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SITTING DAYS—2015

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FORTY-FOURTH PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION—SEVENTH PERIOD

Governor-General
His Excellency General the Hon. Sir Peter Cosgrove AK, MC (Retd)

House of Representatives Office holders
Speaker—Hon. Anthony David Hawthorn Smith
Deputy Speaker—Hon. Bruce Craig Scott MP
Second Deputy Speaker—Mr Robert George Mitchell MP
Members of the Speaker’s Panel—Mr Russell Evan Broadbent MP,
Ms Anna Elizabeth Burke MP, Ms Sharon Catherine Claydon MP,
Mr Patrick Martin Conroy MP, Mr Alexander George Hawke MP,
Mr Ian Reginald Goodenough MP, Mrs Natasha Louise Griggs MP,
Ms Sarah Moya Henderson MP, Mr Stephen James Irons MP, Mr Ewen Thomas Jones MP,
Mr Craig Kelly MP, Ms Michelle Leanne Landry, Ms Clare Ellen O’Neil, MP,
Mrs Jane Prentice MP, Mr Ross Xavier, Dr Andrew Southcott MP, John Vasta MP,
Mr Brett David Whiteley MP, Mrs Lucy Elizabeth Wicks MP

Leader of the House—Hon. Christopher Pyne MP
Deputy Leader of the House—Hon. Luke Hartsuyker MP
Manager of Opposition Business—Hon. Anthony Stephen Burke MP
Deputy Manager of Opposition Business—Hon. Mark Dreyfus QC MP

Party Leaders and Whips
Liberal Party of Australia
Leader—Hon. Anthony John Abbott MP
Deputy Leader—Hon. Julie Isabel Bishop MP
Chief Government Whip—Mr Scott Buchholz MP
Government Whips—Mr Andrew Alexander Nikolic, AM, CSC and
Ms Nola Bethwyn Marino MP Southcott

The Nationals
Leader—Hon. Warren Errol Truss MP
Deputy Leader—Hon. Barnaby Thomas Gerard Joyce MP
Chief Whip—Mr Mark Maclean Coulton MP
Deputy Whip—Mr George Robert Christensen MP

Australian Labor Party
Leader—Hon. William Richard Shorten MP
Deputy Leader—Hon. Tanya Joan Plibersek MP
Chief Opposition Whip—Mr Christopher Patrick Hayes MP
Opposition Whips—Ms Jill Griffiths Hall MP and Ms Joanne Catherine Ryan MP

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Members of the House of Representatives

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<tr>
<td>Willie, Mr Andrew Damien</td>
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Members of the House of Representatives

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<td>O'Connor, WA</td>
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<td>Wood, Mr Jason Peter</td>
<td>La Trobe, VIC</td>
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<td>Wyatt, Mr Kenneth George AM</td>
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<td>Zappia, Mr Antonio</td>
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Clerk of the House of Representatives—D Elder
Acting Secretary, Department of Parliamentary Services—D Heriot
Parliamentary Budget Officer—P Bowen
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<tr>
<td>Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Eric Abetz</td>
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<td>Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on Counter-Terrorism</td>
<td>Hon Michael Keenan MP</td>
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<td>Senator Hon. Richard Colbeck</td>
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Each box represents a portfolio. **Cabinet Ministers are shown in bold type.** As a general rule, there is one department in each portfolio. However, there is a Department of Human Services in the Social Services portfolio and a Department of Veterans’ Affairs in the Defence portfolio. The title of a department does not necessarily reflect the title of a minister in all cases.
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Tuesday, 8 September 2015

The SPEAKER (Hon. Tony Smith) took the chair at 12:00, made an acknowledgement of country and read prayers.

BUSINESS

Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders

Mr PYNE (Sturt—Leader of the House and Minister for Education and Training) (12:01):
I move:
That standing order 133 (deferred divisions on Mondays and Tuesdays) be suspended until 2 pm.
I believe that I have an agreement with the Manager of Opposition Business that that will be voted on without debate, so therefore I will not hold up the House with a terrific oration for 10 minutes about why that should occur. I simply move that that be suspended until 2 pm.
Question agreed to.

