcare assistance, and the schoolkids bonus introduced in the budget this week. There are many families in McEwen who are benefiting from this Labor government's commitment to supporting them. For instance, we have increased the childcare rebate from 30 per cent to 50 per cent and increased the annual limit for each child from $4,354 to $7,500 a year.

We have also established a $102.5 million maternity reform package, which is a key element of our health reform plans to deliver improved maternity care, particularly to regional Australia, and give women more choice. This includes $66.6 million to expand Medicare support for eligible midwives; $25 million to restore access to professional indemnity insurance for eligible midwives, allowing access to cover for the first time since 2002; $9.4 million for improved access to information and support; $11.3 million for expanded medical outreach services to rural and remote areas, bringing care closer to home; and $8 million for workforce support. We have also created a 24-hour pregnancy, birth and baby helpline and website, giving parents access to accurate information and directing parents to other services, like breastfeeding support.

The opposition has no real plan to support families when their child is born or to deliver child care when they need it. Let us not forget that, as workplace relations minister, the current Leader of the Opposition opposed a paid parental leave scheme and said it should be introduced over his government's 'dead body'.

The Gillard government's Paid Parental Leave scheme allows families to make their own work and family choices. Parents can transfer the leave so mums and dads have more options for balancing both work and family. Women in seasonal, casual and contract work, and the self-employed, will have access to Paid Parental Leave, most of them for the first time. The scheme has helped prepare Australia for the challenges of the future. Business will benefit from the retention of skilled and experienced female staff but will not have to fund the parental leave payments. The government has also made it easy for businesses: they get the money up-front from the government and pay their employees through their usual pay cycle. There is no need for special bank accounts or special reports. The scheme has been designed to ensure employers do not encounter new costs. Local employers only need to provide government funded paid parental leave to employees who have been with them for at least 12 months.

The Productivity Commission inquiry report Paid parental leave: support for parents with newborn children, of 2009, states:

The more that parental leave arrangements mimic those that exist as part of routine employment contracts, the more they will be seen by employers and employees as standard employment arrangements, with the dual effect of:

- promoting employment continuity and workplace retention (thus helping to preserve job and employer-specific skills that would be reduced if parents were to resign or move to another employer) and reducing training costs for employers
- signalling that a genuine capacity to take a reasonable period of leave from employment to look after children is just a normal part of working life.

The Productivity Commission also found that there would be a number of benefits in adopting a paid parental leave scheme, such
as increasing the average length of leave taken by employed women after childbirth by around 10 weeks and encouraging increased workforce participation for women prior to having a baby and between pregnancies. Importantly, the Productivity Commission found that PPL would change community attitudes by sending a strong signal that having a child and taking leave from work around the time of the birth or adoption is part of the normal course of work and family life.

ABS findings in Employee earnings, benefits and trade union membership, Australia 2008 found that women in lower paid jobs have less access to employer provided paid maternity leave. We also know that PPL is more available in some industries than in others, and that the industries with the lowest levels of access to Paid Parental Leave are highly casualised. In 2007, less than one-quarter of women on low wages had access to Paid Parental Leave, compared to three-quarters on high wages.

This is a historic Labor reform, because only Labor delivers for Australian families and parents. Paid Parental Leave is a workplace entitlement, not a welfare payment. And it helps employers retain valuable skilled staff. Skilled staff is an issue that we have had to deal with after the 11 years of neglect under the Howard government left us with a nationwide skill shortage. That is why it is disappointing that the Liberals are trying wreck the Paid Parental Leave scheme that so many women and employers, right across the country, are benefiting from. We do not support the Liberals' amendments that would undermine the link between women taking time off to have a baby and their workplace. They have tried wrecking it once, and it got voted down. Now they are trying to wreck it again, with another ill-thought-out, short-sighted amendment that shows that they just do not get it. Paid Parental Leave is not welfare; it is a workplace entitlement. That is why I support this bill and hope that it has a very speedy passage.

Ms LEY (Farrer) (13:06): I rise today to speak on the Paid Parental Leave and Other Legislation Amendment (Dad and Partner Pay and Other Measures) Bill 2012 and to very much support the amendments that the coalition will be moving in this place after this second reading debate. This bill extends the Paid Parental Leave scheme to working fathers and partners who meet the prescribed criteria, enabling them to take two weeks paid paternity leave at the federal minimum wage. That in itself is unremarkable and the coalition have no particular objection to it because we are supportive of any measures which will improve Labor's, quite frankly, substandard Paid Parental Leave scheme. As far as Australian families are concerned, right now every little bit helps as they struggle to make ends meet. However, regrettably, even despite this measure, Labor's proposal falls well short of the coalition's paid parental leave policy. I think that is the message that will come out of today's debate, when people listening and considering the two schemes realise that the coalition scheme is vastly superior. It does so much more in looking after families, in looking after mothers and in recognising the very great need for increasing, in particular, female workforce participation.

As I said, Australian families are doing it really tough under this Labor government. Our side of the chamber appreciates the pressures being felt by families. What is also blatantly clear to us is that the Gillard Labor government must bear responsibility for a number of these pressures. The carbon tax will see family power bills skyrocket. Childcare costs are soaring, with the Australian Childcare Alliance predicting that some families may have to pay an additional
$22 a day for care. Parents are fearful that they will not be able to continue to afford child care for their young children.

As I travel the country I am being made aware of more and more real-life examples of parents placing their children in backyard care. I was provided with all the details of one case where the parents, who live quite close to Sydney on the coast of New South Wales, travel into the city and are leaving three of their children to be minded by somebody in their street. At no stage do I blame parents for the childcare decisions they make or the safety concerns they do or do not have about particular arrangements they may make. But what I do see presented to me continually is parents under stress with the rising cost of child care. They are genuinely fearful that they will not be able to continue to afford the cost of child care. Just managing the weekly budget is a massive nightmare for so many families, as they juggle their finances and have to prioritise which bills get paid.

I note that members opposite, particularly the ministers in this area, refuse to accept that rising childcare costs are making a difference to the decisions and the choices that families make. I receive emails from women who say things such as: 'I would have had a third child, but I can't afford it. If the coalition's paid parental leave scheme was in, I would continue to be paid at my current salary and that would make much more sense. I could continue to afford the mortgage and take some of the stresses off my family.'

We on this side of the House understand what it is that families really need—paid parental leave, paid at their real wage, not the added stress of trying to adjust to a lower wage when one member of the partnership, the earning partnership, is stepping back from full employment.

In addition to the rising cost of living under Labor, this budget predicts unemployment to rise to 5.5 per cent. I, as the opposition spokesperson for employment participation, must note that because it is worth noting. This forecast comes from a Treasurer who promised to create 500,000 more jobs last year. Tragically for Australians, the Treasurer did not get that forecast right and, even more tragically, for those who find themselves amongst the ranks of the newly unemployed, the government have decided: 'You'll be on your own.' They have savaged employment services support for stream 1 job seekers, leaving them to fend for themselves, despite rising unemployment. These are job seekers who have recently lost their jobs. We should be acting quickly, efficiently and effectively to reconnect them with the workplace before they fall off the edge of the cliff and become the long-term unemployed.

The government has failed to introduce any real measures for unemployed youth, either. I am personally very alarmed by youth unemployment. The average rate across Australia is about 11.7 per cent. That is double the general unemployment rate. But in certain parts of Australia it is way higher. I have been provided with figures that show that, in the north-west of Melbourne, it is about 40 per cent. In central and western New South Wales, which include parts of my own electorate, it is about 25 per cent. In New South Wales, the average rate is 23 per cent. There was no mention in this budget by any minister in an employment portfolio of youth unemployment. More importantly, when you look through the programs, you will see that there is nothing that actually addresses this specific and looming national problem.

The coalition's proposed paid parental leave scheme is a comprehensive one. We have proposed 26 weeks paid leave at
replacement wage, up to a maximum of $150,000 a year. We based our decision for a 26-week scheme on World Health Organisation research that indicated that 26 weeks is the recommended period for exclusive breastfeeding, and I think that is an important consideration. But it is not just about World Health Organisation recommendations; all of us in this place should understand the critical importance of the early years. With respect to the importance of child development, the research continues to emphasise that fact. Increasingly, we are being provided with research that the first three or four years of life are a period when a baby and toddler's brain grows to about two-thirds its full size, evolving in complexity at a greater rate than it ever will again. This is the period during which key learning takes place. But this learning is more than just first words, first steps, colours and numbers. The emotional lessons that we learn as babies and children, at home and at school, shape the emotional circuits in our brains that we carry with us for life. The roots of empathy can be traced to infancy. Developmental psychologists have found that infants feel sympathetic distress before they even realise they exist apart from other people. The most basic lessons of emotional life are laid down in those intimate moments, those intimate exchanges between parent and child. The reassurance of feeling emotionally connected provides children with their core emotional outlook and capability, equipping them with the resilience they need to tackle the challenges of life. This attunement that a parent develops with a child in these vital first months shapes the child's emotional expectations about relationships, in all realms of life, for better or worse.

I make that small diversion not to suggest that these things are not happening in the homes and families around Australia—because of course mothers, fathers and parents are living this everyday—but simply to say that we can place no greater importance on the development of maternal and paternal bonding. It is not just a feelgood concept; it is something very real and something that governments must make sure they invest in. For we that have had families and young children at stages of life where we were under financial stress, where it was always very difficult to manage the bonding and the time that you needed with young children with all of the other particularly financial pressures that you found yourself under, a measure such as the coalition's scheme that says, 'Twenty six weeks at your existing wage and, please, take the time to build that bond with your baby,' would have been welcome. And, remember, often women in these situations have other toddlers at home as well and they will also enormously benefit by having mum and dad spend some extra time with them.

Sometimes people say to me, 'Why should certain members of society get a paid parental leave entitlement at a higher rate than others?' I simply answer by saying this: we should not see this as a welfare payment or a handout; we should see this payment as analogous to sick leave, long service leave or annual leave entitlements that you might receive in the workplace. It is something that is just paid at your normal rate and that you access when you need to in the normal course of your working and family life. It is there for you to make use of. It is not something that the rest of society is giving you. It is not a welfare payment; it is not a benefit payment; it is a recognition by government that, in order for parents to properly take the time to bond with their newborn children and set themselves up for those expensive early years, they do need to have parental leave from the workplace. Employers are not in a position to fund all of
this. Not only that, but the last thing we want to see is employers stepping back from employing people who are in their childbearing years because of the cost that they might incur when mothers step out of the workforce to have children.

Our scheme is a stark contrast to Labor's scheme, which is cobbled together, is underfunded and, most importantly, does not recognise superannuation entitlements. The coalition's policy recognises just how critical this is for the long-term future welfare of women. By incorporating superannuation into our paid parental leave scheme we demonstrate our commitment to ensuring that women are not financially disadvantaged later by taking the time to start a family. We recognise that on average women retire with approximately 40 per cent less money in the bank than men. By including a mandatory superannuation contribution as part and parcel of our paid parental leave scheme we can help redress this imbalance and ensure that when the time comes for women to retire they have a superannuation balance that will provide them a respectable standard of living. I cannot emphasise that enough. I meet women in their 50s in small towns in my electorate struggling on very small superannuation entitlements because they have taken this time out of the workforce to have families. Look at the contribution they have made to those small towns: they have raised fabulous children, they have been fabulous community members and they have been part of the fabric and the life and soul of the community. And now they are struggling with not enough to keep them in their retirement. It is something that we should be concerned about. Our approach is a long-term, practical one; Labor's is little more than a flash in the pan.

We sought to reduce red tape for business, with the administration of the Paid Parental Leave scheme resting with the Family Assistance Office, where I understand it rests now but is due to be sent back to employers after the end of this financial year. We do not want to see individual businesses do that, but Labor is determined to strangle businesses in more red tape by making them the paymaster for the scheme. We instead want to provide small business with the opportunity to use the Family Assistance Office as their pay clerk for paid parental leave.

Small businesses are struggling under this government—many are stressing day by day as to how they will remain viable—yet Labor is still insisting they fulfil the role of pay clerk, further imposing red tape and forcing small business owners and operators to spend valuable time on paperwork instead of on their businesses. We know that small businesses do not have the same capacity for infrastructure and investment in their HR divisions as, say, Coles and Woolworths. The government has seen sense on this particular measure, ensuring that the Dad and Partner Pay is administered by the Department of Human Services. Yet Labor fails to concede that it would be far easier if this department were to have responsibility for the administration of all parental leave payments.

Making the Family Assistance Office the default administrator of the Paid Parental Leave scheme is unquestionably practical. It alleviates the pressure on small business but allows for an opt-in should a business decide to fill this role. The government is yet to convince me of its offbeat reasoning as to how small businesses assuming the role of paymaster fosters a bond between employee and employer. That is a bridge too far in terms of an argument.

The coalition has made this undertaking to reduce red tape and, if the government had any understanding whatsoever of small business and the struggles they face on a
daily basis, they would support our amendment. Alas, though, if I am to consider the past record of those opposite, I will not hold my breath.

What is needed is a parental payment leave system that is easy to administer, that does not have additional burdens on business, that adequately provides for Australian families and that gives mothers and fathers the right amount of time to truly bond with their newborn babies. If we reinstate the Family Assistance Office as the default paymaster for all businesses, we can also reduce the red tape burden. As a coalition we present a very strong package of policy in this area for the people of Australia to consider. (Time expired)

Ms HALL (Shortland—Government Whip) (13:21): I believe this is very important legislation. It makes a few minor amendments to the functionality of the Paid Parental Leave scheme as it operates now, but the really important part of this legislation is that it provides for dads and partners, from 1 January next year, for the first time, to receive paid parental leave or pay. Eligible fathers and partners will be able to receive two weeks paid leave and partner pay at the rate of the national minimum wage, the same wage per week as paid parental leave. This legislation is groundbreaking because it not only provides extra support to families at a time when they have a new baby but recognises the role fathers play in relation to babies. I think that is a very important message that the government is sending out—the recognition that fathers play a very, very important role in the care and development of their newborn baby.

I have spent a bit of time looking at and researching some of the implications of the father being able to be intimately involved in that first process—and there is hardly a father now who is not present at the birth of their baby. It is a time that is quite challenging within the family. It is a time when it is really important that both the mother and baby connect. The mother has carried the child for nine months and in many cases goes on to breastfeed their child. Dads need to establish their role once that child has appeared. They feel a significant need to be close to their new baby and help deal with the challenges that occur when a new baby makes its presence felt in the family.

'Engrossment' is a term that is often used to describe the powerful response that fathers often feel towards their newborn child. This includes his attraction to the infant, a perception of the newborn child as perfect—and most fathers have had that feeling that their new baby is perfect—and the elation and feeling of self-esteem he has at the time of the birth. From the research I have done, experts encourage fathers to hold and examine their babies and to feel that they are really a very important part of that period. This bonding that often commences with the father at the birth—the initial eye contact and the response the baby has towards them—is important to develop.

This two weeks paid parental leave will allow a number of workers who have previously been denied the ability to spend time with their newborn child to do so. In 2011 Australia finally caught up with the rest of the world with the introduction of our Paid Parental Leave scheme. I note the amendment from the opposition, and I will speak to that as I get towards the end of my contribution to this debate. Needless to say, the opposition opposed paid parental leave all the way along the line. And then, at the end of the day, the Leader of the Opposition came up with his very, very, very expensive model of paid parental leave after publicly saying for years that he did not support paid
parental leave. This legislation builds on the historic reform of the introduction of paid parental leave, which allowed women to spend time with their child nurturing, bonding and setting in place the relationship that they will have into the future.

At the 2010 election we made a commitment to give dads and other partners a chance to have two weeks leave to support the new mum at home and be involved in the care of the baby right from the very start so that the mother would be able to rely on the father of her child, or her partner, to provide that support during a difficult period when you have sleepless nights and you have a strange creature who is making its presence felt within your house. What it does is allow the family time to consolidate. It allows the family time for the new baby to be integrated into the family. In cases where there are toddlers, it very much helps when the father can be involved and help the transition of a new baby into the house. Anybody who has been associated with a family that has a new baby knows that, if there is a toddler, there are problems and there are little barriers that have to be passed. Quite often that toddler is the only one in the family, and it really changes the relationships within the family.

This is good for new dads, new mums and other siblings within the family, and it provides the best possible start for new babies. This legislation means that it will be available to all eligible fathers and partners. That includes adoptive parents and parents of same-sex couples who care for a child born or adopted from 1 January 2011. The current rate is $590 a week before tax. It means that eligible families welcoming a new baby into the world can receive up to 20 weeks Paid Parental Leave plus the dad and partner payment. I know from my own sons, who have become fathers, how important the time they had had off work when their babies came home was. They had to use their annual leave entitlements. They do not in any way regret that. But when fathers are not automatically given Paid Parental Leave for such periods, it is not recognising the role of fathers. The dad and partner payment will do that.

Claims for the payment will be able to be made from October this year, and it will be available for a wide range of people. This is particularly important. It is going to go not only to those employed in ongoing positions but to casual employees and self-employed people such as tradespeople, small business owners and people working on farms. It is a recognition that fathers come from a variety of backgrounds. It is a recognition that often, when self-employed people and tradespeople have to go away from their workplace, it means that they get no income at all. It is very important that they are able to receive this payment. The legislation is based on and consistent with the independent expert recommendations of the Productivity Commission. The payments will be available in addition to any employer-paid leave but cannot be taken at the same time as paid leave.

Another important aspect of the legislation is that there was widespread consultation between government and employee groups, business groups, family and community groups, and individuals. People were asked to provide feedback on the legislation that we are debating here today, and that feedback was positive. As such, I would argue that each and every member of this parliament should support this legislation. It is about recognising the role that fathers play in our society. It is about ensuring that babies have the best possible start in life. I agree with the previous speaker from the opposition—child development starts from the day a baby is born. The emotional security a baby feels, from the support and input they receive, is
reflected later in that baby's life. This legislation is about providing babies with the best start and providing the right sort of support to the family unit.

I am really disappointed that the opposition is once again engaging in wrecking tactics. I had hoped that when this legislation came to the parliament the opposition would support it. Instead, what we have before us is an amendment designed to wreck the legislation. The opposition's mickey mouse paid parental leave scheme appeared as a thought bubble to the Leader of the Opposition after years of opposing paid parental leave. It is so disappointing. I had hoped that, just for once, the opposition would walk into this place and say: 'This is really good legislation.'

Mrs Griggs: Well, put up some good legislation, then.

Ms HALL: It's legislation that will be good for families. It's legislation that recognises the important role that fathers play.'

Mrs Griggs: Does it include superannuation?

Ms HALL: As I said, it is very disappointing.

I hear members on the other side interjecting, saying that fathers do not deserve to have this legislation passed through this parliament. This legislation is not about welfare; it is about workers entitlements. Now we are going to see the opposition voting it down, voting against families. They voted against families yesterday—they said that families did not know how to spend the schoolkids bonus, when families have to pay thousands of dollars to educate their children. Today they are set to vote against babies, against fathers, against the welfare of children into the future. I can only say I am extremely disappointed and I would beg the opposition to think again, to get behind and support this important legislation.

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP (Mackellar) (13:36): The amendment to which I am speaking points out that whilst we are not declining to give the bill a second reading—if you had listened to the previous speaker perhaps you would not realise that—we are moving an amendment that notes that the government's Paid Parental Leave scheme is too short and does not provide superannuation and does not maintain the income of the majority of Australian mothers, and calls on the government to immediately adopt the coalition's better, fairer paid parental leave scheme.

I have to say that this amendment gives us the opportunity to speak about the benefits that will flow both to mothers and to the economy if our scheme is adopted. In 2006 I was chairman of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Human Services and we brought out a report called Balancing work and family—a very strong and important report. A lot of research was done on the benefit to the economy as a whole when women are able to work full-time in the paid workforce. The need for adequate childcare expenses and Paid Parental Leave were both very important in the submissions that were made to that committee.

Many of the submissions that came to the committee pointed out things like:

… Australian women have embraced the expansion of tertiary education and the opportunities opening up in the workplace. In 1951, only 20 per cent of university enrolments were women. In 1987, for the first time, female students outnumbered males, and by 2004, this majority had risen to 54 per cent.

That is, there were more women than men in tertiary education at university. This means that we have many trained women who want to be able to utilise their experience and their
qualifications in very sensible ways that will work to their own benefit, that of their families and that of the nation.

It was pointed out in other submissions to us that loss of salary is one of the reasons that those women who have taken tertiary education do not have children. One of the things that came out very importantly was that the simple fact of having a child reduces a woman’s lifetime chance of being employed by seven per cent. The authors Dr Matthew Gray and Professor Bruce Chapman writing in the journal *Family Matters* stated this fact and calculated that on average this hypothetical woman would lose 37 per cent of her lifetime earnings by having a child, and that the impact of having the first child was greater than the second or third children.

The Association of Professional Engineers, Scientists and Managers of Australia noted that, of their female membership, 69 per cent did not have children. By comparison the current estimate of the Australian population is generally that 16 per cent of women are likely to remain childless. The association, in its submission, said:

The very high proportion of childless female professionals found in the APESMA Surveys also reflects the reality that professional women with children are leaving the workforce or reducing their level of workforce participation due to family responsibilities …

They also said:

Lack of access to part-time work in such professions—

that is, professional engineers, scientists and managers—

has not been caused by any industrial or legal limitation, but by culture, custom and practice. This is also reflected in the predominance of professional development opportunities being based upon full time workplace participation.

In other words, the women who are going on to take tertiary education face difficulties in choosing to have children and seeking full-time work without proper paid parental leave and without adequate child care arrangements.

Accordingly, the scheme that we are asking the government to introduce is the one that, should we be elected, we will introduce. That is, that there should be 26 weeks of paid parental leave, a full-time replacement wage—that means the whole wage—of a salary of up to $150,000 per annum or the minimum federal wage, whichever is the greater. This paid parental leave should include superannuation at the mandatory rate. To put that into context, we are always hearing about the serious need for people to enter the scientific and engineering areas, but those women who have chosen to do that are penalised more than any others.

We had Access Economics do some research for us on the benefit to the economy overall should we see a greater participation rate of women in the paid workforce. They estimated that the impact of that change could be as high as 4.4 per cent and that GDP could increase by 4.4 per cent—more than that estimated by the government in the *Intergenerational report*. As a reform initiative, increased women’s participation would be placed above the 2000 tax reforms, which had a 2.5 per cent increase in GDP and below the national competition policy reform increases of 5.5 per cent.

We also found, in the submissions and in our findings overall, that women will eventually hold the majority of post-school qualifications, which means that we need to remove all barriers to women working, where they wish to do so. So by paying women the full existing wage that they are paid at the time that they have children, and by including superannuation, we would be
encouraging women to return to the paid workforce and to have children—which are equally important.

We also say that we would use the same work test and eligibility conditions as the government designed scheme, but we would fund our scheme by a 1.5 per cent levy on companies with taxable incomes in excess of $5 million and that the levy would apply only to taxable income in excess of $5 million. It would be paid and administered by the Family Assistance Office and would not impose an unnecessary administrative burden on employers, unlike Labor's scheme. There is no reason that small business in particular should be burdened with becoming an organ of government for the payment of paid parental leave. It is far better that we utilise the Family Assistance Office.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): Order! It being 1:45, the member for Solomon can go and debate with somebody else and try to get my good graces in some other way! The debate is interrupted in accordance with standing order 43. The debate will resume at a later hour today.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Brisbane Roar

Ms GAMBARO (Brisbane) (13:45): I rise to congratulate the Brisbane Roar on winning the A-League grand final for the second year in a row. It was certainly a brilliant game that kept fans on the edge of their seats. Special mention must go to Bersart Berisha, whose penalty goal earned the team the No. 1 title against Perth.

The Brisbane Roar is not only the first side to win back-to-back A-League titles but also the holder of the record for the longest unbeaten reign at the top level of any Australian football code. That record stands at 36 league matches without defeat.

Their record on the field is outstanding, but off the field it is exemplary. I sincerely thank the Brisbane Roar football club for the inspiring work they do for their local and far-reaching community in the Greater Brisbane area. Through their partnership with Mission Australia, the Brisbane Roar has facilitated the development of football in schools as well as assisted Queenslanders experiencing homelessness and long-term unemployment.

I also extend thanks to coach Ange Postecoglou for all the wonderful work he has done for the Brisbane Roar over the last 2½ years. Ange is now taking over the head position at Melbourne Victory, and I am sure his coaching skills will be as appreciated by Melbourne as they have been by us.

To the Roar team: you are a true example of what hard work and determination can achieve. The whole of Brisbane is behind you, and you have made us proud. (Time expired)

Goss, Mr Matt

Mr LYONS (Bass) (13:47): I rise to congratulate Matt Goss of Launceston after his recent cycling success on the world stage. After five second placings in his past eight starts, the 25-year-old Tasmanian sprinter shed his race bridesmaid tag with his team's first grand tour stage win in the Giro d'Italia in a very hectic and crash filled third-stage finish at Horsens in Denmark.

Matt studied at Launceston College in my electorate of Bass. He started cycling at 11 years of age after encouragement from his neighbours, Wes and Bernie Sulzberger, who are also pro-cyclists. He excelled as a world champion track cyclist and is now making a name for himself in the professional road racing arena. His accolades include: 2006 TIS male athlete of the year; 2005 joint TIS male athlete of the year; and 2004 Australian junior male road cyclist of the year. Goss made his debut on the pro international
circuit in 2007, and in 2011 he solidified his name by winning the prestigious Milan-San Remo one-day classic. I spoke on this great win last year.

Matt joins the Gilmorens, the Grendas, the Rices, the Sulzbergers, the Morgans, the Clarkes and the Wilsons as an excellent cyclist from Tasmania, and I congratulate them all. The Wilsons, by the way, now run Velo Wines, a great winery in Bass. (Time expired)

Collinsville Power Station

Mr CHRISTENSEN (Dawson) (13:48): In the bottom of the carbon tax litter tray you will find an offensive little nugget left by Labor and the Greens. It is well known that in the carbon tax packages there was provision for the government to shut down power stations, but it is not well known that one of those was Collinsville. I find that strange because the shutdown order and the associated go-away-and-pack up-your-bags money was only supposed to be made to power generators whose emissions exceeded 1.2 tonnes per megawatt hour. According to the Queensland Competition Authority, the Collinsville power station emits just 1.16 tonnes per megawatt hour. According to the Queensland Competition Authority, the Collinsville power station emits just 1.16 tonnes per megawatt hour.

If Labor and the Greens are successful, this is what the carbon tax will mean for the town of Collinsville and North Queensland: about 130 to 140 workers at the power station will lose their job, as will contractors who maintain the facility, when Collinsville has a population of only just over 2,000; jobs and operations could be scaled back at the Collinsville coal mine, which supplies the power station; and over one-third of the power supplied to the grid north of Rockhampton will have to be replaced—and replacing supply further away means higher electricity costs.

The people of Collinsville want to know what the member for Capricornia is doing to stop this. We in the coalition will not shut down Collinsville; we will axe the carbon tax and through direct action make Collinsville power station cleaner. The member for Capricornia must explain to the people of Collinsville why she is part of this plan to shut down the Collinsville Power Station.

Budget

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (13:50): The Queensland Times newspaper today says: 'Ipswich backs Swan's budget'. Community and political leaders across the board have welcomed the federal government's budget as positive for the Ipswich community. In fact, Ipswich Chamber of Commerce President Brett Kitching said:

... while more help for small business would have been welcomed, the budget was quite positive.

He went on to say:

It appears it has been directed to make life easier and give more spending power to families … … … …

From a general business point of view that's a good thing.

Discretionary spending power of families will increase as soon as the grants commence. Most of that money will find its way through to business."

The article went on to say:

Similarly, Ipswich Business Enterprise Centre manager Tony Axford said with 65% of all ABN holders in Ipswich classed as micro enterprises, the focus on families would help the majority of Ipswich business people.

It continues:

"That funding will trickle into those small retailers such as Top of Town, Orion and Goodna," Mr Axford said.

"Those three areas are hurting in the retail area in Ipswich. I believe this will allow people to spend rather than save."

The point of the matter is that the coalition have failed the people of Ipswich. Not only have they failed to support the Ipswich motorway but also, as we saw yesterday, if
they were on this side of the bench they would have denied the schoolkids bonus to the over 11,000 families in Blair who will benefit from it. The situation is that 2,100 families in Ipswich and Somerset will get funding that they did not get before. *(Time expired)*

**Bradfield Electorate: North Shore**

Mr FLETCHER (Bradfield) (13:51): Yesterday the Prime Minister had this to say about the area of Sydney that I represent:

Mr Abbott's got to get off Sydney's north shore and go and talk to some real families and get himself in the real world.

The suggestion that the North Shore is not in the real world and is not populated by real families is deeply offensive. The communities of Sydney's North Shore, including my constituents in Bradfield, are as diverse and multifaceted as those anywhere in Australia. To stereotype the North Shore as some kind of Anglo-Celtic island of privilege is decades out of date. Just a few days ago I attended the Anzac Day service at a local public school, where over 80 per cent of students are from a non-English-speaking background. It is deeply unfortunate that the Prime Minister of this nation should choose to essentially write off the people of a particular community. The Prime Minister of this nation should be the Prime Minister for all Australians, but, for my constituents on the North Shore, she has demonstrated a degree of disregard which is truly shocking and disappointing. To characterise my constituents as not living in the real world is highly offensive, and I call upon the Prime Minister to apologise to the people of Sydney's North Shore.

**Human Rights: Vietnam**

Mr HAYES (Fowler) (13:53): I would like to draw the attention of the House to a lone protester who is outside the front of the parliament. The protestor's name is Mr Truong Quoc Viet, who is protesting against the ongoing human rights abuses by the communist government of Vietnam. Mr Viet is here for a limited time, while his wife and family are still in Vietnam.

Mr Viet takes the view that Australia is a very generous nation and has contributed much to the development of Vietnam, and he thinks that in view of providing that aid we should be insisting upon greater improvements in essential human rights for the people of Vietnam. Freedom and liberty is something we often take for granted in this place, but for many, including some of our valued trading partners such as the people of Vietnam, that is simply very much a distant dream.

I encourage all members, if they have the opportunity, to take a little time to go to the front of Parliament House and see Mr Viet in his tent. If you cannot converse with him in Vietnamese, please at least give him your business card. One thing that does unite all members across the chamber is our stand on positive human rights not only for Australia but for all those we deal with.

**Regeling, Mr Harold**

Forde Electorate: Grey Light Disco

Mr VAN MANEN (Forde) (13:54): I would firstly like to take this opportunity to pay my respects to one of our great local pioneers. Harold Regeling, a father of five, was an active and passionate member of the community. He passed away on 14 March 2012 after battling a long illness. Harold was known as a larrikin and a joker and leaves behind his wife, Jill Regeling, and their children, Carolyn, Jeffrey, Julie, Wendy and Mary.

Harold was best remembered for his hard work and dedication to his beloved Lions Club, of which he was a member for 36 years. Despite his illness he maintained a 100 per cent attendance record. It is sad to
lose such an inspiring and humble member of our local community and it is with great respect that I pass on my sympathy to Jill and the rest of the family.

I would also like to touch on an Australian first in Logan: the first ever grey light disco. The event was supported last Friday by the Crestmead 40+ Club in conjunction with the Crestmead PCYC with the help of Sergeant Mel Cowie to involve members of the over-40s community. My congratulations go to the President of the Crestmead 40+ Club, Robyn Gallen; The Vice-President, Gene Wright; and the event mastermind, Karen Cavanaugh, who is both the treasurer and an avid volunteer at the Crestmead PCYC. Well done.

Pensions and Benefits

Mr HUSIC (Chifley—Government Whip) (13:56): I represent 24,000 pensioners in the electorate of Chifley. As a result of some of the reforms that we have delivered, we have seen some of the biggest increases to the pension in 100 years. Over May-June those pensioners will receive a tax-free lump sum payment of up to $250 before receiving an increase to their fortnightly pension in March next year. These increases amount to $338 a year for single pensioners and $510 a year for pensioner couples.

I wish to raise my deep concerns that, of those 24,000 pensioners, 4,538 live in public housing, like the residents I spoke to at the housing action group recently. These residents do not want to see their public housing rents increased by the New South Wales O'Farrell government. They do not want to see any pension increase delivered by us instantly go through a rent increase. These pensioners do it tough already; they need to be spared from any increases in their rent as a result of what Premier O'Farrell may do. This increase belongs to them, not to the New South Wales government.

Dudas, Ms Anna: Memorial Benefit Concert

Mr MATHESON (Macarthur) (13:57): On Saturday, 5 May the Wollondilly Shire and the Macarthur community united behind the grieving children of the late Anna Dudas at her 'Night of Nights' Memorial Benefit Concert. Anna was a much loved member of the Wollondilly and Macarthur Community. She was a single mum of four children—Adrian, Tahlia, Ashton and Skye, aged from 16 to three. Anna was diagnosed with terminal cancer in November 2010 and passed away on 29 February this year after a brave and determined battle against all odds.

I would like to express my thanks to the organisers of the memorial benefit—in particular, Dale Burridge and SMA Productions, who put on the show; Brooke Hilton, who rallied the community; and Hayley Harrington, who supported Anna and her children from day one.

I would also like to give special thanks to all the performers who donated their time and talents, local businesses which donated prizes, and the Campbelltown Catholic Club, which donated the venue, staff, advertising, pamphlets, tickets, food and drinks and production costs. Without the support of the club, this event could not have happened.

I would also like to thank the generosity of Damn Good productions, which covered all the video productions costs so the children can remember this massive gesture of support from their community forever. More than 680 people turned up to support these children, who lost their mother in such tragic circumstances, and to celebrate the wonderful life of Anna. I am extremely proud to represent a community that is so generous not just with its time and money but also with its love and support.
Rest in peace, Anna; you will always be remembered.

Qantas

Mr KELVIN THOMSON (Wills) (13:59): In the last couple of days there have been representatives of the Qantas Engineers Alliance visiting Parliament House. This is made up of members of the Qantas heavy maintenance engineering workshops at several locations in Australia. They are at present under some threat, with the prospect, via a Qantas review, of one or even two of these workshops being closed with prospective job losses.

These are members of the Electrical Trades Union, the Australian Workers Union and the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, and I share their concern that we need to have a strong future for aircraft maintenance in Australia. The alliance has called on Qantas to guarantee that the heavy maintenance of the A380 and the B787 fleet will be carried out in Australia.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! It being 2 pm, in accordance with standing order 43, the time for members' statements has concluded.

CONDOLENCES

Bowen, Hon. Lionel Frost, AC

Report from Federation Chamber

Order of the day returned from Federation Chamber for further consideration; certified copy of the motion presented.

Debate resumed on the motion:

That the House express its deep regret at the death on 1 April 2012 of the Honourable Lionel Frost Bowen AC, a minister and member of this House for the Division of Kingsford Smith from 1969 to 1990, place on record its appreciation of his long and meritorious public service, and tender its profound sympathy to his family in their bereavement.

Question agreed to, honourable members standing in their places.

Adams, Senator Judith Anne

Report from Federation Chamber

Order of the day returned from Federation Chamber for further consideration; certified copy of the motion presented.

Debate resumed on the motion:

That the House expresses its deep regret at the death on 31 March 2012, of Senator Judith Anne Adams, Senator for Western Australia, places on record its appreciation of her public service, and tender its profound sympathy to her family in their bereavement.

Question agreed to, honourable members standing in their places.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Budget

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (14:02): My question is to the Prime Minister. I remind the Prime Minister of her government's record of forecasting the budget bottom line. This year's deficit was originally supposed to be $12 billion, then $23 billion, then $37 billion and now $44 billion. Why is next year's forecast of a wafer-thin $1.5 billion surplus any more likely to be accurate?

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:02): I do welcome a question from the Leader of the Opposition on the budget and on economics, because we so rarely see them—causing, as we found out last night, members of the Liberal Party to yearn for a return of Peter Costello.

The answer to the Leader of the Opposition's question is as follows. If the Leader of the Opposition looked at the budget papers he would see that our determination to return to surplus is evidenced by the fact that in the forthcoming financial year 2012-13—where we have budgeted a $1.5 billion surplus—since the
last budget, revenues to be received have gone back by approximately $10 billion. And, despite that major knock on revenues, we have worked to find savings so that we bring the budget to surplus in that year.

This is part of a broader savings package of $34 billion across the forward estimates. So I say to the Leader of the Opposition: look at that determination; look at how it builds on $100 billion of savings identified in past budgets and how it builds on $11.5 billion of savings in the midyear outlook. I say to the Leader of the Opposition, too, that when he is reflecting on this year he needs to acknowledge that this is the year in which we have dealt with a number of one-off factors like, for example, this being the financial year immediately after the most costly natural disasters in the nation's history.

To the Leader of the Opposition, who has spent months and months and months predicting that the government would not bring into this parliament a budget with a surplus, I say this: he has been proved wrong then and he will be proved wrong now. In his negativity, the Leader of the Opposition will do anything to try and besmirch what is a remarkable achievement for our nation: coming out of the global financial crisis so strongly, keeping people in work and now returning the budget to surplus so quickly. He will do anything to deny the Australian nation that achievement, because it is all part of his reckless negativity towards the economy and towards the work of this parliament in general.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Before I call the next member, there is way too much noise in the chamber for anyone to hear any answer. I ask people not to continue with ambient conversations around the chamber; it is very disrespectful.

**Economy**

Mr HUSIC (Chifley—Government Whip) (14:05): My question is to the Treasurer. What is the government doing to keep our economy strong and spread the benefits of the mining boom?

Mr SWAN (Lilley—Deputy Prime Minister and Treasurer) (14:05): I thank the member for Chifley for a very important question, because our economy walks tall in the world. We have solid growth, we have low unemployment, we have contained inflation and we have a strong investment pipeline. Of course, this government has always put the jobs of Australians first. That is why we acted during the global financial crisis to support the jobs of Australians, and we avoided recession because of what we did in putting jobs first.

We have always put jobs first in the reforms we have put in place through our five budgets in this House. This morning we have had a resounding endorsement of our economy and a resounding endorsement of our jobs record. Australia now has more people in work than ever before, with an unemployment rate of 4.9 per cent. That is something that everyone on this side of the House is proud of. Since this government was elected, 800,000 jobs have been created. But we cannot see anyone happy about that on the other side of the House.

There have been—

Government members interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): Order! The Treasurer is actually not being assisted by the people behind him.

Mr SWAN: There have been 90,000 jobs created in Australia since the beginning of the year, and that is why we are bringing our budget back to surplus: because we have trend growth, we have low unemployment and it is important to have a surplus and
build it over the years. That is why we are putting in place productivity-enhancing reforms, particularly incentives for small business. But it is also why we are in a position to spread the benefits of the mining boom right around our country, particularly to 1.5 million low- and middle-income families, with additional payments in terms of family tax benefit and, most particularly, our schoolkids bonus to help 1.3 million families with the cost of education. But, just as those opposite voted against jobs during the global financial crisis, they voted against the schoolkids bonus in this House—and shame on them. As we stand here today, they are voting against it in the Senate as well.

Tonight the Leader of the Opposition needs to come clean on what other assistance to families the Liberal Party opposes. When he walks into this chamber tonight, he should say whether he is supporting proposals to spread the benefits of the boom and how he is going to pay for it. How is he going to pay for spreading the benefits of the boom? If he is supporting a return to surplus, will he support the saves to get there? What is he going to do to find the money to fill the $70 billion crater in the budget bottom line that the shadow Treasurer spoke about on breakfast television? We on this side of the House have always stood for jobs. Those opposite want to give the benefits of the boom to Clive Palmer.

Mr HUSIC (Chifley—Government Whip) (14:08): Madam Deputy Speaker, I ask a supplementary question. The Treasurer has outlined the benefits to the nation, but I would also like to know what it means for local communities like mine.

Mr SWAN (Lilley—Deputy Prime Minister and Treasurer) (14:09): I thank the member for Chifley for that question, because the schoolkids bonus for those families in Chifley will go to 15,000 families. It has now passed the Senate, so it will go to all of those families. We on this side of the House understand cost-of-living pressures on families, and that is why we have moved with the schoolkids bonus. That is why we have moved for the 19,000 families in Chifley to give them some additional support, to spread the benefits of the mining boom and to give them additional family tax payments. We on this side of the House are absolutely proud of what we have done to support employment in our communities, particularly in areas like Chifley. We have supported jobs, and because we have supported jobs families in areas like Chifley are more secure than they have ever been. We will continue to do that with a range of policies to lift our productivity and to spread the benefits of the boom to all Australians, to give them all a stake in our prosperity.

Budget

Mr HOCKEY (North Sydney) (14:10): My question is to the Treasurer. I refer the Treasurer to his answer yesterday that the government needs to increase the debt limit to $300 billion to manage the 'in-year financing challenge' of the existing debt of $224 billion. Treasurer, why can't the government use existing legislation such as the Loan (Temporary Revenue Deficits) Act 1953 to deal with this matter instead of increasing the debt limit to a record $300 billion?

Mr SWAN (Lilley—Deputy Prime Minister and Treasurer) (14:11): I thank the shadow Treasurer for that very important question. The fact is that we have advice from the Australian Office of Financial Management saying that they think it would be prudent to put in place a buffer. The advice and the budget papers very clearly say that at the end of each year we will be within the $250 billion debt cap. They clearly state
that, but the Office of Financial Management have given the government very clear advice that we do require a buffer, for the reasons that I spoke about in the House here yesterday: because the in-year financing requirements mean that we will go over that level.

Mr Hockey: Madam Deputy Speaker, on a point of order: I asked the Treasurer to answer the question about the capacity to use existing legislation rather than increase the limit again.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): The member for North Sydney has made his point of order. The Treasurer is answering the question.

Mr SWAN: First of all, I could refer the member to the minute from the AOFM. He should take the time to read it in full.

Mr Hockey interjecting—

Mr SWAN: I am happy to table it; it is not a problem at all. This is a very serious issue and it is not an issue with which the opposition should be playing politics, and they know it. The fact is that we will be within the debt cap at year's end in all future years, but the AOFM have said very clearly that they would like a buffer, and that is why we are providing it. They have said this is the best way to achieve the objectives of our program. This is just very typical of the lengths to which the opposition will go to talk down our economy and to exaggerate and run scare campaigns about matters that ought to be the subject of bipartisan political agreement in this House. They really should not. These matters are far too important for the opposition to be playing the sorts of politics that they are playing. So I would refer them to the minute from the AOFM. They should take it seriously and they should desist from this sort of behaviour.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for North Sydney is seeking to have the Treasurer table a document, and the member for North Sydney has a supplementary question.

Mr HOCKEY (North Sydney) (14:13): I do, Madam Deputy Speaker. Under the Treasurer's watch, the government debt limit has gone from zero to $75 billion, then to $200 billion and then to $250 billion, and now he wants to increase it to $300 billion. Treasurer, if you do not need to increase the credit limit, why are you doing so?

Mr SWAN (Lilley—Deputy Prime Minister and Treasurer) (14:14): The opposition likes to come into this House and pretend that the global financial crisis and the global recession never happened, and pretend that there were not natural disasters in Queensland and Victoria last year, and pretend that there is no such thing as a European sovereign debt crisis. I would just make this point and I will make it very clearly: for the first time in our history, the very first time in our history, we have a triple-A gold plated credit rating from all three major rating agencies reaffirmed only on Tuesday night. I think that says that we are handling these matters very well, because the three major agencies never gave that to Peter Costello or to the Liberal Party.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke) (14:15): Before I call the member, I want to recognise in the gallery today students from the Rotary Adventure in Citizenship program and welcome them to the House, and congratulate and thank Rotary for this wonderful initiative. I think we have all made them very happy.

Honourable members: Hear, hear!

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Budget

Ms O’NEILL (Robertson) (14:15): My question is to the Prime Minister. How is the
Thursday, 10 May 2012  HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  4561

budget good for the economy, good for jobs and good for helping families make ends meet?

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:15): Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I thank the member for Robertson for her question. I know that she is very concerned about the economic prospects of the families she represents in this parliament, that she understands the cost-of-living pressures they find themselves under, and I know that she is a person with a very deep attachment to our education system in making sure that kids get to school with all of the things they need for their education. So, I thank her for this question.

In answer to the member for Robertson’s question there is no clearer sign of a strong economy than a budget surplus. It gives us a buffer for the future and it also gives the Reserve Bank the maximum room to move. So, delivering a budget surplus now is right for our economy. As we have delivered this budget we have continued our relentless focus on jobs. What has always driven this government, this Labor government, is a focus on job creation and giving people the benefits of the dignity that comes with work and the ability to help their families. There is no better way of assisting a family with all of the things it wants to do for its future than making sure that people have the benefits of work and work opportunities, which is why I am delighted that today's unemployment rate has fallen to 4.9 per cent in April. It is an achievement for the Australian nation, so soon after the global financial crisis, that we should all be proud of.

We know, as our economy is strong in its fundamentals, that there are many Australians who, at the same time, still face pressures trying to make ends meet. We know that there are many Australians who read about the mining boom but do not feel the benefits of that increased prosperity in their own lives, which is why we have been so determined in this budget, in this Labor budget, to assist low- and middle-income Australians, including through the Schoolkids Bonus that has gone through the parliament today in the teeth of opposition from the Liberal and National parties, who wanted to deny working Australians and their families this benefit. Despite their wrecking tactics we are providing that money to Australians because we know they need it for the costs of getting the kids to school.

A little bit later today the Leader of the Opposition will give his budget reply. When he does he should not mention the words 'cost of living' or anything to do with cost of living until he announces that he has reversed his position on the Schoolkids Bonus. Until he does that he cannot with any credibility talk about cost-of-living pressures on Australian families, because never has a Leader of the Opposition been more out of touch with the struggles of working families than the Leader of the Opposition sitting here. (Time expired)

Budget

Mr TRUSS (Wide Bay—Leader of The Nationals) (14:18): My question is directed to the Treasurer. I refer the Treasurer to the fact that on the four occasions the government has increased the debt ceiling since it came to office it has fully utilised the increase. How could the Australian people be confident that yet another increase in the limit will not be abused in the same way and that, once again, our national credit card limit will be maxed out?

Mr SWAN (Lilley—Deputy Prime Minister and Treasurer) (14:19): The opposition has a very small problem. The fact is the IMF, the credit rating agencies and all responsible bodies around this country
and around the world happen to think that our financial situation is one of the best in the developed world. So, trying to maintain this argument that somehow there is a problem with the modest level of debt we have, which is one-tenth of what occurs in the major developed economies, is simply farcical and speaks very loudly about the opposition's economic incompetence. We have taken on a modest amount of debt to protect our economy. We are coming back to surplus and building those surpluses to pay that down. That is what we should be doing—accumulating surpluses when growth returns to trend and implementing our fiscal rules. That is what this budget does. It brings the budget back to surplus and builds the surpluses over the years to build up the buffer that we need, because our economy is strong. That is precisely what we are doing.

Of course, our actions have been endorsed by the three major global rating agencies. Those on the other side of the House want to pretend that there have been no revenue losses from the global financial crisis, no revenue losses from the global recession and that our revenues have not been reduced overall by $150 billion. Of course, if they want to pretend that, I would hate to think what our level of debt would be now if they did not take the actions or go anywhere near the actions we took during the global financial crisis, because it would be far higher. If action had not been taken, unemployment in this country would be far higher and deficits and debt would be far higher. Of course, we took the responsible action and, having taken the responsible action, we are doing the responsible things: bringing our budget back to surplus, building those surpluses and paying down debt over future years. That is classic economic policy, which has been endorsed by the global agencies and endorsed by the rating agencies, and all that those opposite are doing here today is turning their economic credentials into a complete farce.

**Far North Queensland Infrastructure**

Mr KATTER (Kennedy) (14:21): My question is to the Prime Minister. Could the Prime Minister intervene in the impasse that is destroying the economies of Cardwell, Mission Beach and most of the Paradise Coast. Seventeen months after Yasi there is still no reconstruction of the key Barrier Reef water accesses at Mission Beach and Port Hinchinbrook. Since reconstruction is by way of the federal government's generous renewal program and since below the waterline is federal jurisdiction, could the Prime Minister assure the House she will address the logjams? Could she acknowledge the refurbishment of the Mission Beach jetty, dangerously exposed to ocean currents, is tantamount to trash-canning $3 million, whilst Port Hinchinbrook is being administered under arrangements that make it impossible for it to ever be cleaned up or to stay operational— *(Time expired)*

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:22): I thank the member for Kennedy for his question. I know of his very sincere interest in this matter. He has raised the matter with me before. I know on the times that I have travelled to the region with the member for the Kennedy—and the Deputy Prime Minister has travelled there with him, I believe, on more than one occasion—he has raised these and a series of related questions. I am very happy to say to the member for Kennedy that I am happy to look in detail at the matters that he has raised today.

He would be aware, of course, that we have been working with the local community for reconstruction and relief following the cyclone. That has taken many forms. It is part of the overall contribution the Australian government is making to rebuilding essential
community infrastructure, and that is in the order of a $5.9 billion contribution. There is a special package of $15 million that the member for Kennedy is aware of to assist with repair of marine infrastructure and restoration of foreshore areas. I know he was involved in the development of that particular package. I know too he has been involved in the recommendations of various work, including looking at some jetties that the member for Kennedy has raised.

All in all, I can provide the House with an update: in the Far North, $443.3 million worth of projects have been completed or are progressing or are out for tender, and a further $243.7 million worth of projects will shortly be released to markets. We understand very sincerely that small businesses and primary producers took a very big hit with the cyclone, so we have been delivering grants and loans, in the number of 2,500, to small businesses and primary producers and also to not-for-profit groups who felt the brunt of the loss of infrastructure and of the community need at this time. On further specifics, I am very happy to keep in discussion with the member for Kennedy about the needs of the community as it recovers from what was a very devastating blow.

Budget

Mr HAYES (Fowler) (14:25): My question is to the Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Minister for Disability Reform. How is the government helping families meet the costs of education, like school books and uniforms? Minister, what are the obstacles to this support?

Ms MACKLIN (Jagajaga—Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Minister for Disability Reform) (14:25): I thank the member for Fowler very much for his question. He does understand how important it is to spread the benefits of the mining boom especially to those Australians who are not living in the fast lane, who are not benefiting from this mining boom, in many parts of Australia. As the Treasurer has just indicated, the Schoolkids Bonus has now passed the Senate—of course, no thanks to anyone opposite; absolutely no thanks to anyone over there.

The new Schoolkids Bonus will benefit 1.3 million families and I am very pleased to say to the member for Fowler that it will benefit around 13,000 families in the electorate of Fowler. That means that families with primary school aged children will receive $410 a year, and $820 for each secondary school student. The good news for families is that this money will come when they need it: at the start of term 1 and the start of term 3.

I was very interested to hear on Radio National this morning the member for Sturt, who actually thinks that this is a good idea. He does seem to understand, as a result of his comments, that the big costs associated with children going to school come in January and February, when parents need to really get out there and pay for the new schools and books and all the other things. I just say to the member for Sturt: that is exactly what this legislation does—it delivers to families when they need it. But of course the member for Sturt, along with everybody over there, just wanted to say no, and they opposed the legislation yesterday.

While they were trying every single trick in the book, every trick they could try yesterday to prevent families getting this money, this government has got on with it and will make sure that the Schoolkids Bonus is delivered to those parents that need it. The real test is going to be for the Leader of the Opposition tonight. Tonight we will
hear how the Leader of the Opposition is going to justify giving billions of dollars to Gina Rinehart and Clive Palmer while he says no to families.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The minister is straying!

Ms MACKLIN: Last year the Leader of the Opposition talked about forgotten families. Well, he certainly has forgotten them.

Member for Dobell

Ms JULIE BISHOP (Curtin—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (14:28): My question is to the Prime Minister. Given the Prime Minister's previous statement to the House that she has had private discussions with the member for Dobell, and her reference to media reports that she spoke to the member for Dobell on 28 April—

Honourable members interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Could the Deputy Leader of the Opposition resume her seat. I am going to ask her to start her question again. I would very much like to hear this question, for various reasons. I ask the Deputy Leader of the Opposition to recommence her question—and she will be heard in silence.

Ms JULIE BISHOP: My question is to the Prime Minister. Given that the Prime Minister has made a previous statement to the House that she has had private discussions with the member for Dobell, and her reference to media reports that she spoke to the member for Dobell on 28 April about his status as a member of parliament, is it the case that the issue of the payment of the member for Dobell's legal fees was raised with her by the member for Dobell in that conversation on 28 April?

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:29): No, it was not.

Budget

Mr MELHAM (Banks) (14:29): My question is to the Treasurer. Why is it important to clearly set out policies in returning the budget to surplus and spread the benefits of the mining boom to all Australians?

Mr SWAN (Lilley—Deputy Prime Minister and Treasurer) (14:30): I thank the member for Banks for that very important question. It is important to bring the budget back to surplus because we should be coming back to surplus when growth is returning to trend and when our economic fundamentals are as strong as they are. As I was saying before, you build up surpluses when growth returns; you build up those surpluses for the good times.

But what you also have to do is make sure that you spread the benefits of prosperity right around your country, because not everybody is in the fast lane of the mining boom. But coming back to surplus was made much more difficult in this budget because of revenue write-downs. That is why we had to find $34 billion worth of savings. Really hard savings were found in this budget, because that is what you have got to do if you are serious about coming back to surplus. And by coming back to surplus you can give the Reserve Bank much more room and much more flexibility when it comes to interest rates, and you can build up that buffer for the future.

It is this discipline that has given us the triple-A credit rating from the three major rating agencies, something that Peter Costello and those opposite could never achieve at any time they were in government. You can only come back to surplus and you can only invest in the future if you have fully-costed policies.

There is a very big test for the Leader of the Opposition tonight: are we going to see
fully costed policies or not? Is he going to explain how he is going to fund everything he claims to support in this budget? Is he going to be really clear about what he is going to do when it comes to the Family Tax Benefit and how that will be funded? Is he going to be really clear about how he is going to fill in the $70 billion budget bottom line hole that has been announced by the shadow Treasurer on morning TV? I think he ought to tell us that tonight, because this is the advice he gave our party back in 2003. He said this: 'Let the Leader of the Opposition tell us what he would do. Let him tell us exactly how he would pay for it.' We should be hearing that tonight, but I do not think that I will hold my breath waiting to hear it, because with or without Peter Costello the economic credentials of those opposite are wrecked.

**Member for Dobell**

*Mr Pyne* (Sturt—Manager of Opposition Business) (14:32): My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to the recent statement by a man she once described as having a bold and articulate vision for the Labor Party, Mark Latham. He said:

The tragedy for progressive politics is that there are scores of Craig Thomsons across the labour movement. He is the cultural norm, not an isolated peccadillo.

What steps has the Prime Minister taken since the matters in relation to misuse of union funds by the member for Dobell were first aired in April to assure herself that no other member of the team has ever received a personal benefit from a trade union or trade union official?

*Mr Albanese:* Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The standing orders and *House of Representatives Practice* are very clear about casting aspersions upon members of parliament and reflecting on members of parliament. The question that was just raised by the Manager of Opposition Business attempted very clearly to cast an aspersion on every single member of the Labor Party caucus on this side and it should be ruled out of order. It is not in order to come in and just do general sprays like that under parliamentary privilege, particularly when this member will not say what he knows about James Ashby.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The Manager of Opposition Business will resume his seat. The question was in order. The Prime Minister will answer the question.

*Ms Gillard* (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:34): In answer to the member's question, I will make my own decisions and not take advice from the former leader he refers to. But I would be recommending to the opposition that it takes some advice from one of its former leaders, Prime Minister Howard, who said in respect of budget matters and opposition leader replies: 'A litany of negatives is no substitute for an alternative economic plan.'

*Mr Pyne:* Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I asked a very serious question about what steps the Prime Minister had taken to assure herself that no member of her team was in a similar position—

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! There is no point of order. The Prime Minister will return to the question.

*Ms Gillard:* I am dealing with the question in the way in which it was put—to play the politics, not anything serious, as we know from this member. John Howard was right about two things. He was right about the member for Sturt and he was right when he said that an opposition leader fails the test of a budget reply if there is not one positive word, not one positive thought, not one alternative idea—

*Honourable members interjecting*—
Ms GILLARD: I conclude by saying that that former leader's words were: 'You have got to present an alternative'—and you had better tonight.

Mr PYNE (Sturt—Manager of Opposition Business) (14:36): Madam Deputy Speaker, I ask the supplementary question, since the Prime Minister did not answer that question. What steps has the Prime Minister taken since the matters in relation to the member for Dobell were first raised in April 2009 to satisfy herself that no member of her team has engaged in similar misuse of union funds? (Time expired)

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! It is the same question and I am ruling it out of order.

Economy

Ms LIVERMORE (Capricornia) (14:36): My question is to the Assistant Treasurer and Minister Assisting for Deregulation. Why is it important to have a credible plan for managing the economy and supporting hardworking Australian families?

Mr BRADBURY (Lindsay—Assistant Treasurer and Minister Assisting for Deregulation) (14:37): I thank the member for Capricornia for her question. I am proud to be a part of a government that is supporting hardworking Australian families, and I know the member for Capricornia feels the same way. One of the best things we can do to support families is to have a strong economy. The unemployment figures today, showing that unemployment in Australia is at 4.9 per cent, are further evidence of how strong the Australian economy is.

But of course we understand that there are some families who are doing it tough. That is why in the budget that we have handed down we have provided assistance to working families. We have provided that assistance in the form of the schoolkids bonus but also in the form of additional payments to families. In addition to that, by returning the budget to surplus we know that we are giving the Reserve Bank the room that it needs to cut interest rates if that is what it thinks is appropriate—and, of course, that is important for Australian families. That is what this government believes managing the economy is about. It is about low unemployment, low interest rates and providing assistance to hardworking Australian families.

But of course the opposition do not care about Australian families. We saw that last night when we came forward with a plan to provide assistance to hardworking Australian families and they opposed it. They opposed it not once, not twice, but six times. Six times they opposed our plan, and they opposed it on the basis that the Leader of the Opposition said that families could not be trusted to manage their own budgets. Well, if Australian families cannot be trusted to manage their own budgets, why should Australian families trust the Leader of the Opposition to manage the nation's budget—and why should they do that when he has got a $70 billion budget crater and he has no plans to fill it? That is why he has no economic credibility.

Those on the other side are very concerned about the lack of credibility of the Leader of the Opposition. That is why I was not surprised to see reports in the papers today that there is a cunning and devious plan to parachute Peter Costello back into parliament. They figure that is about the only way they might be able to give their economic leadership a little bit of credibility.
Honourable members interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Assistant Treasurer will return to the question.

Mr BRADBURY: Unfortunately, it looks as though what was reported might not be happening—we will not be getting Abbott and Costello; we are just stuck with the Three Stooges.

Ms Julie Bishop: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Previously that phrase has been deemed unparliamentary and I ask that he withdraw.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Deputy Leader of the Opposition is correct. That has been ruled as out of order in this context, and I will ask the Assistant Treasurer to withdraw.

Opposition members interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Everybody on that side might walk the plank very quickly if they do not show some respect to the chair. The Assistant Treasurer has the call.

Mr BRADBURY: I withdraw.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I thank the Assistant Treasurer.

Ms Livermore (Capricornia) (14:41): Madam Deputy Speaker, I ask a supplementary question. Further to the answer from the Assistant Treasurer, I ask why it is important to make sure that these plans that he described are transparent and properly costed.

Mr BRADBURY (Lindsay—Assistant Treasurer and Minister Assisting for Deregulation) (14:41): I once more thank the member for Capricornia. The government has laid out clear and costed plans, responsible plans, to return the budget to surplus—and that is out there for all to see. But of course tonight it will be the Leader of the Opposition's opportunity to come forward and show us exactly how he intends to fill his $70 billion budget crater. It will be interesting to watch, because it really has been something in the nature of slapstick that we have seen.

The last time we saw the Leader of the Opposition go to an election and attempt to cost his policies, we saw him go to an election with an $11 billion black hole. But not only did he go to the election with an $11 billion black hole, he also went with a set of costings that had been costed by a dodgy audit. It was a dodgy audit. The irresponsible spending that we have seen from the opposition and their failure to come up with a credible plan to cost their policies mean that this evening the Leader of the Opposition will have to either come forward and acknowledge that he does not have the money to deliver the plans that he says he is committed to or come clean with the Australian people about exactly which payments and which services he intends to cut. If he does not announce tonight which ones he is going to cut then the Australian people will have to assume—(Time expired)

Distinguished visitors

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke) (14:42): I wish to inform the House that we have present in the gallery this afternoon members of the United Kingdom Foreign Affairs Committee. On behalf of the House I extend a very warm welcome to them. On this occasion, I am not sure if we should be following your 30-minute question time or not, but we thank you very much for attending the parliament today.

Honourable members: Hear, hear!

Questions without notice

Member for Dobell

Mr Keenan (Stirling) (14:43): My question is to the Prime Minister. Can the Prime Minister guarantee that no member of
her staff has held discussions or meetings with New South Wales Labor Party officials in relation to the arrangements between the member for Dobell and the New South Wales Labor Party to pay his legal fees and provide him with loans?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: In respect of this matter, I think *House of Representatives Practice* is very clear:

- statements, activities, actions or decisions of the Minister's own party or of its conferences, officials, representatives or candidates, or of those of other parties, including opposition parties—

are ruled out of order.

Mr Pyne: I rise on a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. This is not a question about the Labor Party; it is a question about her office and what role her office has played in the arrangements between the member for Dobell and the New South Wales Labor Party. It is about her staff.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: My apologies. In the hubbub I actually did not hear the word 'staff'. In that respect, yes, the Prime Minister must answer as she is responsible for the actions of her staff. The Prime Minister.

Opposition members interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: It is a very serious question and the 'death stare' will apply quite happily to anybody who does not want to listen to their leader give his address-in-reply this evening. The Prime Minister has the call.

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:45): The matters raised are not my responsibility, my staff's responsibility or the department's responsibility.

Pacific Highway

Ms SAFFIN (Page) (14:45): My question is to the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport. Will the minister please outline the government's commitment to the duplication of the Pacific Highway, and why is it important that infrastructure commitments are met with funding commitments?

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House and Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) (14:46): I thank the member for Page for her question. Tomorrow I will be up on the North Coast with the member for Page and the member for Richmond outlining our commitment to deliver the full duplication of the Pacific Highway by 2016, something that has been championed by many in this chamber over a long period of time but something that has only been delivered by this government. That is why on Tuesday night we put $3.56 billion into the Nation Building Program, which will be made available on a dollar-for-dollar basis to the New South Wales government for the Pacific Highway.

I am asked why is it important that commitments are met with funding—with actual plans to get them done. I am reminded that recently the Leader of the Opposition has had discussions about infrastructure. He does not have commitments, of course; he has aspirations. Well, you cannot drive on an aspiration. In his op-ed in the *Daily Telegraph* on 5 March he announced over $50 billion in aspirations for Sydney's infrastructure. It included building a road tunnel under Mosman, in his electorate. That has suddenly become a national priority. All this on top of a $70 billion black hole that he starts with. No wonder he did not match it.

But there is something in common here, which is that it is only Labor governments that actually do something about funding infrastructure, not just talking about infrastructure. We know that for the Pacific Highway for the life of the Howard
government they contributed $1.3 billion while the state government contributed $2.5 billion during that same period. Yet now, in spite of the very clear statements made by the Premier of New South Wales prior to the election in March 2011 that he was absolutely committed to delivering funding, we have support for the program being withdrawn. Despite the fact that they were completely critical, the Premier, the Deputy Premier and the now minister for roads gave very specific commitments about matching funding. Indeed, in last year's budget we put in $750 million based upon matched funding. On budget night last year the state government said they would exceed that matching, but now $300 million has disappeared from that commitment.

We need to get on with the job of building the Pacific Highway full duplication. The fact is you cannot drive on an aspiration; it does need funding and it is about time the coalition and the National Party local members, who had transport ministers for all those years, get on with the job of telling their coalition colleagues in New South Wales to fund this road. (Time expired)

**Member for Dobell**

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP (Mackellar) (14:49): My question is to the Special Minister of State and Minister for the Public Service and Integrity. I remind the minister of the $267,000 of Health Service Union members' funds that were used in the 2007 Labor campaign for the electorate of Dobell and not declared. What steps has the minister responsible for political parties, unions and associated entities taken to satisfy himself that the Labor Party has in all other respects complied with the Electoral Act in relation to financial support from the Health Services Union in Lindsay and La Trobe?

Mr GRAY (Brand—Special Minister of State and Minister for the Public Service and Integrity) (14:50): I thank the shadow minister for her question. I received the Fair Work Australia report on Monday evening and on Tuesday morning I referred to the Australian Electoral Commissioner questions that were raised in it and asked for advice from the Electoral Commissioner as to whether or not there were any matters that should be considered by the government. The Electoral Commissioner—and the Department of Finance and Deregulation, for that matter—will report back to me on that when they have concluded their investigation.

**National Disability Insurance Scheme**

Ms PARKE (Fremantle) (14:50): My question is to the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and the Minister for Disability Reform. Will the minister update the House on progress towards a National Disability Insurance Scheme and how will this benefit people with a disability, their families and carers?

Ms MACKLIN (Jagajaga—Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Minister for Disability Reform) (14:51): I thank the member for Fremantle very much for her question and for all of the advocacy she does not just in her own electorate but in many parts of Australia for people with disabilities, their carers and their families. I think it is true to say that she along with many, many others understand that people with disability, their families and their carers have been waiting for this change for a very, very long time.

I think it is also the case that for people with disability—and so much so for carers as well—often they wake up every day to a day of waiting. Whether it is waiting at the end of the phone for a respite place or waiting for a new wheelchair, we, I think, do understand
just how critical it is that we get on with the job that we have at hand. It is why in this very, very significant Labor budget we have for the first time put the money down to build the first stage of a National Disability Insurance Scheme. It is something that so many people have been waiting for and working for for a long time, and we have committed $1 billion for this first stage. It will mean that around 20,000 people over the next two years in, we estimate, four locations around the country will be part of the first stage of a National Disability Insurance Scheme. We will work with the states and territories on the rollout of the National Disability Insurance Scheme, on the design work that is so important and also on the funding and governance that is necessary for the scheme.

We are delivering this new scheme one year ahead of the schedule set out in the Productivity Commission report, and that is because we understand just how critical it is to address the long wait that people with disability and their carers have had over a long time. That said, this government has been getting on with delivering other significant reforms for people with disability, including a very significant boost to funding for disability care and support to the states and territories; we have been doubling the money going to the states and territories. We delivered historic increases in the pension, the disability support pension and the carer payment. We are delivering much-needed increases in pay for community service workers and early intervention services for children with disability. These changes are making a difference but the NDIS is now here to stay. (Time expired)

Member for Dobell

Mr SCHULTZ (Hume) (14:54): My question is to the Assistant Treasurer. Has the minister referred the findings of the Fair Work Australia report about the member for Dobell to the tax commissioner to determine whether all appropriate tax has been paid in relation to the almost $500,000 of personal benefits he received?

Mr Albanese: Madam Deputy Speaker, on a point of order: the tax commissioner makes his own decisions and is not responsible for references from ministers. If those opposite do not understand 'independent statutory authority' it is not my fault.

Mr Pyne: Madam Deputy Speaker, the question was directed to the Assistant Treasurer; it was not directed to the Leader of the House. If the Assistant Treasurer wishes to say that, that is a matter for him.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Manager of Opposition Business will resume his seat. The Leader of the House is entitled, as you are, to take points of order in respect of questions, and I allowed him to do that. The question is in order and the Assistant Treasurer has the call.

Mr BRADBURY (Lindsay—Assistant Treasurer and Minister Assisting for Deregulation) (14:55): I thank the member for his question. As the Leader of the House indicated, the Australian Taxation Office is an independent statutory authority, and it is entirely appropriate that that be the case. I think we all agree it is appropriate that bodies such as this, and the various investigatory and compliance arrangements they pursue, should be at arm's length from government. To the extent that this report is already in the public domain, I suspect that it would be a matter of consideration to the extent that other matters in the public domain are, as a matter of course, matters for the taxation commissioner. It is always open to any other authority or any other individual to refer the matter. If they choose to do that
then I am sure the commissioner will consider the matter.

**Carbon Pricing**

Mr GEORGANAS (Hindmarsh) (14:56): My question is to the Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency. Minister, is it important to be transparent and responsible on the impact of carbon pricing on household electricity prices and the cost of living?

Mr COMBET (Charlton—Minister for Industry and Innovation and Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency) (14:56): I thank the member for Hindmarsh for his question. It is extremely important that there is transparency about the impact of carbon pricing on electricity prices. In recent weeks regulators in jurisdictions such as New South Wales and Queensland have confirmed that the Treasury modelling of this impact is bang on what the Treasury said it would be. Indeed, there is an average impact on households across the nation of only $3.30 a week and the government is making available household assistance that averages $10.10 a week across households in Australia—$3.30 versus $10.10. That household assistance is delivered via tax cuts from 1 July this year involving a trebling of the tax-free threshold and an increase in the pension of $338 a year for a single pensioner—and $250 of that increase will be delivered over May-June to single pensioners. Many self-funded retirees will receive benefits, and a supplementary allowance for youth, the unemployed and single parents, to be paid in the next financial year, was also announced by the Treasurer in the budget.

This government is acting to relieve cost-of-living pressures on Australian householders. Up against this are all sorts of misrepresentation. The Leader of the Opposition has claimed there would be unimaginable cost increases. He has claimed that electricity prices will rise by as much as 30 per cent. Today in Western Australia the Liberal Premier, Colin Barnett, is trying to misrepresent the fact that he has already increased electricity prices for Western Australian households by 57 per cent since he came to power, and now he is increasing them by another 15 per cent and trying to blame the federal government. In fact, the electricity price rise, averaged across Western Australian households, is less than $3 a week and the federal government is delivering an average of $10.10 a week in assistance.

The shadow Treasurer has been tweeting on this issue this morning indicating that, if the opposition came to power, they will cut electricity prices. The question for the Leader of the Opposition is: will he tell us in his address tonight whether he is going to cut electricity prices? Rule it in or rule it out. Let us have the facts.

**Member for Dobell**

Mr PYNE (Sturt—Manager of Opposition Business) (14:59): My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to her previous answer to a question from the member for Stirling today, where she said, ‘The matters raised are not my responsibility, my staff’s responsibility or the department’s responsibility.’ Regardless of whose responsibility these matters are, can she categorically confirm that no-one in her office has had any involvement in the arrangements between the member for Dobell and the New South Wales Labor Party?

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (15:00): In answer to the member’s question, these are matters for the member for Dobell and the New South Wales branch of the Labor Party. I played no part in this matter and I am not responsible for this matter. My
staff are not responsible for this matter. The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet is not responsible for this matter either.

MOTIONS

Member for Dobell

Mr PYNE (Sturt—Manager of Opposition Business) (15:00): Madam Deputy Speaker, I seek leave to move a motion, and the motion is: 'That this House calls on the Prime Minister to outline in the parliament today all involvement that the New South Wales Labor Party has had in providing financial and in-kind support to the Member for Dobell since the story concerning his misuse of union funds first broke in the Fairfax press on 8 April 2009, including but not limited to the settlement of the cost of defamation proceedings, the legal costs involved in those proceedings, the preparation of his response to the Fair Work Australia inquiry and all other matters.'

Leave not granted.

Mr PYNE: I move:

That so much of the standing and sessional orders be suspended as would prevent the Member for Sturt moving immediately—That That this House calls on the Prime Minister to outline in the Parliament today all involvement that the New South Wales Labor Party has had in providing financial and 'in kind' support to the Member for Dobell since the story concerning his misuse of union funds first broke in the Fairfax press on 8 April 2009, including but not limited to the settlement of the cost of defamation proceedings, the legal costs involved in those proceedings, the preparation of his response to the Fair Work Australia inquiry and all other matters.'

Mr Laming: Where are you going? We're talking to you!

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): The member for Bowman then left the chamber.

Mr PYNE: Standing orders must be suspended and this motion must be debated because the answers the Prime Minister gave in question time today could only be described as evasive and tricky. The Prime Minister must explain every aspect of the Labor Party's deal with the member for Dobell because, without the deal, she would not be Prime Minister. The Prime Minister must explain every aspect of the Labor Party's arrangements with the member for Dobell because, by keeping the member for Dobell in parliament, by paying his legal fees and avoiding his bankruptcy, she maintains his vote in this parliament. Without that vote, the government would fall and she would not be Prime Minister.

Nothing could be more important for us to debate after question time today than the Prime Minister's hold on power with the pillar of support that is the member for Dobell. This is properly a matter for the parliament to consider. The reason why the parliament should consider it can be found in the admission in the first article about this matter, in a long-forgotten story in the Daily Telegraph in August 2011 by Andrew Clennell, repeated today in the News Ltd press. When Labor sources were asked why they paid the legal costs of the member for Dobell they said:

We paid because if he hadn't he'd be bankrupt ...

Why is that important? It is important because if he was bankrupt he would not be able to sit in the chamber, and if he did not sit in the chamber and vote for the Labor Party this Prime Minister would not hold office today.

So we are in a very murky area. Some people would call it a quite inappropriate conflict of interest for the member for
Dobell—him relying entirely for staying out of bankruptcy on the deal that he has made with the Australian Labor Party in New South Wales to pay what is hundreds of thousands of dollars in legal fees.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): The member for Sturt will return to the motion before the chair.

Mr PYNE: The reason why standing orders need to be suspended is that the Prime Minister in question time today was given the opportunity on at least two occasions to outline what she and her office knew about the arrangements with the New South Wales Labor Party and she absolutely declined to do so. She came up with a form of words about how it was not her responsibility, her staff's responsibility or the department's responsibility. But she was not asked about whose responsibility it was; she was asked what she knew about these arrangements and whether she could guarantee that no member of her office was involved in the arrangements between the member for Dobell and the New South Wales Labor Party.

Those of us who have been in this House for some time know exactly why the Prime Minister declined—because the answer was that she could not guarantee that her office was not involved in these arrangements with the New South Wales Labor Party. She knew what we all know, and that is that this has been part of the protection racket around the member for Dobell for three years. For three years the Labor Party has been paying the legal fees of the member for Dobell to stave off his inevitable bankruptcy. They admitted it in the paper two years ago and they admitted it today in the News Ltd press.

Mark Latham showed that he certainly knows his political party when he said: The tragedy for progressive politics is that there are scores of Craig Thomson across the labour movement. He is the cultural norm, not an isolated peccadillo.

The party that gave us Tom Domican has now given us Craig Thomson. It is a matter for the parliament to consider, because nothing could be more important—

Mr Albanese: Madam Deputy Speaker, I would ask that that be withdrawn.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Manager of Opposition Business has stepped over the line and will withdraw.

Mr PYNE: I will withdraw in the interests of allowing the debate to continue.

Firstly, the member for Dobell rode on the backs of the 77,000 members of the Health Services Union, taking their money and spending their money on personal matters—on fine dining, on overseas trips and on his election campaign. Now he is riding on the backs of the 8,500 members of the New South Wales Labor Party, who pay their dues, stand at the polling booths, put up the election posters, come to the fundraisers and buy Johno Johnson's raffle tickets. Yet their money—Johno Johnson's raffle tickets—is being spent today on the legal fees of the member for Dobell. How ashamed he must be. The standing orders must be suspended so that the Prime Minister can come into the House and outline, for the good of the parliament, the arrangements between the New South Wales Labor Party and the member for Dobell that keep the Prime Minister clinging to power.

What do we know already about this matter? We know that in 2011 New South
Wales Labor paid $150,000 of undeclared funds to settle the member for Dobell's legal actions against the Fairfax press. We know that New South Wales Labor has paid an undisclosed sum, since September last year, for the member for Dobell's legal fees in relation to the Fair Work Australia inquiry into him—an undisclosed sum which only came to light today, again when it was reported in the News Limited press.

Last night, the member for Dobell updated the Register of Members' Interests when he got an inquiry from the media about it. His story is that he only got the money two weeks ago. The New South Wales Labor Party story is that they have been paying since last September. Those of us who are lawyers know that we do not usually bill every eight months. We tend to bill on work in progress every month. So the possibility that Holding Redlich waited eight months to register their invoice to the New South Wales Labor Party is utterly unbelievable. I do not stand up for lawyers every day, but they are very good billers, I can assure you of that. In fact, only on 20 April, Holding Redlich was writing to the Senate Legislation Committee on Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. They were being paid by the New South Wales Labor Party in order to stop the production—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Manager of Opportunity business will desist using a prop at this point. He will put it down.

Mr PYNE: I will. The reason they wrote that letter to the inquiry was to ask the inquiry not to release the Fair Work Australia inquiry report. So even on 20 April, paid for by the New South Wales Labor Party, they were trying to cover up the Fair Work Australia inquiry report on behalf of their political masters in the Labor Party. That is what the Prime Minister needs to explain to the House. She needs to explain what her office knew about this and why it is that in the same week that she is claiming to take credit for the suspension of the member of Dobell the New South Wales Labor Party is paying lawyers fees to write letters to try and cover up the Fair Work Australia inquiry.

We also know that in 2011 the New South Wales Labor Party was making loans to the member for Dobell of undisclosed sums in order to keep him from going into bankruptcy. I yet again agree with the former Leader of the Opposition Mark Latham when he wrote about this scandal involving the member for Dobell:

I cannot imagine anything more gut-wrenching for the party faithful, the salt-of-the-earth types who grew up with the legends of working class decency under Ben Chifley and John Curtin. I find it hard to believe that the member for Grayndler can get up again and defend the member for Dobell. Perhaps the so-called fabled light on the hill of Ben Chifley—the Leader of the Opposition referred to it recently—has turned into the red light on the hill, to which all the union leaders are running with their credit cards!

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Is the motion seconded?

Ms JULIE BISHOP (Curtin—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (15:11): I second the motion. Standing orders must be suspended to provide the Prime Minister with an opportunity to give a full explanation about her actions, and the actions of the party she leads, in support of the member for Dobell.

I made the point yesterday that it is a matter of the gravest importance that one of the elected members of parliament has been found, by an independent government authority, to have fraudulently funded the campaign that enabled him to take his place...
These findings are not gossip. These are not the accusations or wild allegations that come from a factional battle within the union movement. A quasi-judicial arm of the government, established by the Prime Minister herself, has made these very serious findings against the member for Dobell after an investigation and an audit that took more than three years.

The Fair Work Australia website reminds us that Fair Work Australia is part of Australia’s national workplace relations system, which also includes the Fair Work Ombudsman and the Fair Work Divisions of the Federal Court of Australia and the Federal Magistrates Court of Australia. This is a quasi-judicial organisation, and it appointed an official investigator, Mr Terry Nassios, who produced a report of more than 1,100 pages with findings as to the activities of the HSU and the member for Dobell.

This report contains a litany of legal and industrial breaches, abuses of power, and misappropriation of funds for personal gain, including the procurement of prostitutes. These are findings. That is why standing orders must be suspended. These are not allegations or innuendo; these are findings that require a court to impose penalties.

Mr Albanese: That's right. That's the point, you fool!

Ms JULIE BISHOP: The matter casts a pall over the integrity of this parliament because this report has found—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Deputy Leader of the Opportunity will resume her seat. The Leader of the House will withdraw.

Mr Albanese: I withdraw.

Ms JULIE BISHOP: This matter casts a pall over the integrity of this parliament because the report found that more than $270,000 was misappropriated to fund the election campaign of the member for Dobell. He sits here in the face of that finding of fraud to win his right to be in this place.

Standing orders must be suspended because it is important for the reputation of the parliament as a whole that the Prime Minister reveal all the support provided to the member for Dobell by any member of the federal parliamentary Labor Party and the New South Wales Labor Party, whether she or any member of her government was consulted about that support and whether she lobbied for any support to be extended to him.

Standing orders must be suspended because it is also important for the broader community. The Fair Work Australia report found that the member for Dobell’s misappropriation—his misuse—of more than $500,000 collected from lowly-paid workers in the healthcare sector was during this time as national secretary of the Health Services Union. However, ongoing support that could exceed even that amount has been extended by New South Wales Labor to the member for Dobell, and it is safe to assume that the majority of funds provided to the New South Wales Labor Party organisation came from union fees collected from workers across the state, including in healthcare and other industries. The battlers who look to the union movement to protect their interests must be appalled.

Standing orders must be suspended because the member for Dobell has been found by an official government agency to have misappropriated hundreds of thousands of dollars, yet the Labor Party, funded by the unions, has extended potentially hundreds of thousands of dollars more in supporting him. There is only one possible answer for this situation: the Prime Minister knows that, if the member Dobell were unable to pay his legal bills, he could potentially be declared bankrupt and his vote would be lost to her government. The Prime Minister has a very
personal interest in keeping the member here.

The legitimacy of the member for Dobell’s place in the parliament must be seriously questioned due to the findings of Fair Work Australia, and the role of any member of this government in supporting his ongoing presence in this parliament must be explained. The member for Denison has said in the past that his support for the government may be withdrawn in the event of serious misconduct; the members for Lyne and New England have said maladministration or corruption. There are few allegations more serious than this government’s being complicit, and I say to those members: there is a line that has been crossed here, and it is time to support this motion.