MOTIONS

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development

Attempted Censure

The SPEAKER (12:01): The Clerk.
Mr Albanese: Mr Speaker.
The SPEAKER: I have just called the Clerk.
Mr Albanese: Mr Speaker.
The SPEAKER: I have just called the Clerk.
Mr Albanese: I am seeking the call.
The SPEAKER: I am sorry. I have called the Clerk.
Mr Burke: He got the call before.
The SPEAKER: Well, I have called the Clerk.
Ms Macklin interjecting—
The SPEAKER: The member for Jagajaga will cease interjecting. The member for Grayndler on a point of order?
Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler) (12:02): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I move:
That so much of standing orders be suspended as would allow the member for Grayndler to move—
The SPEAKER: No, the member for Grayndler will resume his seat.
Mr ALBANESE: No, I am entitled to:
… to move the following motion:
This House:
(1) censures the Deputy Prime Minister for misleading the House in question time on Monday, 7 September when he:
(a) stated that reports that senior officials from his Department—

CHAMBER
Mr Pyne: Mr Speaker, on a point of order, suspensions of standing orders can be moved between two items of business. You called the Clerk, quite correctly, for the first item of business. The member for Grayndler then indicated he was making a point of order, which you generously allowed him to move. He then abused your generosity, and therefore I would suggest that the correct call that you originally made was for the Clerk to call the first item of business. When that is completed, the member for Grayndler, between that and the next item of business, if he chooses to do so, can take the action that he has indicated he wishes to take.

Mr ALBANESE: Mr Speaker, on the point of order, I sought the call, I received the call and I am moving a motion.

The SPEAKER: The member for Grayndler will resume his seat.

Mr ALBANESE: And I am moving a motion, as I am entitled to do.

The SPEAKER: No, the member for Grayndler will resume his seat.

Mr Burke: Is that your ruling?

The SPEAKER: I am going to speak to it now. The member for Grayndler was given the call because I thought he was seeking clarification on the earlier motion that the—

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: No, hang on. No, sorry. I am not going to be interrupted when I am addressing the House. I had called the Clerk. Standing orders normally provide that there are no divisions to be moved by members who are not government ministers during these hours, and that standing order has now been suspended, which is the case. I had called the Clerk. I want business to resume as swiftly as possible. We have notice No. 1 on the program, of a motion moved by the Prime Minister. I want business to move as swiftly as possible. I would say to the Manager of Opposition Business that it is my understanding, as I just heard from the Leader of the House, that an agreement had been reached with the point in mind of facilitating the free flow of debate. If the member for Grayndler insists on moving his motion, there are measures open to the Leader of the House.

Ms Macklin: The motion has halfway been—

The SPEAKER: No, the member for Jagajaga will cease interjecting.

Mr Albanese: On the point of order, with respect, Mr Speaker, we supported the suspension of standing orders, which we were entitled to do. They might have thought it was about their motion; we think it is about our motion, in terms of being facilitated before the chamber. The Clerk has not called on any business before the chair. No business has been called on. For that to occur, the Clerk has to stand up and say, 'Item of business No. 1'—

Government members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: Members on my right will cease interjecting.

Mr Albanese: And no amount of yelling from the rabble opposite changes that fact. There is nothing before the chair, and I was entitled to move my motion.

The SPEAKER: You can't debate. You need to move it or resume your seat.