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House and Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) (15:16): On the day of the budget reply, this is the priority of the opposition, because it is their priority each and every day—each and every day getting down in the gutter. But today we saw a step further: today we saw questions and statements from the Manager of Opposition Business which slurred each and every member on this side of the chamber and each and every trade union leader.

I thank the Deputy Leader of the Opposition for her contribution, because it indeed belled the cat when she said very simply, ‘These are matters that are to be determined by a court: not by parliamentary members; by a court.’ It is important because, when there are serious issues, the judicial system determines them, not parliamentarians based upon party allegiance. That is an important separation of powers which is the basis of fundamental rights in this country, and it is important.

I refer to an article of 12 January 1978 in the *Daily Telegraph*, just as the Manager of Opposition Business spoke about past articles in the *Daily Telegraph*. The headline reads: ‘Assault raised laughs and jeers, woman tells court.’ I table it. I refer to a follow-up article on 13 January 1978, the headline of which reads: ‘Touching charge by girl fails.’ The Leader of the Opposition had accusations made against him, they went through proper processes in court and he was found not guilty. That is the appropriate way we deal with these issues. It was not determined by Sydney Uni SRC based upon the numbers at Sydney Uni SRC; it was determined properly.

Ms Julie Bishop: Madam Deputy Speaker, the response of the Leader of Government Business should be relevant to the motion. Matters that involve somebody who was not—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Deputy Leader of the Opposition will resume her seat.

Ms Julie Bishop: I am sorry, but—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Deputy Leader of the Opposition will resume her seat or she will leave the chamber. If anyone is going to be talking about speaking to the motion that I have now sat through for three days, then I think I have allowed a great deal of latitude—more to the opposition, who have moved it—but I will ask the Leader of the House to refer to the motion before us.

Mr ALBANESE: We should not support this motion—we should not support this suspension of standing orders—not just because we should get on with the business of government but also because of the rank hypocrisy that we have seen from those opposite.

The Leader of the Opposition was also pinged by the *Daily Telegraph*, a fine newspaper, in an article, "$710,000 in
Abbott loans not declared—Liberals cash crisis. For two years he did not declare the loan, and he has the hypocrisy to come in here and authorise these attacks. He does not have the guts to do it himself, but he comes in here and authorises these attacks. He is a bloke who has been negligent in terms of his pecuniary interests, a bloke who has sat in the dock of the court being charged with serious offences, a bloke who knows how important the separation of powers is.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Leader of the House will not go to those issues again; he will go to the motion before the chair.

Mr ALBANESE: The reason we should not do this is that perhaps this afternoon we can hear from the Manager of Opposition Business about what he knew about the issue with James Ashby. In interview after interview he got the bucket out for the member for Fisher, someone they have preselected nine times.

On 29 April he said, 'I had no specific knowledge of these claims before that,' the same words used by the Leader of the Opposition. When asked about his relationship with Mr Ashby, he said:

I walk into the reception in the Speaker's office with Speaker's staffers there … I've said hello to all of them, so I passed the time of day with all of them.'

But on 1 May—

Ms Julie Bishop: Madam Deputy Speaker, on a point of order: I take note of what you said about how the coalition have approached this, but not once have we spoken about people outside the confines of the motion.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The Deputy Leader of the Opposition will resume her seat. When she is told to resume her seat, she should stop talking and sit down. It is quite disrespectful. The Leader of the House will refer to the motion before the chair in respect of this issue.

Mr ALBANESE: I will indeed, Madam Deputy Speaker, because if this suspension motion is not carried, we could get on. We could continue question time and perhaps we could explore exactly what the Manager of Opposition Business's involvement is with this, because we have heard the stories change bit by bit. He said he had just passed the time with all of them. Then on 2 May he did not remember having asked for Mr Ashby's number, then later on he said he could well have, then he said he met him at least three times and then he said he had not spoken to James Ashby on the phone.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the House will resume his seat. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition will resume her seat.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The Deputy Leader of the Opposition will resume her seat. I know what her point of order is and I will ask the Leader of the House to refer to the motion before the chair.

Mr ALBANESE: The motion before the chair is to suspend standing orders so that someone can come in here and talk about issues with regard to what the Manager of Opposition Business suggests they should—to direct a member of parliament to answer particular questions. The Manager of Opposition Business should not be supported on this, because he himself will not answer any questions about these issues at all. Today on ABC NewsRadio he was asked seven times—I will spare you the beginning of it but his basic answer was, 'I'm not going to play these games, Marius.' Asked again, he said, 'It's irrelevant.' Asked again, he said, 'I'm not playing these games, Marius.' He would not answer anything today and yet he
comes in here and moves a suspension of standing orders about these issues.

If we are going to go down this road, we will have suspensions of standing orders about the member for Indi and court cases that are being conducted with regard to her involvement. We will have suspensions of standing orders about the Manager of Opposition Business, about the Deputy Leader of the Opposition—about all the others that we know were involved in the Ashby incident. We now have a new explanation. They have gone from specific knowledge—they got pinged on that one—to now all having a different script. The Leader of the Opposition is now saying, 'The first I knew of all these things was when I read the newspapers on the Saturday morning.'

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the House will resume his seat.

Mr ALBANESE: So they get 15 minutes to open the batting for the—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Leader of the House is in trouble now; he will resume his seat. The member for Cowper has the call.

Mr HARTSUYKER: Madam Deputy Speaker, on a point of order: he is clearing defying your ruling.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Cowper will resume his seat. It is my determination if anyone is defying my call. What I have actually asked the Leader of the House to do—and I am sick of the armchair experts assisting along the way—is to refer to the motion before the chair.

Mr ALBANESE: I will try to do my best, Madam Deputy Speaker. I will try to do my best—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: No, you will not try to do your best; you will.

Mr ALBANESE: even though the mover and seconder did not talk about why standing orders needed to be suspended. The reason why standing orders should not be suspended is so that we can debate the budget and so that the Leader of the Opposition can do his budget reply. I do not think they have even woken up yet. By moving a motion to suspend standing orders, we have not even carried the procedural resolution which allows the Leader of the Opposition to do his budget reply tonight. If this motion is carried, you will knock over the Leader of the Opposition's budget reply. They just do not pay attention. They are so concerned with being in the gutter, they just do not pay attention. (Time expired)

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The time for debate has expired. The question is that the motion be agreed to.

The House divided. [15:31]

(The Deputy Speaker—Hon. Anna Burke)

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AYES

Abbott, AJ  
Andrews, KJ  
Baldwin, RC  
Bishop, BK  
Briggs, JE  
Chester, D  
Ciobo, SM  
Coulton, M (teller)  
Dutton, PC  
Fletcher, PW  
Frydenberg, JA  
Gash, J  
Haase, BW  
Hawke, AG  
Hunt, GA  
Jensen, DG  
Keenan, M  
Ley, SP  
Marino, NB  
Matheson, RG  
Mirabella, S  
Moylan, JE  
O'Dowd, KD  
Prentice, J  
Ramsey, RE  

Alexander, JG  
Andrews, KL  
Billson, BF  
Bishop, J  
Broadbent, RE  
Christensen, GR  
Cob, JK  
Crok, AJ  
Entsch, WG  
Forrester, J  
Gamboro, T  
Griggs, NL  
Hartsuyker, L  
Hockey, JB  
Irons, SJ  
Jones, ET  
Kelly, C  
Macfarlane, J  
Markus, LE  
McCormack, MF  
Morrison, SJ  
Neville, PC  
O'Dwyer, KM  
Pyne, CM  
Randall, DJ  

CHamber
Question negatived.

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

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House and Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) (15:35): Madam Deputy Speaker, documents are tabled in accordance with the list circulated to honourable members earlier today. Full details of the documents will be recorded in the Votes and Proceedings and Hansard.

I move:

That the House take note of all documents:

Australian River Co. Limited and its consolidated entities—Report for the period 1 December 2010 to 30 November 2011.


Question agreed to.

Debate adjourned.

BUSINESS

Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House and Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) (15:36): by leave—I move:

That standing order 31 (automatic adjournment of the House) be suspended for the sitting on Thursday, 10 May 2012 and at that sitting, after the Leader of the Opposition completes his reply to the Budget speech, the House automatically stand adjourned until 10 a.m. on Monday 21 May 2012 unless the Speaker or, in the event of the Speaker being unavailable, the Deputy Speaker, fixes an alternative day or hour of meeting.

PAIRS

Somlyay, AM  Rowland, MA
Washer, MJ  Marles, RD
For the benefit of honourable members, the proposal is that the parliament will sit until around six o'clock, have an adjournment and then come back at 7:30 pm for the Leader of the Opposition's budget reply, after which it will adjourn automatically.

Question agreed to.

COMMITIES

Selection of Bills Committee Report

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke) (15:37): I present the Selection Committee’s report No. 51 relating to the consideration of bills. The report will be printed in today’s Hansard. Copies of the report have been placed on the table.

The report read as follows—

Report relating to private Members’ business and the consideration of bills introduced 8 to 9 May 2012

1. The committee met in private session on 8 and 9 May 2012.
2. The committee determined that the following bills be referred to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration for inquiry and report:
   • Migration (Visa Evidence) Charge Bill 2012; and
   • Migration (Visa Evidence) Charge (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2012.

REASONS FOR REFERRAL/PRINCIPAL ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION: The explanatory memorandum does not explain how many visas will be affected by this charge nor what visa sub-classes are affected. For example, will a child visa need to be evidenced, for example so that the child can go to school? Isn’t this another barrier to participation? Nor is a reason given why this extremely high charge of $250 is necessary. According to the explanatory memorandum, it is expected that this charge will raise $90 million over three years.
3. The committee recommends that the following item of private Members’ business listed on the Notice Paper be voted on:

Order of the Day—
Air Services (Aircraft Noise) Amendment Bill 2011 (Mrs Moylan).

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Budget

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke) (15:37): The Speaker has received letters from the honourable the Leader of the Nationals and the honourable member for Chifley proposing that definite matters of public importance be submitted to the House for discussion today. As required by standing order 46(d) he has selected the matter which, in his opinion, is the most urgent and important; that is, that proposed by the honourable the Leader of the Nationals, namely:

The failure of the Budget to provide economic security for regional Australians.

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

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

Mr TRUSS (Wide Bay—Leader of The Nationals) (15:38): The Treasurer did get one thing right this week: this is a true-to-form Labor budget. It is hollow, it is shifty, it is vindictive and it is not to be believed. There is a fudged surplus—in fact, some have branded this budget the ‘fudge-it budget’—there are more broken promises, there is nothing to drive productivity, and there is nothing to repay debt or to secure jobs. This budget is really built around a carbon tax and additional compensation for the burden that is going to be placed on Australian families and the burden that is going to hit Australian businesses right across the country in just 51 days.
Labor has learnt absolutely nothing from the lessons handed out to it by the voters in New South Wales and Queensland in their recent elections. The people of Australia are sick of governments that waste their money, they are sick of governments that spend what they do not have, and they are certainly sick of governments that fail to tell the truth. This budget just delivers more bad news for Australians. It does nothing in particular for regional Australia. There is a feeble, contrived $1.5 billion surplus, and it certainly fails to inspire or encourage struggling communities and families in regional Australia. It offers no hope for small businesses battling in a difficult economic environment. Bringing spending forward and pushing expenditure into out years just to invent a one-off surplus does not give you any more money. Businesses balancing their books and struggling to meet the costs of keeping their employees on staff, and families budgeting for their household needs, are painfully aware of that.

This slippery budget surplus is simply not worth the paper it is written on. For instance, the $1.1 billion that is being paid early to local government of itself almost wipes out the surplus. The $1.8 billion being paid to the states early for infrastructure projects more than wipes out the surplus. The $1.4 billion being paid to the states early for disaster relief also almost wipes out the surplus single-handed. The $1.5 billion compensation for the carbon tax, being paid early, also wipes out the surplus. Then, of course, there are many other measures like this where money is shifted from one year to another just to deliver a surplus standing on a lonely island in a sea of debt. Simply no-one will believe this kind of attempt to master the true bottom line after four Labor budgets have simply amassed a cumulative deficit of $174 billion.

Of course, this is not the first time that Labor have promised a budget surplus. They did that in 2008-09 at their first budget, but it was not some tiny $1.5 billion surplus then. On that budget they promised a surplus of $22 billion.

Mr Chester: How'd they go?

Mr TRUSS: How did they manage? A very good question. They actually ended up with a $27 billion deficit. They were out by $49 billion. If they are only out by $49 billion this time, it will be a $48 billion deficit that we will end up with at the end of this year. This $1.5 billion means absolutely nothing. The reality is that it is only about two weeks of borrowing at the rate of this government out there in the marketplace. It only takes a 0.4 per cent change in expenditure and the budget surplus is gone. Labor cannot get their hands off the honey pot. It will only be days or weeks before they announce a new program which shoots the alleged surplus to pieces. In 2010-11, the year we have our closest memories of, we were promised a $12 billion budget deficit. That was bad enough, but it soon became $22 billion, $37 billion and, last night, $44 billion—and we still have a few months to go. The number just keeps on going up and up and up.

One of the most important concerns for people living in regional Australia is what this budget has done to road spending. There is absolutely no new spending on roads or rail in 2012-13. In fact, if you look at the overall expenditure on roads, it plummets from $6.2 billion in 2011-12 to just $2.6 billion in 2012-13. There is $2.3 billion that has been brought forward or deferred but, after all Labor's rhetoric about big projects, nation building and all the rest of it, this will be a road budget that is lower than the road budget in the last year of the Howard government. If you look at the forward
estimates, they show a lower figure for road funding in 2015-16 than in the last budget of the Howard government. There is less for roads in 2015-16 than the Howard government delivered almost a decade earlier. This has naturally been condemned by those people who care about roads. The Minister for Infrastructure and Transport was happy to quote the NRMA yesterday. He did not quote their press release issued on budget night:

NSW motorists will be shocked by a Federal Budget that slashes spending on the state’s roads by almost half to an alarmingly low $1.2 billion. The government halved the road funding for New South Wales. Yet we have a minister talking all the time about how Labor is going to fund the Pacific Highway, as well as his dishonest claims that, somehow or other, the New South Wales government is to blame for the fact that the promised 2016 completion date will not be met. The member for Lyne acknowledged quite some time ago that that target is not going to be met. The Prime Minister repeatedly says it will, but this budget simply blows the whistle on that. Even if you believe the rhetoric of the minister that the New South Wales government was going to provide $3.5 billion, there is not $3.5 billion in this budget from the federal government. It is about $1 billion short and the rest of it is going to come sometime later, so that guarantees that the 2016 date will not be met.

That is not the only dishonest statement of the infrastructure minister on this issue. Let me quote a higher authority, the Prime Minister, who said yesterday:

The deal on roads is always 50/50. That is what the Minister for Transport has made clear and that is what the NSW government should step up to.

That is simply wrong. The minister for infrastructure has said there is no deal with an 80-20 split, but the reality is that there is. There is a current agreement signed by both governments which has, effectively, an 80-20 split. If you look at the funding for the Pacific Highway, when the Labor state government was in power in New South Wales the split was actually 86 per cent to the Commonwealth and only 14 per cent to New South Wales. It is only since the election of the state coalition government and a $468 million infusion made by that state government that the figures got to 80-20. So, talk about there being some kind of a deal on 50-50 is simply dishonest, and the Prime Minister must know that.

In question time yesterday the minister for infrastructure said that he was upset with the New South Wales Labor government because they cut their share of the funding from $800 million to $500 million. As a result of that he had taken $50 million off New South Wales. He said:

... because New South Wales Labor were not delivering on their Pacific Highway promises, I took action against them.

But, if you read his letter to the then New South Wales minister, he did not take $48 million off them because they had withdrawn their funds. He took $48 million off them because they had not met the deadline for signing the agreement. He said:

... the $48 million has been retracted in the update MOU schedule.

That is because they had not met the required date for signing the agreement. But this penalty, this tough action, by the minister only lasted two paragraphs in his own letter. If you read a little bit further down in the same letter he says:

... I have taken a decision to direct an additional $48 million to provide for further duplication works on the Pacific Highway ...

So, he took the $48 million off them for signing up late and then gave them another $48 million for upgrading the highway. This is simply a dishonest approach. His answer
to the question yesterday was simply not truthful and that is clearly the case on the basis of the letter that he signed. Once more he did not seek a single extra dollar from the New South Wales Labor government for the $48 million that he provided. The reality is that this is a double standard. When Labor were in power in New South Wales it was quite okay for the Commonwealth to pay 80 per cent and, indeed, on three major projects the Commonwealth provided 100 per cent of the costs. But, as soon as a coalition government got elected, the minister expected the rules to be changed. This is typical of Labor’s dishonesty, and everywhere you go in relation to road funding the story is very similar.

Earlier this week, when the budget was announced, the minister tried to pretend that he was spending another $388 million on the Bruce Highway between Cooroy and Curra. Frankly, the people living near the Bruce Highway are shocked because the budget has completely shunned the Bruce Highway. The $388 million he is talking about has been announced many times already. The project is almost finished; it is not new money at all. The minister is pretending the rules have changed while the project is finished. There is no money for the next stage of the project, which guarantees that the commitment to complete the Cooroy-to-Curra upgrade by 2020 can no longer be met. The RACQ said it: … condemned the dearth of funding. The Bruce Hwy accounts for one-in-six deaths on our national highways and to see that really it’s just being treated with spot funding and black spots and a few dollars here and there is a very disappointing result …

That is Labor’s approach to road funding in regional Australia. There is a lot of rhetoric and a lot of noise but in reality they do not deliver.

On top of all of that, if that is not a big enough insult, this budget also includes a $166 million hit to the road user charge. Labor is going to collect $700 million over four years from extra taxes on the road transport industry. This comes after the ATC’s latest calculations on road user costs. Everyone in the industry has acknowledged that the calculations are dodgy, that they are inaccurate and that they have made an inaccurate assessment of the number of trucks. This is the biggest increase in the road user charge in history. It comes on top of the carbon tax and all the other costs being imposed on the industry. This government is keen to advocate safe roads with truckies, but then it slugs them with an extra $700 million worth of tax.

Then there is the passenger movement charge. One industry facing the most difficult circumstances in Australia at the present time is the tourist industry. They can ill afford an extra $600 million in passenger movement charge. On top of that the government is now intending to send bills to the airports for having the Australian Federal Police there. Next time, if you are charged and being investigated for murder, you will get a bill before you even start the investigation!

What sort of accounting practices do this government have? Don’t they know that the tourism industry is in serious difficulty? Don’t they know that this is an industry that needs help? With the carbon tax coming, which makes tourism in Australia less competitive with the rest of the world, the industry can ill afford to be thumped with these extra, unnecessary taxes. This is an example of how this government is just so out of touch with reality. In fact, according to ASIC, in the last quarter 2,500 businesses have become insolvent. That is up 17 per cent, and 23 per cent of those are in Queensland, the tourism state. So this is a heartless measure in these circumstances. Indeed, business right across regional
Australia is suffering. The ABS tells us that 800,000 businesses have disappeared since Labor came to office and that small business closures were up 48 per cent last year. What is even worse, there was a 95 per cent reduction in the number of new start-ups. People have simply lost hope with this government and they have been given absolutely no heart by what is in this budget.

A classic example of what Labor think about regional Australia is that last year, with a whole stack of press releases, they announced a promoting regional living program. In this budget they have axed it. After all the press releases and all the launches, it has been axed. That is typical of what Labor think of regional Australia.

(Time expired)

Mr CREAN (Hotham—Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government and Minister for the Arts) (15:53): After that pathetic performance you can see why regional Australia has deserted the National Party. They knew when they were in government they had become a branch office for the Liberal Party, but if that is the best they can come up with in response to this budget no wonder they continue to be rejected.

No government has made a greater commitment to engage regional Australia, to help it diversify its economic base or to challenge them to be their best than this government. No government in the history of this country has made a greater effort on all of those fronts. You only have to look at not this year's budget but last year's budget, which made the biggest ever commitment to regional Australian history of this country: $4.3 billion of new money committed over the forward estimates—the largest ever injection of funding for regional Australia. And this year, on top of that, we have got $475 million for regional hospitals; $80 million to encourage dentists to go to the regions; $35 million for doctors to go to the regions; and we have announced the three-year rollout of the National Broadband Network, which covers 238 regional centres and will enable those hospitals and medical facilities, along with the doctors and dentists, to apply e-health service options as well as to be creative in the e-education space.

Mr Truss interjecting—

Mr CREAN: This would not have been done if you were there because you were never committed to giving the capacity to the country to invest in fibre to the home that provides this fast-speed broadband network.

In addition to that, the budget has provided the important schoolkids bonus, which, disgracefully and hypocritically, the opposition opposed yesterday in this place. Apart from insulting families as to whether they could manage their own budgets they hypocritically opposed it, when how many times do you recall the Howard government paying one-off bonuses—which we then called bribes, I might say. But they have the blatant hypocrisy to come into this place where we have converted a tax rebate, which was not accessed fully, to ensure that people get the money in their pockets when they are sending kids to school at the beginning of first term and third term, and they oppose it. And they say that they want to support families in regions? What utter hypocrisy.

In addition to that, the budget has provided significant increases in the family tax benefit A from next year. Further, with the National Disability Insurance Scheme there are opportunities for regions to access the initial rollout. These are very important opportunities for regions because we know this is a major problem in the regions. In relation to aged-care facilities, the aged-care package provides $3.7 billion and, importantly, has continued the zero interest
loan. We know that has been so successful in encouraging regional centres to build much-needed facilities and we have continued it. The other important investment that you have got to make as a nation is in skills, and there is not only $1½ billion in terms of remote regions and jobs but also the significant increase in the skills budget.

That is what we have done in two budgets—and they come into the House and seek to carry a motion that says that we have failed to provide economic security for regional Australians. We reject that completely. What we have done is gone out to the regions and said: 'We understand the complex nature of this economy, we understand that it is going through fundamental transition and we understand that it is facing competitive pressures because of the high Australian dollar. But we want to help you counter the increase in costs associated with the dollar—if you like, the lack of competitiveness—and we want to encourage new ways to drive competitiveness.' That is why we are investing in infrastructure. It is why we are investing in skills. It is why we are investing in the schools and in the regions: so that we can drive competitiveness in the knowledge that the resources boom is driving the dollar higher.

In addition to all of those things that I have announced, let us look at the Regional Development Australia Fund. That is a billion dollars that we have committed to make available to the regions over the course of the next three years. Already the first round has been rolled out: $150 million, which leveraged three times that amount in investments either from state governments, local governments, the private sector or the not-for-profits. The second round, which will be announced shortly, is another $200 million. And the third and fourth and fifth rounds are now secured because we have passed the minerals resource rent tax. This is a very interesting proposition for those who cry crocodile tears on that side. They will oppose the next three rounds because they have committed, if they win office, to abolish the tax—and so, under them, those next three rounds would disappear. Don't come in here and talk about your complaints about assisting regional Australia when you have opposed the very mechanism by which we fund increasing economic and social development in the regions. We have also strengthened the Regional Development Australia Fund network. I have negotiated agreements with my state counterparts including those from different political persuasions, and the member for Gippsland would know the agreement that we have reached with the Liberal coalition government in Victoria in relation to the Latrobe Valley and the Gippsland region to look for economic diversification. I applaud the government down there for joining with us because they understand that we are serious. They do not listen to the empty rhetoric they hear from this Leader of the National Party who could only talk about surplus and roads—forget about the wealth of information and commitment that we have made. We have recognised the importance of doing this to ensure that the regions that are the patches in this patchwork economy can make the transition. We know that they cannot do it on their own. We know that what they require is support from government, and we are doing our best to ensure that we make the programs available and we work with state governments and local governments to leverage that which we have made available.

Mr Chester: There's no t a cent on the table!

Mr CREAN: No money on the table? I have just said to you that there is $150 million in the first round and leveraged three
times that amount. If we can get the leveraging factor up, we will turn the billion dollars we are talking about in excess of $3 billion in the regions. Don't you think the regions want that? Don't you think they deserve it? Don't you think they are entitled to it? Well, why don't you support the mechanism by which we are going to do it. We will fight every inch of the way to the next election to demonstrate our commitment to the regions because they have not had that commitment before. The members that sit on this side of the House, who are just as committed and who work with us actively to ensure that these agendas are being developed, know the importance of it and they are out there fighting for their regions.

Let me go to the question of surpluses and interest rates. We have done all these things in last year's budget and this year's budget and produced surplus budgets over the course of the next four years in the forward estimates. Why do we need to produce a surplus? Because if the government is doing the right thing in terms of fiscal policy, what that does is give room to the Reserve Bank to move properly on monetary policy. We saw an example of it last week when they reduced interest rates by half a per cent. Don't you think that helps those businesses in the regions that you are talking about? Don't you think it helps families in terms of their cost of living pressures? So we are committed to delivering surpluses because we understand the interaction with the other instruments of economic policy of this country. We acknowledge the independence of the Reserve Bank, yes, but we know that the Reserve Bank looks to what we do on fiscal policy in making the decisions that it makes.

If anyone is in any doubt about the effectiveness of our economic strategy, have a look at the employment figures today. I did not hear anyone over there talking about the great demise in unemployment because we saw unemployment come down. We now have an unemployment rate in this country with a four in front of it. There is not a developed country in the world that has an unemployment rate with a four in front of it. Australia alone stands out there as a beacon of hope for what you can do with sound economic policy, and other countries look to us and ask how we did it. You come in here and try to trash everything that is done; globally we are recognised for the great economic management that has been undertaken.

But if you accept that the argument about getting the surplus right is important because it puts downward pressure on interest rates, then I will be very interested tonight, along with all of my colleagues, to hear what the Leader of the Opposition has to say about his surplus outcome. We already know that the commitments he has made will take the budget not to surplus but to a huge black hole. He has already committed to a $70 billion black hole—$70 billion! If what we have got to do is produce a surplus to get pressure downwards on interest rates, what do you think the $70 billion blowout in the budget is going to do? What do you think the Reserve Bank's reaction is going to be to that?

So let us have a look tonight as to how the Leader of the Opposition presents his budget. I have been in his position myself. I have actually delivered two budget speeches in reply and in both of them I have presented alternate budgets. I showed how you can cost and fund each one. That is what we need from him tonight. None of this empty rhetoric, forget the slogans: show us where the money is; show us how you are going to fund your black hole; and show us how you are going to produce a surplus when you have been opposing everything that we have done in this place as we move forward.
I heard the Leader of the National Party talk about us wiping out the surplus. I will tell you what is going to wipe out the surplus, and that would be the election of an Abbott government. That would completely wipe the surplus out of this country and we would have economic chaos in the country.

Let me also make this point, Mr Deputy Speaker Scott, in terms of commitment to the regions. We have heard the great claim about their being the party that represents regional Australia. Let us look at the history. Each time the coalition wins office it tears away the regional development programs and structures and it takes Labor governments each time to restore them. It happened in 1975 when the Fraser government abolished the Commonwealth Department of Urban and Regional Development established by the Whitlam government, a government that my father was the Treasurer in. It happened again in 1996 when the Howard government's first decision was to abolish the Department of Housing and Regional Development, and I can remember the then Leader of the National Party, John Anderson, saying, 'There is no constitutional role for the Commonwealth in regional development.' I will tell you what: if the National Party does not stand for regional development, what the hell do you stand for? But there you were, giving it away and letting the Liberal Party trash the department that is supposed to deliver the very programs and mechanisms that you say you are interested in. Let us again understand what we are debating here. This is a party that comes in with empty rhetoric, claiming that we have not provided security for regional Australia. In all of the circumstances, for all the global recession, for all of the difficulties, for all of the downturn in Europe, for all of the difficulties with markets, we have stood proud as the only developed economy in the world to have avoided the global recession. We stand proud today as the only developed country in the world with an unemployment with a four in front of it. We stand proud on the basis that since we have come to office we have created now almost 800,000 new jobs.

We know that whilst there are going to be pressures on jobs because of things like the high dollar, our task is to help regions diversify their economic base and build on their strengths. They are the structures that we have put in place and the programs that we have put in place to support them. I know you support the programs, because you all come around to my drop-in sessions and ask how you can access the programs. So I know you have people sitting over there who want to get access to the programs. All I say to you is: vote for them; do not follow blindly the Leader of the Opposition, who wants you to oppose everything. Stand up for regional Australia—because we will.

Mr BRIGGS (Mayo) (16:08): As a member of this parliament representing a regional electorate I stand up to support the MPI that the Leader of the National Party has raised today. It is a matter of absolute public importance—the damage being caused by this government. I am sad to say that the Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government, who just spoke before me is, sadly, responsible for much of this damage.

I will address a couple of the remarks that the minister made. He did remind the House that he was at one time the Leader of the Opposition—and we do remember that period fondly. I remember the budgets that Peter Costello delivered when the minister was the Leader of the Opposition. The budgets of 2002-03 and 2003-04 delivered surpluses of $7 billion each. They actually delivered surplus budgets. They did not have a false concocted plan, which this budget
claims, to deliver surplus budgets; they were surplus budgets.

Before the minister tries to claim that the economic situation at that time was completely rosy, I also remind him that in September 2001 there was a seismic event that changed the economic structures of our world and put a lot of pressure on our budgets. Of course, Peter Costello and John Howard were able to manage that time, manage the budget, continue to deliver surpluses, continue to cut tax and continue to deliver to regional Australia. On the other hand, what we have seen since 2007 and since the election of this minority government with the support of a couple of regional Independents, it must be said, are budgets which have delivered a $54 billion deficit, a $47 billion deficit and, of course, in this financial year, a $44 billion deficit. That was after it was proposed in last year's budget that there would only be a $22 billion deficit. So we do not have much faith, it must be said, in the claims of this government and this minister that there will be a surplus budget delivered next September when we find out the final results—a time, I suspect, when we will not see the current Treasurer be able to crow over these results, because there will not be a surplus delivered.

The other issue that the minister raised was jobs. We are all pleased to see Australians in work. We are all pleased to see Australians getting jobs. While we acknowledge today that it was not full-time jobs which went up—in fact, they went down; it was casual and part-time jobs—it is good and important for people to be in work. That is in stark contrast to what that minister used to say about casual and part-time jobs. In fact, the ACTU, the owners and operators of the Australian Labor Party, have currently got a case going looking into temporary employment. So you have got the minister trying to claim credit for the jobs results at the same time as his paymaster, the ACTU, is saying that they are not real jobs—and we know that for a fact, because the Minister for Family and Community Services in 2002 said on Meet the press that a casual job was not a real job. I remember it quite clearly, and so will the former minister sitting alongside me. The minister at that time said that casual jobs are not real jobs.

So today we have them claiming, 'What a great success! We have got all these new people in casual and part-time jobs,' but they used to say that they were not real jobs. So you see the hypocrisy of the Australian Labor Party right there before you—and those who are supporting this government and the continual damage that they are doing to our country should hang their head in shame.

The issue which of course is the elephant in the room—and again I refer to those who have backed and supported the introduction of the carbon tax even though it was promised at the last election that it would not be delivered—is the impact that the carbon tax will have on regional Australia. I will refer to an article that appeared today in the Southern Times in the McLaren Vale area. The Onkaparinga Council, which is the council responsible for that area, has released its budget and, interestingly, it is increasing its rates.

Mr Windsor interjecting—

Mr BRIGGS: The member for New England may laugh at the people of McLaren Vale, but they are going to have to deal with a 6.25 per cent increase in rates. And guess what? The carbon tax will be blamed for the increase in rates. The Onkaparinga Council, which looks after McLaren Vale—an important regional area in our country, producing the world's finest wine, and I think everyone would agree with that—is quite
clearly now being put under additional pressure. That is why this MPI that was proposed by the Leader of the National Party is so important for us to debate here in this place—not quite as important as hearing the Prime Minister's explanation about the Labor Party funding the member for Dobell's interesting activities. This is actually a very important issue for us to be debating.

Tonight we will hear an alternative Prime Minister put forward a plan for Australia. That is what we will hear. We will hear from someone who is experienced in government and who has the judgment to make the right decisions and lead Australia down the right path. He knows—

Dr Mike Kelly interjecting—

Mr BRIGGS: The minister at the table, who represents a regional area, should be ashamed about what he is doing to his area. You should be ashamed about the increased costs you will put on people with your carbon tax—the carbon tax that you promised the people of Queanbeyan and the people of Batemans Bay that you would not deliver, Minister. We will see in a little over six weeks time the introduction of the carbon tax which will destroy so many of the opportunities for the people who live in Eden-Monaro. Hopefully at the next election we will see the election of Mr Peter Hendy, who will take the seat of Eden-Monaro on the back of a carbon tax—on the back of the tax you said would not be introduced, Minister; on the back of a carbon tax you promised would never be introduced. Long be it over your head, Minister.

Dr Mike Kelly interjecting—

Mr BRIGGS: This is a bad budget for regional Australia. There is the elephant in the room of the carbon tax—and I am sure the member for Newcastle will stand up following my contribution and recommit her support to that carbon tax, because the people of Newcastle love it! They just love it! They just want it so desperately! The great coal producers of Newcastle desperately want this carbon tax! They are marching in the streets, asking, 'Please, bring on a carbon tax for us: the one that was promised there would not be "under a government I lead". We want it.' And so do the people of New England! They are waiting for their opportunity as well to make their voice known, to take their democratic right to express their view about a promise that was given to them at the last election which was a complete and utter fib. We know that for a fact, because it is about to be introduced very, very shortly.

Mr Windsor: I was elected on it; I'm proud of it.

Mr BRIGGS: Really? You were elected on a carbon tax? Well, we will see if you get re-elected on the carbon tax, shall we?

We have seen this week another budget being delivered with bigger deficits, more debt, a higher credit limit for the Australian credit card by a government that just does not understand the people of Victor Harbour, does not understand the people of Strathalbyn, does not understand the people of Mount Barker or the people of McLaren Vale. It will not explain to the people of McLaren Vale why its rates are going up by 6.35 per cent. It is the carbon tax which is doing it. That is the elephant in the room of this budget. That will do so much damage to the regional communities, to the industries which are struggling under the pressures of the structural changes we are seeing in our economy—through the change in the dollar exchange rate and the change we have seen through the challenges in the retail environment.

We are not seeing any of these plans answered in this budget. Instead, what we see is more waste, more wasteful spending,
more cash splashes. We know how successful the last cash splash was, particularly for dead people, for animals, people living overseas and in jail! They did very well out of the last cash splash and I am sure this government will again deliver more cash splash, more sugar hits to try to boost its electoral prospects. But the fact of the matter is that the Australian people have seen through it. They have seen through this government and they have seen through the fibs about carbon taxes. They have seen through the years of inaction on roads like Pennant Hills Road, which my colleague has so vigorously campaigned for over such a long period of time. They have seen through the years of not seeing the additional interchange at Mount Barker being delivered, even though their state mates have opened up far more land for housing. There is no additional infrastructure; typical of the Labor Party. There is no plan, just open up the land, do the deal with the developers; no plan for infrastructure. There is no funding in this budget to build an additional interchange. It is a promise we made at the last election and it is a commitment that I know the Leader of the of the National Party will support at the next election as well.

This is a bad budget. This carbon tax has got to go. We will get rid of it. What you will hear tonight from the alternative Prime Minister of Australia is a real economic plan to make our country stronger, because the economic security of regional Australia has always been a priority for Labor governments, and nothing shows that more than the current budgets, which of course sits on the shoulders of four previous budgets which have reflected massive investments into regional Australia.

Before I speak particularly about my region and the benefits flowing to that region I just say to you as a member of parliament you do not always get the opportunity to go to remote Australia. Just recently as part of the ATSIA committee I went there, having not been for about five years. I must say that to go to a place like Utopia and have a meeting in their BER facility is absolutely wonderful. To go to a place like Halls Creek and see a massive, wonderful community centre, built by the federal government in a partnership agreement with the Western Australian government, who will pay for the services inside that centre, is satisfying. To see these quality resources and facilities that remote Australia have never seen before is very uplifting and it reminds us all what a fortunate country we are and certainly how we have the wealth to spread right throughout this country.

In terms of this budget, though, any suggestion that it neglects regional Australia needs an absolute reality check. Families and businesses are the heart and soul of our regions and they are the heart and soul of this budget. Across my own region, Newcastle and the Hunter, 61,000 businesses may be eligible for lost carry-back tax relief, as well as being able to immediately deduct the first $5,000 of new or used motor vehicles purchased from 1 July this year. What a wonderful opportunity for business to say, 'Yes, we've been cautious. Yes, there is uncertainty in the global economy. But we
want to keep our regional economies strong. We are going to take those investment steps. We are going to invest in our business.

Almost 41,000 local families in my region are expected to receive the schoolkids bonus—$410 for each primary school student and $820 for each secondary student. I am a former educator and school principal. I know very well how much costs have increased in this technological age. I know how much kids need to gain the most from their education and I know the pressure on parents to give their child the best. The schoolkids bonus will be a wonderful thing right across every region in Australia.

In addition, 48,000 families in the Hunter region will receive an increase in family tax benefit part A from 1 July 2013. Not only is there that assistance, but we have actually assisted many young people in this budget—students, single parents and the unemployed, who will receive a supplementary allowance: $210 for singles or $175 for a person who is a member of a couple. That is to help with those essential bills, those cost-of-living pressures that that side of the House have been telling us about and the public have been telling us about. I am really excited that tripling the tax-free threshold to $18,200 in this budget means approximately 212,000 working people in the Hunter region will get a tax cut beginning on 1 July. That is typical of regional Australia, where incomes are not always as high, and those are the people that are going to benefit most.

Secondly, any suggestion that federal Labor is ignoring infrastructure investments in regional Australia defies the reality of over four years of significant investment. I am very fortunate in my region that we have been given the opportunity to have some wonderful region-to-region links and capital city-to-region links built into our area. The $1.6 billion Hunter Expressway is progressing well. When you fly over my electorate and my region you will see this infrastructure. It is a wonderful, blissful scar on our environment! The $1 billion coal chain improvements continue. The Newcastle northern freight corridor improvements have commenced. These are projects that have been outstanding for years.

In this budget we saw a $3.6 billion pledge from the federal government to complete the duplication of the Pacific Highway. Every electorate from my electorate north to the Queensland border is a regional electorate. For them, tourism growth and smooth freight interactions are very much part and parcel of the Pacific Highway. The safety record on that highway is not well known. The Premier of New South Wales went to the New South Wales election promising this was a priority for him. I can only say to him: it is your turn to put in. We have put our pledge on the table. Let us get the Pacific Highway finished.

In this budget we saw funding for another important link—the F3 to the M2. Yes, that is in Sydney, but I can tell that you regional Australians do not always want to go into capital cities when they are moving around the country. They want smooth bypasses; that is what benefits them. We set aside $150 million for the project; let us see the New South Wales state government put in.

We have not neglected community infrastructure either. There would be no member of this parliament who has not received some bonuses, some special investments into community infrastructure. It is terribly important to regional Australia. In the past, during the 10 years of the Howard government, we begged for regional community infrastructure in seats such as mine. We all remember the regional rorts. My seat was not a priority because it is a
Labor seat. Money was only going to National and coalition seats.

A government member: Wentworth!

Ms GRIERSON: Yes, that is a good example. I say judge us on what we have done. The BER went to every community around Australia. Our regional community programs have gone to every region around Australia. It has been more important to build productivity in this nation by investing in every part of Australia. That is what we do, and that is what we are proud of.

We have seen investment in research reflected again in this budget because we know it is also part of economic security. That has been wonderful. For my electorate new institutes in research that have never been there before are being completed, are underway right now or are investing into our communities. I am sorry the member for New England has left the chamber. There has been investment in regional universities, and our policy has opened universities up to students from lower socioeconomic areas. I saw the figures today for some New South Wales universities. My university, the University of Newcastle, and the member for New England's University, the University of New England, had a 20-plus per cent increase in the number of offers to students from regional Australia, from low socioeconomic backgrounds. That is building the capacity of our regions and it is something we should be very proud of.

The budget also shows the future projections for the NBN. Within the next three years the NBN will be rolled out to 110,200 households and businesses in the Hunter region. That is outstanding. What a productivity lift, what an economic boost to our region. I noticed that today in the papers the member for Paterson is complaining about not getting enough roll out of NBN to his electorate. But remember, the greatest threat to regional Australia lies with an Abbott-led coalition government. They would scrap the NBN. They would scrap the Clean Energy Future package. They would scrap the MRRT. And the budget mentions that too. There will be over $6 billion available through the MRRT for critical infrastructure in mining regions. Well, come on down, that is where we live! By the end of this year we are planning on exporting 200 million tonnes of coal from the Hunter Valley through the Port of Newcastle. The biggest threat remains an Abbott coalition government. These investments are important.

Starting from this month, something like 90 per cent of my electorate will receive household assistance packages from the Clean Energy Future package, with an impost of less than 1c in the dollar. That side opposite forget that they introduced the 'never ever' GST, which was 10c in the dollar. My goodness, they have short memories! Federal Labor has got us through a global financial crisis. It has turned a mining boom into the wealth of the nation by spreading it throughout the whole nation. It has achieved a AAA credit rating from all international ratings agencies for the first time ever in this country, reaffirmed this week. The benefits to regional Australia are indisputable. They are a source of great pride to me and my colleagues. I congratulate the Treasurer on the 2012-13 budget, his fifth budget. (Time expired)

Ms MARINO (Forrest—Opposition Whip) (16:28): As a rural and regional member of this parliament I am pleased to speak on this significant matter of public importance. What concerns me is that this Labor government is treating rural and regional Australia, and the Australians who live there, with contempt. The Labor government, particularly in Western Australia, is treating us like a cash cow. The
evidence is in this budget with the mining tax—over 65 per cent out of Western Australia—and the carbon tax. My electorate of Forrest and the greater south-west of Western Australia are going to be contributing hundreds of millions of dollars through the carbon tax. That is what the government is going to rip out of some of the biggest employers in my part of the world. Businesses such as Wespine, Wesfarmers, Kleenheat Gas, the Water Corporation, Simcoa and Iluka are all on the government's carbon tax incomplete hit list that was announced just last week. I have warned many companies elsewhere in my electorate that the responsibility and the liability for the carbon tax lies with them. If their names are not on this list, they need take no comfort because they are liable and responsible when this tax commences in July. They are major employers like Alcoa, Alinta, Worsley Alumina, the Dampier to Bunbury natural gas pipeline, Verve Energy, Synergy. That is hundreds of millions of dollars coming out of the south-west of Western Australia and this really concerns me.

Regional Australians and regional communities are hardworking. They are fiercely independent and they are resilient. They make the best of whatever life throws at them and they show pretty good humour because they have a number of daily challenges simply because they live and work in rural and regional Australia. You have seen them crack a joke at a drought or a flood or a fire or a storm despite having to live through it and the devastating effects. They deal with the blight of weeds and feral animal invasions and they stay positive.

But regional Australia now has to deal with the blight of the Gillard government. Even these stalwart Australians have lost their smiles. You only have to come to my electorate to see it. Regional Australia, along with members like myself, are absolutely appalled at the ignorance of and the contempt they receive from this government. This is the government that will take its total interest bearing liabilities to $293 billion. No wonder they have tried to hide this by raising the credit card limit in this nation to $300 billion. This government's debt will take generations to repay, particularly if this economy continues to be managed by the Labor government. There is no hope for this country under a Labor government. On the basis of the truly aspirational surpluses claimed in the budget forward estimates, the debt will take decades to pay off with an interest bill of $8 billion in 2015-16.

After every Australian pays interest on their own homes, farms and businesses, they have to pay another $350 in taxes just to foot the government's interest bill. Tax paying Australian parents will have to cover the $350 of interest for each year for each child they have. That is the equivalent of the so-called kids bonus. These same kids that are referred to by this government are the ones who will ultimately have to pay off Labor's debt splurge. They are going to have to pay. Regional and rural people know that mining and industry and agriculture make up around 60 per cent of our export trade and underpin our entire economy. But where does that this government think that comes from? It is from rural and regional Australia. Yet we are imposing a carbon tax and a mining tax on rural and regional Australians, on small businesses and on every single individual and family. Every time it is coming out of every electricity point. Every time you turn on anything that requires electricity to do anything, you are going to be contributing to the carbon tax.

The government is depending on the regions to continue to provide the wealth but is desperately missing in action. As we saw the other night in the Treasurer's presentation, this is the tax which must not
be named, the carbon tax. It is a massive hit on rural and regional communities, taking hundreds of millions of dollars out of my electorate alone and the south-west of Western Australia. In that light it is no wonder that the Treasurer could not even bring himself to name it on Tuesday night. We could not hear the words 'carbon tax'. It is a new tax on every power point in every house and every business in Australia. It will rip millions of dollars out of the regions.

Common sense tells Australians, who have great common sense, that they will all pay more under the carbon tax. Common sense also tells them that taxing businesses and industry in Australia—not in other countries because our competitors will not have this same tax—is going to drive industry and business and jobs offshore. It will not cut carbon emissions but will simply redistribute wealth.

The carbon tax will have an immediate and a devastating later direct impact on transport. Anybody who lives in regional and rural Australia knows that we rely on transport for everything and mostly it comes on the back of a truck. Practically everything that is delivered in this nation comes on the back of a truck. The carbon tax is going to apply to road transport from 2014, so you will get a reduction in the diesel fuel rebate of 6.858c on heavy vehicles delivering vital goods to and from regional Australia. That is expected to cost the industry and its customers $510 million. Guess what? That is most of us in regional and rural Australia. In 2014-15, it will be $510 million alone on top of the recent 2.4c a litre rise in the diesel fuel excise.

This means higher costs and greater impacts in regional areas. What is it about rural and regional Australia that this government does not understand? I think perhaps there are not enough members who live and work there and understand the impact of carbon taxes and mining taxes because that is where they operate, in rural and regional Australia. In 2007, Australian trucks transported 277 million tonnes of food and animals around the country, and the proposed tax is going to add cost to every tonne and every item. Whether it is mining, marine or rail service, they will start paying the tax this year. But someone should really point out to the Prime Minister that mining, oil and gas production and fishing take place in regional areas. As someone from a rural and regional area, I would really like to hear this Prime Minister talk about farmers in Australia because I do not know that I have heard that; someone else may have. Clearly, we have got a Prime Minister who does not understand where food and fibre comes from in this country. So where does the government think Western Australia's wheat, gas and iron ore come from? All this really means is that the carbon tax will not just apply to 400 or 500 businesses; it will initially apply to 60,000 businesses because they face increased air, rail and maritime transport costs. By 2014, when the tax is applied to trucks on roads that number will jump to 100,000 businesses and millions of Australian families. Where will customers be hit the most by this? Where will Australians be hit the most by this? This tax will have a compounding impact on regional, rural and remote Australia. No-one should be in any doubt about this.

We have seen the cuts that the government has made to biosecurity—an absolute national disgrace. Agricultural production drives $155 billion a year in economic production in this country. It generates about 1.6 million Australian jobs and $32 billion in farm exports a year. Around the world we see that Australian produced food is regarded as safe, clean and green. It is essential that we retain that
reputation. The quarantine budget has been slashed by more than $58 million since 2009. On top of carbon taxes, mining taxes, this budget is a greater attack on rural and regional Australia—  

(Time expired)

Mr STEPHEN JONES (Throsby) (16:38): After sitting through question time and then listening to the contributions from those on that side of the House on this matter of public importance, I will be heading back home to dust off my old CD collection. I am looking for a particular album from 2004 by an independent rock band known as Modest Mouse. I can see the member for Mayo over there giving me a smile. He is obviously a fan of their work, and particularly a fan of their 2004 album 'Good news for people who hate bad news'. That says it all about the mob over there: good news for people who hate bad news. They are the people who spend their entire time here trawling for misery.

Today we have had some fantastic news from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, which is that for the first time in living memory the unemployment rate has dropped below five per cent. And what do we hear from those on the other side? Nothing but bad news. They are never happier than when they are unhappy. They are never happier than when they are out there talking down the economy. In the same month that the Reserve Bank drops interest rates by a full 50 basis points, they are out there telling people that the sky is going to fall in. They are not out there telling people that they are paying less on their mortgage payments now than they were at any time under the Howard government. In fact, people are paying $3,000 per annum less than they were at any time under the Howard government. They are not telling people that.

Those opposite come in here and, in one breath, talk about how hard small businesses are doing it out there and, in the next breath, they are out there bagging our proposition to cut company tax. They are supposed to be the party of small business, yet there they are voting against company tax cuts. It is really hard to believe. The people on that side of the House absolutely hate good news. Whenever there is some good news, they try to come into this place and say, 'Look over there'—anything for a distraction. We saw the Treasurer stand here, in the House, on Tuesday of this week and hand down a budget which many commentators throughout the world said was nothing less than remarkable. Here you have a major developed economy such as Australia and its national government is able to hand down a budget that is seeing the fastest fiscal consolidation that we have ever seen a government put in place and also deliver a surplus over the financial year 2012-13. It is absolutely remarkable. Even that does not bring a smile to the faces of those on the other side of the House.

Nothing ceases to amaze me about those opposite. They have come in here and moved a matter of public importance that is supposed to be draw attention to some concerns about economic security for regional Australians. This is from the same mob who stood there and voted against the $300 million Steel Transformation Plan—a package that was put together to assist regional communities like my own and like those of the member for Newcastle and the member for Cunningham. These electorates rely on the steel industry and the manufacturing industry, which are doing it tough because of the high Australian dollar. Yet that mob over there would poke a stick in the eyes of all those steel workers and everyone else who relies on businesses in those regions by voting against the $300 million steel transformation package.

Against that background, I should not have been surprised when I saw members of
the coalition parties come into this place yesterday and twist and turn and then ultimately vote against one of the excellent budget initiatives—the schoolkids bonus. This is an important initiative. Within a few weeks it will deliver $410 per household per child in primary school and $820 per household per child in secondary school, and this mob over there voted against it. I represent a regional electorate, and I have done some figures on what the schoolkids bonus will mean to my region. It will mean an annual injection of $27 million into households in my region. It will assist those households with their education expenses. Of course, that money will be spent within the region, boosting the local economy, assisting small businesses as well as assisting all of those households to help see them through tough economic times. So you really do wonder about the hypocrisy and the idiocy of many of those on the other side when they stand there and pretend to champion the interests of regional Australia when they say one thing in their electorates and then come in here and vote against the interests of regional Australia.

If you want to look at one of the things that we on this side of the House are doing that will have a great benefit—it is probably having the greatest benefit—for regional Australia over the next decade and, in fact, over the next 30 or 40 years, it is the rollout of the National Broadband Network. Yet those on the other side of the House play a double game. When they are back in their electorates they are winding up their local mayors—I have a Liberal Party local mayor in my area who is writing letters to the paper almost on a daily basis, saying, 'We want the NBN rolled out in suburbs in the shire.' Yet when her very close colleagues come down here to Canberra they are voting against the NBN and bagging it with every breath. They know what is good for the region when they are in the region and they stick their hands up for it and want to claim it, but when they come down here they vote against it. It is nothing short of hypocrisy.

If you want to look at a party that is committed to the interests of regional Australia, Deputy Speaker, and to putting in place lasting, long-term reforms which will assist regional communities, look at what it is doing for economic infrastructure, and by that I mean rail, roads and ports. There is nothing better, as a local member representing a regional area, than being able to point to this government's record in investing in economic infrastructure in the regions: $36 billion is being spent to modernise our rail, our road and our public transport infrastructure throughout regional Australia, something that all Australians and every member on this side of the House is very proud of indeed.

Let us have a look at the road infrastructure spend. We have almost doubled the road infrastructure spend, which is probably why we will not see the Leader of the Nationals ask a question of the minister for infrastructure on this—because he is ashamed. He knows that his regions are getting a better deal out of the Labor government than they ever got out of a coalition government when it comes to spending on roads in regional Australia. We have spent $28 billion over six years, doubling the investment in our national road-build effort.

But it does not stop at roads. Nothing short of remarkable is the fact that federal Labor has lifted rail spending tenfold to over $9 billion over six years in order to rebuild our nation's rail network. In fact, we have nearly rebuilt one-third of the nation's rail infrastructure network—a remarkable task—and we have already committed $7.3 billion to modernise and extend infrastructure in
Thursday, 10 May 2012

every mainland capital city when it comes to urban public transport. This is more than the total amount that has been spent by any national government at any time since Federation; a truly remarkable contribution and a legacy that will be enjoyed by generations to come, but not celebrated by those on the other side. Nearly 3,800 kilometres of freight rail track is being rebuilt, or one-third of the interstate rail network, but all we hear from those on the other side is carping and whingeing.

There are threats to regional Australia, but we never hear any solutions from those on the other side of the House. It is true that regions like my own are doing it tough because we have relied on manufacturing over many years to support jobs, livelihoods and regional investment. But this government is putting in place things like regional innovation funds to support new investment in that region. A $27 million injection of new money is going into every household in Throsby and the Illawarra and Southern Highlands regions through the schoolkids bonus while those on the other side of the House are voting against it. If you want to look at what a party thinks about regional Australia, look at its record and look at what it is actually doing, not what it stands in here day in and day out whingeing about.  

Mr COULTON (Parkes—The Nationals Chief Whip) (16:48): I rise this evening to support the Leader of the Nationals in this matter of public importance: the failure of the budget to provide economic security for regional Australians. If I may, before I address the topic in general I might address some of the comments that have been made by the government benches in this debate.

The minister for regional Australia started off, and his contribution was quite extraordinary. Never before has there been a minister for regional Australia who can put together so many words and say so little. He spoke about the input through Regional Development Australia. It might be quite appropriate that the member for Newcastle followed because she has been a great beneficiary of the regional Australia program with the $7 million she got for the art gallery. It was just a shame that the residents of Newcastle did not want the thing, and spent days chained to the fig trees out the front complaining about the redevelopment. That is as far as the regional development of this government goes.

Regional Development Australia has been a huge disappointment. I spoke to a director in the last week who expressed his frustration at the time that he has allocated to regional Australia for such a poor result. In my part of the world there are some very good people who are involved in those committees, people who have given up a lot of their time. For someone who represents a third of New South Wales, which I would have thought was a regional electorate, to have missed the last two rounds of regional development funding—to my knowledge there was only one allocation made west of the range—this has been a huge disappointment. There have been a lot of meetings and discussions but no real action.

The member for Newcastle also mentioned how much she enjoyed sitting in the BER hall when she was in regional Australia. I suggest she go to Windeyer, in New South Wales, because they have a brand new classroom under the BER. It is lovely; it is just a shame it was opened a month before the school shut down. Perhaps we could go to Louth—they have a new classroom under the BER, which is lovely because they now have a classroom for each child in the school. Never before have we seen such a lost opportunity. The theme of this discussion of a matter of public
importance is the economic direction of regional Australia and, to describe the mood at the moment, it is one of frustration and disappointment. The people have seen the large amounts of funding that were allocated, but unfortunately they have seen it go to projects that really have not benefitted the people in the area. While we are on the BER, which was to be a stimulus package to help tradespeople, right across my electorate we have people who are still owed vast amounts of money. Indeed, in this place on Monday there was a builder from the town of Moree who is owed $642,000 through the mismanagement of the BER. He will be lucky if his business survives. This is what is underpinning. You cannot gauge the success of what a government is doing by just measuring things in dollar terms.

Government is about leadership, and what this country is lacking at the moment is government giving the people that it governs the confidence to actually get on and do things. That is what is happening in regional Australia. The people do not have the confidence to expand their business, buy the property next door, buy a new house or whatever. They do not have confidence in the future. As we have heard the members from the other side say that they are the ones who represent regional Australia, I would like them to go to the streets of Dubbo, Mudgee, Moree, Narrabri, Condobolin, Cobar—any of those places—and listen to what the people out there on the streets have to say.

I will say one other thing, and that is this budget—

Mr Windsor: Say something!

Mr COULTON: I am glad you prompted me, Member for New England, because you are coming into focus. This budget is underpinned by the carbon tax. It was the elephant in the room when the Treasurer made his speech here on Tuesday night; it hardly got a mention. I was on ABC Radio on Wednesday morning in Tamworth. I followed the member for New England, and I could not believe my ears. He was telling me that the carbon tax is going to be the saviour of the beef industry—that the carbon tax is going to help abattoirs. He has been grumbling away over here about the negativity coming from members about regional Australia. I suggest he goes up to his electorate and listens to the negativity that is going on there.

In an attempt to save his seat, the member for New England has stuck to this government like a limpet—mind you, like a limpet stuck to the side of the Titanic. We are seeing legislation come into this place, supported by the crossbenchers, that is a direct affront to the people of regional Australia. We are talking about the wonderful opportunities for farmers under the carbon tax—the fund that was being set up, which was the great idea of the member for New England, the Carbon Farming Initiative! I had a farmer in the other day who understood that there was money to be made from the Carbon Farming Initiative. But there is a catch: you actually have to sign up to the Carbon Farming Initiative and have someone from the government come along and suggest how they run their operations.

So we have Big Brother creeping into everything we do. That is the issue that we have seen in this place for the last five years. Every piece of legislation that has come through, every idea that has come from that side, is about restricting growth, about taking away incentive. Everything is about regulation and greenness. We have a Murray-Darling Basin Plan that has been
cast through the eyes of 10 years of drought, and now we are seeing that the people who are going to face the attack are the people who are actually producing something. This budget is a mix of sugar hits and taking money away from people who actually produce things. It provides the lowest amount of spending for roads in at least 10 years.

It is interesting to note that the $8 billion that will be paid in interest by this government in the next 12 months would build two Melbourne to Brisbane rail lines. That is just the interest bill. If there is one great frustration in regional Australia, it is knowing that in five years we have gone from being a country that had money in the bank, that was in charge of its own destiny, to having to increase the debt level of this government to debts of up to $300 billion. For anyone out there to say anything else is not in tune with the people of regional Australia. I have just spent six weeks living in the front of my car, touring my electorate, and people who have voted Labor all their lives have come up to me in absolute despair and disgust, saying, 'When can we have an election? We have had enough.' That is what is underpinning this budget. This budget reinforces that mindset in the people of regional Australia.

The member for New England has been going crook about the negativity in this debate. I can tell you that the negativity in regional Australia at the moment is palpable, and that is because of the mismanagement by the members of the government benches. The sooner we can put an end to this, the better.

Mr FITZGIBBON (Hunter—Chief Government Whip) (16:58): This will be my quickest speech in this place because I want to give the Independents an opportunity to make a contribution. This is an MPI allegedly about economic security in rural and regional Australia, so I will very quickly make five points. The best way to give people economic security is to give them a job, and the unemployment rate in the Hunter region is 3.5 per cent—a level I would never have dreamed of 10 years ago. The second is to invest in education and skills, and this government's record in that area is without challenge. The third is to keep interest rates low, to take the pressure off families. Our budgetary strategy is about just that. The fourth is to support families with family budgets when they need that assistance most, and this budget does that writ large. The fifth is to build physical infrastructure so our local economies in the regions can expand, and earlier speakers on this side have indicated that we are investing record amounts of money in physical infrastructure—projects such as, in my electorate, the $1.7 billion Hunter Expressway and the $1.2 billion third rail track to take coal to the port. These are allowing our economies to expand.

We could do so much more if the opposition would just get out of the way on the mining tax issue and allow us to return some of that mining tax to the regions. They have been an embarrassment today. The member for Parkes was a late inclusion into the debate because they suddenly realised that the Leader of the National Party did not have one member of the National Party backing him up. Then the member for Parkes bravely came along. All they can do is scaremonger and talk about carbon. We will get on with expanding the economy, growing jobs and giving people economic security in rural and regional Australia.

Mr KATTER (Kennedy) (17:00): This matter of public importance is about economic security in regional Australia. You must be judged upon your outcomes. The Liberal-National Party government in New
South Wales moved immediately to sell electricity. The National Party put up a hell of a fight in Western Australia over this issue, because, if you privatise the electricity industry, then, in those areas where there are fewer people concentrated, the lines—and I was a minister for mines and energy in the Queensland government—have got to be stretched over a longer area, and in country areas the cost will go up 40 or 50 per cent. The last New South Wales Leader of the National Party screamed and yelled in the middle of the election campaign and said, 'We'll never roll over and accept the privatisation of electricity in New South Wales.' The current National Party Leader in New South Wales rolled straight over. The Leader of the National Party in New South Wales said, 'When it is privatised, the cost of electricity in rural New South Wales will go up 40 per cent.' In Western Australia, the National Party said: 'When it is privatised, the price of electricity will go up in rural Western Australia by 40 per cent.' I would say is probably closer to 60 per cent in Queensland, because our population is more sparsely distributed.

Judge people on their outcomes. The LNP in Queensland talked about economic security. They have only been there six weeks and they are closing down the fishing industry. They made an announcement that they are buying out what is left of the fishing industry. The LNP closed most of it down. They are back in power in the state and now they are going to close down what is left of it. And they come in here and talk about economic security! There is no economic security for those towns like Innisfail or Bundaberg. Where is the member for Bundaberg? Where is he squealing while his industry is about to be closed down around him?

Whilst the coalition are in here talking about economic security, the LNP minister in Queensland, McArdle—I love the new government; they are giving me a press release every day!—has announced he is not going to have any electricity flowing into north-west Queensland. Well, that just means we cannot have any mines in north-west Queensland. The greatest resource outside of Olympic Dam—no, bigger than Olympic Dam—is the Galilee Basin coalfields. It needs railways, which are being sold off by the current LNP government, and it needs electricity. The LNP government have just announced that they are not going to put an electricity line into the Galilee Basin or the coalfields, and the coalition have got the enormous hide to stand up in this place and say they are for economic security for rural areas! Under agreement, I hand over to my colleague.

Mr WINDSOR (New England) (17:03): It is very pleasing to hear the member for Kennedy back in the building. I am not sure my ears are so pleased, though! This matter of public importance is about economic security in regional Australia. During the discussions in relation to the formation of the government, both Mr Abbott and Ms Gillard agreed that regional Australia had been neglected. That was a great admission on their behalf. They were prepared to admit that the parties and governments that they both belong to had been party to the neglect of regional Australia. Those were their words, not mine. Part of the arrangements that were put in place, particularly with the member for Lyne and me, were to try and improve the lot of regional Australia.

There are a lot of things in the current budget for regional Australia, not the least of which are some of the spatial budgeting initiatives to try and get a handle on government spending in various governmental areas. But a whole range of regional packages and infrastructure packages have been set up, including the
Education Investment Fund, of half a billion dollars, and the Health and Hospitals Fund, where $1.8 billion was assigned to country Australia. That was not to ignore city Australia, but to redress the imbalance that both leaders agreed had occurred—for political reasons. Loyalty is not rewarded in Australia as it should be, probably, and the subservient country members, on all sides, are outnumbered by the city based politicians of their parties. So there was a degree of neglect that had occurred, and a range of packages were set up. As of the budget the other night, 130 health services had gained support through the Health and Hospitals Fund, and the member for Riverina's hospital was one of them. And a whole range of country universities and TAFEs will get support through the Education Investment Fund.

Given the limited time, I would just like to say that there is a lot of talk about the carbon tax, emissions trading schemes, renewable energy et cetera and how the price of power is supposedly going to go through the roof. The day the sky does not fall in is going to be a fascinating day in politics for me! The member for Parkes referred to some comments I had made in relation to the beef industry. We are working with various people in the meat-processing area at the moment. There is a clean energy fund. There are a number of initiatives in the carbon-pricing arrangements where companies and individuals can seek assistance. In the meat industry, a lot of the abattoirs and networks are very old. They have enormous effluent issues, water issues, et cetera. In recent months, with a number of companies, we have been looking at various technologies internationally. If you listen to the NFF, the National Party and a number of others, they will say that it will just destroy the beef industry—in fact, the reverse could occur. I would urge those who work in the meat industry and those who manage, run and invest in the meat industry to have a look at these packages and at what can be done to turn what you believe is a potential negative—and what is being bleated at you as a potential negative—into a real positive in terms of your unit cost of production, fertiliser development and a whole range of things that can come out of the various effluents that are used.

That applies not only to the meat industry; it can apply to parts of the dairy industry. The piggery people are onto it already. They are actually doing it. There are enormous potential positives in relation to renewable energy resources in country Australia. I thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for the little time that I have had.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Symon): Order! The discussion is now concluded.

COMMITTEES
Appointment

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Symon) (17:07): The Deputy Speaker has received three messages from the Senate informing the House of the appointment of senators to certain joint committees. As the list of appointments is a lengthy one, I do not propose to read the list to the House. Details will be recorded in the Votes and Proceedings.

BILLS

Family Assistance and Other Legislation Amendment (Schoolkids Bonus Budget Measures) Bill 2012

Returned from Senate

Message received from the Senate returning the bill without amendment or request.
Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 1) 2012

Report from Federation Chamber
Bill returned from Federation Chamber without amendment; certified copy of bill presented.
Ordered that this bill be considered immediately.
Bill agreed to.

Third Reading
Ms BIRD (Cunningham—Parliamentary Secretary for Higher Education and Skills) (17:09): by leave—I move:
That this bill be now read a third time.
Question agreed to.
Bill read a third time.

Paid Parental Leave and Other Legislation Amendment (Dad and Partner Pay and Other Measures) Bill 2012

Second Reading
Debate resumed on the motion:
That this bill be now read a second time.
to which the following amendment was moved:
That all words after "That" be omitted with a view to substituting the following words:
"whilst not declining to give the bill a second reading, the House:
(1) notes that the Government's paid parental leave scheme is too short, does not provide superannuation and does not maintain the income of the majority of Australian mothers; and
(2) calls on the Government to immediately adopt the Coalition's better, fairer paid parental leave scheme."

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP (Mackellar) (17:11): I rise to speak on the Paid Parental Leave and Other Legislation Amendment (Dad and Partner Pay and Other Measures) Bill 2012 and on the opposition amendment that proposes that, whilst not declining to give the bill a second reading, we insert:
(1) notes that the Government's paid parental leave scheme is too short, does not provide superannuation and does not maintain the income of the majority of Australian mothers; and
(2) calls on the Government to immediately adopt the Coalition's better, fairer paid parental leave scheme.

In the first part of my speech, which was prior to question time, I was outlining the fact that women who return to the paid workforce and many women who delay having children or decide not to have children are very much impacted by whether there is adequate paid parental leave and whether there are adequate childcare arrangements. I spent some time outlining findings from the report of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Human Services, of which I was the chair in 2006, entitled Balancing work and family. I outlined the importance of those two issues in women's contribution to the paid workforce, particularly outlining the fact that women will soon be a majority of those with tertiary university education. We cannot as a nation afford to waste that education. We do need them to be utilising those skills. Therefore, these two issues are of fundamental importance not only to them but also to the nation as a whole. In fact, if women withdrew from the workforce today, our economy would collapse. Therefore, the opposition thinks it is fair that we have a proper paid parental leave scheme of 26 weeks, at the existing wage of the person concerned, capped at $150,000 per year.

I now want to raise the matter of in-home care or nanny care, as some like to term it. I want to refer to the fact that as part of our policy, the Leader of the Opposition has said he would refer to the Productivity Commission the question of in-home care
receiving the same childcare benefit that is paid in respect of people who put their children into institutional care called a childcare centre. I would simply say that there are very similar reasons to argue in favour of delivering in-home care—that is, services into the home—applying to childcare as there are for applying it to aged care. As former Minister for Aged Care, I introduced thousands of community aged-care packages, allowing people to have care in their own home where they wanted to be. I believe it is equally fair that mothers should have that same choice with regard to their children, of having the care delivered in their own home. It has a double benefit. It is a less expensive way of delivering services if you build a specifically built institution called an aged-care facility or called a childcare centre. If you build an institution, you have to pay for the land, for the bricks and mortar and for the electricity, rates, taxes and everything else associated with running that, whereas if you deliver those services into the home, the land is already paid for, the bricks and mortar are already there and somebody else is already paying for the services to that building.

In our report, we recommended that in-home care, or nanny care, be categorised as approved care and thus attract payments extended to users of approved care where providers are registered with the Family Assistance Office. We further said that those people should have, or be at an advanced stage of attaining, a minimum certificate II qualification in child care or an equivalent recognition of prior learning, have a current working with children police record check and have current first aid certification. We believed it was important to have those. That is something that others may deliberate upon later.

The whole point of the report was to give mothers a choice and to overcome the difficulties of people who do not work the hours during which childcare centres operate. Even long-term day care does not take into account people who do night shifts, people who work at intermittent times or people who work a 12-hour shift. So we believe that the policy that the Leader of the Opposition has put forward, to refer this to the Productivity Commission to outline how this can be best achieved, is very sensible—just as we believe that our system of paid parental leave is far superior to the one that the government has put in place. That is why we moved this amendment. It will not deny a second reading but allows us to debate this important question and to put it on the record.

The point that we make very strongly is that ours is the only policy that would allow the government to live up to its rhetoric on paid parental leave. It provides paid parental leave and suitable arrangements so that mothers can nurture their own children, can make arrangements for their children that are satisfactory to them and their family situation and can return to the workforce, and it takes into account those women who can only progress in their careers by working full time. As I stressed, it is in the interests of mothers. They could nurture their children during the paid parental leave and then continue their careers knowing that the arrangements they had made for their children suited their family arrangements and were in the best interests of their children. I call upon the government to accept that ours is a superior recommendation and adopt this motion.

Mr HUSIC (Chifley—Government Whip) (17:18): I am proud to voice my support for the Paid Parental Leave and Other Legislation Amendment (Dad and Partner Pay and Other Measures) Bill 2012—proud because this bill builds on the historic government funded Paid Parental
Leave scheme, the first of its kind in Australia, and proud because this very important social policy reform was introduced and delivered by a Labor government.

Last year's introduction of the scheme followed decades of debate about the merits and affordability of paying mothers to stay home to look after their newborn babies. The scheme gives eligible working parents up to 18 weeks leave at the national minimum wage of around $590 a week before tax. More importantly—and I think this is welcomed by a lot of parents—it gives parents the opportunity to stay home and bond with their newborn children at a stage in their development which is most critical.

In every respect, the Paid Parental Leave scheme was a revolution in Australia, but we had long lagged behind the rest of the developed world. Around 1,000 people living in the Chifley electorate have already benefited from the Paid Parental Leave scheme and. For women on low incomes or in casual or part-time work, this was the first time they had ever had access to this type of support. When parents decide to take time off work to look after a newborn child, they do not need the added burden of worrying about how to make ends meet. This scheme ensures that Australian families no longer have to make the difficult choice between spending time with their new baby and earning an income.

Today, in this bill, we build upon the Paid Parental Leave scheme. At the last election, we gave a commitment to give Australian dads and other eligible partners the chance to join mothers in having time off work. From 1 January 2013, dad and partner pay will give eligible fathers and partners, including adopting parents and parents in same-sex relationships, two weeks pay at the national minimum wage to support mums to care for their babies. This reflects our belief that bonding with a new child is just as important for dads and other carers as it is for mums.

Most fathers do take time off work when a child is born or comes into the home, but usually it is at their own expense and they do it by either taking leave without pay or dipping into annual leave. Fathers often feel pressured, though, as the primary breadwinners to stay at work and maintain an income at a time when the household income has fallen. Dad may be, for example, a casual employee without annual leave entitlements or a self-employed business owner—such workers have not been quite so fortunate in the past.

Dad and partner pay will make an enormous difference for thousands of Australian families. Payments to dads and other eligible partners will be available in addition to any employer funded paid leave. This is consistent with the recommendations made by the Productivity Commission. Just like paid parental leave, a work test and a residency requirement will apply, and dad and partner pay will have the same income test for eligibility. Eligible fathers and partners will be able to lodge claims for dad and partner pay from 1 October this year. Their eligibility will not rely on the mother having been in paid work before the birth of the child or adoption. That means they may claim dad and partner pay even if the mother is not claiming paid parental leave. I think that is a fantastic move. Where the mother is not claiming paid parental leave and the father is claiming dad and partner pay, the family may also be eligible for other family assistance payments such as the baby bonus and family tax benefit. Dad-and-partner pay cannot be transferred to the primary carer. So if you do not use it you lose it. This should encourage fathers and other partners to take more time off work and will signal to employers that a father's role in caring for a
new baby is equally important. I am very supportive of this as I believe that in many instances, as I indicated earlier, there are pressures on new fathers from an income perspective. They wonder whether they have the time to be there at that critical point when a baby first comes home. Income should be less of an issue now for new dads and these measures should also ensure that there is an opportunity to bond with a new child at a very important time in a new family's life.

Where a family chooses the father or partner to be the primary carer of a new or adopted child, the balance of the paid parental leave can be transferred from the mother to the father or partner in addition to the dad-and-partner pay. However, they cannot claim more than the 18 weeks maximum leave. It is important in the modern age that the scheme be suitably flexible in providing families with choice about who should care for the child and who should return to work.

In bringing this bill before the parliament, I am confident that the dad-and-partner pay is fair for families and businesses alike. Employer and employee groups were consulted, along with family and community groups, in an effort to get the balance right. As is the case with paid parental leave, dad-and-partner pay is fully funded by the government and will not rely on a new tax on business to pay for it. Without a new impost on business, dad-and-partner pay will not drive up the price of groceries as would the scheme proposed by those opposite, if it were adopted.

In conclusion, I am very pleased about this bill—and I have spoken in great support of it—but I am also pleased with a number of measures that were announced this week in the budget that aim to assist families with their cost of living pressures. In particular, I am pleased with the Schoolkids Bonus and the changes to family tax benefit. I think these are enormously important. I am particularly mindful of how important these measures are to families in my neck of the woods, where 15,000 families will benefit from the Schoolkids Bonus and approximately 19,000 families will benefit from the family tax benefit changes.

Obviously, every one of the families trying to make ends meet will welcome the extra pay. On occasion, in discussion with people from the electorate I represent—the electorate of Chifley—I have heard of cases where young people leave school early under pressure to add to the family income. These families feel that without children working they will not have the ability to make ends meet. It is concerning to me that in this day and age and in this country, as wealthy as we are, those pressures still exist. Certainly, the measures that we are taking and the comprehensive nature of these changes—changes for children from birth through to their teenage years—are important, not only in terms of being able to help families sustain themselves, but also for kids in my neck of the woods who are leaving school early to help build family income. I worry about the longer-term impact that leaving school early has on families in terms of the pressures placed upon them. Children leaving school early deny themselves the opportunity of maximising their own personal bank of skills or growing that personal bank of skills and there are consequences to losing those years.

So these types of measures that we are talking about, which help family life—the paid parental leave scheme, the bill that is before us now and the types of measure that are being introduced—are making our country fundamentally better from the perspective of families. The measures make it easier for families to meet their day-to-day bills and to enjoy the experience along the
way. And I am proud that we have seen these measures take hold. There is room for these measures to grow and for us to build upon them. I commend this legislation to the House.

Dr LEIGH (Fraser) (17:27): The work we do in this place impacts on people's lives—often far more than we imagine at the time. This bill, the Paid Parental Leave (Dad and Partner and Other Measures) Bill 2012, is one such example. I want to start off by sharing with the House the story of a friend of mine, Damien Hickman, and how he felt about the two weeks leave that he took when his first child arrived. Liesel Grace Hickman arrived on 23 June last year. Damien said: 'I just did not want to be anywhere else. My whole world shrunk to this tiny four-kilogram bundle and the three-hourly cycles.' He said: 'It was like nothing I had experienced or could have prepared for. I was placed under this spell. She was the ultimate timewaster. I would just stare at her and half an hour would go by like 30 seconds. To be there for my partner, look after the house and be there as an extra pair of hands and support was pretty special.'

Damien said: 'I wanted to be part of it all. I was Liesel's dad and I wanted to be with, and care for, my little girl. I can still remember how scared I was the first time I gave her a bath. I remember how she would fall asleep on my chest, so small her feet barely made it to my bellybutton.' Damien said that for him the joy of being a dad was being there for all of those firsts; being there with Liesel and Kate was a great privilege. Liesel probably will not remember any of this but it is a memory that Damien will take to his grave.

That is why this legislation is so important: it allows dads and partners to take time off work and be at home to support new mothers in those crucial early days. It builds bonds that will extend to a lifetime of love, encouragement and support for children. It is the kind of encouragement and support that all kids need as they venture into life and face the challenges and opportunities that it presents—opportunities that are the foundation of the ideas and innovations that will inevitably drive a nation's prosperity.

Before outlining the measures in this bill let me share with you why dads being there in the early days is so important to their newborns and partners. Research from children's experts has found that, the more dads are involved right from the start, the better it is for the dad, for the mum and, most importantly, for the baby. Hands-on dads are important in developing social skills, independence, a strong moral sense and intellectual skills. Parenting expert Pam Linke of the children's, youth and women's health service in South Australia says:

When a man holds a baby they get a sense of security that's quite different from a mother's. While Dad's role may be only a supporting one for things like breastfeeding, it's absolutely critical in a baby's development.

Dr Kyle Pruett, clinical professor of psychology at Yale University, says, 'What dads actually do with their kids matters more than how often they do it,' so it is important that every dad gets time in the lead role. Pam Linke's advice is 'let him change nappies', and I can attest to having changed plenty of nappies in my few years as a dad. In fact, studies show that sons who are nurtured by their fathers are more likely to be more hands-on with their own children. Fathers who interact with their daughters reduce the rate of emotional problems in those girls when they reach their teenage years. Dads help daughters, even when they are young, feel competent—an essential prerequisite for self-esteem.

For us politicians, bringing up young children can come with additional risks. It
might be apocryphal, but the story goes that the member for North Sydney received a phone call at home from John Howard after one of the elections. The former Prime Minister said, 'What are you doing?' 'Changing nappies,' replied the member for North Sydney. Prime Minister Howard apparently then said, 'I have something similar for you—industrial relations.' As the Work Choices episode shows, the similarity is more than passing.

I have found my own role as a politician and a father to be a constant and at the same time delightful juggling act. There are many challenges and changes with a newborn baby, and it is vital that dads can be there to support the partner and the child; to share the joys of the new baby; to give some respite—some time-out—for the partner to do little things such as take a bath, have a cup of tea and relax in front of the TV; and to share the responsibility for what is, especially to first-time parents, a vulnerable and mysterious creature. Liesel's mum, Kate, told me, 'It was so good to be home together as a family—to see her and Damien just be together. To see her respond to his voice or be fast asleep on his chest was just magical.'

After the 2010 election, Labor made a commitment to give dads the chance to have two weeks off to support new mums at home. The government's historic Paid Parental Leave scheme has now benefited more than 150,000 new mums. Labor's Paid Parental Leave scheme is funded by the government and paid through employers, so employers can stay in touch with their long-term employees while they are taking time off to care for a new baby.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms K Livermore): Order! The minister and the shadow minister can find another place to talk if they need to do it that loudly. Otherwise, please be quiet while we listen to the member for Fraser.

Dr LEIGH: That was the approach recommended by the Productivity Commission after their extensive inquiry. It reflects the fact that Paid Parental Leave scheme is a workplace entitlement, not a welfare payment. It is critical that we maintain that link to employment, and it is maintained in Labor's Paid Parental Leave scheme as the Productivity Commission recommended.

Under this bill, eligible fathers and partners will receive two weeks dad-and-partner pay at the same rate per week as paid parental leave is paid, which is currently $590 a week before tax. Dad-and-partner pay will begin on 1 January 2013. The eligibility criteria for dad-and-partner pay—including the income test, the work test and residency requirements—will be consistent with those for parental leave pay. Dad-and-partner pay cannot be transferred to the primary carer; it has a use-it-or-lose-it provision to encourage fathers to take more time off work.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The level of conversation in the chamber is just too much. The member for Fraser deserves to be heard in silence.

Dr LEIGH: It also signals to employers that a father's role in caring for a new baby is important. The government expects that employers will retain their existing parental and paternity leave provisions and continue to set themselves apart as employers of choice for parents. We are working with employers to provide fathers the maximum opportunity to take time off work so that they can be involved in their child's care from an early age. The dad-and-partner payment gives families more options to balance work and family commitments. It is good for dads, it is good for mums and it gives newborns the best possible start in life.
For the last two years, I have held a welcoming-the-babies event, which was originated by the Treasurer in the electorate of Lilley.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Sturt!

**Dr LEIGH:** Welcoming the babies is a chance to recognise Canberra’s new parents and for them to meet other parents, connect with community services and find out what is available. For last year’s welcoming-the-babies event we had a terrific weather, and around 150 parents and children turned up. They grabbed a coffee or a sausage sandwich, enjoyed the sunshine and chatted to stallholders about playgroups, breastfeeding, maternal health, immunisation, toddler sports and other supports. First-time dad Tito Hasan told me: ‘It’s been great to see kids having fun. My wife and I see the range of things out there for first-time parents. I’m looking forward to coming back next year.’

This year we had horrendous rain and Commonwealth Park was closed on the weekend of welcoming the babies, so, in lieu of us having the event outside, around 30 parents and children enjoyed morning tea in my electorate office, shared stories and met with service providers. They all took home a baby pack and a formal certificate. As the saying goes, it takes a village to raise a child, and now dads can stay in the village for another two weeks and enjoy this special time without having to worry about the family finances.