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler) (12:06): Thank you. I move:

That so much of the standing and sessional orders be suspended as would prevent the member for Grayndler from moving the following motion—
That the House:

(1) censures the Deputy Prime Minister for misleading the House in Question Time on Monday, 7 September when he:

(a) stated that reports that senior officials from his Department advised Bill Milby of North Star Cruises to reflag his vessel to a foreign nation, sack his 50 Australian workers and hire foreign crew to compete, were "inaccurate"; and

(b) told the House that such advice "is not possible under the proposed legislation before Parliament";

(2) notes the evidence before the Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee where Mr Milby confirmed his written evidence contained in his submission that he was advised by officials to "consider taking our ship True North off the Australian Shipping Register, re register the ship in a foreign country, lay off our Australian crew and hire a cheaper foreign crew" under his proposed laws;

(3) notes that last night Judith Zielke, Executive Director, Surface Transport Policy Division and Michael Sutton, General Manager Maritime and Shipping Branch both gave evidence that they did give advice to Mr Milby about the reflagging option;

(4) further notes last night's comment from Mr Milby that "I don't have an issue with the people who gave that advice because if you read the legislation and the explanatory memo, they were telling me the truth";

(5) notes the evidence from the government's official economic modelling for the bill assumed that the displaced Australian seafarers would "get other jobs";

(6) also notes the evidence from Tasmanian freight operator Searoad, North Star Cruises and Maritime Industry Australia Limited, that investment in shipbuilding and local job creation is threatened by this flawed legislation; and

(7) accordingly, calls for:

(a) the Deputy Prime Minister to immediately correct the record following his misleading answer in Question Time yesterday—

The SPEAKER: The member for Grayndler will resume his seat.

Mr ALBANESE: I am concluding.

The SPEAKER: I call the Leader of the House on a point of order.

Mr Pyne: Mr Speaker, it is almost a two-page motion. It is absolutely ridiculous. It is an abuse of the standing orders and the government will be quite within its right to amend the standing orders in the future to make sure that motions cannot be of such an inordinate length.

The SPEAKER: The member for Grayndler will move his motion forthwith.

Mr ALBANESE: (b) the Prime Minister to apologise to Mr Bill Milby of North Star Cruises in Western Australia for questioning his honesty and integrity; and

(c) the Government to withdraw its Shipping Legislation before the Parliament and to enter into a proper consultation process with the maritime sector about any future proposed changes to maritime legislation.

Mr PYNE (Sturt—Leader of the House and Minister for Education and Training) (12:09): I move:

That the member be no longer heard.

The SPEAKER: The question is that the member be no longer heard.
The House divided. [12:13]
(The Speaker—Hon. Tony Smith)

Ayes .................81
Noes .................51
Majority.............30

AYES
Abbott, AJ
Andrews, KJ
Baldwin, RC
Bishop, BK
Briggs, JE
Broadbent, RE
Buchholz, S
Christensen, GR
Coleman, DB
Entsch, WG
Gambharo, T
Goodenough, IR
Hartsuyker, L
Henderson, SM
Hockey, JB
Howarth, LR
Hutchinson, ER
Jensen, DG
Joyce, BT
Kelly, C
Landry, ML
Ley, SP
Marino, NB
Matheson, RG
McNamara, KJ
Nikolic, AA (teller)
Pasin, A
Prentice, J
Pyne, CM
Robb, AJ
Roy, WB
Scott, BC
Simpkins, LXL
Stone, SN
Sukkar, MS
Tehan, DT
Turnbull, MB
Varvaris, N
Whiteley, BD
Williams, MP
Wyatt, KG

Alexander, JG
Andrews, KL
Billson, BF
Bishop, JI
Broad, AJ
Brough, MT
Chester, D
Cobb, JK
Coulton, M (teller)
Fletcher, PW
Gillespie, DA
Griggs, NL
Hawke, AG
Hendy, PW
Hogan, KJ
Hunt, GA
Inrons, SJ
Jones, ET
Keenan, M
Laming, A
Laundy, C
Macfarlane, IE
Markus, LE
McCormack, MF
Morrison, SJ
O'Dowd, KD
Pitt, KJ
Price, ML
Ramsey, RE
Robert, SR
Ruddock, PM
Scott, FM
Southcott, AJ
Sudmalis, AE
Taylor, AJ
Truss, WE
Van Manen, AJ
Vasta, RX
Wicks, LE
Wilson, RJ

NOES
Albanese, AN
Bird, SL
Brodtmann, G

Bandt, AP
Bowen, CE
Burke, AS
Question agreed to.