I have a story to share about my own experience of being a new dad. I remember that first hour of my eldest son’s life. It was an extraordinary period, because my eldest son was born by caesarean section. For those who have not seen a caesarean section performed, what is most amazing is how quick it is. From the first incision to when the baby comes out is only about seven minutes but then the remainder of the operation takes about an hour. So, as a dad, you then have an hour on your own with the newborn.

I remember being struck by how relaxed and peaceful my son was. I just talked away to Sebastian. I babbled away and started to think about the advice that a father should give a son. I had never given father-son advice before, so after about 10 minutes of babbling, I finally settled on the one thing I wanted most of all: I wanted him to be curious. Five years later the conversation sometimes floats back to me—when he asks questions like: dad, why is the sky blue?—and I wonder whether I should have encouraged him to be quite so curious when he is in his cupboard-opening mode.

Those first weeks are an extraordinarily precious time, and encouraging fathers to spend more time bonding with their sons is a critical thing to do. It is a great privilege to be a dad. It is really important that we as policymakers encourage that bonding. It is good for early childhood and it ensure that dads enjoy that precious time with newborns, because a newborn child is too important, too precious and too loved to miss out on those early weeks with their father.

I commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned.

**BUSINESS**

**Rearrangement**

**Mr ALBANESE** (Grayndler—Leader of the House and Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) (17:38): I move:

That Federation Chamber, private Members’ business, orders of the day No. 1 relating to World Plumbing Day, No. 3 relating to Wind turbine planning policies, and No. 6 relating to Careers in agriculture be returned to the House for further consideration.
Question agreed to.

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House and Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) (17:39): by leave—I move:

That so much of the standing and sessional orders be suspended as would prevent the following orders of the day, private Members' business, being called on, and considered immediately in the following order:

Motion relating to Careers in agriculture;
Motion relating to World Plumbing Day;
No. 22 – motion relating to the Delay of the consideration of the Wild Rivers (Environmental Management) Bill 2011; and
Motion relating to Wind turbine planning policies.

Question agreed to.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS
Careers in Agriculture

Debate resumed on motion by Dr Stone:

That this House:

(1) notes that the Australian agricultural industry offers excellent career opportunities, including:

(a) approximately 100,000 jobs in the agricultural sector;
(b) 2.5 jobs for every agricultural graduate; and
(c) a diverse range of careers requiring a wide range of skill levels;

(2) acknowledges that responding to the expanding global food task will require Australia to substantially upskill and increase the size of its agribusiness workforce;

(3) recognises that there are declining participation rates and graduates in the agriculture sector as tertiary agricultural science courses offerings decline, and secondary school students do not take up undergraduate courses; and

(4) calls on the Government to:

(a) resource the promotion of careers in agriculture through the primary and secondary school system;
(b) provide incentives for universities to offer agricultural science courses; and
(c) encourage industry in the development of agribusiness educational and training resource material.

Question agreed to.

World Plumbing Day

Debate resumed on motion by Mr Hunt:

That this House:

(1) recognises the:

(a) importance of World Plumbing Day on 11 March and its aim of highlighting the role that the plumbing industry plays in relation to health, through the provision of safe water and sanitation; and

(b) environmental role of the industry in water conservation and in energy efficiency and the increasing use of renewable sources of energy;

(2) notes that it is estimated that 3.1 million children die each year as a result of water related diseases; and

(3) congratulates the World Plumbing Council on its role in promoting the importance of the plumbing industry both in developed countries and in developing countries where good plumbing could save lives.

Question agreed to.

Wild Rivers (Environmental Management) Bill 2011

Debate resumed on motion by Mr Abbott:

That this House:

(1) notes that since the Wild Rivers (Environmental Management) Bill was first introduced on 8 February 2010, it has been referred to the following committees:

(a) the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee which commenced its inquiry on 25 February 2010 and reported to the Senate on 22 June 2010;

(b) the House Standing Committee on Economics which commenced inquiry on 17 November 2010 and reported to this House on 12 May 2011;
(c) the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee which commenced its inquiry on 24 March 2011 and reported to the Senate on 10 May 2011;

(d) the House Standing Committee on Agriculture, Resources, Fisheries and Forestry which commenced its inquiry on 15 September 2011, was due to report to the House on 2 November 2011 and is yet to table a report; and

(e) the House Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs on 24 November 2011 with a reporting date which is yet to be determined;

(2) expresses its concern that despite the unprecedented scrutiny for a private Member’s bill this House is yet to have the opportunity to vote on this bill;

(3) notes that Noel Pearson and the Cape York Institute have called for traditional owners of land on Cape York to have more control over the way the land is used; and

(4) calls on the Government to allow the members of this House to exercise their vote on this important bill.

Question agreed to.

Wind Turbines

Debate resumed on motion by Mrs Moylan:

That this House:

(1) recognises the importance of clean energy generation technologies in Australia’s current and future energy mix;

(2) acknowledges the exponential growth of wind power across Australia;

(3) appreciates that prudent planning policies are key to ensuring new infrastructure development does not adversely impact upon the social fabric of communities;

(4) notes that:

(a) the Environment Protection and Heritage Council has decided to cease further development of the National Wind Farm Development Guidelines;

(b) there is significant anecdotal evidence supporting concern about the health and associated social effects of wind farms which remain unresolved; and

(c) the Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee’s report, The Social and Economic Impact of Rural Wind Farms has, as a matter of priority, called for adequately resourced studies into the possible impact that wind farms have on health;

(5) recognises that the National Health and Medical Research Council’s rapid review into wind turbines and health is only a cursory compilation of literature on the topic and not an in-depth study and should not be principally relied upon to inform planning guidelines;

(6) calls on the Government to urgently commence full in-depth studies into the potential health effects of wind turbines, especially low-frequency infrasound;

(7) requests that the Government fully investigate international best practice in planning policies regarding wind farms and, in conjunction with State governments, publish comprehensive updated guidelines;

(8) calls on State, Territory and local government authorities to adopt cautious planning policies for wind farms and in the interim provide adequate buffer zones and not locate wind farms near towns, residential zoned areas, farm buildings and workplaces; and

(9) calls for approval processes to require wind farm developers to indemnify against potential health issues arising from infrasound before development approval is granted.

Mrs MOYLAN (Pearce) (17:41): by leave—I move:

That the motion be amended in the terms as circulated to honourable members in the chamber. The motion reads:

That this House:

(1) recognises the importance of clean energy generation technologies in Australia’s current and future energy mix;

(2) acknowledges the exponential growth of wind power across Australia;

(3) appreciates that prudent planning policies are key to ensuring new infrastructure development
does not adversely impact upon the social fabric of communities;

(4) notes that:

(a) the Environment Protection and Heritage Council has decided to cease further development of the National Wind Farm Development Guidelines;

(b) there are claims supporting concern about the health and associated social effects of wind farms which remain unresolved; and

(c) the Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee’s report, The Social and Economic Impact of Rural Wind Farms has called for adequately resourced studies into the possible impact wind farms have on health as a matter of priority;

(5) recognises that the National Health and Medical Research Council’s rapid review into wind turbines and health is only a cursory compilation of literature on the topic and not an in-depth study and should not be principally relied upon to inform planning guidelines;

(6) acknowledges that the National Health and Medical Research Council is now conducting an in-depth literature review of the scientific evidence on the potential effects of wind turbines, including low-frequency noise and infrasound to:

(a) inform any update to the National Health and Medical Research Council’s Public Statement Wind Turbines and Human Health; and

(b) identify critical gaps in the current evidence base;

(7) calls on the government to facilitate further expert investigation and research should critical gaps be evident;

(8) requests that State and Territory Governments fully investigate international best practice in planning policies regarding wind farms and publish comprehensive updated guidelines;

(9) calls on State, Territory and local government authorities to adopt cautious planning policies for wind farms and in the interim provide adequate buffer zones and not locate wind farms near to towns, residential zoned areas, farm buildings and workplaces; and

(10) calls on the approval processes of State and Territory and Local Governments to require wind farm developers to indemnify against potential health issues arising from low frequency noise and infrasound before development approval is granted.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms K Livermore): Is the amendment seconded?

Dr Stone: I second the amendment.

Question agreed to.

Original question, as amended, agreed to.

BUSINESS

Rearrangement

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House and Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) (17:42): I move:

That business intervening before order of the day No. 1, Government business, be postponed until the next sitting.

For the benefit of members, it is Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2012-2013. This will enable the Leader of the Opposition to give his reply to the budget speech.

Question agreed to.

Sitting suspended from 17:44 to 19:30

BILLS

Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2012-2013

Second Reading

Debate resumed on the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (19:30): The job, Madam Deputy Speaker, of every member of this parliament is to help shape a better Australia. It is to listen carefully to the Australian people, respect the hard-won dollars they pay in tax, do our honest best to make people’s lives easier, not harder, and honour the commitments we make to those who vote for us. If that is how we discharge our duties as members of parliament, politics is an honourable calling, the public can respect
their MPs and MPs can respect each other even when we disagree.

My values are the product of an Australian life—a real life much like yours—with Margie, raising three daughters in suburban Sydney, paying a mortgage, worrying about bills, trying to be a good neighbour and a good citizen, appreciating that no-one has a monopoly on virtue or wisdom, and grateful that our country has normally been free from the class struggle that has raged elsewhere, to other countries' terrible cost.

In a healthy democracy, people need not agree with everything a government does but they should be able to appreciate its purpose and why it could be for the long-term good of the nation as whole. The fundamental problem with this budget is that it deliberately, coldly, calculatedly plays the class-war card. It cancels previous commitments to company tax cuts and replaces them with means tested payments because a drowning government has decided to portray the political contest in this country as billionaires versus battlers. It is an ignoble piece of work from an unworthy Prime Minister that will offend the intelligence of the Australian people.

So, on behalf of the Liberal-National coalition, I assert these fundamental truths: government should be at least as interested in the creation of wealth as in its redistribution; government should protect the vulnerable, not to create more clients of the state but to foster more self-reliant citizens; the small business people who put their houses on the line to create jobs deserve support from government, not broken promises; people who work hard and put money aside so they will not be a burden on others should be encouraged, not hit with higher taxes; and people earning $83,000 a year and families on $150,000 a year are not rich, especially if they are paying mortgages in our big cities. Australia needs more successful people and more opportunities for people to succeed, yet this government's message is: 'The harder you try, the harder we'll make it for you.'

From an economic perspective, the worst aspect of this year's budget is that there is no plan for economic growth—nothing whatsoever to promote investment or employment. Without a growing economy, everything a government does is basically robbing Peter to pay Paul. With a growing economy, it is possible to have lower taxes, better services and a stronger budget bottom line—as Australians discovered during the Howard era. That now seems like a lost golden age of prosperity. As this budget shows, to every issue this government's knee-jerk response is more tax, more regulation and more vitriol.

The Treasurer referred just once on Tuesday night to what he coyly called the 'carbon price' before rushing to assure people that it would not affect them. If the carbon tax will not hurt anyone why is the government topping up compensation in this budget? If the carbon tax will not hurt anyone, why did the Prime Minister say, six days before the last election, that there would be no carbon tax under the government she led? If the carbon tax will not hurt anyone, why are Labor members of parliament now frightened to go doorknocking, even in their heartland?

Let's be clear about this: no genuine Labor government would be hitting the families and businesses of Australia with the world's biggest carbon tax at the worst possible time. No genuine Labor government would be hitting our economy with what amounts to a reverse tariff, making Australian businesses less competitive and Australian jobs less secure compared to our overseas rivals who face no such tax. It does not matter how
many times the Treasurer refers to a Labor government with Labor values; the real Labor people with whom I mix beyond the Parliamentary Triangle despair of the politicians who have sold their party's soul to the Greens.

I applaud the Treasurer's eagerness to deliver a surplus—but, if a forecast $1.5 billion surplus is enough to encourage the Reserve Bank to reduce interest rates, what has been the impact on interest rates of his $174 billion in delivered deficits over the past four years?

How can the Treasurer be so confident of next year's skinny surplus when this year's deficit, forecast to be $23 billion in last year's budget, has now grown to $44 billion? How can he be confident that next year's surplus will not evaporate completely, given that it has already shrunk from $3.5 billion in last year's budget, and the cumulative budget bottom line has deteriorated by $26 billion in just 12 months?

The forecast surplus relies on the continuation of record terms of trade even though growth in China is moderating and Europe is still in deep trouble. Yet on Treasury's own estimates, a decline in the terms of trade of just four per cent would turn the surplus into a $1.9 billion deficit next year and a $5.1 billion deficit the year after.

As everyone who has managed a household budget knows, shuffling costs from one year to another, as the Treasurer has, does not make them go away; and a tiny surplus in one year does not outweigh huge deficits in other years. Even if the Treasurer is right, it will take 100 years of Swan surpluses to repay just four years of Swan deficits.

I know what it is like to deliver sustained surpluses because I was part of a government that did; indeed, 16 members of my frontbench were ministers in the government that delivered the four biggest surpluses in Australian history. By contrast, no-one will know whether the Treasurer has actually delivered his microsurplus until late next year; is it any wonder that he seems to be suffering from a bad case of surplus envy?

If the budget really was coming into surplus it stands to reason that the government would have no further need to borrow. If the government really thinks that a surplus can be delivered, as opposed to being merely forecast, why is it proposing to add a further $50 billion to the Commonwealth's debt ceiling? I challenge the government to stop hiding this massive lift in Australia's credit card limit in the appropriation bills and to present it honestly, openly to the parliament as a separate measure where it will have to be debated and justified on its merits.

Just two months ago, the Prime Minister said, 'If you are against cutting company tax you are against economic growth. If you are against economic growth, then you are against jobs.' In dumping her commitment to company tax cuts, the Prime Minister has reinforced her trust problem: why should this year's budget commitments be any more reliable than previous ones, especially when so much is such obvious spin?

The Treasurer boasted about his aged care changes but failed to mention that everyone who is not a full pensioner faces up to $10,000 a year more for in-home aged care and up to $25,000 a year more for residential care. He hailed the delivery of the National Disability Insurance Scheme but neglected to mention that it was short-changed $2.9 billion from the Productivity Commission's version. He trumpeted more money for the states' dental schemes but not his plans to abolish the Medicare dental scheme. He highlighted more spending on the Pacific
Highway but not the get-out clause that it has to be matched 50-50 by New South Wales, not 80-20 as agreed with the previous New South Wales Labor government. The Treasurer insisted that military spending could be cut—breaking more commitments in the process—without harming our defence capability even though defence spending, as a percentage of GDP, will soon be at the lowest level since 1938.

The Australian people deserve better than this and they are looking to the coalition for reassurance that there is a better way. The coalition has a plan for economic growth; it starts with abolishing the carbon tax and abolishing the mining tax. Abolishing the mining tax will make Australia a better place to invest and let the world know that we do not punish success. Abolishing the carbon tax would be the swiftest contribution government could make to relieving cost-of-living pressure; it would take the pressure off power prices, gas prices and rates; it would prevent more pressure on transport prices. Abolishing the carbon tax would make every job in our economy more secure. It would help to ensure that we keep strong manufacturing and vibrant agriculture, and grow knowledge based industries and a resilient services sector as well as a mining industry, in a vigorous five-pillar economy.

Australians understand that a tax reduction to compensate for a tax increase is not a real cut; they know that the only sustainable tax cuts are based on a permanent decrease in the size of government or a permanent increase in the wealth of our nation. Under the coalition, there will be tax cuts without a carbon tax because we will find the savings to pay for them. After all, the Howard government turned a $10 billion budget black hole into consistent surpluses averaging almost one per cent of GDP; it turned $96 billion in net Commonwealth debt into $70 billion in net assets. The coalition identified $50 billion in savings before the last election and will do at least as much again before the next one. It is not as if savings are impossible to find. Why should the government commit nearly $6 billion to power stations that the carbon tax would otherwise send bankrupt rather than just drop the carbon tax? Why spend billions of dollars to put people out of work rather than into it? Why does the Defence Materiel Organisation need 7,000 bureaucrats, especially when major equipment purchases are being put off? Why does Australia need to spend millions to join the African Development Bank?

Why spend $50 billion on a national broadband network just so customers can subsequently spend almost three times their current monthly fee on speeds they might not need? Why dig up every street when fibre to the node could more swiftly and more affordably deliver 21st century broadband? Why put so much into the NBN when the same investment could more than duplicate the Pacific Highway, Sydney's M5 and the road between Hobart and Launceston; build Sydney's M4 East, the Melbourne Metro, and Brisbane's cross-city rail; and upgrade Perth Airport and still leave about $10 billion for faster broadband? Why spend another $1.7 billion on border protection cost blow-outs because the government is too proud to admit that John Howard's policies worked?

The Treasurer boasts that our economy will be 16 per cent bigger by mid-2014 than it was in mid-2008, before the global financial crisis. What he does not mention is that, over the previous six years, growth was 22 per cent and that over the six years before that—spanning the Asian financial crisis, the tech wreck and September 11—the Howard government achieved growth of 26 per cent while implementing far-reaching economic reforms such as the GST.
Strong economic growth will be the overriding aim of the next coalition government. We have done it before; we will do it again. We will cut business red-tape costs by at least $1 billion a year by requiring each government agency to quantify the costs of its reporting and compliance rules and delivering an annual savings target. Public service bonuses will not be paid unless these targets are met. There will be a once-in-a-generation commission of audit to review all the arms and agencies of government to ensure that taxpayers are getting good value for money.

We will respond carefully but decisively to the problems that the community has identified in the Fair Work Act so that small businesses and their staff can get a fair go and our productivity can increase. We will restore the Australian Building and Construction Commission—the successor of the Cole royal commission, which I established—as a strong cop on the beat and the guarantor of $6 billion a year in productivity improvements in a vital industry. Where union officials and business people commit the same offence, they should face the same penalty; but, unlike the government, we did not need the Fair Work report into the Member for Dobell to realise that some unions are corrupt boys' clubs.

We will work with the states to put local people in charge of public schools and public hospitals because they should be as responsive to their patients and to their parents as businesses are to their customers. Our objective is to bring to the running of public schools and hospitals the same have-a-go mindset that the move to the Job Network, which I oversaw, brought to employment services under the former government.

The coalition wants more Australians to be economic as well as cultural contributors. That is why Work for the Dole or some other serious undertaking should be mandatory for long-term unemployed people under 50. Welfare quarantining for long-term unemployed people should be extended from the Northern Territory to the rest of the country. Where unskilled work is readily available, unemployment benefits should be suspended for fit people under 30, as recommended by Warren Mundine, a former Labor Party national president.

Yes, there will finally be a fair dinkum paid parental leave scheme, giving mothers six months at full pay with their babies and bringing Australia into the 21st century to join the 35 other countries whose parental leave schemes are based on people's pay. Because parental leave is a workplace entitlement, not a welfare benefit, it should be paid at people's real wage as sick leave and holiday pay are. There will also be a Productivity Commission inquiry to consider how child care can be made more flexible and more effective, including through in-home care, so that more women can participate in a growing economy if that is their choice.

I will continue to work with Noel Pearson to help shift the welfare culture that has sapped Aboriginal self-respect, and with Twiggy Forrest to get more Aboriginal people into the workforce. I will keep spending a week every year volunteering in Aboriginal communities, and I hope that a tribe of public servants will soon have to come with me to gain more actual experience of the places we are all trying to improve. That is what good social policy does—it empowers people to make the most of their lives and to prove to themselves what they can do rather than what they cannot. That way, it reinforces good economic policy.

In a productive and competitive economy it should be easier to get things built,
provided they meet the best environmental standards. So the coalition will allow the states to be a one-stop shop for environmental approvals. The coalition will reward conservation minded businesses with incentives to be more efficient users of energy and lower carbon emitters. Our policy means better soils, more trees and smarter technology—unlike the carbon tax, which is socialism masquerading as environmentalism. There will be a green army, an expanded version of the Green Corps that I put in place in government, to tackle our landcare problems so that beaches and waterways can be cleaner and land more productive.

The next coalition government will fund infrastructure in accordance with a rational national plan based on published cost-benefit analyses. We will find the most responsible ways to get more private investment into priority projects so that the new roads, public transport systems and water storages that we need are not so dependent on the taxpayer. Too often, government's focus is on the urgent rather than the important; on what drives tomorrow's headline rather than on what changes our country for the better. We are supposed to be adapting to the Asian century, yet Australians' study of foreign languages, especially Asian languages, is in precipitous decline. The proportion of year 12 students studying a foreign language has dropped from about 40 per cent in the 1960s to about 12 per cent now. There are now only about 300 year 12 Mandarin students who are not of Chinese heritage. Since 2001, there has been a 21 per cent decline in the numbers studying Japanese and a 40 per cent decline in the numbers studying Indonesian.

If Australians are to make their way in the world, we cannot rely on other people speaking our language. Starting in preschool every student should have an exposure to foreign languages. This will be a generational shift, because foreign language speakers will have to be mobilised and because teachers take time to be trained. Still, the next coalition government will make a strong start. My commitment tonight is to work urgently with the states to ensure that at least 40 per cent of year 12 students are once more taking a language other than English within a decade.

The coalition can find responsible savings to cover tax cuts without a carbon tax and emissions cuts without a carbon tax because, at least until the budget has returned to strong surplus, our plan for a stronger economy and a fairer society involves more efficiency rather than more spending.

There is little wrong with our country that a change of government would not improve. On day 1, a new government would order the carbon tax repealed and accept Nauru's standing offer to reopen the detention centre. Within a week, the Navy would have new orders to turn around illegal boats. Within a month, the commission of audit would be making government more efficient. Within three months the parliament would be dealing with carbon tax, mining tax and border protection legislation. Within a year, national infrastructure priorities would be agreed and there would be more cranes over our cities. Every day, with every fibre of my being, I would be striving to help Australians be their best selves.

As someone whose grandparents were proud to be working class, I can feel the embarrassment of decent Labor people at the failures of this government. As Ben Chifley famously said, the goal of public life, our 'light on the hill', should not be making someone Prime Minister or putting an extra sixpence in people's pockets but rather 'working for the benefit of mankind, not just here but wherever we can lend a helping hand'.
I regret to say that the deeper message of this week's budget is that the Labor Party now stands only for staying in office. Everyone knows that this Prime Minister is a clever politician, but who really trusts her to keep any commitments? She said she would never challenge the former Prime Minister but did. She said there would never be a carbon tax but has imposed one because, she claimed, the Greens made her do it. The Prime Minister told the member for Denison, 'There will be mandatory pre-commitment under the government I lead,' but she now tells clubs and pubs, 'There will be no mandatory pre-commitment under the government I lead.'

This week, the Prime Minister and the Treasurer have constantly invoked Labor values. Were they Labor values the Prime Minister showed in carpet bombing Kevin Rudd's reputation or in turfing Harry Jenkins as speaker for Peter Slipper or in protecting Craig Thomson, the Member for Dobell, to this very day, despite Fair Work Australia's findings? By a government's actions will its values be judged.

Budget week has not just been about the budget. Under these circumstances, how could it be? It has been about the Prime Minister's integrity and judgment. As long as Labor keeps voting in this parliament to protect the Member for Dobell and keeps paying his legal fees, his suspension from the caucus will not end the sleaze factor paralysing this government.

Decent Labor people should not be buffed by the deal with independents to keep a leader who is trashing a once-honourable political party. Before this government dies of shame, it should find a leader who is not fatally compromised by the need to defend the indefensible. Then this parliament can once more be a proper contest of ideas between those who see bigger government and those who see empowered citizens as the best guarantee of our nation's future.

As budget week has demonstrated, minority governments are too busy managing the parliament to manage the economy properly. While they are surviving, not governing, our country is drifting, not flourishing. With each broken promise, with each peremptory change, with each tawdry revelation, with each embarrassing explanation, the credibility of this government and the standing of this parliament is diminished. But a shrunken government diminishes us all; that is why our country needs a change.

I want to assure the people of Australia that it does not have to be like this; we are a great people let down by a bad government which will pass. There is a better way. The coalition stands ready to restore hope, reward and opportunity so that, once more, all Australians can face a bright future with confidence.

Debate adjourned.

House adjourned at 20:00

NOTICES

The following notice(s) were given:

Mr Alexander: to move:

That this House recognise the:

(1) strong history of Chinese migration to Australia over the past 200 years;
(2) significant contribution that Chinese-Australians have made over this period to our nation;
(3) vibrant festivities and events hosted by the Bennelong Chinese community and enjoyed by people of many cultures; and
(4) unique opportunity for the local Chinese, Korean and broader communities to come together at the Bennelong Cup Table Tennis Test Match for an international table tennis competition against Australia.
Thursday, 10 May 2012

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott) took the chair at 09:30.

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

Anzac Day

Mr McCORMACK (Riverina) (09:30): The following are not my words but those of Tumbarumba Shire Council General Manager Kay Whitehead:

The Anzac Day commemoration in Tumbarumba was once again very well attended, with an estimated 100 people attending the dawn service and then approximately 300 people attending the 10.30 am service, despite bleak weather.

The ceremony was marred by the absence of the usual catafalque party, whose presence provides comfort to the Tumbarumba community that the nation values the sacrifices of so many of the community in past wars, and also provides a contemporary reminder that many young people continue to risk their lives in defence of the nation.

The Anzac Day gathering was informed that the Federal Government has decided that providing a catafalque party to small communities such as Tumbarumba is too expensive to continue. As a consequence there was little ceremony to add gravitas to the day, and no serving defence force member to give the Anzac Day address.

Many people in the community expressed disappointment and disgust about the perceived 'misguided penny-pinching' to councillors and it was discussed at the Council meeting held on the 26th April.

The community has every reason to feel angry and cheated. Tumbarumba and district gave mightily to Australia's war efforts and lost many good men. Only last November, I took part in a moving ceremony at the town's memorial park and I was privileged to unveil a splendid monument honouring three brave locals, prisoners of war, who died as a result of the Sandakan death marches in 1945. They, like many others from the region, gave their lives for our freedom and they deserve better than the shabby treatment this government dished out to Riverina towns this Anzac Day.

Temora and West Wyalong also missed out on Australian Defence Force representation. When the West Wyalong RSL Sub-Branch queried as to why the usual catafalque party could not and would not be provided, they were told that cutbacks to personnel attending district services had been made because of budget constraints. There is a new rule stating that only towns within a 100-kilometre radius of the nearest military base will now be eligible for ADF support. Tumbarumba and West Wyalong are more than 100 kilometres from Wagga Wagga, where the Air Force, Army and Navy all have bases.

Military members have always been keen to make themselves available to support local communities on Anzac Day. For recruits, this is an important and essential part of their training. Now, because the government is trying to cut costs—especially in regional areas—to bring about an illusionary budget surplus, these towns have had to unfairly miss out. In the case of West Wyalong, this is an insult to a town which lost 22 of its best and bravest in World War I during which the Anzac legend dawned, and to a town which counts among its favourite sons Reg Rattey, VC. It is particularly disappointing also because for the past two years I have run an electorate-wide writing competition for schoolchildren and for the past
two years the towns with the most entries and the most winning entries have been Temora, Tumbarumba and West Wyalong.

Anzac Day is our most important national day and it is very important to the people of West Wyalong, especially the schoolchildren. Let us not forget that this is the same Labor government which recently spent $370,000 of taxpayers' money on a politically correct focus group which wanted Gallipoli centenary commemorations in 2015 toned down because of fear of creating divisiveness because of multiculturalism. And this is the same Labor government which unjustly stripped $5.5 billion from Defence spending in Tuesday's budget.

**Origin Alliance**

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (09:33): With opening of the Dinmore to Goodna section of the Ipswich motorway—which is a wonderful project that was funded by the federal Labor government—next week, I want to take the opportunity to thank Origin Alliance. Origin Alliance is the Department of Main Roads, Queensland, and a number of construction companies who have left a lasting legacy in the western corridor between Brisbane and Ipswich. Thousands of jobs have been created and also thousands of apprenticeships, Indigenous and otherwise, and much community infrastructure has been undertaken. Origin Alliance has provided assistance to local community groups and we have also seen funding for breast cancer research and for prostate cancer, funded through charity golf days. The community engagement has been fantastic from Origin Alliance. I wanted to name a number of people but there are just too many to thank, so I will thank them individually for the work they have done at the dinner we will have in Brisbane in the next few months. But I want particularly to recognise Origin Alliance and the lasting legacy, and just to mention today one example about how they helped us. In the flood in January 2011 the section of motorway between Dinmore and Goodna was cut by rising floodwaters at several places, including Woogaroo Creek, Goodna Creek and Six Mile Creek. The first priority of Origin Alliance was to get the road inspected and to clean the mud away to make it safe to be reopened. About 200 Origin Alliance workers were involved in the clean-up over subsequent days, clearing debris, cleaning roads, removing rubbish, repairing potholes and controlling the traffic between Goodna, Redbank and Riverview. They worked closely with Ipswich City Council as well as the Australian Army. They applied to the task 60 trucks, 20 water trucks, 10 bobcats, 10 backhoes, 10 excavators and six loaders, and much of the equipment was subsequently available to Ipswich City Council to continue the flood recovery efforts.

The community consultation continued during that time. It is to be remembered that the ground floor of more than nine offices of the Origin Alliance site office at Redbank was inundated by three metres of floodwater, but that did not stop them continuing to work despite the fact that much of the infrastructure, plant and equipment was damaged. They also worked to assist Riverview Neighbourhood House, which was an evacuation centre and recovery centre in Riverview, distributing items and providing portaloos and portable showers to assist residents in Goodna without power and water. This is a demonstration of the great community spirit of Origin Alliance. They have really left a lasting legacy in the Western Corridor: jobs created, people's lives enriched, a safer road, economic development enhanced. I commend them for their wonderful work and thank them sincerely on behalf of the people of Blair and the people of Ipswich.
Budget

Mr CIOBO (Moncrieff) (09:36): I rise to speak about the impact of this week’s federal budget on the Gold Coast, particularly in respect of one significant project that is going to be happening on the Gold Coast, the Commonwealth Games. We know that the federal government’s fiscal position has deteriorated rapidly under this Labor government. Unfortunately, we have seen the government recklessly wasting billions and billions of dollars. We are now faced with the situation where, as part of the preparation and planning for the Commonwealth Games on the Gold Coast, my city and indeed my constituency have been put in a very difficult situation because there is simply no money available from the federal government to ensure the required appropriate infrastructure and planning and works can in fact occur to stage what we hope will be the world’s greatest Commonwealth Games. The former Howard government provided a contribution of some $272.5 million over four years to the Melbourne Commonwealth Games. They were excellent games. The reality is that that should be the benchmark that is applied to and levelled against this federal Labor government with respect to the funding to be provided to the Gold Coast and indeed the state of Queensland to ensure that the Commonwealth Games in 2018 are the best Commonwealth Games that have ever been staged.

This is part of an ongoing campaign that needs to be pressed, given the reality that the Commonwealth Games are not just about the one Commonwealth Games at that one particular point in time. The infrastructure associated with the Commonwealth Games—the roads, the stadium, the swimming pools, the velodromes and all these kinds of things—are important and this infrastructure will service not only the Gold Coast but indeed all of Australia for decades. If we use the Commonwealth Games as the platform and as the leverage point to ensure that we install this kind of infrastructure of a world-class standard now, we enable our city to be well placed to host an array of various regional sporting championships throughout the Asia-Pacific region; indeed, for national titles to be held on the Gold Coast, and to able to draw upon a bigger domestic tourism population as well as an international tourism population to come and visit the city, to stay in the city and to compete in the city.

It is on that basis that I say the investment in this infrastructure is crucial to driving our tourism exports around the world over the coming decades. So with that in mind the Gold Coast needs to move much higher up the ladder when it comes to the priorities of this federal government. The federal government need to get their spending under control. They need to start making wise investments rather than simply splashing cash around the place. They need to recognise that it is through sustainable investment in national infrastructure, especially sporting infrastructure, that they will place not only the Gold Coast but indeed Australia on a much firmer footing going forward to ensure that we are able to generate tourism exports and, most importantly, to ensure that our international reputation, when it comes to sport and our ability to host and organise events like the Commonwealth Games, will be par excellence. In that respect the Labor government needs to pull up its socks.

Trade Training Centres

Mr SIDEBOTTOM (Braddon—Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry) (09:39): I welcome the students who are with us in the chamber today and I say to...
them: I do not want you to be too upset about the grumbling going on on the other side—clearly they are not in government and that is why they are unhappy.

Today I would like to announce that we have four trade training centres that have been approved and are now completed in my electorate. In my electorate, high schools are separate from senior secondary colleges except for a number of private schools which go right through years 11 and 12. A couple of the colleges were successful in getting a trade training centre. St Brendan-Shaw College got a hairdressing trade training centre—and I notice that Vidal Sassoon died overnight, so there is a bit of symbolism in presenting this. They got about $1.5 million for a trade training centre particularly for training in hairdressing and services. Marist Regional College recently opened their trade training centre devoted to hospitality and, in particular, the development of pastry and bakery skills, which are difficult to acquire skills in at the moment. They also got $1.5 million. Importantly, in the Circular Head region, two schools got together and got two campus trade training centres: one devoted to construction, engineering, electro-technology and automotive skills, and the other combining to develop agriculture, aquaculture and horticulture. Students from both schools choose those activities and then go to the campuses that are presenting them. In all, there is about a $7.5 million investment in our trade training centres.

On top of that, we have recently had an announcement of an AgriTas centre of excellence for the training in services related to dairying and skills thereof. That is another investment of $4 million. In total there is about $11.5 million devoted to trade training and the development of skills, industry standard qualifications, in the north-west coast of Tasmania. It is a great investment and you cannot invest in anything better than our young people and most especially in their skills.

Vietnam

Mr FRYDENBERG (Kooyong) (09:42): I rise to speak about the ongoing persecution in Iran of those citizens who practise the Baha'i faith. It is a subject that should be of concern to all of us. Founded in Iran in 1844 by Baha'u'llah, there are now around six million Baha'is across the globe. Their key message is one of unity—one God, one human race, dedicated to the pursuit of harmony among the people of the world. Over the years I have had the good fortune to meet a number of people who share the Baha'i faith, some of whom have become close friends. Indeed, my electorate is home to the newly-planned Victorian Baha'i Centre of Learning in Canterbury, and the Baha'i Bookshop and Information Centre exists in Hawthorn.

In my meetings with the Baha'i community, they have raised with me the horrific treatment suffered by their fellow believers at the hands of the Iranian government. Arrests and intimidation, detention and questioning, the confiscation of businesses, school expulsions and the prohibition from centres of learning such as universities are common forms of persecution meted out to Baha'is in Iran. In fact, since August 2004, 545 Baha'is have been arrested in Iran. More than 100 are still in prison, including seven Baha'i leaders who have been incarcerated for more than 10,000 days. Such behaviour by the Iranian authorities is not only in breach of Iran's obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights but also but abhorrent to freethinking people the world over. I am pleased to say that the Australian parliament and successive governments in a bipartisan manner have consistently condemned Iran's behaviour. In fact, world leaders, including US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton, UK Foreign Secretary William Hague and Canadian Foreign Minister John Baird
have all called on Iran to respect the rights of the Baha'i community. In fact, David Cameron, the UK Prime Minister said last year:
I remain deeply concerned about the ongoing plight of seven Baha'i leaders and the continued attacks on the Baha'i Faith in Iran. Your dignity and patience is admirable in the face of such severe discrimination and intimidation for simply staying true to your faith.
The Australian and the international communities must do everything to pressure Iran to respect the people of Baha'i faith until that time comes when the Baha'i community in Iran can practise their faith free of persecution.

**Westfield Fountain Gate Shopping Centre**

**Mr BYRNE** (Holt) (09:45): I rise today to acknowledge a local success story in my electorate of Holt. It relates to the Westfield Fountain Gate Shopping Centre. Its origins were in a shopping centre that was created in 1970. From that small shopping centre, it has grown into one of the most impressive shopping centres in this country.

Next week Westfield Foundation Gate is going to open the first stage of its $320 million redevelopment. In the construction process so far it has created about 1,500 jobs in construction. Given the weakness of the local economy at the moment, this is important. These are new jobs and jobs for our region. As I said, it was developed in 1970. It is currently the fourth largest shopping centre in Australia with the 12th highest retail turnover.

Currently, Westfield Fountain Gate services a trade area of more than 325,000 people. Upon completion, Westfield Fountain Gate with this extension will become the second largest shopping centre in Australia to Chadstone. It will have a service area of about 171,000 square metres.

The investment by Westfield, which is a $300 million investment, an investment in our local community and local jobs, will see approximately 114 additional shops, which would bring when it is completed about 444 shops in the shopping centre.

After the full redevelopment, Westfield will comprise a full-time Myer department store, Big W, Kmart, Harris Scarfe and an expanded Target. Supermarkets will include a relocated brand new Coles, Woolworths and Aldi. Local residents can also look forward to a brand new TGI Friday's, which will be added to their new dining precinct, which is pretty good considering the businesses that are in the area.

One of the good issues is Westfield's commitment, and what symbolises Westfield's commitment to the local area is that they are going to employ 800 permanent retail workers. As I said, the retailers are doing it pretty tough down our way. Given this investment in both construction and also in terms of jobs—to invest in retail with 800 permanent jobs—it is a great thing for our area.

The federal government has worked in partnership with Westfield with respect to disadvantaged and Indigenous employees. We are trying to bring more of these employees into the retail sector. I think that is a great credit to Westfield that they are doing that.

Westfield Fountain Gate is located in one of the largest growth corridors in Australia. It is adapting to change and meeting the changing needs of the community. Westfield has a commitment to the area. People that live near Fountain Gate feel that they own the shopping centre. There is a great sense of pride and community in that shopping centre. It has been a hub. It is a place where people have met for well over 10 years. It is a meeting place. I
congratulate Westfield, and it will be my great honour to be there at the opening of stage 1 of the exciting new investment in the area.

Vesak Day

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (09:48): Last Sunday I celebrated the birthday of Buddha, also known as Vesak Day with the Vietnamese community in the electorate of Cowan. The celebration of Vesak includes the birth, enlightenment and passing of Gautama Buddha. It is the right time to reflect on the fact that to this day in Vietnam people do not have the freedom to speak, the freedom to worship, the freedom to travel without being under strict police surveillance.

In recent years, countless Vietnamese democracy activists and human rights offenders have been subjected to ill-treatment and arbitrary detention by the Hanoi regime. Many Vietnamese people from inside and outside the country have endeavoured to help shoulder the hardship and further democrat change in Vietnam through peaceful grassroots action. An example is Dr Nguyen Quoc Quan, who, in April 2012, was detained upon arrival at Saigon airport. According to stories published by the state controlled media, Dr Quan has been charged with terrorism under the Vietnamese penal code.

The Vietnamese government’s accusations of terrorism against Dr Quan are completely fabricated and have no basis. Dr Quan is a former high school teacher in Vietnam, a long-term democracy activist and a member of Viet Tan, the democracy party. His detention is the latest example of the Vietnamese Communist Party’s ongoing crackdown on human rights defenders and anyone who speaks against them. I challenge the Hanoi regime to prove its accusations in the court of Vietnamese and international public opinion. Dr Quan and all other voices of conscience must be released immediately and unconditionally in Vietnam.

In my Vesak speech I highlighted that in Australia we are very lucky and fortunate that we can exercise our rights freely and that we have a legal system that protects us from the wrongdoer—unlike in Vietnam, where the abuse of laws is orchestrated by local officials and government officials throughout the country. A current example of the legal system being controlled by the government is in the Van Giang district, where land has been unconstitutionally confiscated from farmers—land that they have worked so hard on for many years and lands that families depend upon to put food on the table. Farmers in this district are facing the use of military force, weapons and grenades to force them out of their rightfully owned land by local officials—by what the regime calls the 'people's police'. Many farmers have lost everything, including a roof over their head, and yet the government turned away and let these harassing persecutions continue.

I believe that this parliament should aim, as I do, for a democratic Vietnam where the Vietnamese people determine their own future, a Vietnam where everyone is free to practise their religion without fear, and a Vietnam where Vietnamese people can speak freely and where the government is accountable to the people and not where the people are accountable to the government.

Trade Training Centres

Dr LEIGH (Fraser) (09:51): The Australian government is establishing trade training centres to help increase the proportion of students achieving year 12 or an equivalent qualification. Since parliament last sat it has been my pleasure to open two sites of an ACT
trades training centre. The lead site of the trade training centre is St Mary MacKillop College, and that was opened by the Prime Minister and Minister Garrett on 17 February 2012. But it was my pleasure on 26 March to open the site at St Francis Xavier College and on 2 May to open the site at Merici College.

The site at St Francis Xavier College includes a large workshop, a machine room, a covered outdoor workshop and flexible learning areas, and works in with the Canberra Institute of Technology. I acknowledge College Captains Chloe Kelly and Nick Mahony; the Director of Catholic Education, Moira Najdecki; Archbishop Mark Coleridge; CIT's Adrian Marron; and Principal Angus Tulley.

The Merici College site includes a restaurant and a commercial kitchen. I acknowledge Principal Catherine Rey; College Captain Anne Cusack; and Spirituality Captain Danielle Farrell; the school board chair, Graeme Plenderleith; guest speaker, Callum Hann, from the Jamie Oliver cooking skills program; and Monsignor John Woods.

St Francis Xavier and St Angela Merici were both alive 500 years ago—St Angela Merici, a teacher in Brescia, Italy; and St Francis Xavier, a missionary from Spain who travelled to India, Japan, Borneo and the Moluccas. They never met one another but I think in the stories of both of them we can learn something about the trade training centres today. Like St Francis Xavier, Australian school graduates will travel the world. They will go through different careers and work in different industries, and they need to be ready for the unexpected that accompanies them. But, as St Angela Merici so passionately did during her life, they need to be provided with the best quality of education. They need that sustenance that education provides to the soul and to the mind to allow them the flexibility to adapt to a changing environment.

I commend both schools on the work that they have done, in conjunction with the fourth site, St Clare's College in the electorate of Canberra. The work that these schools and the school communities are doing as part of these trade training centres is essential in equipping young Canberrans for a future of change and a future in which they require all the skills that we can equip them with.

**Gilmore Electorate: Work Experience**

**Mrs GASH** (Gilmore) (09:54): I would like to say a few things about my experience in parliament and around the federal office in Gilmore. These words are from Quinn Patterson, a 15-year-old student who did work experience in my office just before the sitting break:

My careers adviser said to me the other day, Quinn, the time has come to work! I found myself asking the same question I had been asking for many years now, what will I do?

Work experience is certainly nothing to take lightly; so I thought it over. After thinking for a while I decided that I would apply where I knew the least: Politics.

I've never really know exactly what went on in parliament, but my chance to find out was here! Immediately seizing the opportunity I handed in my forms at my local members office and hoped I would be accepted.

To my surprise I was accepted with a smile and offered a better opportunity: To go to parliament itself! I had to take an extra week off school, but it was well worth it! Having been interested in debating and public speaking since I could talk, the experience was amazing!
I was able to see both behind and in front of the scenes as I glided from office to office. I was able to meet and greet some of the people who run this country, and some who work in their shadows.

The idea of being able to work and watch in this place while other people went about their business was amazing!

Everyday at 1:45 pm, I was given permission to make my way up to the senate or House of Representatives to see question time. The events sometimes became a little bit out of control, but most of the time they were composed.

I learned of many things while I was there, including the current bills, who everyone was, and the location of the coffee shop. Priorities may vary between people.

Of course, my learning didn't stop in parliament! After three days I came back to the local office and was able to meet many nice people who were happy to take me in. The office, I discovered, is where the nitty gritty stuff happens. All the brochures and posters and campaigns and schedules are made by the people behind the scenes. The work of a politician is not something that is done alone.

These people who I've had the pleasure to meet have helped me to learn exactly what I need to know in order to become involved in my community, and what it's like to be a politician. The work involved with parliament is beyond comprehension, it takes a lot of effort to organise an electorate and I appreciate it more now.

I'm amazed at how hospitable and helpful the staff at Miss Gash's office have been, and I thank them for their friendly support.

Congratulations to Quinn. He was certainly a valuable worker in my office and a pleasure to have. We wish him well in his future career. Bearing in mind that Quinn was only 15 when he came to Parliament House, he was a great support to me and my staff.

**Shortland Electorate: Proposed Bottle Shop**

Ms HALL (Shortland—Government Whip) (09:57): I would like to raise an issue of great concern within the community that I represent in Shortland. Mount Hutton is one of the suburbs in the Shortland electorate and it has come to my attention that Woolworths is seeking to open a liquor outlet in that suburb right next door to a school. This has been opposed by the community and is really very controversial. I would like to congratulate Councillors Jodie Harrison and Phillipa Parsons for the work that they have done in engaging with the community and raising the profile of this issue. I would also like to congratulate the New South Wales upper house, which unanimously passed a motion, which I will seek to table at the end of my contribution, opposing this liquor outlet.

The proposed site is only 100 metres from Mount Hutton Public School and Mullington Park. The school, park and existing shops have suffered a lot from vandalism and graffiti and a bottle shop is only going to make this situation worse. Mount Hutton already has bottle shops and does not need another one. There are two within one kilometre of the site and 14 within a five-kilometre radius. Woolworths itself actually has a bottle shop only 850 metres from the proposed site. So I argue very strongly that there is not a demonstrated need for this bottle shop. Woolworths accounts for one-third of the alcohol suppliers and 70 per cent of alcohol sales in the area, so a new outlet will not do anything to increase competition.

The consultation that Woolworths undertook was with the police and not with the community. The police said that the crime data did not warrant rejection of it, but it did not support it. There has been no social impact statement.
I would like to congratulate Jane Oakley, who has been championing this cause within the community. It is an issue that really is of great importance. Within this parliament, I would like to put on the record my support for the rejection of this bottle shop. I would also like to table the motion that was passed within the New South Wales upper house and unanimously supported.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott): In accordance with standing order 193, the time for members' constituency statements has concluded.

BILLS

Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 1) 2012

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

Mr JOHN COBB (Calare) (10:00): I rise to speak on the Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 1) 2012. As time moves on, acts always need to be tidied up, amended, and basically that is what this bill is about. It is about efficiencies, and it is good to see that the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry has produced a bill that actually reflects, more or less, the wishes of the agriculture industry. It is a bill that the industry pushed for with the future in mind. The industry is working towards facilitating a conducive environment in which agriculture can prosper. In this case, the department has acquiesced, as indeed it should. In saying this, the coalition does support the Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 1) 2012.

This bill will make minor amendments to eight portfolio acts to improve the operation of existing legislation and make technical amendments. I am pleased that the proposed changes are aimed at reducing red tape, complexity and unnecessary regulation that for too long have clogged up the system, even though the modifications seem minor in nature. I would have to say, though, that under this government the agriculture sector and most sectors have become more restrictive environments due to red and, in particular, green tape.

But amendments to the Wine Australia Corporation Act 1980 are welcome. To ensure accurate record keeping and effective auditing, labels have to provide truthful claims relating to the product. However, industry groups have raised concerns regarding labelling laws, which have become onerous and confusing. The proposed amendments would reduce the onerous record-keeping requirements of people who supply or receive wine goods that are packaged for sale to a consumer.

The industry approached the department seeking these changes. The most important role of the department of agriculture is to facilitate an environment which allows farmers and the industry to get on with the job and provide an environment where agriculture can prosper. We are talking about practical measures that maintain the integrity of the wine industry and associated programs.

Further changes to the definition of 'vintage' have also been welcomed. A vintage year at present is from the period 1 July to 30 June the following year; however, harvest normally occurs from the late summer, finishing before 30 June. Some producers make wines from grapes harvested after 30 June but before 1 September. Common sense will now see more
accurate labelling of these late-harvested products. A vintage year will now be considered to be the period of 1 September to 31 August.

Amendments to the Fisheries Management Act 1991 are also sensible, moderate reductions in regulations to simplify and improve the administration of the fisheries.

Changes to the Primary Industries Levies and Charges Collection Act 1991 allow the departmental secretary to consider all requests made by levy payers for the remission of penalties. It is amazing to think that penalties might be late in being paid. This delegation of responsibility to the departmental secretary will improve the efficiency and, one would hope, the speed of the penalty provisions process while, importantly, still allowing unsatisfied levy payers to seek a review from the minister.

A number of technical amendments will also be made to a number of other pieces of legislation, which allow for the correcting of errors and other issues which reduce confusion and deliver more clearly the original intent of the acts being amended. These would often be delivered through the House without debate at a later stage. However, due to the timing of the above amendments, we agree that it makes sense to combine these technical amendments so that the bills could be amended earlier.

The coalition supports these amendments as well as the repealing of the States Grants (War Service Land Settlement) Act 1952, which is now redundant. This was a great act—a historic act, actually—which helped returned war veterans repatriated after the war. Although there are still a few of the original returned servicemen operating under this act, by agreement with the relevant states those states have taken over responsibility for any continuing lease arrangements.

For too long, I have to say, there have been an increasing number of Green and environmental activist agendas under this government. Despite that, when the department sets its mind to it, it can actually deal with the industry and come up with changes which are in everybody's interest: they are more efficient and they get things happening. Certainly, I believe, this bill is one of those very few put forward by this government that actually see the department consulting and listening to industry and putting words into action. There have been massive increases in red tape and business costs under this government, and there are about to be a heck of a lot more from 1 July. But I have to say that these sorts of efficiency changes do not cost much and they are needed. They have to be done when you consider that the Prime Minister had the gall to say just a few days ago how our agriculture can respond to the needs of Asia, when at the same time they put a blight on the cattle industry and are going to severely limit the ability of the irrigation industry to provide for that same sector of our customers and bring a carbon tax on. I truly believe that, if you take away with one hand, you cannot give it back just by standing up in the public arena and saying how agriculture will deliver. The Prime Minister is probably right: agriculture most certainly will deliver, but it will be despite her government, not because of it. I find it pretty galling that, with the actions they have taken regarding the agriculture sector, she can stand up and skite about what they will do for Asia. They will do that despite her government, not because of.

Mr ADAMS (Lyons) (10:08): The Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 1) 2012 will make minor amendments to a range of portfolio legislation. The bill will amend eight portfolio acts to improve the operation of the existing
legislation and make technical amendments. We need to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of regulation, reduce red tape and create clearer Commonwealth laws. It is always important to have easily read legislation. These proposed amendments will reduce complexity and unnecessary regulation, provide consistency, amend outdated and unclear provisions, and reduce the likelihood of reader confusion. Mr Deputy Speaker, you would be well inclined to support that. The bill will also repeal one redundant act in its entirety—the old soldier settlers act. The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry consulted relevant Australian government departments and agencies on the proposed fisheries amendments. The department also consulted relevant industry stakeholders on the proposed amendments to the wine legislation. So the proposed amendments involve minor policy changes to four portfolio acts. These are the Wine Australia Corporation Act 1980, the Fisheries Management Act 1991, the Fisheries Administration Act 1991 and the Primary Industries Levies and Charges Collection Act 1991. The first amendment relates to the Label Integrity Program. The program aims to ensure the truthfulness of label claims on vintage, variety or geographical indication of wine manufactured in Australia. It relies on accurate record-keeping so that wine goods and their labels may be audited effectively and efficiently—and wouldn't that be the right thing to do and also a great thing for those who are running vineyards and making a living from their vineyards? So it is making sure that we have integrity in what we put on the label and that people know what they are buying. So from the vineyard to the bottle and to the glass you can tell someone—and they can learn and understand—exactly what grape variety it was, what year it was made, when it was laid down and went into the bottle and what was put on those vines. We get into a situation now where agriculture has to be able to show what went into producing the product, the food, the beverage. We need to be able to show the consumer that, and this will be an advantage for Australian agriculture into the future because we will be able to do that.

I understand that in the electorate of Braddon of my colleague, the Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, there is actually a camera that shows broccoli growing and that that image is shown in a restaurant in Japan so people can see what they are eating: broccoli, growing in Tasmania. This gives integrity and can show people that. People want it and consumers into the future around the world will want to know what they are eating and drinking and where that comes from and what has been added to make that happen—and Australian agriculture can make these things happen for itself into the future. So this sort of thinking can really keep things going.

The program was amended in 2010 to extend record-keeping requirements to all participants in the wine supply chain. Before these amendments, the program focused on 'wine manufacturers' and did not provide for an adequate audit trail throughout the supply chain. However, since these amendments have been implemented, retailers and wholesalers have raised some concerns that the record-keeping requirements are too onerous. The proposed changes respond to those concerns and have been agreed to by retailers and wholesalers and the wine industry representative bodies. The proposed amendments would reduce the record-keeping requirements of people who supply or receive wine goods that are packaged for sale to a consumer. Suppliers and retailers who do not change labels or effect any label changes about wine goods would be required to provide the Wine Australia Corporation auditors with details of the manufacturer or supplier of the wine goods, rather than with full details of the supplier, recipient, goods receiver, vintage and geographic...
indication. Of course, they are all significant things for wine and for the wine industry, because there are people who spend their whole lives getting to know where the best wine grape grows and of course we have all had those arguments around the dinner table, Mr Deputy Speaker. This maintains the integrity of the program while meeting the practical requirements of suppliers and retailers.

The second amendment to the Wine Australia Corporation Act 1980 relates to the definition of 'vintage'. A producer does not have to describe the vintage year on a label but if a producer chooses to describe the vintage they must follow the rules relating to 'vintage' claims—and of course that gives integrity to that label. The 'vintage' indicates the year in which the grapes used to make a wine were grown. For example, when specifying 'vintage' on a label, a vintage year is considered to be the period from 1 July to 30 June the following year and appears on the label as the second of those two calendar years. Harvest normally occurs from the late summer, finishing before 30 June. Sometimes producers make wine from grapes harvested after 30 June but before 1 September. For example, producers of sweet dessert wine styles leave grapes on the vine for extended periods to increase the sugar levels and develop dessert wine characteristics.

To provide for more accurate labelling of those late harvested products, this amendment will change the definition of 'vintage' so that a vintage year is considered to be the period from 1 September to 31 August. For example, a wine made from grapes harvested from 1 September 2012 to 31 August 2013 could be labelled as a 2013 wine. The proposed changes respond to concerns raised by producers and are supported by wine industry representative bodies.

Schedule 3 of the bill will amend the Fisheries Management Act 1991 to explain requirements for directions to close a fishery, or a particular part of a fishery, to fishing. Amendments will be made to section 41A to correct some grammatical errors and delete redundant text. These amendments will better reflect the intention of the provision. Amendments will also be made for consistency and to simplify the administration of section 41A. It is an express condition of most types of fishing concessions, permits and licences granted under the Fisheries Management Act 1991 that the holder comply with a direction given under subsection 41A(2) to close a fishery, or part of a fishery. The amendments will remove the need for a separate decision or regulatory process to make the condition apply to statutory fishing rights. They will also ensure consistency among provisions that make compliance with directions a condition of other types of fishing concessions. These amendments do not change the meaning of section 41A, or of other provisions on conditions on concessions, but they will explain the meaning of such a provision to ensure consistency, reduce the likelihood of reader confusion and simplify the administration of the act.

Schedule 5 of the bill will amend the Primary Industries Levies and Charges Collection Act 1991 to allow the departmental secretary to consider all requests made by levy payers for the remission of penalties. The amendments will not make any changes to the substance of the law. Levy payers who are not satisfied with a decision made by the department will still have an opportunity to approach the minister to review a decision made by the department. At present, only the portfolio minister can remit amounts of penalty exceeding $5,000.
Schedule 7 of the bill will amend the Farm Household Support Act 1992 to remove specific references to departments and secretaries in the act so that, when changes are made to the administrative arrangements orders, the act will not require amendment.

Schedule 8 of the bill repeals a redundant act—the States Grants (War Service Land Settlement) Act 1952. The Australian government negotiated the sale and transfer of the War Service Land Settlement Scheme to each of the respective states. Western Australia was the last jurisdiction to operate the scheme. The Commonwealth and Western Australia executed a cessation deed on 3 May 2011. The legislation is now redundant and may be repealed. This legislation worked for a lot of returned soldiers, helped them get on the land. Some would say some of them did okay, because they got the right piece of land; others got the wrong piece of land, worked hard and probably never achieved very much. The neighbour bought them out and probably made a property that became successful.

A cousin of mine, Pucka Saltmarsh, farmed on King Island and his son, my cousin Kim Saltmarsh farmed there for many years along that old soldier settlers block. It is well known in Tasmania that people settled land and were able to go into farming under this old act and gave our returned servicemen an opportunity to do what they wanted to do.

This is really a tidy up act that will have no financial impact on government finances. The amendments make minor policy and technical changes that will improve administration of portfolio legislation, tidy up a lot of words that were hard to understand, give us a clearer picture of how the act works and how the legislation flows. It will help the improved administration of portfolio legislation and do that quite well. That is a very good thing to achieve. These are good acts tidying up good legislation. Congratulations to the minister and the parliamentary secretary for getting good work done. I support the bill.

Mr CHESTER (Gippsland) (10:21): I appreciate the opportunity to speak in relation to the Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 1) 2012. I also note the contributions by the member for Lyons, the parliamentary secretary and also the shadow minister, who explained the nature of this bill, which is primarily one of an administrative manner. I also acknowledge the positive comments in relation to the way the department is working with the relevant industry sectors towards what I believe should be our common goal: to provide for sustainable and productive industries in these various sectors.

The bill also provides an opportunity for me to raise a few concerns that have been brought to my attention, primarily within the commercial fishing sector, and also to put forward some of the constructive suggestions that have come through from the industry in my region.

For those members who are not aware, Lakes Entrance is home to one of the largest commercial fishing fleets in Australia. It is a critically important industry for the East Gippsland region but also for the broader Victorian and Australian economies. There are many threats to the future viability of the commercial fishing industry. I have spoken in the past about the impact of things like the AFMA licence fee increases on the commercial sector but also the influx of inferior imported sea food products. There are other issues like threats to habitat through accidental events or inappropriate development, or the impact of invasive and introduced species.

There is also the ever increasing issue of green tape and red tape, particularly as it relates to the question of access to the resources and this obsession we have seen from the extreme
environmental groups to shut down commercial fishing activities, regardless of the science or the proven sustainability of the catch. I welcome the intent within this bill to try and reduce the amount of red and green tape.

I hasten to say we have a fight on our hands. When I say 'we', I am talking about those of us who care about the commercial fishing industry, who believe in the future of the industry or who want to consume fish caught from clean Australian waters which have been sustainably managed. We have an enormous fight on our hands in that regard. We have to fight this overblown rhetoric that we are seeing and the hype we are seeing from the green movement. We have to make sure that the department and other statutory bodies let the science decide. We have to make sure that the decisions that we make are in the best interests of the entire community, the industry and the resource that we are trying to manage.

I have a very good relationship with my local fishing sector, with the men and women on the boats and the people who manage the local cooperative or represent the industry to governments. It is a relationship that I value very highly for the matter-of-fact and commonsense advice that these people are able to provide about the conditions on the ground and the way regulations or legislation imposed by governments affect the people in the industry.

If you believe the Greens, you would believe that these men are out there raping and pillaging the environment and the ocean on a daily basis. It is simply not the fact. I acknowledge that some of the past practices have contributed to some resource shortages and some environmental concerns, but the industry has changed enormously in recent times and recent decades. I commend this government and previous governments for being willing to work with the industry on things like setting catch limits to make sure that we manage our fishery in a sustainable manner and to ensure that future generations can not only continue to work in one of the oldest professions in the world but also continue to enjoy—the opportunity to participate in the bountiful harvest of the fishing sector.

As I indicated, we do have a fight on our hands. We need to ensure that the future is viable for these people and that this green tape and red tape that I have referred to does not overwhelm the commercial fishing sector. Today I make it very clear where I stand in this debate. I have said many times in this place that it is time for everyone who cares about the freedoms we have enjoyed in the past to take fish in a responsible and environmentally sustainable manner.

We need to make sure we stand together to push back against these extreme environmentalists and their philosophies. Lock it up and leave it is not an environmental policy. It has been a proven disaster on land and it will not work in the marine environment. We continually have to fight this ideology and embrace the opportunity for active management and use of natural resources in a sustainable manner. The claims we constantly see about collapsing fish stocks are unproven and untrue. I have referred previously to the work of Dr Ray Hilborn and his report entitled Australian seafood consumers misled by prophets of doom and gloom. The reason I raise those issues in the context of today's debate is to highlight the need for the science to decide and for common sense to rule when the department and the various agencies deal with the fishing sector. That is why I am supporting the proposed amendments to the bill today.
The bill also talks about labelling in the wine industry, but I do not think it is too big a stretch to refer to the seafood industry in that regard. In his comments the parliamentary secretary said that the bill would 'amend requirements of the labelling integrity program under the wine legislation'. The parliamentary secretary further said: 'The program aims to ensure the truthfulness of label claims on vintage, variety or geographical indication of wine. It relies on accurate record-keeping so that wines and label claims can be audited effectively.

That proposed change to the bill has been supported by both sides, but in the context of the concerns I am raising in relation to the fishing industry I would like to highlight labelling within the fishing industry. There is no description that comes to mind other than that it is a complete mess. It is confusing for the consumer and extremely frustrating for the industry itself. I have spoken in the House before about cooked seafood. I believe there should be a nationwide requirement that consumers be fully informed about the seafood they are eating.

I know that I have just talked about the need to reduce red tape and that I am about to suggest another regulation but, in the presence of the parliamentary secretary, I would like to comment a bit on that. In the Northern Territory, we have seen a trial introduction of regulations which has worked very well. It has actually added value to the Australian product. The restaurant and catering industry, I believe, can demand a premium for fresh Australian seafood. When consumers are fully informed about the origin of their seafood, they are more likely to make that choice to pay a bit extra for a product they can trust. I think the discerning customer, who cares about quality, who cares about the conditions in which the seafood has been harvested and who cares about the sustainability of the resource itself, should be able to make an informed decision. That is simply not possible today in Australia, apart from the Northern Territory, where the origin of the seafood you are about to consume is declared on the menus in restaurants and other establishments.

In relation to the retail sector and the labelling of seafood products, again I think we have an enormous problem. I am referring specifically to the two giants, Coles and Woolworths. They are locked in a battle for market share at the moment, and they are using every means at their disposal to try to attract customers. They like to trumpet their environmental credentials, and we saw Coles waffling on about hormone-free beef, I think, or something ridiculous like that. We have seen seafood species removed from sale under pressure from the Greens. But, at the same time, the supermarket giants are selling seafood under extremely dubious titles such as 'South American flathead', which I understand is a fish caught in Argentina that is not even of the flathead genus.

If we then go to the pre-packaged section, we see fish variously described as 'flathead fillets in beer batter' and 'flake fillets in beer batter'. They are obviously designed to instil confidence in the Australian market because the consumer has an understanding of what those products are, but what is actually in the box is by any definition not flathead and it is not flake. But that is on the box and it is a deliberate ploy to build confidence in the consumer by using names with which the Australian consumer has some level of familiarity and some level of confidence. It is a big issue facing the Australian fishing industry because our industry is subject to very strict conditions and regulations and is managed in an environmentally sustainable matter—and I am not confident we can say the same about these imported products.
I appreciate the opportunity to raise these concerns. I must stress that the fishermen who talked to me, and the professional staff, their elected office bearers and their various representative organisations, are not afraid of the competition. They have enormous confidence in their own local product, which they believe is drawn from better environmental conditions and standards. They have better-tasting fish and a product which is produced from a better managed fishery, but the problem is they are fighting with one arm behind their back. They are up against these imported products, which are being misrepresented in the marketplace and sold to the consumers, I think, in an almost nefarious manner. It is something that we need to work on in this place and I encourage the department to continue working with the industry in that regard to have a fairer playing field for the commercial fishing sector.

In the time I have left, I want to raise one other issue, relating to the commercial fishing sector, its relationship with the department and the manner in which we manage the resource in Victoria. I refer to an area of fisheries management which I have brought to the attention of the House in the past—and there have been some developments since then—relating to the Australian Fisheries Management Authority, AFMA, and its dealings with the Victorian Department of Primary Industries. It relates to the strict 50-kilogram snapper bycatch limit per trip on each Commonwealth licensed trawler. For those not familiar with the issue, as I understand it, the snapper is subject to Victorian licensing arrangements, but sometimes it is caught by Commonwealth licensed vessels as an unavoidable bycatch. There has been targeting of snapper by at least one operator in Victoria. I have no sympathy at all for the licence holder concerned and I can understand why the Victorian department would like to crack down on that particular operator. But, when snapper is caught as a bycatch of normal fishing operations in Bass Strait and the quantity sometimes exceeds 50 kilograms, what is the fisherman to do with that snapper? Snapper is a highly desired fish. It is highly sought after, I know, by recreational and commercial fishermen. When the 50-kilogram limit was in place, basically it meant that if you caught more than 50 kilograms you could not land it; you had to throw it away. That is not a situation we want to see in the Australian fishing industry.

The industry and the department have worked with the commercial sector and we were hoping that we could achieve a result and a revised set of rules that would overcome this issue. What we came up with under this revised set of rules is a 200-kilogram per trip catch limit on these Commonwealth licensed vessels. If you were generous you would say it is an improvement because it has gone from 50 to 200 kilograms, so obviously there is some level of improvement. But the simple fact is that, in day-to-day operations in Bass Strait, if a fisherman puts a shot out and happens to pull in 250 kilograms or 500 kilograms of snapper, we still have the same problem: he cannot land those fish in Victoria. So what is the fisherman going to do? He cannot go to Lakes Entrance because he is not allowed to land in Victoria. He does not want to throw the fish away because that is just against his moral code and professional ethics, I would say, so he will go to Eden and land the fish at Eden, where he is allowed to.

There is an inconsistency there where, if you catch the fish in Bass Strait, technically you are in strife already because you are over the 200 kilograms, unless you discard it straightaway. No fisherman is going to discard that valuable fish straightaway; they are going to motor around the corner to Eden, land the fish there and get the return on that trip. It is an inconsistency; it is a problem. It will undermine the viability of the Lakes Entrance fishing co-
op if this continues. As I understand it, it is not often that you will hit a batch of snapper in excess of 200 kilograms, but if you do get onto some, you do not want to just throw them over the side. The Australian public would be horrified if they thought that we had fishermen in Bass Strait throwing good fish away just to meet a regulation. We could end up with a situation where a fisherman who may catch more than 200 kilograms will turn up at the entrance to Lakes Entrance on the incoming tide and throw the fish overboard to make a point—and that would be a horrible point to make. He will land his 200 kilograms, he will throw the other couple of hundred kilograms on the incoming tide, they will flood through the lake system and people will say, 'What's going on?'

I think we need to come up with some solutions here, and it is not going to be easy. We need to make sure the fish are not being targeted—I understand that—but we also need to make sure that we understand the practical reality in that, when you are fishing in Bass Strait, occasionally you are going to exceed that 200-kilogram limit. The industry sources are saying to me that they can come up with a solution. They say the way to approach it would be that you have an exclusion zone in the area around Port Phillip Bay where the snapper were being targeted illegally in the past. They say have an exclusion zone there—that is a way to manage the targeting of the species—but also put a requirement in place for the fishermen that you move on from a place if you catch 200 kilos. If you happen to catch 500, that is fine, but you do not continue to target that particular spot. I think, with some goodwill and some practical management between AFMA, the department and the fisheries sector, we can overcome this issue.

I thank the House for the opportunity to speak today in relation to these issues. I congratulate the parliamentary secretary in relation to the amendments which are before the House. I look forward to continuing positive dialogue between the department, the various agencies and the people on the ground. I think that we need to continue to respect the people on the ground—or in this case at sea—who have a very practical understanding of these issues and are interested in working in a very positive way to secure the long-term viability of their industry. I thank the House.

Dr STONE (Murray) (10:35): I too wish to speak on the Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 1) 2012. The coalition is happy to see that this government is finally addressing some of the complexities and unnecessary red tape and regulation that make agriculture, fisheries and forestry in Australia even more difficult than they need to be. Many of the complexities have only been put into place in the last few years. This government needs to address them, but some of the complexities go back many years indeed.

It is not just the complexity and the pure quantum of regulation that need to be changed; there is also the issue of the costs that are often part of fees or different charges that are made. I use for example the recent removal of the 40 per cent rebate on AQIS inspections that we put in place when we were in government. We now have some exporters with increases in costs to export with these inspections of over 1,000 per cent. When you add the costs of the carbon tax to those AQIS inspection costs, you can see that we are really heading down the non-competitive-market slippery slope. That is just too hard when you think of the enormous global food task growing, especially in our region just to the north of us.
So the coalition are happy that we are seeing a bill containing minor amendments to at least eight portfolio acts, but we need to go much further. I will begin by talking about one of these areas, the vintage labelling. Of course, this is of great concern and interest in my electorate, where we have a number of wine producers. A vintage year at present is from 1 July to 30 June the following year, but some producers make wines from grapes harvested after 30 June. In fact, they develop their characteristic the longer they are sitting on the vines, so producers wish to produce some wine with harvests after 30 June. Common sense is now going to allow a vintage year to be considered to be the period from 1 September to 31 August. This is sensible, and I know the wine industry will welcome this.

We also have other areas of labelling which are equally difficult for different agricultural sectors. I refer to the pork meat sector. If only we could remove what is currently allowed, which is that, when a piece of pig meat comes in from another country—say from Denmark—and it is cured in Australia, that product is then allowed to be labelled as 'product of Australia'. That is just not appropriate. It is confusing and deeply distressing for those who wish to buy an Australian product to find that they have been hoodwinked by the label simply because the product was cured in Australia. It had no origin at all in Australia's lean, clean farm practice. The pig meat was produced in another country in another hemisphere.

There are a whole range of labelling issues. We know a lot about them because they are constantly before the public. Our labelling laws need a major pull-through, a major re-examination. It is adding to the supermarkets' capacity to increase their home brand, because the labelling laws allow them to get away—whether it is canned or plastic-packaged product—with not making it absolutely clear that there is very little Australian product in their generic or home brand. I want to also refer to the part of this bill which refers to the repealing of States Grants (War Service Land Settlement) Act 1952. A great deal of the farm development in the middle of last century in the electorate of Murray came as a result of soldier settlement—the Second World War soldier settlement activity. There was not so much First World War soldier settlement, which was more developed in the Mallee or west of Northern Victoria. Soldier settlers in particular pioneered the closer settled dairy industry in my area. They often had enormous burdens to carry with their injuries and life-changing experiences of the Second World War, including as prisoners of war, yet they literally soldiered on as farmers—some without much experience before, others already the sons of local farming families. These soldier settlers were given very generous treatment by the governments of the day, including very low-interest loans, including housing and shedding that was built for them, roadways, and the farms themselves were subdivided in order to be viable with the irrigated agriculture that was accessible and developed at that time.

Of course, 1952 is a long time ago. We understand that we do not have a soldier settler need in the way we did in those days, but it is a very important illustration of how low-interest loans can and should be applied to certain developing industries like agriculture. We have still in Australia some attempts to offer special concessional low-interest loans for young farmers or into agribusiness—I refer particularly to the recent flood related loans that in Victoria Rural Finance has been offering, which were in turn largely funded by the federal government.

It is almost impossible for a farmer to access those Rural Finance loans. The interest rates are not much better in some cases than commercial loans, but some of these flood related
concessional loans are at two or three per cent interest, so that would be of enormous value to farms wiped out by flood: where all their fencing has gone, where they have lost a lot of their livestock, where gravel tracks have to be replaced, where their fodder has been washed away. They have also in my area come out of seven years of drought preceding the floods, so the equity on their properties was substantially eroded during those drought years. You can imagine their distress when they go to try and access these concessional loans made possible through the federal government's funding and they are told: 'Sorry, the equity in your property has dropped in recent years. It has dropped to quite low levels. Sure, you have a long history before the drought of very viable farming. We can see you are expert. We can see that you are only in your midlife as a career farmer—you are in your forties or early fifties; that is young for a farmer.' But they are rejected.

In the floods that occurred 18 months ago in the west of my electorate, only a handful of these concessional loans were approved through Rural Finance when two and three times that number actually applied. With this more recent flood that has occurred, I am told that virtually no-one has been approved for these concessional loans.

We did it right in the soldier settler days: we had potential farmers, often not experienced farmers, who had been broken by war. We were prepared to take them on and give them low concessional interest loans. We built their infrastructure for them, and they were magnificent in building the dairy industry of Northern Victoria—the biggest exporter of product out of the ports is still out of Geelong, major employers through the dairy manufacturing sector. We did it then and we have to remember the lessons of the past and not make it unrealistic and too hard for these often, through no fault of their own, battling farm sectors, who have seasonal conditions they cannot always predict wiping them out.

I want to acknowledge the extraordinary contribution that the soldier settlers made throughout Australia, but particularly in northern Victoria, and it is rather historic repealing this particular act as we are going to do in this bill. It is important to note the contribution that these people made and the foresight of that legislation at the time and the generosity of its conditions which allowed this industry to become a major Australian economic contributor and jobs provider.

In this bill we have reference to cutting red tape to try to make it easier for agribusiness to survive. That then makes it a little bit ironic that in the budget announced this week, some 48 or so hours ago, this same agriculture sector that is being targeted through these eight portfolio acts has seen the hypocrisy of $941 million of infrastructure funding for improved water use efficiency in the Murray-Darling Basin being deferred and $40 million for water buy-backs off drought-debt-stressed farmers being brought forward to be spent before the end of this financial year. Those same descendants of soldier-settlers in my area who have continued to dairy—often they are now up to their second or third generation in those families—are often now pressured by the banks to sell their water. But when you do that your capacity to recover from drought and then flood is substantially reduced. Yet this government has brought forward another $40 million to pay for a water buy-back tranche, one that it announced on the day that the actual submissions as to the Murray-Darling Basin proposal closed. I find that very concerning and it is deeply distressing to the agribusiness sector in my electorate that is trying very hard to recover from extraordinary seasonal circumstances. They would recover if only the foot were to be taken off their throats in terms of financial pressures.
and the demand that they sell their water to the environmental water holder, who has not as yet convinced me and many others that that extra water will indeed do the job that we want it to do in improving the Murray-Darling Basin's environmental sustainability.

We also have $34.4 million in reduced department and agency funding for direct agricultural support. We have circumstances throughout Australia needing funding—for example, tasks associated with weeds and feral animal control and agricultural research and development. All of those very important tasks are now being defunded or having funding deferred. This is a serious problem when we know that, in addition to mining where we have a competitive advantage throughout the world—or we should have and certainly we do before 1 July, when the carbon tax comes in—we have a competitive advantage with agriculture and food and fibre production, yet we are killing that competitive advantage by not understanding that government needs to be a partner in this business and certainly put some hope and faith back into the agribusiness sector.

At the moment we are seeing young farmers walk away, saying it is all too hard. We are seeing the agricultural education sector with the numbers of its new graduates or even those entering courses in agricultural science or natural resource management at their lowest ebb ever, with courses closing right around the country. This piece of legislation is an important step forward but we need to not step forward quietly. We need to run ahead. We need to address seriously the problems that are at the moment facing agribusiness so it can take advantage of the opportunities that are there for us. The government should really stop trying to kill off the goose that laid the golden egg for us not just in centuries past when we depended on living off the sheep's back but now, when we can do much better with our food production. I commend this bill but I want to see it go much further, and when we are in government we will make substantial new changes.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Windsor): The question is that the bill be now read a second time. I call the parliamentary secretary.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM (Braddon—Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry) (10:48): Thanks, Mr Deputy Speaker Windsor, and congratulations on your appointment to the chair. I cannot think of anyone better to be in the chair whilst we discuss and summarise the Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 1) 2012. I would like to thank my colleagues in the House—the members for Calare, Lyons, Gippsland and Murray, all good regional and rural representatives—for supporting this legislation and being so positive about it. I do note the comments by the member for Gippsland in relation to fishing and labelling and I also note the comments on rural concessional loans by the member for Murray. This amendment bill tackles the issue of reducing red tape and improving legislative clarity. It is an example of the government working with industry, as all members who have spoken have testified to, for more practical and effective regulation. It responds to industry requests for reform of regulation and it streamlines administrative practices. For example—you would probably be interested, Mr Deputy Speaker—it amends the Label Integrity Program to address concerns raised by retailers and wholesalers that record-keeping requirements are problematic. In response, it amends the definition of 'vintage' to address concerns raised by some wine producers who harvest their grapes later than the normal harvest period.
Amendments to the fisheries legislation will simplify administration for business. They will also ensure that, when it is necessary for the Australian Fisheries Management Authority to issue directions to close a fishery, for example, the requirements are clear to fishers.

Amendments to levies legislation will result in improved response times for our industry levy payers when they submit requests for the remission of late levy penalties.

The portfolio continues to identify redundant legislation for removal from the statute books. The repeal of the States Grants (War Service Land Settlement) Act 1952 is a further example of the portfolio’s efforts towards deregulation—and I note, in particular, the member for Murray’s comments about the war service land settlements and the significant contribution that they have made to the development of agriculture and the Australian economy.

Importantly, the bill provides a cost-effective opportunity to clean up, so to speak, portfolio legislation. The various technical amendments will improve readability, update references and remove redundant text, resulting in clear legislation. After all, isn’t this the very aim of good legislation? I thank all those responsible for giving effect to this amendment bill.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Ordered that this bill be reported to the House without amendment.

COMMITTEES
Social Policy and Legal Affairs Committee
Report

Debate resumed on the motion:

That the House take note of the report.

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (10:52): I am very pleased to speak on the report In the wake of disasters: volume two: the affordability of residential strata title insurance, which looks at the affordability of residential strata title insurance in North Queensland in the wake of the disasters which have been experienced by the people of the northern state. In the last decade they have experienced Cyclone Larry and Cyclone Yasi, in 2011. There have not just been cyclones; there have been floods, fires and storms which have ravaged many parts of Australia, but particularly North Queensland. I have been to North Queensland many times in my life as a Queenslander; my mother lived up there for quite some time in Cairns, and I know it very well.

Strata title is a strange legal ownership arrangement. It involves individual ownership in a collective arrangement. There is usually a general insurance cover which covers common property, and the individual owners own apartments or units in complexes. There is a common area, wiring, lifts and car parks. Usually there is a body corporate established by law, and an annual insurance premium is paid to cover the buildings and the common area. In Queensland this is governed by two pieces of legislation: the Body Corporate and Community Management Act 1997 and its associated regulations and the Building Units and Group Titles Act 1980. In the last 20 years we have seen a very large increase in the number of strata title units, particularly in Queensland—not just on the Gold Coast and the Sunshine Coast but particularly in North Queensland. According to Australian Bureau of Statistics data analysed by Macroplan in the 1990s, there was one apartment approved for every three houses. By
April 2011, that ratio had shrunk to only 1.6 houses approved for every apartment. The people of North Queensland—people in Mackay, Townsville, Cairns, Port Douglas and other areas—have seen a very large increase in strata title insurance premiums. The Unit Owners Association of Queensland reports that these increases have been the most excessive over the last two years. They seem to coincide with Cyclone Yasi, and it has accelerated a process which has been going on for some years. Members of that association report increases ranging from 300 and 800 per cent. That is consistent with the plethora of evidence that we received in the inquiry.

We had hearings in Port Douglas, in Cairns, in Townsville, in Mackay via videoconference, and also in Canberra. In a very short time frame we had 431 submissions and 17 supplementary submissions. The number of people involved was extraordinary. In fact, when we were in Cairns the room was simply not big enough. People had to stand outside. That is how much interest there is in this issue in North Queensland.

We looked at a whole host of things during the inquiry but I want to come to the conclusion—as I did during the inquiry—that it is not up to the government to intervene in the market to establish a new SGIO. It is up to the government to make sure the market works and works more equitably. I think that is the way to go in relation to this matter.

It is obvious from the evidence that was given that it was common for increases of 500 per cent or more on an annual basis to be received by corporates. It is an extraordinary increase. Strata title owners in North Queensland are in a unique predicament, with very few players in the insurance market. There is a great concentration of strata title holders in North Queensland and, governed by the legislation I mentioned before, there is compulsory property insurance. They have been copping excessive premium increases year after year, and there are very few insurance companies in the market. Some of them have pulled out and others are just not taking any new insurance.

Since the 2010-11 floods and Cyclone Yasi, the Queensland government has reported an increase in strata title premiums between 130 and 360 per cent on the previous year. It is amazing when you consider that inflation is so low in this country. The reinsurance costs are very small indeed, notwithstanding the propaganda peddled by the insurance industry in relation to these matters. We had evidence all over the place about the excessive amounts of insurance costs inflicted on body corporates—many of whom are not well educated and do not possess great accountancy skills or legal facilities.

This federal Labor government commissioned the Natural Disaster Insurance Review to look at what is happening around the length and breadth of the country, particularly in parts of Western Australia, Victoria and Queensland as well as Tasmania and New South Wales—where floods have been copped not just in one year but year after year. The government recognised that there was an issue in relation to affordability and availability of strata title. The NDIR made a series of recommendations in relation to reinsurance which the government should consider and has acted on—a standard definition of flood, a key fact statement and so on. And there is legislation before the House, the Insurance Contracts Amendment Bill.