The SPEAKER: Is the motion seconded?

Mr Burke: The Prime Minister lied to the people of Canning about this issue. The Deputy Prime Minister lied to this parliament about—

The SPEAKER: The member for Watson will resume his seat.

Mr PYNE (Sturt—Leader of the House and Minister for Education and Training) (12:19): I move:

That the member be no longer heard.

The SPEAKER: The question is that the member be no longer heard. If any members are changing their vote, they should report to the tellers.

The House divided. [12:21]

(The Speaker—Hon. Tony Smith)

Ayes ...................... 81
Noes ...................... 51
Majority .................. 30

AYES
Abbott, AJ  Alexander, JG
Andrews, KJ  Andrews, KL
Baldwin, RC  Billson, BF
Bishop, BK  Bishop, JI
Briggs, JE  Broad, AJ
Broadbent, RE  Brough, MT

CHAMBER
AYES

Buchholz, S
Christensen, GR
Coleman, DB
Entsch, WG
Gambharo, T
Goodenough, IR
Hartley, L
Henderson, SM
Hockey, JB
Howarth, LR
Hutchinson, ER
Jensen, DG
Joyce, BT
Kelly, C
Landry, ML
Ley, SP
Marino, NB
Matheson, RG
McNamara, KJ
Nikolic, AA (teller)
Pasin, A
Prentice, J
Pyne, CM
Robb, AJ
Roy, WB
Scott, BC
Simpkins, LXL
Stone, SN
Sukkar, MS
Tehan, DT
Turnbull, MB
Varvaris, N
Whiteley, BD
Williams, MP
Wyatt, KG

NOES

Albanese, AN
Bird, SL
Brodthman, G
Butler, TM
Champion, ND
Clare, JD
Collins, JM
Danby, M
Elliot, MJ
Feeney, D
Fitzgibbon, JA
Gray, G
Hall, JG (teller)
Jones, SP
Leigh, AK

Chester, D
Cobb, JK
Coulton, M (teller)
Fletcher, PW
Gillespie, DA
Griggs, NL
Hawke, AG
Hendy, PW
Hogan, KJ
Hunt, GA
Irons, SJ
Jones, ET
Keenan, M
Laming, A
Laundy, C
Macfarlane, IE
Markus, LE
McCormack, MF
Morrison, SJ
O'Dowd, KD
Pitt, KJ
Price, ML
Ramsey, RE
Robert, SR
Ruddock, PM
Scott, FM
Southcott, AJ
Sudmalis, AE
Taylor, AJ
Truss, WE
Van Manen, AJ
Vasta, RX
Wicks, LE
Wilson, RJ

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CHAMBER
Question agreed to.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The Leader of the House has the call.

Mr Pyne: I move:

That the motion be put.

The SPEAKER: The question is that the motion be put.

The House divided. [21:25]

(The Speaker—Hon. Tony Smith)

Ayes .......................... 81
Noes ........................... 51
Majority ....................... 30

AYES

Abbott, AJ
Andrews, KJ
Baldwin, RC
Bishop, BK
Briggs, JE
Broadbent, RE
Buchholz, S
Christensen, GR
Coleman, DB
Entsch, WG
Gambaro, T
Goodenough, IR
Hartsuyker, L
Henderson, SM
Hockey, JB
Howarth, LR
Hutchinson, ER
Jensen, DG
Joyce, BT
Kelly, C
Landry, ML
Ley, SP
Marino, NB
Matheson, RG