In volume one of the committee's inquiry, I really asked some serious questions of the insurance industry in relation to their codes of practice, which we found to be thoroughly and utterly ineffective. There was a get-out-of-jail-free card in code of practice 4.3, which allowed them to completely abandon any obligations they had to consider. Consumers were not aware
of their rights, and the insurance companies almost seemed to delight in keeping their policyholders ignorant. When dealing with them, their attitude towards their policyholders was often contemptuous and their response to claims was categorised by inertia and inactivity, hoping to wear people down. So we made a series of recommendations—13 in all—which the government has to respond to, and I urge the government to respond positively towards those recommendations.

The then Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation, the Hon. Bill Shorten, asked us to look at this other aspect—what is happening in North Queensland. We did that in November 2011. What we found was terrible devastation, emotional and financial impact on the people of North Queensland, investors being driven out of the market and lives destroyed. We heard a series of people giving evidence about the abject failure of the insurance industry in North Queensland; about the towns and cities in North Queensland being affected in terms of their economic development and the impact on people’s lives—particularly, pensioners, self-funded retirees and people on low incomes.

I found the evidence of the insurance companies to be unconvincing and inconsistent. I personally found the conduct of the insurance companies to be unnecessary, outrageous and, at times, reprehensible. It was extraordinary. In Cairns one of the insurance industry representatives gave a submission. When I questioned him, his evidence was the opposite of the reason for the increase. When I pulled that particular representative up during the forum, you could see the look on his face. Hundreds of people in the room could see that I had caught him out, that he had given evidence completely inconsistent with what he had said in writing. But we found this all the time. It is a disgrace, and I have continued to push the representatives privately, personally as well as in the committee, to take action in relation to this matter.

We have made a series of recommendations. It is not easy; it is a very complex area we have to act on. We recommended a 12-month moratorium on stamp duty charged on strata title for properties north of the Tropic of Capricorn. We recommended that APRA, the Australian Prudential Regulation Authority, conduct a review of risk assessment methodologies. People gave extraordinary evidence in relation to this that somehow earthquakes in New Zealand and tsunamis in Japan had affected them. When you looked at it, you could trace the insurance premiums preceding all this. It was extraordinary that they had the temerity to give evidence like that. Who do they pay? Their representatives, their employees who draft these submissions, should be put out the back and be scolded by their CEOs—they really should.

In the review we said that APRA should focus on the calculations of premiums in North Queensland. We made some recommendations in relation to the ACCC conducting a review into the cost drivers and relative profitability and competition. I do not think the markets are successful. I think the markets abjectly failed in North Queensland, and a review should be conducted in relation to that.

I also have talked—and I put this to the insurance industry many times in the inquiry—about their social and community obligations, not just of an economy but of a community, and they have obligations to offer insurance across the country. I represent a rural and regional seat in South-East Queensland and I am telling you: the way they treat my constituents is a disgrace at times and was during the aftermath of the floods.
We have looked at and made recommendations for the government to look at the expansion of the Australian Reinsurance Pool Corporation—and, fortunately, we have not had to make use of terrorist risk reinsurance at any stage in the last decade. It has never been used, but we should have a look at that and see if that will assist.

We made recommendations in relation to the use of intermediaries, because many of these managers of body corporates and some of the insurance brokers are acting with disgraceful abandon and are in the pay of the insurance industry. There are conflicts of interest. It reminds me of the old biblical saying: 'You can't serve two masters. You will be devoted to one and despise the other. You will hate one and love the other.' They simply have a terrible conflict of interest in relation to the way they conduct themselves. We have recommended that there be greater education and information given to body corporates. Some of these body corporates cannot handle themselves. They simply cannot get people to put their hand up to serve on body corporates and, when they do, the people are, at times, ill-equipped to manage those types of things. They may not have a business, union or community background that enables them to conduct a business—because it is a business—and simply do not know what to do.

We have recommended that the federal Attorney-General conduct a review of state and territory regulatory requirements. I know that our states and territories, no matter which side of politics they are on, might not particularly like that, but we have recommended they do that and expand the role of the Financial Ombudsman Service.

The Financial Ombudsman Service technically is a good service, but we found during the floods that not enough people knew about it. They are based in Victoria. They should be on the ground more readily in disaster areas. And we have recommended that they have a few more teeth.

There are hold-ups in cases and claims. We have still got, in my electorate, unresolved claims. As recently as this week I was into the Insurance Council of Australia representatives about the fact that the insurance industry still have not resolved cases of businesses and individuals, householders, in South-East Queensland in my seat of Blair. Hundreds of them are still outstanding. So we recommend that the Attorney-General look at that.

We also recommend that this should be in the COAG process, because it is not just North Queensland that is going to cop this. There is evidence of this in the Northern Territory and in Western Australia as well. Anywhere where the market has failed and there is not enough competition, what happens? Affordability of insurance goes down the drain.

We are talking about an industry that makes tens of billions of dollars a year. During the year of the cyclones and disasters in this country, the insurance industry, on their own figures, made $5.6 billion in profit. Yet now they are saying to people in towns and postcodes around Queensland, 'We're not going to insure you.' They have said so to these poor beggars up in North Queensland—and that is what they feel like; they feel like they are beggars going to the insurance industry and saying to them, 'Please reinsure us.' But guess what? It is interesting, because when they picked up the phone and challenged them, we saw decreases in premiums in the hundreds of percent. Don't tell me that that is because of some earthquake in Christchurch or tsunami in Japan. It is because they are just abusing the market. The market has failed.
So we have made recommendations to government. My hope and my expectation is that the government acts on those recommendations for the people of North Queensland, because if it can happen to them, if it can happen to the people on the Gold Coast and Sunshine Coast and in Brisbane and Ipswich and South-East Queensland, it can happen all across the country. I hope the market improves and I hope the government listens to our recommendations.

Debate adjourned.

BUSINESS

Rearrangement

Mr HAYES (Fowler) (11:08): by leave—I move:

That order of the day No. 2, committee and delegation reports, be postponed until the next meeting.

Question agreed to.

COMMITTEES

Law Enforcement Committee

Report

Debate resumed on the motion:
That the House take note of the report.

Mr HAYES (Fowler) (11:08): The Parliamentary Joint Committee on Law Enforcement has had a longstanding interest in securing effective unexplained wealth legislation. Unexplained wealth laws were moved in this parliament amending the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 but they were moved in this parliament in 2010. The Parliamentary Joint Committee on Law Enforcement has been concerned that, ever since those laws were amended, giving our law enforcement agencies greater power to attack serious and organised crime, to date not one case has been brought forward relying on those powers.

These are powers that people refer to as draconian. They are powers that call on people, with a reverse onus of proof, to explain how they obtained their wealth. Failure to do so could result in a forfeiture of their wealth. We knew that was a very bold step for the parliament to take, but as with terrorism the parliamentary joint committee recommended that this issue be advanced in the parliament and the parliament agreed on the basis of the amount of damage that is done to the community resulting from serious and organised crime. In fact, the committee's interest in this really sprang from an overseas delegation that was conducted in 2009, where the committee heard from a number of jurisdictions internationally that, while serious criminals may consider imprisonment to be an acceptable occupational hazard, taking their illicit profits was considered to be a far more serious blow to them and their operations. Serious and organised crime is motivated by greed, power and money and has serious impacts, threatening the economy, national security and quite frankly the wellbeing of all Australians. It has been estimated that the financial cost to the community is conservatively around $15 billion a year as a result of the behaviour of serious and organised crime. The Australian Crime Commission informed the committee that, while serious and organised criminal groups continue to prove resilient and adaptive to legislative amendment and law enforcement intelligence and investigative technologies, the reduction or removal of the proceeds of crime is likely to result in a significant deterrent and certainly a disruption to their activities.
Unexplained wealth legislation represents a new form of law enforcement. Where traditional policing was focused on securing prosecutions and, as a consequence, follows the commission of the crime, unexplained wealth provisions contribute to a growing body of measures aimed at preventing and disrupting crime itself. They take the incentive to participate in criminal endeavour. They actually attack the business model that underpins crime. I have often said in this place that we are mistaken if we think of organised criminals as not being business people. They might be running a nefarious operation, but they are still running a business and their business has an underlying profit motive. So to attack the profit imperative of their business not only puts in doubt their ill-gotten gains but also causes them no doubt to reflect upon whether the risk is worth the commission of the crime.

We as a committee think this provision will fill the gap that has been exploited by the heads of criminal organisations, people who are big enough and smart enough—certainly very sophisticated—that you would very rarely see them involved in the actually commission of the crime itself. They are not going to be the ones who are going to be arrested on the street for selling drugs, but they might be the ones who are actually organising the importation of many kilos of drugs at a time. They are the Mr Bigs. What the committee has determined is to recommend that the government address what we think are inadequacies in the current legislation to allow our law enforcement agencies to go after the Mr Bigs of the criminal world. We see it very much as a new technology that law enforcement should have available to it.

I am often lectured by those who are defenders of those pleading innocence in crimes that the appropriate way to proceed with criminal law is that after the commission of a crime, should there be the evidence, an investigation and down the track maybe a prosecution may follow. But what I have always put back to our esteemed colleagues of the legal fraternity is that that analogy always means that, where there is a crime, there is a victim to a crime. What the committee in a very bipartisan way is trying to address is: how do you actually slow down or deter the commission of the crime itself and therefore protect future victims of crime?

Clearly there are a number of jurisdictional issues. The committee has considered the evidence regarding the requirement to link a Commonwealth scheme to a Commonwealth head of power, necessitating the inclusion of a link to a federal related offence. We considered that to be a significant limitation. It undermines the most vulnerable aspects of unexplained wealth provisions, which provide a means to target the heads of criminal networks, who, as I said, are often very insulated from the actual commission of the crime itself. Unfortunately, as we all know from our own electorates, crime does not respect geographic boundaries and criminals certainly do not spend much time reading the federal Constitution.

I will summarise some of the recommendations that the committee brought down in this extensive review that it undertook into the unexplained wealth provisions of the federal legislation. Given the intrusive nature of the unexplained wealth provisions, the committee sought to provide greater clarity and accountability for the use of the provisions, including, in the act itself, a statement of intent stating the objects of the clauses relating to unexplained wealth, noting their primary use against serious and organised crime.

The committee also recommended leaving in place a judicial discretion with the courts about whether to make an unexplained wealth order in respect of cases under $100,000. We did that to show that we are not talking about the person dealing on the street; we have this
legislation to target the Mr Bigs of the criminal world. Also, in place of judicial discretion, there is the introduction of additional oversight and accountability measures. We understand that what is being proposed is highly intrusive, some might argue draconian, but nevertheless I think that in the modern world it is so necessary in fighting the contemporary nature of organised crime.

The committee also recommended that further support of unexplained wealth investigations be included—for instance, ensuring that Australian Crime Commission examination material can be used as evidence in trials. This material is often produced in coercive hearings, where a person is compelled to answer. We have indicated that, where material is produced for coercive hearings such as that, with respect to the accumulation of wealth it should also be available to be used as evidence in court.

We explore the possibility of enabling the Australian Crime Commission to conduct specific examinations for the purpose solely of investigations into unexplained wealth proceedings in a manner consistent with the Proceeds of Crime Act and court proceedings. Further, we also recommend the amending of search warrant provisions of the Proceeds of Crime Act to allow specific warrants to be issued in relation to the collection of evidentiary material with respect to unexplained wealth proceedings.

Another significant matter that we sought to bring to the attention of government was the involvement of the Australian Taxation Office. Some time back, the committee recommended that the Australian Commissioner of Taxation be included as a member of the Australian Crime Commission board, and that did occur. I think there is more that we expect out of taxation than revenue collection. Taxation does have a very vital role in ensuring that people are law abiding, and we think there could be an extension of that role. We also think that the Criminal Assets Confiscation Taskforce, which is set up and coordinated by the Australian Federal Police under the taxation regulations, should be expanded to allow greater information sharing, particularly with the Australian Taxation Office, to make greater use of information, including information obtained through telephone interception material, where appropriate. We also recommend the streamlining of core processes through eliminating the current—what we see as unnecessary—duplication in meeting a double evidentiary threshold in respect to unexplained wealth; providing an extension of the time limits for serving notice for a preliminary order where appropriate; removing the potential for abuse of legal expenses and the harmonisation of legal expense related issues to other aspects of the Proceeds of Crime Act itself; and the granting of the ability to register a charge over restrained property to load and secure a payment. One of the problems that has been pointed out to us by the law enforcement jurisdictions is simply to examine unexplained wealth, we will simply see the money transferred the very next day. This will allow law enforcement to proceed directly to the courts, allow them to take a charge out of the property affected as security.

Other aspects were the development of a consistent, effective national approach to unexplained wealth across Australia. As I said, the people that are of interest in these matters do not look at the geography of the country and they do not read the Constitution. They will commission a crime in areas where there is a window of opportunity, where they can make a profit. We recommend that the Commonwealth government take the lead in an effort to harmonise laws in this respect, including seeking the referral power from states to enable sufficient power to be referred, rather to enable the Commonwealth to legislate for an
effective unexplained wealth scheme that can be utilised by each of the states and territories in addition to the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth government, effectively, we recommend participate in efforts to also establish international agreements relating to unexplained wealth in the knowledge that serious and organised crime is very much of an international character. We need the participation and cooperation of other international agencies and states.

Further, we recommend pursuing the option of the Commonwealth and states to cooperate in this area, particularly through the Standing Committee on Law and Justice. This has been directly referred to the Attorney-General. I have tried to make the case out that these are laws that our police need to fight contemporary crime.

We expect a lot of our police officers. People put themselves out on the street in harm's way to do what we expect them to do—that is, looking after the safety of our community. Next week on the 17th, I will be attending a fundraising function for Senior Constable David Rixon, whom you will recall was shot and killed in Tamworth on 2 March.

Policing is a very dangerous business. It takes a special type of person with a very special type of courage to put on a police uniform and undertake their duties. They are not and cannot be seen as traditional employees. They are very dedicated people who see that their role in life is to protect our community. For Senior Constable David Rixon and his wife Fiona, they have paid the ultimate sacrifice as a family. I think we have an obligation to ensure that people who serve in the force such as Senior Constable David Rixon have at their disposal the necessary support, regulative support, laws and arrangements to allow them to effectively do their jobs on behalf of our community. I commend the report to the House.

Question agreed to.

Infrastructure and Communications Committee Report

Debate resumed on the motion:

That the House take note of the report.

Mr NEVILLE (Hinkler—The Nationals Deputy Whip) (11:24): We are dealing with the Telecommunications Amendment (Enhancing Community Consultation) Bill 2011. It was referred to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Infrastructure and Communications, of which I am deputy chair. The committee, including me and my colleague here today the member for Ryan, was asked to look into this particular matter. The bill was introduced to the House of Representatives on 19 September last year by the Independent member for Denison and subsequently referred to our committee for inquiry. The bill in a sense proposes 12 amendments to the Telecommunications Act 1997 and aims to enhance the level of community consultation by telecommunications carriers who wish to install mobile phone towers.

The inquiry received 77 submissions. Sadly, many of these were from those who came together to oppose mobile phone towers. At other times their evidence cascaded into other aspects of the network of telecommunications towers, dishes and the like and probably was not within the terms of reference. Submissions were also received from the telecommunications carriers, the peak industry bodies in telecommunications and the government agencies which either administer them or look into scientific aspects of them. We
held a public hearing here on 17 February this year and the committee put the concerns of
these community groups to the industry and to government agencies. Those who gave
evidence for the government were the Department of Broadband, Communications and the
Digital Economy; the Australian Communications and Media Authority, ACMA; and the
Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency, ARPANSA. From industry we
had the Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association and the Communications
Alliance.

Sadly, many of the concerns raised by the community organisations in their submissions to
the inquiry, as I said before, are not being addressed by this bill. This is a new phenomenon,
as we know, for the House of Representatives and we have to strike a balance between these
types of inquiries and the broader inquiries into aspects of policy that might be referred by a
minister. Where a bill is referred from the House via the Selection Committee, you have to be
quite specific in dealing with the terms of reference and whether or not you recommend the
bill. I think a lot of people out in the public do not see that distinction.

Fundamentally the committee is aware that balance is needed. You have to have this
balance between getting telecommunications out to people on one hand and, on the other,
doing that safely and with due regard to public aesthetics. I for one think that we could be
doing that a lot better. What I have noted in my own electorate is that when a tower is going
to go up there may be an article in the paper saying that the council is looking into a tower at
such and such a site, but there is no definitive information for the public to latch onto. Often
the first time I hear about it is a request I get from a protest group to come to a part of the
electorate. Then I sit around in a hall, or over in a paddock somewhere where it is proposed
the tower will go up, with a lot of angry people who do not quite know what is proposed. It
quite often takes a long time to engage the telecommunications providers, by which time the
anger level has well and truly built up and, by the time they come to a similar gathering,
usually some time later, the daggers are well and truly drawn. As I have said before—and I
know this offends some people—it quite often becomes a contest between well-meaning
people but often at a level of zealotry rather than with rational debate. Somehow we have got
to get out of the mode of the ‘daggers drawn’ stage before anything happens.

Mr Wilkie, the member for Denison, proposed in his legislation that the specified time for
consultation be increased from 10 to 30 business days and that it apply to a residence within
500 metres. But the point is that towers are not subject to that sort of level of scrutiny.
Strangely, the bill covers small things, dishes and the like, but do larger edifices, like towers,
come under the regime of a local authority or state government regulations? Because of that,
there is very little that we can do at a federal level in respect of where certain towers might be
located. Again, it is not always clear to the public whose jurisdiction or authority is at play.

The committee noted that there was a great deal of confusion in this issue, particularly
amongst communities, about how telecommunications services work; who regulates them;
what level of government does what, and why and how; what the responsibilities of the
industry to consult with the community are, and how and when; and what happens when there
is a problem and who can fix things. I remember cross-examining the industry witnesses at
this inquiry. I asked them why we had to get to this ‘daggers drawn’ level before there was a
good level of community consultation. By that, I mean that you put out a brochure which is
not full of pious bumf but is hard-hitting, sensible, material perhaps composed of two types—
on the one hand simple, clearly stated technical data on the safety of the emissions and what emissions are proposed from that tower or that edifice and, perhaps in another part of the brochure, an explanation in layman's terms. It would be technical on one hand and for the layman on the other. As a result, nobody would be left without a good understanding of what is proposed. That would require the telecommunications providers to be more proactive, to attend to these things early and not to refuse to attend early meetings. I find that, when I get involved and start to throw my weight around a bit, people start to want to attend public meetings. You have those who will be arguing an aesthetic argument: 'If you put that particular tower on this water tower or water reservoir, that will be an eyesore and we will never sell our homes in this area.' The counter argument is, 'Broadband is not going to come up to this rather remote hill where all of you have built your homes. Your only chance of getting high-speed broadband in the future will be from wireless technology; therefore if you are not going to have a tower up here you are going to be without good internet connections. Therefore you will have trouble selling your houses, but for another reason.' I think that a lot of this angst could be obviated by the providers and community groups consulting early. We could perhaps give ACMA the authority or act around ACMA to make sure that these processes occur and occur early, so that you do not have endless cost. We all know telecommunications in Australia are expensive by international standards. Part of the reason is that we have got to cover huge distances and we have got to put towers and facilities up in quite inaccessible places. If you add on to the top of that people who have a zealot-like approach and do not want anything to go near this or near that or who say, 'this is going to be terribly dangerous' when all the evidence is that it is not, then we are going to have a layer of bureaucracy, time wasting and greater expense.

Coming back to this particular bill—I know I have strayed a little from the core of the subject—the core of the subject is: do we, or do we not, recommend Mr Wilkie's, the member for Denison's, bill. The committee found, and I quote from paragraph 1.69:

… no evidence which would cause it to recommend any change in current public policy settings on this issue.

In other words, we found no evidence which would cause the committee to recommend any change in current public policy settings on this issue. In other words, we could not find the evidence. We also noted, as I said before, that a lot of the things that were referred to in the legislation are covered by state and local authority planning laws.

As committee on a broader scale, it is not for us to make subsidiary recommendations and it was not, in a formal sense, put in those terms, but we did note that the committee is interested in examining these issues and playing its role in the parliament within its portfolio responsibilities. But we felt it would greatly assist the work of the committee if, when referring legislation for consideration, any suggestions for the reason for the referral be given, so that we can slant our inquiry into the areas where there is angst or potential angst or where the selection committee or other forces in the parliament feel an issue has to be flushed out. Finally, the committee's recommendation is that we should oppose the bill.

Mrs PRENTICE (Ryan) (11:39): I rise to speak on the advisory report on the Telecommunications Amendment (Enhancing Community Consultation) Bill 2011 by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Infrastructure and Communications. I was delighted when the independent member for Denison, Mr Wilkie, proposed this bill because,
for many years, I have shared the concerns of the community as to the way that the telcos put infrastructure into our community without having to answer to the community for what they are doing. In particular, I have had many examples of a lack of consultation and inappropriate work practices. So I thought that for once we had the opportunity to address many issues. I would like to thank all the groups and members in the electorate of Ryan who took the time and effort to make submissions to this inquiry.

However, as the deputy chairman of the committee and my colleague the member for Hinkler pointed out, as an inquiry we were tied to only considering the impacts of the bill and could not introduce new clauses or change the clauses already there. I was most disappointed that the member for Denison obviously failed to consult with those most affected before he drafted this legislation because, quite frankly, it fails on many fronts—indeed, it fails on the most important fronts: consultation and the impact of the larger towers. As the member for Hinkler said, the large towers are not even mentioned in this legislation. So it is very disappointing that all this effort has been made and yet it completely fails the reasons we need legislation in this area.

The reason we need to address some of these issues I think is exemplified by a group now called No Towers Near Schools. They are located in Bardon in the electorate of Ryan. These are ordinary community members who, at short notice, were confronted by a telco wanting to put up a large tower. They were not helped in any way. The telco was obviously helped by government legislation as it exists. And not only did they have to form a community group and protest and put in submissions, but, when they went on formally to lodge an objection with ACMA, ACMA chose not to investigate it. During the inquiry I asked ACMA: 'Are you rushed with inquiries? Are so many people complaining that you have to look into them?' But they said, 'Oh, no, they are reduced greatly.' I said, 'So why would not you investigate this inquiry?' It turns out that ACMA can choose whether or not to investigate an inquiry, and their discretion was not to investigate. So these hard-working members of my local community then had to raise tens of thousands of dollars to take Telstra to court—in which they eventually succeeded, coming out with a consensus arrangement at the end. But how is it that we, as a government, are failing them to the extent that people have to put their lives on hold and put together legal action, raise money to fund lawyers and take on a telco, when we are supposed to have industry bodies that will help and support them in this area? So it is very disappointing that this legislation has failed to address those sorts of issues when, I believe, it had the opportunity to do so.

As we heard, there were 77 submissions. Many of them raised issues outside the legislation that we received. For example, electromagnetic radiation is obviously an issue of great concern to many in the community, particularly with the larger towers, and, once again, as we heard, the larger towers are not covered by this legislation.

It was interesting to see in a submission by the No Towers Near Schools people that they have researched this throughout the world and no studies anywhere in the world have been done purely on the effects of electromagnetic radiation on children. I believe that that is something we could possibly try and organise through one of our research bodies. I think that is of great concern because, more and more often, these towers are put on government land to make it easier for the telcos to get past the consultation with the community, with the ongoing effect that they are there on school grounds with young children, who are sitting under that
radiation all day throughout school. So I think the concern being raised by this community group is a genuine one that we should look into in other areas. They also mentioned that there have been no conclusive longitudinal studies done on the cumulative effects of electromagnetic radiation. But, as we said, that was not in the remit of our inquiry and we were restricted to what was in front of us in the bill.

The other problem we had was the fact that Mr Wilkie sort of had an ambit claim. So the 10 to 30 days community consultation was great—except that it also now applies under this bill if you want to put a fixed line into your house so that, if your neighbour wants to get an extra phone line put in, now you have to do 10 to 30 days community consultation. Also, if there were a flood or an accident in your street and the telephone lines came down, unfortunately there was not a provision just to put them back up again as we would have to do community consultation on that. So, Madam Deputy Speaker, as you can see, the committee had its hands tied. There were quite a number of flaws in this proposed legislation which made it very difficult to support it. I note, however, that despite the assurances from the many industry bodies that presented to us, I had a letter the other day telling me about a tower that was going to be put up and advising me that there was going to be a community meeting to discuss it. I thought, 'That's great; I am getting notice,' and when I said, 'When's the meeting?' they said, 'Oh, it's tonight.' So once again nothing has changed and these systems are still failing the community, because they are not working, quite frankly.

The other issue I have, one once again raised by No Towers Near Schools in their formal submission, is, as the member for Hinkler said, this ongoing conflict that even when the telcos come to the community consultation time they have already signed their lease for the particular site, so there really is not an opportunity to discuss alternative options. I understand the commercial imperatives of that. They have already invested a lot of time and money in that location so intrinsically it is in their interests to fight for that location instead of looking at a compromise situation. That is where we get this conflict and that is where we do not always get the best outcomes. So I believe that there is a lot of work that needs to be done in this area. As I have said previously in this place, it is unacceptable that after three decades of such towers being put up we still have these big, ugly towers in our community. For a while some of the telcos—and I commend Optus, who used to come up with faux palm trees—made some sort of effort but these days it is the cheap, dirty and quick way of doing it: get it in and get out. I am also very frustrated by the telcos who appoint another company as a body to do the negotiations. So they have this one-step-removed theory that 'it's not us; it's this third company that's doing it for us.' I think they need to take responsibility and they need to do proper consultation. I would like to congratulate the people who made submissions and I do think we need to address, going forward, some of the issues that they have raised. Importantly, as I said previously, the biggest flaw is the fact that this legislation does not cover the big high-impact towers, which are probably the major concern for our community.

I would like to thank the committee secretariat for working with us on this report. It was very difficult for them, I know, because there were some very concerned community members who particularly wanted to come and meet with the committee and it was not always easy to explain how this legislation actually did not cover the issues that they felt it should. So I would like to thank Julia Morris, Kilian Perrem, Susan Dinon and Peter Pullen for their support and assistance. As the member for Hinkler said, due to the flaws in this
legislation and the fact that it really does not address the problems we have out there at the moment, the committee is unfortunately unable to support it in any way. I digress but in fact one of the submitters, Pipe Networks, pointed out that it actually slows down repairing telephone lines as well as the putting in of new ones and that if you want to repair the pipes in the ground once again you have to do community consultation. Obviously, I think this was rushed and I would hope that the member for Denison would consult more widely next time and take on board the real issues that are in the community and the issues that we do need to consider in support of our residents in this area. So, unfortunately, as the bill stands we could not support it.

Debate adjourned.

BUSINESS

Rearrangement

Mr HAYES (Fowler) (11:49): I move:
That further proceedings on order of the day No. 3, government business, be conducted in the House.
Question agreed to.

COMMITTEES

Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Joint Committee

Report

Debate resumed on the motion:
That the House take note of the report.

Mr ROBERT (Fadden) (11:50): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to rise and make some comments about the joint delegation that had the opportunity to go into theatre to review combat operations within the wider Middle East area of operations, in this case in Afghanistan. It was my third visit into Afghanistan to review the state of combat operations and the state of our engagement within the wider International Security Assistance Force in coalition with the partners of freedom-loving nations across the world.

First of all, let me put on the record my great thanks for the committee's assistance, for those who supported the committee's work and also for the Department of Defence, which facilitated the work of the delegation going in. For those who are unaware of a delegation going into a combat operation, a not insubstantial amount of administrative work is required. There is a special forces protection group of up to 15 people who are there to make sure that anything untoward does not happen to us. That was very kind of them, I must say. It is a significant impost on our special forces personnel. They were taken away from their homes, their families and their wives and children not only for the two-week period while we were in theatre but for the preparation for us to go in and the post work outside. So let me thank the members of the Special Air Service Regiment and the 2nd Commando Regiment based in Holsworthy for their commitment to duty, their support and their work. It was incredibly appreciated. I do not need a man with an M4A1 machine gun 'bombed up' standing outside the bathroom, but I appreciated the gesture anyway. It made me feel incredibly safe within the wider Tarin Kowt fire support base, which was already surrounded by 2,500 soldiers. That gives an indication of the degree of professionalism they have, the support they give and the work they do.
I also thank the government—the Minister for Defence and the wider government—for allowing the committee to go in and do its work to review the state of combat operations and the work of the Australian military force within theatre. We covered everything from Al Mihad, which is a forward staging area, to the work of our administrative and logistics command and support personnel; the joint support unit—all three services right through to Tarin Kowt; the work of our fire support base; our patrol base personnel; our headquarters; our mentoring task force; our provincial reconstruction teams through to KAF, Kandahar Airfield; and the work of our allies right through to IJC, ISAF Joint Command, which is a three-star core level command. Then we went into Kabul to visit a range of Afghan parliamentarians and the Afghan parliament and to commence a dialogue.

To give an understanding of how difficult the environment is, some of the key members of the Afghan parliament, including the Governor of Oruzgan province, have subsequently been killed, having been attacked by insurgents with improvised explosive devices. I think half the parliamentarians we met with, commenced a discussion with and continued a dialogue with have now been killed for service to their country. That shows some of the ongoing challenges of representing their people and building a legitimate democracy.

Speaking on behalf of the delegates who went along—Senator Furner, Dr Jensen, Ms Brodtmann and me—I would like to say not only how much we admired what our fighting men and women are doing but how much we respect what they do. We had the opportunity to leave the fire support base Tarin Kowt and go to the patrol bases in the upper reaches of the Mirabad Valley. It is instructive that, when we got off the helicopters and walked to the forward operating position on top of the hill and went down into the patrol base, we actually walked across the remnants of war. There were machine gun spent rounds by the thousands lying on the ground, spent smoke cartridges and 'link' from Minimi machine guns lying around. The entire scene was out of a battle. When I was there for the second time in theatre, seven or eight months beforehand, the battle for that upper reach of the Mirabad Valley was indeed being fought. It was being fought with fighter aircraft in the air; it was being fought by combat troops on the ground. There is a marvellous story of a young section commander—a young lance corporal—fighting in that battle of the upper reach of the Mirabad Valley. He was under such sustained direct fire that he actually lay down on the ground and played dead to act as a ruse so the enemy fire would lift from him while his mates attracted more fire, allowing him to get up. The reason that he was moving between the patrol base that they were building and the fire support position was resupply for ammunition. He was an incredibly brave young soldier and that is one of the many stories of the battle there in the upper regions.

Here we were, a group of parliamentarians, six, seven, eight months later, walking across that ground quite freely, up to the hill to be briefed by the young captain of the Australian patrol base and then down into the patrol base proper, to get a feel for how they live and the conditions they fight in. Then there was a traditional shura with the Afghani elders and the local people, which 40 or 50 people attended. We met for an hour and a half in the traditional shura, a traditional talking fest, to discuss issues. In that hour and half, not once was the issue of security raised. Within seven months, the mentoring task force had established their patrol base, had gained supremacy on the ground, had destroyed the insurgency in the upper base of the Mirabad Valley and had begun the consultation, the dialogue and the build process in terms of putting in place a situation where there were both economics and security so that
people could get on with their lives. Many of the elders had fought the Russians as part of the original mujaheddin and, from their wise and crinkled faces and grey beards, they looked like they had fought the great battles of the mujaheddin. These men spoke of schools and health clinics. They said, 'thank you for the bitumen road' and 'when will the road continue up to the Chora Valley'—which extends past the Mirabad Valley into Baluchi and then extends up to the upper reaches of the Chora. They wanted to know: when could marketplaces be put in place? When are health clinics coming? These men spoke of community and the infrastructure that you and I take for granted that build, enshrine and empower that community. Not once, in 90 minutes, did they actually talk national security, about feeling safe, about being threatened by a Taliban. They spoke of alternative crops—in terms of cash crops, in terms of wheat and almonds—to the crops that the Taliban are forcing them to grow, such as narcotics and poppy. But not once did they mention national security. I think that is instructive of the value of the mentoring task force and the hard work that our men and women are doing on the ground.

It was great to see a whole range of areas within Tarin Kowt—not just the mentoring task force but also the provincial reconstruction team led by a civilian out of AusAID. He is a tremendous man. Incidentally, when we actually went out to the patrol base in the upper reaches of the Mirabad Valley, he went off to look at a bridge. Such was the security situation, where he could go and look at a bridge to be built as part of the provincial reconstruction team. One hundred and eighty-nine people were in that reconstruction team at that time. Once you are safe, once security is assured, communities can move on. They can establish their sense of economics. They can establish their sense of infrastructure. Provincial reconstruction teams and other donor nations like AusAID can get out and build into that infrastructure.

It is interesting to reflect that, upon our return, the bitumen road up to the extents of the Chora Valley has now been finished. Almost within a week, two or three of that road being finished, the price of palm oil—normally seven times the cost in the Chora Valley compared to Tarin Kowt—had instantly reduced to one and a half times. Because you could drive up the road, up to the Chora Valley. We in Australia might take that for granted, but let us not forget that the average person in Afghan society or the average Afghan family might not, in their entire life, move more than three kilometres away from their village. Ever. It has been that way for thousands and thousands of years. The level of infrastructure that is being put in place is empowering communities to do a lot more in terms of their lives. We also had time to work and look at what the headquarters was doing. The headquarter elements. We visited the men and women of the special operations task force—SATG or task group—to look at what they were doing in terms of their kinetic operations in dismantling, disrupting the enemy insurgency—and especially the IED and the bomb making components. We looked at the unmanned aerial vehicle side of things, we looked at the Heron detachment, where Heron was going and what it is doing, and of course Scan Eagle now in Tarin Kowt has been replaced by the new Shadow system. I am looking forward to seeing how that works. It was my great pleasure to travel with the member for Canberra and to be on the rifle range with her. I say you shot very well, ma'am, to your great credit. I know the member for Canberra had an opportunity to speak to a number of the women who in their time off, which I think is one of the greatest misnomers of combat operations but in the eight hours when they are not working in a day, actually go into the township of Tarin Kowt and surrounding areas to connect with
other women. In a time when you would want to sit back and perhaps do nothing but rest and get a little control of your environment, call home, write some letters, read letters from home, these women were going out to connect with Afghani women as part of how they could build a society. That is incredibly impressive. It can be a dangerous place, so all power to those women who are in combat and who are going out and doing some really good stuff.

The time in KAF, Kandahar airfield, was instructive in terms of the higher headquarter elements looking at the wider battle picture. Remember KAF is the busiest airport in the world. There is an aircraft taking off or landing literally every 30 seconds; it is busier than Heathrow. An entire airborne brigade of the 101st Airborne Division is there with hundreds and hundreds of helicopters, let alone the transport aircraft landing, the fighter jets and the unmanned aerial vehicles in the space at the same time. The time in Kabul was at a political level, a higher headquarter corps level command to get a feel for how the operation is going.

I think it is fair to say, and I look forward to the member for Canberra's contribution, that we came away deeply impressed with what our fighting men and women are doing. They are seriously batting well above their weight. Over 150 Australian officers are embedded in all levels, from the ISAF four-star to the IJC three-star corps level to the CTU and patrol base level, embedded at various command levels because of their expertise and their capacity to do a great job across a whole range of different nations. Forty-seven nations coming together is no mean feat in the battle for freedom. Australian officers have a great propensity to move seamlessly across those nations and to act as a glue that pulls a lot of things together. We were deeply impressed with the capacity and capability of our men and women.

I came away encouraged by the equipment at our soldier level. The only comment I was getting from some of our soldiers was, can we make this bit of gear a bit smaller so we can put it here on our gear. I think we are servicing our men and women very well in terms of gear. My first time in theatre many years ago in Afghanistan was 18 kilograms of body armour with nothing else on it. This time I saw the new integrated body armour, the lightweight gear that is being worn, the personal bubbles being used for protection from IEDs. I was greatly encouraged at some of the work especially that Colonel Blaine is doing at Digger Works, which is directly feeding back to soldier on the ground and having a tremendous impact.

The committee was incredibly impressed at our command level, at our soldier level, at our equipment level. We came away very cautiously optimistic. We note the Prime Minister's comments on 16 April this year that she expects President Karzai to announce that within the next 12 to 18 months the transition from MTF training the 4th Afghan national army brigades will be complete and the MTF will come home. She said the PRT but I think she meant the MTF. If that is the case, the Prime Minister has announced that we would be bringing the bulk of our combat forces, except for a few kinetic areas as well as reconstruction and some trainers, home by Christmas 2013. We have always asked that it will be a command judgment and metrics-based withdrawal. There is nothing to indicate that the Prime Minister has not taken such advice and that the announcement is anything other than based upon sound metrics and sound commanders' advice. We take what she has said on face value. As I said to the Minister for Defence this morning, we look forward to reviewing those metrics and getting a chance, as we do as part of our bipartisan support, to sit down with our commanders and get a
better feel on the ground. Bipartisanship is not a blank cheque but we certainly support the government 100 per cent.

We thank the government of the day and the minister for his generosity of spirit in allowing the committee full access at every classified level to combat operations. There was nothing that was denied to us, to the minister's credit. The nation was well served by a very strongly bipartisan team going into the theatre to review operations. I thank the House.

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (12:04): I welcome the opportunity to speak on this report today by the Defence Subcommittee of the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, and commend the Member for Fadden for his speech. The member for Fadden, Senator Furner, the member for Tangney and I became quite close during our delegation to Afghanistan. Being the only female on the delegation I can tell you now that my colleagues were incredibly supportive of me. There were a number of professional challenges for me in going on this delegation. This was my first time going to a country that was experiencing conflict, but also there were a number of personal challenges for me, particularly in going to bases. I have been to bases before, but I have never actually stayed on one. We actually stayed on a range of bases in both Dubai and Al Minhad, outside of Dubai, and also in Afghanistan. That may not have posed its normal challenges: I actually got very good accommodation—better accommodation than most of the ADF get. What I found particularly confronting was actually the unisex toilets at Tarin Kowt. That is a legacy of the Dutch. There was an American commander there at the time and his inclination when he first took over the command was to change over the unisex nature of the amenities to dual sex. He thought that most people on the base would prefer that option, but they said they were happy with the Dutch arrangements, so the unisex arrangement was what was on offer. It is quite interesting running across pebbles in a pretty stark environment with a little towel and trying to get showered in this very tight amenity with both men and women there. It was a bit of a personal challenge in that respect, as was knowing that the special forces are outside the door guarding you. So there were a number of personal challenges for me.

As the member for Fadden acknowledged, I also shot for the first time in my life. I did find that quite confronting. The security and safety of the situation was very well managed. The member for Fadden, Senator Furner and the member for Tangney were incredibly supportive of me too knowing that it was my first time but also knowing that I found it quite confronting and really did not want to continue. What I also found confronting was lying down to do the shooting with all these hot bullets and the hot UAE sun skirting all over my body. I did not find that particularly interesting.

The most challenging thing for me was going down to Mirabad Valley, which is a war zone. It had been secured at that stage, but it was still incredibly fractious. I was not sure whether I wanted to go down there, and I did so with the support of the member for Fadden, as well as Senator Furner and the member for Tangney. They encouraged me to go down and experience it, and I am really glad that I did it. I think that in this life we have to stare down some of our demons and our fears. We have to take some risks to realise opportunities and gain more knowledge and experience. This was definitely one of those days. It was, as I said, very confronting to be there. We had to helicopter out. We were being guarded the whole time by the special forces. It was a bit like a Vietnam experience with them hanging out the helicopter while we were flying down to the valley.
It was an incredibly enriching and rewarding experience. Again, my advice to everyone is to take some risks in your life because you will enhance your life experience. We met with the elders of the community, and there were some younger men there too. We met with the senior citizens in this community—all men, of course. There was only the one other woman, a woman from AusAID. It was just absolutely fascinating to hear first-hand what their experiences have been in terms of us securing that environment in that valley and learning from them about how important it is to have a secure environment, particularly for their agriculture, their business and their farming, and how appreciative they were of the ADF being there and securing the valley for them.

What I also found particularly heartening was that there was this young ADF officer there, probably in his late 20s—I think he actually understood some Farsi; that is the language they speak—who had obviously established this incredibly trusting, warm and deep relationship with the senior citizens in the community. You could see that they held him in awe—he was a bit like a rock star. They hung off every word, particularly the young men. They greatly admired him. I cannot imagine the time he had spent with the people in that valley building up that level of trust, commitment and depth of understanding. In a way, he was incredibly revered. So I think that his departure from that area when he came back from his rotation would have been a real loss and they would have felt it quite deeply. Being a member of this delegation is, I think, probably one of the highlights of my life. I was very glad that I was asked to partake in it. It was in mid-May last year, and we were a bit concerned that we were going there when things were beginning to hot up again, literally and strategically. During my time there I learnt a huge amount. The purpose of the visit was to go to the ADF units and visit the embedded personnel based in the vicinity and the Australian Embassy in Kabul and also conduct a roundtable discussion with the Afghan politicians at their parliament house. These visits were intended to provide us with an opportunity for further understanding of the issues affecting the ADF operations, the progress of our operations in Afghanistan and the governance in Afghanistan. I do believe strongly that we achieved those aims.

Afghanistan has been a topic of much discussion over the past decade and recent events ensure that its position on the national agenda continues to be prominent. In fact, the Minister for Defence today gave an update on Afghanistan, focusing mainly on the detainees, and the member for Fadden also gave a worthwhile response. I would like to pause here to express my sadness at hearing of the recent killing—I think it was in March—of those innocent civilians in southern Afghanistan. It was a truly abhorrent crime and there is no doubt that it makes the challenges for our ADF—and there are plenty of challenges—even more acute.

What our trip to Afghanistan really brought home to me was just how dedicated our Australian troops are. They are extraordinary men and women. They are working towards a common goal, despite the setbacks, the chaos and the carnage. I can say with confidence that this trip gave me a much greater understanding of their role and what we are doing to fight terrorism and to stabilise and secure Afghanistan. I share with the member for Fadden a degree of optimism because we have made progress in Afghanistan in the last 10 years, particularly at the human level.

Now when people ask me why we are in Afghanistan, I no longer only talk about our commitment to the alliance and the need to eliminate terrorists to defend our presence—although I acknowledge that is one of the main reasons—but I also talk about the training
centres, the roads, the airfields, the mosques and the girls schools that I heard about that we have built. Six million children now go to school and one-third of them are girls. In 2001 this was around the one million mark and there were no girls at school.

Afghanistan's future stability and security relies as much on its infrastructure and getting the basics in place as it does on strongarming the enemy. Stability and security will not only come from eliminating the presence of terrorism; it will also come from training the military and the local police so that they can defend and protect their own people and their own country—and we are doing great work in that area. It will come from improving roads so that food can get to market and the economy can prosper. It will come from introducing a largely agricultural community to new crops to help get them off the addiction to opiate crops. It will come from training people so that they have the skills to build up their own nation.

Our overall approach—and this was really underscored during the delegation's visit there—needs to be tailored to the vastly different communities that make up Afghanistan. Having lived in India and having worked on the Middle East desk in Foreign Affairs, I have a strong appreciation of the differences between metropolitan and regional and rural communities right throughout that part of the world. But the differences in Afghanistan are incredibly stark. They are deeply tribal and embedded in centuries of history.

This is why the challenges need to be tackled province by province and, in some cases, village by village—and they are.

I now want to focus on some of the highlights of the visit. I mentioned the personal challenges that I had to face when I was there. Having not been a scout or a majorly outdoor girl, I have to say that it was challenging doing the unisex toilet. Apart from those personal challenges, we also had the great opportunity to meet with some of the parliamentarians in the Afghan parliament and in Kabul we met with the internationally renowned Fawzia Koofi, who is a bit of a megastar throughout the world, particularly in the States and Canada. She, at that stage, was chairwoman of the Defence and Territorial Affairs Standing Committee. She has a masters in business and management and she is a strong advocate of human rights, particularly of women's and children's rights. She is also from a very politically active family.

In our meeting she was incredibly articulate and forthright and she praised our presence in Afghanistan and wanted it to last as long as possible because for her it ensured that women like her were safe. In Uruzghan we met only with men.

I mentioned before about the experience at Mirabad Valley, which was another real highlight, and also army and police in Tarin Kowt. All of them, particularly the very influential Governor Shirzad, praised the international community's work in building the vital infrastructure particularly in waste management and food storage facilities and all those basics that we so take for granted here—and particularly for the women's and children's health centres. Governor Shirzad was also at pains to point out the gains we had made in stability and security in the last 12 months. We are going back to May 2011 now, particularly in the last six months. In recent years the international community, as the member for Fadden has mentioned, has trained tens of thousands of members of the national army, and many of them have been trained by young Australians in the artillery training centre in Kabul. They have built up the Afghan forces; they have essentially doubled them. Meeting these young Australians was incredibly inspirational. They are just young kids, they are only in their 20s. That is what was so extraordinary about meeting so many of these ADF actually on operations, that these are just kids in their 20s dealing with enormous challenges, facing up to
enormous challenges and succeeding against those challenges. These guys were just young and cheeky—there were a few women there but mainly men—and yet their youth and their cheekiness in a way belied a maturity and a confidence and a commitment to training the national army. They were extraordinary young people and, again, just a real inspiration. We should be very proud of the ADF.

Our mission in Afghanistan is multifaceted and it is working. Uruzghan now has double the number of patrol bases as a result of the training efforts we have done with the police. We have also got hundreds more tradesmen thanks to our trade training centre. There are many examples at the human level that really affected me. But there was one particular instance that actually brought me to tears and I think it brought the rest of the delegation to tears. We went to an ANA English reading class. Apparently the maximum age for people enrolling in the ANA is 35 years but this particular gentleman that came up to the board to show us his skill was probably about 55 years. He was bearded, gray, painfully thin and deeply lined from the extreme weather experienced in Afghanistan. He had been doing this course for I think it was about six weeks, and he got up and read loudly and clearly and proudly. Six weeks before he could not read. I know we are there for the stability, I know we are there for the security, I know that we are there to fight terrorism, but that to me just underscored that we are also making a huge impact at the human level, and I think that just was a symbol of our achievements in Afghanistan since we have been there.

The member for Fadden also mentioned Kandahar hospital, an extraordinary hospital, incredibly modern and with amazingly dedicated doctors and nurses working there from all over the world. It was doctors and nurses gaining valuable battlefield experience. Again, the value of that battlefield experience was underscored when Gabrielle Giffords, the US politician who was shot in Tucson—unfortunately she has had to retire from politics—was fortunate enough to be wheeled into a hospital where there was a qualified surgeon, Dr Peter Rhee, who had been a military surgeon for 24 years and had treated hundreds and hundreds of battlefield injuries during stints in Afghanistan and Iraq. Without that experience I doubt that that woman's life would have been saved. The personnel there were at pains to say to us that we needed to get that expertise here in Australia.

Debate adjourned.

Health and Ageing Committee

Report

Debate resumed on the motion:

That the House take note of the report.

Mr IRONS (Swan) (12:20): I rise to continue my remarks on the House of Representatives report Lost in the labyrinth.

But first I would like to acknowledge one of my constituents, Luke Elson, from Como High School, who has been here since Saturday night visiting Canberra. Welcome to Canberra, Luke. I hope you get a lot out of the week in your time here.

To return to the report, Lost in the labyrinth is the report on the inquiry into registration processes and support for overseas trained doctors. I again acknowledge the chair of the committee, the member for Hindmarsh, and his remarks, and also the Chief Opposition Whip, the member for Leichhardt, who was particularly keen to see this inquiry go ahead.
As I stated in my tabling remarks, the crux of this issue is the shortage of doctors and medical staff across Australia. It was particularly interesting that, on the day of the tabling, there was an article on the front page of the *West Australian* entitled 'Call for GPs to help amid new baby boom'. The article referred to great shortages of obstetricians and gynaecologists in Western Australia in the face of a surge of births last year, and shows the challenges that we face from medical staff shortages across Australia. 32,494 babies were born last year in the West, and it looks like that number will continue to grow, with latest projections suggesting the state's population will reach 3.06 million by 2026, which is 400,000 more than was estimated in 2006.

There is no doubt that we need more medical staff in Western Australia, and overseas trained doctors can only be part of the solution. That is why in Swan I am also supporting Curtin University's campaign for a new medical school at the Bentley campus which would help address this issue. I can also see that there would be many benefits for local health care from having such a new facility in Swan—in particular, for the Bentley antenatal clinic, where I am currently running a community campaign to save maternity services there. I note that over 3,000 people have signed the petition for the Curtin medical school, demonstrating community support for the proposal. However, I must say that it did take me by surprise to see a counterpetition, signed by 250 people who do not want the medical school at Curtin.

However, even if the government approved the medical school in my electorate tomorrow, it would still be 2019 before the first graduates emerged. So overseas trained doctors will continue to play a role. The purpose of the particular inquiry that we have just had is to improve what, at the moment, is a regulatory process that is not doing its job for Australian communities. It is not, as the *Australian* put it in a report, designed to fast-track overseas trained doctors into Australia. It is about improving a flawed process.

I want now to go into more detail in my speech today, including on the recommendations that were made. The report makes 45 recommendations for improving the registration and support processes for overseas trained doctors, which I think you will agree is a significant amount. I would not say there was one recommendation that was a standout or more important than the others. They are all important and have been welcomed by many in the industry.

I was sent a press release from Rural Health Workforce Australia titled 'Report on overseas doctors deserves praise,' which was a very positive response and reflection on the committee and the secretariat's work. In their press release, they said:

If these recommendations are adopted, they will have a significant impact on addressing medical workforce shortages in rural Australia. As part of that vision, we agree with the committee that more needs to be done to encourage Australian-trained professionals to work in rural communities and remain committed to that goal.

Just by the way, as background before I speak more about the recommendations, I would like to echo some of the words of the chair on Australia's system of medical practitioner accreditation, which provide a bit more background for members listening. Australia's system of medical practitioner accreditation and registration was overhauled in 2010 following the formation of the AHPRA, with AHPRA designed to oversee 10 national health boards. The Medical Board of Australia is responsible for a new national scheme of medical accreditation and registration, and its formation was designed to streamline former state and territory
processes. It is this transition to a national scheme that has been confusing and difficult for IMGs and others and forms the background to this inquiry. For many stakeholders, this was the first time they had been consulted. I think this inquiry has been a great listening exercise and hopefully we have achieved a result which everyone feels they have contributed to.

The committee visited most states in Australia; in fact, I think we actually visited all states. A highlight of our trips was Cairns, and I also recognise Warren Entsch, the Chief Opposition Whip, who helped initiate this inquiry. There was a trip to Townsville and trips to most of the committee members' electorates around Australia as well. The nature of the committee hearings had a common thread. A lot of it was repetitive and a lot of it was about conflict, but at the same time it was the message that got to us and it was the message that was put by all parties and stakeholders who had an interest in the output of the committee's inquiry and recommendations. I was particularly impressed with the member for Shortland, who at stages during the inquiry defended the role of the inquiry and the modus of the committee, which were challenged sometimes by people giving evidence. I do say that the member for Shortland was quite passionate in her defence of the committee and the work that we were doing, so hats off to the member for Shortland for that.

During the hearings we heard of international medical graduates having difficulties gaining access to their primary sources of verification. In terms of recommendations, the committee identified a need for the Australian Medical Council to increase the availability of the Australian Medical Council Structured Clinical Examination. We did receive some feedback from candidates attempting the structured clinical examination. Their view was that it is currently limited and leaves candidates unaware of shortcomings in their knowledge and unable to take steps to rectify these shortcomings. Publishing detailed information outlining the processes for determining the allocation of places for the structured clinical examination and providing constructive written feedback for candidates who have undertaken the examination will reduce demand by identifying the difficulties that repeat candidates have encountered. The report also recommends that an independent evaluation of the workplace-based assessment model be a priority. Issues relating primarily to specialist medical college assessment processes were raised during consultations as well as the need to improve recognition of previous medical training and experience that international medical graduates have gained in their home country.

The Health and Ageing Committee agreed that the Department of Health and Ageing and the Australian Medical Council should publish agreed definitions of levels of comparability on their websites, for the benefit of international medical graduates applying for specialist registration, and develop and publish objective guidelines clarifying how overseas qualifications, skills and experience are used to determine the level of comparability.

The report also recommends that specialist medical colleges adopt the practice of using workplace-based assessment during the period of peer review to assess the clinical competence of specialist international medical graduates in cases where applicants can demonstrate that they have accumulated substantial prior specialist experience overseas. This recommendation is part of the committee's desire to improve specialist college assessment processes for overseas-trained specialists seeking special registration in Australia. Furthermore, a recommendation for all specialist medical colleges to consult with the Australian Medical Council, to ensure each college undertakes a consistent three-stage
appeals process for assessments, will make international medical graduates aware of their right of appeal regarding their application for specialisation. To further strengthen this process, the development of an independent appeals mechanism to review decisions relating to the assessment of clinical competence to be constituted following an unsuccessful appeal is also recommended.

The committee recommends that—prior to undertaking practice in an area of need, position or regional, rural or remote position with indirect or limited access to clinical supervision—international medical graduates be placed in a teaching hospital, base hospital or similar setting. I note this is a practice Curtin University also promoted as a benefit for its proposed medical degree for domestic students.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Vamvakinou): Order! It being 12.30 pm the debate is adjourned and the member for Swan will have leave to continue his remarks.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr MELHAM (Banks) (12:30): I move:

That the Federation Chamber do now adjourn.

Parkes Electorate: Toomelah

Mr COULTON (Parkes—The Nationals Chief Whip) (12:30): I rise today to speak about the issue of one of the communities in my electorate: the village of Toomelah. Toomelah has been in the national press this week again. I wanted to take this opportunity to address the House and express my opinion and concerns as to what is happening in the Toomelah community. It is important to note something of the history of Toomelah to properly understand the issues that Toomelah is confronting at the moment. Toomelah is not a village or a town as such; it is a continuation from what was originally a mission station. There are no individual blocks of land, no individual ownership. Toomelah is one land title. That is part of the reason that some of the issues that are confronting that community are happening, that there is actually no individual ownership of any property.

The village of Toomelah hit the headlines some 25 years ago when Marcus Einfeld conducted the inquiry into what was happening there. It was interesting to note that the current Governor-General was part of that inquiry in a previous role that she had. Last year after the floods in the Macintyre River affected the Toomelah community, the Governor-General accompanied me on an inspection, and I could tell she was quite distressed that in 25 years none of the issues that had been identified have been addressed. I think that the time for Toomelah to be bought out of the wretchedness and squalor in which it has found itself is long overdue. I acknowledge that in the past people with the best of intentions have worked very hard to rectify the issues surrounding that community. I acknowledge now that as the member it now falls on my shoulders, partly with other colleagues, to address this. There are serious issues that need to be addressed.

While the CDEP was by far from a perfect scheme as far as employment goes, while it was in Toomelah it did provide some employment to that community, but certainly it did not lead on, as it was designed, to more permanent employment. There does need to be employment but there is employment in surrounding areas and I think we need to encourage the residents of that village to partake in genuine employment—proper jobs. Creating jobs for the sake of creating jobs has certainly not worked in the past, and, with mentoring and encouragement,
we are going to have to help those people into regular and employment. I acknowledge the work of people like Sid Craigie, who over the last couple of years has on an individual basis helped people into employment. But we need to acknowledge that it is a difficult process that requires ownership and mentoring and keeping on with this problem. I think that the New South Wales government now are looking at the child abuse issues. They are looking at issues with the school and the fact that the attendance rate is below 50 per cent. I believe that there will be measures taken to address these issues.

I met with the minister's office last night to offer my support for whatever position this government takes. I am more than happy to play my part into coming to a solution for the people of Toomelah. I encourage the minister—and I said so to her adviser last night—to work in cooperation with the state government and Moree Plains Shire Council in a united front so that we chart a course of action and stick to that course of action until, indeed, we can start to turn around the situation, because a child that is born into poverty has no choice into where they are born. In the year 2012, a child should be entitled to go to bed in safety, not hungry and not frightened. Indeed, that is not the case today in Toomelah.

**Shortland Electorate: Proposed Bottle Shop**

Ms HALL (Shortland—Government Whip) (12:36): by leave—I table a motion that was unanimously passed by the New South Wales upper house in conjunction with the speech that I made earlier today.

**Marfan Association Victoria**

**Australian Broadcasting Corporation**

Mr MITCHELL (McEwen) (12:36): On Sunday, 22 April I joined members and supporters of Marfan Association Victoria to kick off their fifth annual Walk for Marfan around Albert Park Lake in Melbourne. Marfan Syndrome is a genetic disorder of connective tissue that affects one in about every 3,000 people. Lives can be saved through early detection, medical treatment and managing lifestyle to reduce stress on the body. The symptoms and severity of the conditions are highly variable and visible characteristics can differ significantly from one individual to the next. A lot more community awareness and professional medical education is needed so that earlier diagnosis and intervention can occur when required.

This year's Walk for Marfan raised much-needed funds which will go towards making an educational DVD for medical practitioners, which aims to address this gap in knowledge. As members may recall from my first speech in this place, I spoke of my family's loss of my younger brother Jason, so I know firsthand how Marfan affects families. So I am very proud to lend my support to the tireless effort of the association's volunteers. I congratulate the Marfan Association and in particular secretary Kate Anderson-Nix for organising the Walk for Marfan and thank them for asking me to be part of the day.

On a sadder note, the ABC recently ran a program called *Two on the Great Divide*, with Tim Flannery and John Doyle, two people who I normally have a bit of respect for. However, their recent portrayal of the town of Seymour in the McEwen electorate has justifiably drawn anger and outrage from residents of the town, many of whom have spoken to or written to me recently. On the television series, they briefly visited the town. No one is exactly sure when, based on the footage being out of date. It showed the Aldi building site—Aldi has been going
for nearly two years now—as part of their journey along the Great Dividing Range. What has upset local residents—and I share their anger—is the portrayal of Seymour as a bleak and socially disadvantaged town—a town lacking in opportunity for youth and a place where people only live when they have no other choice. This representation is overwhelmingly wrong and ignorant. The 200 emails and letters of complaint to the ABC, and dozens of letters to the local newspapers objecting to such a selective editing of imaging and interviews, are solid evidence that the Seymour community believes—rightly so—that the ABC got it wrong.

I have the privilege of representing Seymour in this place. I have known the town all my life and I know that there are great people who live there. Sadly, the producers of the program choose not to meet people proud and representative of the town. Most likely, the comments from those people would not have provided the fodder to illustrate the social divide that was needed for the program. Instead, the producers and presenters found a regionally based drug and alcohol worker who does not live in the town, the shire or the electorate and labelled him the ‘local social worker’. Viewers were not told about the tremendous community spirit present in so many of our Australian country towns. Viewers were not shown any of the new shops, homes and infrastructure like Seymour College—a new school which incorporates primary, secondary and special schools. Seymour is a town, I might add, that is defying the trend by increasing its population by choice—that is, people want to come and live in Seymour. Instead, we got selective images of back fences in the rain and even the home of a family who are determined to become ecologically sustainable and self-sufficient by recycling as much as they can. To the producers, this was an opportunity to ignorantly show their home and yard as being untidy.

So frankly, the producers and presenters of the program and the ABC got it wrong. Theirs is one view—an elite inner city view of a regional town. Anyone who has paid more than a fleeting visit to the town knows all too well that that view is not true. Simon Melkman from ABC Audience and Consumer Affairs said in a response that the two presenters ‘openly meet and engage with people from all walks of life to discuss their perspectives on life in the places they live’. In addition, the director of the series provided the following information:

We certainly didn't set out to willingly denigrate Seymour, or to do it harm. In assessing content against the impartiality standards, it is necessary to consider, in context, all relevant factors, including the type, nature and subject matter of the content and the audience's likely expectations of it.

The information within the segment was presented with due impartiality, and the favouring of the perspectives of Mr Doyle and Professor Flannery—consistent with the format of the series—was not undue. We are therefore satisfied that the relevant editorial standards were met.

Well, I would just like to mention to Mr Melkman that perhaps if he watched the TV show he would know that the people interviewed were not locals.

The show left Seymour and travelled off to a place called 'Kings Lake'. For the record and for the ABC's benefit, it is Kinglake—one word, not two. The ABC should know this because the ABC spent three months up there after the bushfires, milking that for all it was worth. This is what the ABC calls its 'editorial standards'. I know that the outrage continues with a letter to the ABC from the mayor, Sue Marstaeller, who also pointed out that it was 'an appalling, blatant and undignified kick to the guts to Seymour and Seymour residents'.

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FEDERATION CHAMBER
Thursday, 10 May 2012

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Mining
Employment

Ms MARINO (Forrest—Opposition Whip) (12:41): Australia's economy is in transition, the fourth such significant economic refocusing since we became a nation. We started as an agricultural economy and became a manufacturing based economy and then a service based economy. We are now in the process of tying our immediate financial future to the mining industry. Nowhere is this more apparent than in my home state of Western Australia, where the iron ore and gas industries lead the nation in activity and, given the level of reserves, also in future potential. Of course, we are not the only state riding on the haul pack. The coal reserves in the eastern states, especially Queensland and New South Wales, mean that the mining sector is important to all of us. No mainland state would be where they are without it.

The mining industry, however, faces major challenges in attracting the necessary trained workforce—and this is not just occurring in the mining sector. Given the employment demands of the mining industry, trying to find skilled transport machinery operators, agricultural workers and even semiskilled workers is a nightmare across rural and regional Western Australia. I am sure other states find their farmers as well as their transport and machinery businesses in a similar position.

There is no doubt that Australia faces a desperate shortage of skilled labour, but the government dithers with its inadequate training platform, and industries are being hamstrung. This is having a major impact on productivity. This government is fiddling while our businesses are burning, particularly those in the south-west of WA. Those businesses are continually losing their heavy-duty machinery operators, their heavy-vehicle drivers, to the north-west. This is placing extraordinary pressure on a range of businesses in the south-west. The Western Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry is on record as saying that our state will need an additional 488,500 workers over the next decade and, of these, only 69,000 are in mining. The construction industry is expected to need an additional 130,000 skilled tradespeople. With a current workforce of 1.27 million workers, the expected demand of nearly half a million skilled workers represents an increase of 38 per cent. An increase of this size would require a total population increase of around 75 per cent.

As attractive as Western Australia is in which to live and work, a near doubling of the population over a decade is not realistic. The infrastructure requirement alone staggers the imagination. Even the chamber of commerce reasonably estimated an expected shortfall of 210,000 workers. Given this, it must be obvious to even the most naive observer that skilled migration is an essential component of our economic future. But it is only by managing an efficient and effective skilled migration program that our economic potential will be unlocked. I cannot understand why the government is making such a mess of it. Skilled workers are needed now, particularly in my south-west. The government's token increase in the budget of 5,000 workers across the entire nation ignores WA's needs. They are not needed just up north in WA. The South West, as I said, is a major industrial and mining economy with a $12 billion GDP. It is a major training centre that produces skilled staff, many of whom are immediately attracted to the northern mining sector. While no-one would seek to deny these people the financial opportunities available to them in the north, this leaves a major skills shortage in the South West and industry there is frustrated on a daily basis at losing those vital skills. As a practical example, heavy machinery operators and heavy vehicle
drivers are not on the government's skilled occupation list, but they are in desperate shortage across the state and particularly in my part of the South West. They need to be highly skilled and fully trained in many areas, including safety. If you are a heavy machinery operator or a driver, you cannot just get into a $250,000 vehicle with tonnage upwards of 42 tonne and do the job you are expected to do. They are skilled and they need to be highly skilled and fully trained in many areas.

Businesses in the South West continue to bleed their apprentices and their workers. There is an urgent need for change to the skilled occupation list to assist businesses not only in the mining industry but also in the transport industry and the contracting industries so that they can access the staff they need to be able to do the work that we have. The South West has a lot more to offer this economy and we need infrastructure to go with it, but we certainly need the workers and the skilled and trained people to be able to keep driving the economy to contribute to the Australian economy. This government needs to get its foot off the hose and start supporting the new drivers of the Australian economy.

**Budget**

Mr PERRETT (Moreton) (12:46): I stand before you as a proud member of the Gillard Labor government, a government committed to delivering much-need cost of living relief to everyday Australian households, including thousands in my electorate of Moreton. I thank Treasurer Swan for his hard work to protect low- and middle-income earners and my most vulnerable residents. In Moreton alone the new schoolkids' bonus cash payment will help 6,800 families with kids in school to make ends meet. That is $410 for each child in primary school and $820 for each child in high school. More than 9,000 Moreton families will receive an increase of up to $600 in their family tax benefit part A payments. Vital assistance to help with the cost of living will go to over 9,000 Moreton young people, single parents and the unemployed who are currently receiving allowances by providing cash payments to help meet the cost of essential services like electricity, gas and water. Singles will receive a supplementary allowance of $210 while couples will receive $350. Thousands of Moreton workers will benefit from a boost to their superannuation, thanks to Australia's mining boom. For a 30-year-old on average full-time earnings this means around an extra $118,000 when they retire. More than 19,000 Moreton small businesses will benefit from a major new tax break from 1 July 2012. The $6,500 instant asset write-off recognises that not every small business is in the fast lane of the mining boom. Although a few of mine are, not every one is. Moreton parents are also receiving a helping hand with the cost of child care, with a 50 per cent rebate on all approved out-of-pocket childcare expenses up to a maximum of $7,500 per child per year. We have also introduced a paid parental leave scheme, providing parents with 18 weeks of government funded pay so they can stay home and care for their newborn baby. It is a great initiative that I am particularly proud of. It is hard to properly explain how valuable this support is to everyday Australians.

Many working Moreton residents are struggling and feel that it is harder and harder for them to make ends meet. For many electricity, rents, mortgages and the cost of groceries and petrol are putting pressure on family budgets. Builders have told me that the only renovation work they are doing is for those of us who are lucky enough to have work associated with people in the mining industry. Many small businesses, especially in retail, are having a slow end to a tough financial year. In my electorate, sadly, some businesses are still recovering.
from last year's floods. As a nation, we have come a long way since the dark days of the global financial crisis, yet we still face an uncertain world economy. We look at the French and Greek elections and see difficult days for the European Parliament as well.

The budget will provide a strong helping hand to many of my constituents. It is a very welcome package of measures to help people make ends meet. Not only have the Gillard Labor government provided this support to everyday Moreton locals; we have also found room to deliver reforms which make for a stronger community and a fairer society. The first historic steps towards the National Disability Insurance Scheme; aged-care reform to help senior Australians stay in their own homes, which is very much the hope of many of the baby boomers; a big new investment in dental health; and major investments throughout the health system—these are wonderful investments. These reforms demonstrate Labor's commitment to managing the economy responsibly in the interests of working Australians and not just a fortunate few.

We are returning the budget to surplus, on time, as promised. Obviously this is our best defence at times of global uncertainty and it gives our Reserve Bank maximum flexibility to cut interest rates further, especially with some of those other factors that are coming into play. We see the unemployment rate dropping down to 4.9 per cent, and I heard the previous speaker talk about the wage pressures that are coming into her electorate as people take advantage of the mining jobs. Interest rates are now lower than at any time under the previous Howard government. A family on a mortgage of, say, $300,000 is now paying around $3,000 a year less in repayments.

It is a pity that the opposition have been unable to offer anything but whingeing or complaining. Those opposite trip over themselves to see who can complain the loudest, but the Gillard Labor government just gets on with delivering for Australian families. We are delivering a surplus with targeted and responsible savings while protecting the front-line services that Australians rely on, as well as helping families with these cost-of-living pressures. This is a surplus for families, not taken from families, and an important delivery for the people of Australia.

Budget

Carbon Pricing

Mr HUNT (Flinders) (12:52): I want to raise the impact of the carbon tax announced in this budget—it is the first budget in which the carbon tax has been included in the figures—on my constituents in Flinders. Let us begin with the fact that the budget includes $36 billion of carbon taxes which will be imposed on the Australian public. Those taxes are not going to be imposed on some mythical group of 248 or 400 or 500 companies—

Mr Melham interjecting—

Mr HUNT: I will tell you about that in a minute, matey. Those taxes will be passed through in electricity, gas and grocery prices to Australian mums and dads. I know precisely why this does not work because, as the member for Banks raised, I did a thesis over 20 years ago on trade waste—zinc, cadmium, lead—and economic instruments and on the way in which economic instruments can be successful or the ones around the world which have failed. A critical factor is about finding a tool which does not push on an inelastic good.
What is the most significant essential service that consumers purchase? It is electricity. That is why it is an inelastic good. That is why driving up the price of electricity is highly ineffective. Because it is an essential service, what occurs is that people substitute out of discretionary items. That is why we have seen 70-plus per cent increases in electricity prices—74 per cent in my own home state of Victoria, according to KPMG—and the result has been pain for families but no significant change in electricity consumption. In other words, it is a massively ineffective tool—with a good purpose, may I add, but incredibly ineffective, on the basis of not just economic theory but the lived experience of Australians everywhere who have faced massive increases in electricity prices. And guess what? Members on both sides of this House know that.

That brings me again to my own electorate. The first thing we see as a result of the carbon tax is the direct impact on families, on their electricity budgets, on their gas budgets, on their grocery bills. Increasingly you will see it on the transport of all goods, as heavy transport is brought into the scheme. According to the Minerals Council, the best part of 100,000 firms by 2014 will be hit with off-road and on-road changes to their diesel fuel rebate, which is the other half of the carbon tax. That is going to be incredibly painful for small businesses, but everybody—every Australian, every time they turn on the light, use the television, use the air conditioning or use the heating—pays for the carbon tax. That is its intention. That is its design. That is its reality. And, sadly, that is its effect.

But there is also another secondary impact that I particularly want to focus on—that is, the impact on council budgets and council services. The government says that there will be a 10 per cent increase in electricity prices and a nine per cent increase in gas prices, as part of its modelling. The Energy Supply Association of Australia, which comprises the members that actually issue the bills, says there will be a 20 per cent increase in relatively short order in electricity bills. That is because, under the system the government has designed, they will be forward-purchasing permits from early 2014, which means that the electricity companies are going to have a second massive round of price increases, which will take us to 20 per cent.

What does that mean for councils? When you look at the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council, they have responsibility—as do all the others—for street lighting, community halls, toilet blocks, sporting facilities, council offices, car parks, depots, barbecues, security lighting, information centres and community theatres. All of these things continue. Mornington Peninsula Shire Council spend about $1.75 million a year on gas and electricity. At 10 per cent, that is a $175,000 increase a year. At 20 per cent, that is $300,000 a year in increase. Either services will be cut or rates will be increased. The City of Casey council spends $3.155 million a year on gas and electricity. It will have between $315,000 and $630,000 a year increase. Bass Coast Shire Council will have an increased bill of between $39½ thousand and $79,000 a year. Those are the real impacts: firstly, on families; secondly, on council budgets; thirdly, on services; and, fourthly, on rates.

Canberra German Community

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (12:57): It is with great pleasure that I rise today to speak about the German community here in Canberra, particularly the Jennings Germans, who celebrated their 60th anniversary of arriving in our nation's capital last month.

After the end of the Second World War, Germany's reputation was understandably at a low point. However, German tradesmen were still renowned for their work ethic and outstanding
technical skills and education and were attractive to companies here in Australia and to companies here in Canberra. There was a skills shortage here in Canberra then, as there is now, and the idea of recruiting migrants from overseas was a particularly attractive one.

So, in the early 1950s, 150 German carpenters and bricklayers were recruited by construction company AV Jennings. They came here to build 1,800 houses, many of which still stand today in O'Connor, Ainslie, Narrabundah—in my electorate—Harman and Yarralumla. In fact, there are a number of them just around the corner. They have a very distinctive look about them. They are weatherboard and they have a very distinctive look about them. They are very, very well built houses that have withstood the test of time.

The Jennings Germans made an important contribution to the construction of the Australian national capital, so much so that their reputation quickly spread throughout the country. Not only did they help build our beautiful city here in Canberra—which I think is the best city in Australia—but they also helped to rebuild the image of German Australians and thus added a new chapter to the long list of contributions made by German people and German companies and associations to Australia's history. I know from my own family—my own family came out here in the 1850s, as did my husband's—that there is a long history of Germans contributing to Australia and to the nation's capital.

I can appreciate that coming here to Australia following the end of a bloody war would not have been easy for these German tradesmen. They were transported into a strange new environment with a vastly different culture. They came to a very underdone city. Canberra in the 1950s was very underdone. Menzies can be commended for the great investment that he made in building this city. It was, from all reports, at the instigation of Dame Pattie Menzies, who made the well-known remark, 'Bob, you've got to do something about this town.' Apparently, that was from wheeling Heather along a bumpy road one day. So Bob got on and did something with this town and, as a result of those efforts, we have the beautiful city we have here today.

There were many problems of adjustment on both sides, particularly given that it was so soon after the end of the Second World War. Australians had to overcome a post-war anti-German prejudice and the tradesmen had to overcome isolation, homesickness and the language barrier. Yet both parties did overcome these barriers. Upon the end of the building contract, 100 of the tradesmen decided to stay on in Australia. They settled into Australian life, and before long they married, had families and formed strong ties to local community. Many of the men married local women; others went back to Germany and brought their new brides back to Canberra, Queanbeyan and the region.

On 21 April, I had the pleasure of attending the Jennings Germans 60th anniversary celebrations at the Harmonie German Club in my electorate. It was hosted by the Jennings Germans Association. Hundreds of Jennings Germans and their families and friends turned out for it, including Minister Sonn from the German Embassy. I would like to thank the president of the association, Klaus Scharrer, for inviting me, as well as Patricia and Karl Cloos, who continue to give so much to their local community.

There was a lunch at the Harmonie German Club and there were hundreds of children and grandchildren there. It was a real pleasure to go around and meet the Jennings Germans and their families, who have made a huge contribution to Australian society and have gone on to
succeed in a broad range of fields such as in business, building and medicine. They have made a significant contribution to every facet of Australian life.

I also took the opportunity to present a *Hansard*. I spoke about the Jennings Germans in the House of Representatives last year and I presented the *Hansard* to them, and that was a great pleasure.

Today the Jennings Germans community is spread far and wide. Twenty-two still live here in Canberra and 16 live in other parts of Australia. Many went back to Germany. Their contribution to our community is remarkable and I congratulate them on their 60th anniversary.

*Federation Chamber adjourned at 13:02*
QUESTIONS IN WRITING

Flannery Centre

(Question No. 873)

Mr Craig Kelly asked the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport in writing, on 27 February 2012 (transferred to the Minister representing the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Science and Research on 13 March 2012):

(1) Is the Government paying for, or contributing to, the construction cost of The Flannery Centre; if so, what sum. (2) How many square metres of floor space is The Flannery Centre. (3) Does the Commonwealth own the land upon which The Flannery Centre is being built; if so, (a) when was it acquired, (b) for what sum, and (c) what is its current value; if not, are any Government subsidies attached to the development, if so, in what form and of what value. (4) Once fully operational, how many staff will The Flannery Centre employ on a (a) full-time, and (b) part-time basis. (5) What are the estimated annual operating costs of The Flannery Centre, and will the private sector cover any of these costs. (6) Has he received any (a) written, or (b) verbal, requests for ongoing funding from representatives of The Flannery Centre. (7) Will the Government need to fund The Flannery Centre to keep it operational; if so, for what sum per financial year. (8) What sum will be charged per participant for the (a) two hour Living Sustainably training session, and (b) Climate Change workshop, and does this sum cover the full cost of the session/workshop, if not, what proportion will the Government contribute. (9) Will the Climate Change workshop cover rising sea levels, including the assertion that we are at the brink of a 25 metre sea-level rise; if not, can he indicate what sea level rise will be discussed in the workshop.

Mr Combet: The Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Science and Research has provided the following answer to the honourable member's question:

(1) Central West Group Apprentices Ltd (trading as Skillset) received a grant of $5 million through Round 2 of the Education Investment Fund (EIF) for the Flannery Centre – Skillssets for a Low Carbon Economy project.

(2) The Flannery Centre's floor space is 1852m², which comprises training spaces, offices and student amenities.

(3) No, Skillset holds title to the land on which the Flannery Centre is located.

(4) This information was requested from Skillset. Skillset's response: Skillset is a not for profit training organisation that will employ staff that work from the Flannery Centre. Initially the Centre will contain 25 full time staff, 3 part time staff and up to 20 Trainers and Assessors on a sessional basis.

(5) This information was requested from Skillset. Skillset's response: The Centre is fully integrated into the Skillset business model. Sustainability programs are run on a fee for service basis paid for by the private sector and individuals. In some circumstances these companies and individuals are eligible for a contribution to their training fees from the NSW and Commonwealth government. Skillset offers apprenticeships, training, workforce development and sustainability programs and generates revenues of around $30 million annually.

(6) The Minister for Tertiary Education has received a letter from Ben Bardon, CEO, Skillset, requesting additional funding. The Minister is currently considering the request, but as noted below in the response to Question 7, there is no legal obligation on the Government to provide additional funding.

(7) The $5 million in funding from EIF was for capital costs and no Australian Government funding has ever been provided for recurrent or operational costs. The Australian Government has no legal
obligation to provide additional funding under the terms and conditions of the EIF funding agreement. Skillset has confirmed that it does not receive operational funding from the Australian Government.

(8) This information was requested from Skillset.

Skillset's response: The Climate Change for Small Business course runs over six weeks and will cost around $450 per participant. This will be fully funded by the small business.

(9) This information was requested from Skillset.

Skillset's response: The workshop covers the diverse range of climate change impacts including sea level rise. We reference the International Panel on Climate Change aggregated research in this course.

Coptic Christians in Egypt

(Question No. 874)

Mr Craig Kelly asked the Minister representing the Minister for Foreign Affairs, in writing, on 27 February 2012:

In respect of the motion carried by the House on 'Coptic Christians in Egypt' (Votes and Proceedings, 13 October 2011, page 991), what action has the Australian Government taken, specifically, has it; (a) issued a public statement condemning the ongoing attacks against the Coptic Christian minority in Egypt, (b) made representations to the United Nations to end the persecution of Coptic Christians in Egypt, and (c) strongly urged the Egyptian Government to provide equal rights to all Egyptian citizens regardless of race or religion; if so, (i) on what date(s), (ii) what was said, and (iii) what response was received (if any); if not, why not.

Dr Emerson: The Minister for Foreign Affairs has provided the following answer to the honourable member's question:

(a) Yes

19 March 2012: Address to Parliament by Senator Carr

10 October 2011: Joint Press Statement by the Prime Minister, Ms Gillard and the former Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Rudd.

(b) Yes

(c) Yes

(i) 19 March 2012; 15 February 2012; 18 October 2011; 11 October 2011

In addition to these specific representations, the Australian Ambassador and other diplomatic staff at the Australian Embassy in Cairo regularly discuss the situation of Copts, express concerns about violence and discrimination, and urge equal treatment in meetings with Egyptian political and religious figures.

Expressions of support to the Coptic Community have been made at the highest levels, including through a statement of condolence by Prime Minister Gillard on 18 March after the death of Pope Shenouda and the attendance of the Australian Ambassador at the Pope's funeral on 20 March.

(ii) Addressing Parliament on 19 March, I (Senator Carr) noted the tragic loss of life caused by ongoing sectarian violence in Egypt and called on the Egyptian government to ensure equal treatment and protection under the law for all Egyptians. I (Senator Carr) said it was critical that religious freedoms were protected and that Egypt's transition was just and inclusive.

In other representations the Australian Government has:

- Expressed concern at incidents of sectarian violence and loss of life in clashes of 9 October 2011;
- Sought assurances from Egyptian authorities on equal treatment for Egyptian citizens;

QUESTIONS IN WRITING
- Called on Egypt to meet its undertaking to enhance legal protection for all religious minorities including through implementation of a "unified law" on houses of worship and a law to criminalise religious discrimination; and
- Emphasised that Australia would stay closely engaged on the issue of religious tolerance.


**Prime Minister and Cabinet: Credit Card Breaches**

*(Question No. 904)*

Mr Briggs asked the Prime Minister, in writing, on 20 March 2012:

In respect of departmental credit card use in (a) 2008-09, (b) 2009-10, and (c) 2010-11, (i) how many times has the use of a credit card breached departmental guidelines, (ii) what was the dollar value of each breach, and what sum was repaid in each instance, and (iii) were any employees disciplined for such breaches.

Ms Gillard: I am advised that the answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

(i) In 2010-11 there were no instances of credit card usage that breached departmental guidelines.

Between 2008-09 and 2009-10 two staff members breached departmental guidelines in relation to the use of credit cards.

In the first case an investigation in 2009 uncovered eleven instances of a breach of departmental guidelines.

In the second case an investigation in 2009 uncovered two instances of a breach of departmental guidelines.

(ii) In the first case the total value of the eleven breaches was $2,494 which was fully repaid.

In the second case the total value of the two breaches was $295 which was fully repaid.

(iii) In the first case the employee was suspended whilst a formal investigation was undertaken.

In the second case a formal investigation was undertaken.

Both investigations determined that breaches of the APS Code of Conduct had occurred and sanctions were recommended. Both employees were terminated at their request before sanctions could be imposed.