Alexander, JG
Andrews, KL
Billson, BF
Bishop, JI
Broad, AJ
Brough, MT
Chester, D
Cobb, JK
Coulton, M (teller)
Fletcher, PW
Gillespie, DA
Griggs, NL
Hawke, AG
Hendy, PW
Hogan, KJ
Hunt, GA
Irons, SJ
Jones, ET
Keenan, M
Laming, A
Laundy, C
Macfarlane, IE
Markus, LE
McCormack, MF

NOES

MacTiernan, AJGC
McGowan, C
Neumann, SK
O’Neil, CE
Perrett, GD
Ripoll, BF
Rowland, MA
Snowdon, WE
Thistlethwaite, MJ
Watts, TG
Zappia, A

Marles, RD
Mitchell, RG
O’Connor, BPJ
Owens, J
Plibersek, TJ
Rishworth, AL
Ryan, JC (teller)
Swan, WM
Thomson, KJ
Willkie, AD
Question agreed to.

**The SPEAKER:** The question now is that the motion be agreed to.

The House divided. [21:28]

(The Speaker—Hon. Tony Smith)
Ayes ......................50
Noes ......................81
Majority.................31

AYES

Albanese, AN
Bird, SL
Brodtmann, G
Butler, TM
Champion, ND
Clare, JD
Collins, JM
Danby, M
Elliot, MJ
Feeney, D
Fitzgibbon, JA
Gray, G
Hall, JG (teller)
Jones, SP
Leigh, AK
MacTiernan, AJGC
Mitchell, RG
O'Connor, BPJ
Owens, J
Pilberserk, TJ
Rishworth, AL
Ryan, JC (teller)
Swan, WM
Thomson, KJ
Wilkie, AD

NOES

Abbott, AJ
Andrews, KJ
Baldwin, RC
Bishop, BK
Briggs, JE
Broadbent, RE
Buchholz, S
Christensen, GR
Coleman, DB
Entsch, WG
Gambaro, T
Goodenough, IR
Hartley, LR
Henderson, SM
Hockey, JB
Howarth, LR
Hutchinson, ER
Jensen, DG
Joyce, BT
Kelly, C
Landry, ML
Ley, SP

Alexander, JG
Andrews, KL
Billson, BF
Bishop, JI
Broad, AJ
Brough, MT
Chester, D
Cobb, JK
Coulton, M (teller)
Fletcher, PW
Gillespie, DA
Griggs, NL
Hawke, AG
Hendy, PW
Hogan, KJ
Hunt, GA
Irons, SJ
Jones, ET
Keenan, M
Laming, A
Laundy, C
Macfarlane, IE
Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (12:31): I move:

That this House:

(1) record the enormous economic potential of the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement (FTA) to deliver Australian jobs, growth and investment;

(2) acknowledge that for benefits to flow to Australian businesses and workers without delay, it must be passed by the Parliament this year; and

(3) fully support the China-Australia FTA in its negotiated form.

It is important to remind the House of just how big a deal the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement is—just how big an opportunity for our exports and for jobs in Australia the China free trade agreement is. Already China takes about one-third of our exports. China is already the strongest economy in Asia, and soon China will be the biggest economy in the world. What the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement—the China-Australia export agreement—does is give Australia and our exporters privileged access to the biggest market in Asia and what will soon be the biggest market in the world.

It is important for people in this parliament to understand that this is the only free trade agreement that China has made with another G20 country. This is by far the best agreement that China has done with any significant developed economy. As members right around this chamber should know, this agreement has been 10 years in the making; it was started by the Howard government and it was finalised and concluded by the Abbott government. It is also important for people right around Australia to understand that, under this agreement, more than 95 per cent of our exports to China will enter duty free—will enter without any tariffs at all. That is why this agreement gives us absolutely unparalleled and absolutely unprecedented access to what is certainly the biggest market in Asia and will soon be the world’s biggest
market. This is something which applies across the board when it comes to our exports. Our resources will go in on a better basis than now, our agricultural exports will go in on a better basis than now and there will be unprecedented access for Australian services to the Chinese market because of this particular agreement.

We all know that about five years ago New Zealand successfully concluded a free trade agreement with China. We probably do not know, but we should, that under this agreement New Zealand's exports to China more than quadrupled. At a time when our exports to China merely doubled, New Zealand's exports to China more than quadrupled because of the free trade agreement that they had and we lacked. Our free trade agreement with China is a much better agreement than New Zealand's. It is a much better agreement than New Zealand's because ours involves services too.

I have to point out to the House that the agreement that was negotiated by us with China—the agreement that was so carefully and painstakingly finalised by the Minister for Trade and Investment, the member for Goldstein, with China—is a done deal. It cannot be renegotiated. It is a done deal. It is a deal that we either take or leave, and I put it to the House that it would be absolutely unconscionable for us not to take the deal as negotiated by this government with the Chinese.

I have to say that, on a momentous day 10 months ago in this very chamber, the Leader of the Opposition said to this House:

… Labor welcomes the prospect of a trade agreement between our two countries. A decade of hard work has gone into creating this opportunity for Australia, from Prime Minister Howard to Prime Ministers Rudd and Gillard, and now Prime Minister Abbott.

That is what the Leader of the Opposition said 10 months ago in this chamber, in the presence of President Xi Jinping himself. He said, 'Labor welcomes the prospect of a trade agreement between our two countries.' That is what he said in this chamber when President Xi Jinping was here on his historic visit to our country.

What has happened since? What has happened since is that the CFMEU has come out and condemned the deal, and as soon as the union movement started to condemn the deal what happened was that the Leader of the Opposition started to shift his position. The problem right now that the Leader of the Opposition faces—and I invite him to come into this chamber and speak on the deal—is that, unless he is to come into this chamber and speaks on this motion, the very strong impression will be created in the minds of the people of Australia that every time the Leader of the Opposition moves it is the CFMEU that is pulling the strings, and every time the Leader of the Opposition speaks it is the CFMEU's voice that we hear.

Notwithstanding all the advantages of this export agreement for Australia, the CFMEU has already spent what is estimated to be $12 million on undermining, sabotaging and telling lies about this agreement—this agreement vital for the future of our country.

Right on cue, as soon as the CFMEU and other unions started attacking this agreement, what did the Leader of the Opposition say? The Leader of the Opposition, on cue, said, 'It's a dud deal.' He now has his chance to stand up in this parliament and say exactly where he stands. Right now what we have had is Labor member after Labor member taking their cue from the union movement, standing up and threatening to block this deal which is vital for Australia's future.
Let me make it absolutely crystal clear to members opposite what this deal will involve in this parliament. In this parliament, acceding to the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement involves no legislation to change the Fair Work Act. It involves no legislation to change our immigration laws. The only bills that will be before this parliament to put the China Free Trade Agreement into practice, to put it into effect, are changes to our tariff laws. So there are no changes to the protections for workers, no changes to the protections built into our immigration laws—none whatsoever.

So there is absolutely nothing possible under this agreement with China that is not already possible. Let me repeat that: there is absolutely nothing possible under this agreement with China that is not already possible, including under free trade agreements negotiated by members opposite when they were in government. So absolutely every single thing which is envisaged under this free trade agreement was envisaged under free trade agreements negotiated by members opposite when they were in government. It is absolutely critical to note that there is absolutely no possibility of placing any foreigner in an Australian job without labour market testing. That was the situation under members opposite when they were in government and that is the situation under this government under this agreement.

So what have we got here? We have a campaign of lies. It is a campaign of lies—xenophobic at best, racist at worst—being peddled principally by the CFMEU, being taken up by the ACTU more generally, being connived at by members opposite, being articulated by members opposite. I just want to make it absolutely crystal clear: the only free trade agreement that members opposite have complained about is the free trade agreement with China. What have they got against China? Why is it that they are preparing to snub the strongest economy and the strongest power in Asia? What is it that members opposite have got against China? Why is it that members opposite seem to be channeling the ghosts of the Federation parliament, echoing the kinds of sentiments that were heard in the Federation parliament at the time of the White Australia policy? Let me make it absolutely crystal clear. Members opposite talk about the Asian century. This agreement makes us part of the Asian century. Why are members opposite against an agreement which makes us part of the Asian century?

I am pleased that the Leader of the Opposition has finally deigned to enter the parliament and I hope he is going to contribute to this debate. I hope that finally the Leader of the Opposition is going to tell us exactly what he thinks is wrong with this agreement, if indeed there is anything that he can come up with which is wrong with this agreement. We know exactly where other significant Labor leaders stand. Bob Hawke supports this agreement, Bob Carr supports this agreement, Simon Crean supports this agreement and the Labor premiers of Victoria, Queensland and South Australia support this agreement. Where does the Leader of the Opposition stand? Whose side is the Leader of the Opposition on? Is he on the side of Bob Hawke, Bob Carr, Simon Crean and the Labor premiers of Victoria, Queensland and South Australia, or is the Leader of the Opposition yet again listening to the CFMEU? That is the challenge that I put to the Leader of the Opposition: just for once, tell us where you stand. Just for once, stop playing politics. Just for once, put the interests of Australia first and back this agreement.

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Leader of the Opposition) (12:43): I move:

That paragraph (3) be deleted and that the following be inserted:

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Leader of the Opposition) (12:43): I move:

That paragraph (3) be deleted and that the following be inserted:
(3) support the China-Australia FTA and call on the Government to work with the Parliament to legislate safeguards which:

(a) maximise job opportunities for Australian workers;
(b) protect overseas workers from exploitation and maintain Australian wages and conditions; and
(c) promote safety on Australian work sites by ensuring the skills and qualifications on temporary trades workers are of the highest standard.

Labor supports this amendment and the amended resolution, because otherwise here we will be again—another day, another stunt from the Abbott stunt factory of Australian politics. I can just imagine the Liberal brains trust—if that is not an oxymoron—high-fiving each other this morning. They would have rushed in and said, 'We've got a great idea. We've got a great idea—we're going to have another national time-wasting resolution from the champions of national time wasting.' They would have said, 'Let's put up aparenthood resolution on the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement and try to wedge Labor.' Unfortunately, this unamended motion changes nothing about Labor's position. It is the ultimate hollow resolution of the ultimate hollow man.

The Prime Minister's motion pre-empts consideration of the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement by the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties. The treaties committee had its latest public hearing only yesterday. The committee is still deliberating and it has set 19 October as the date for reporting to this parliament. This kind of reckless behaviour we have learned to expect from this Prime Minister—pre-empting this report—does not surprise. But this motion does provide an opportunity for me to set the record straight and to restate Labor's priorities for a China-Australia Free Trade Agreement. Labor wants the best possible free trade agreement with China: a high-quality agreement that creates and protects Australian jobs and a deal that generates high-skill, fair-paying jobs here in Australia and ensures that Australians are given the first opportunity to do the work in Australia.

Firstly, in support of this, Labor believes in trade liberalisation and the bilateral and multilateral agreements which support this. We have delivered trade liberalisation when in government. It was Labor governments that reduced Australia's trade tariff barriers unilaterally in the 1980s and 1990s. It has been Labor that has opened the way for the modernisation of Australian industry and improvements in living standards for working people. It is Labor that has presided over the formation of the Cairns Group, an initiative that secured significant freeing up of world markets, delivering benefits for Australian farmers in particular. It was Labor that secured the WTO Uruguay Round Agreement, one of the most significant multilateral trade agreements of the modern era. It was Labor that has negotiated and implemented free trade agreements with Malaysia, Chile, the 10 ASEAN countries and New Zealand. And in my time in opposition we have supported the Korea-Australia Free Trade Agreement and the Japan-Australia Economic Partnership Agreement.

Our support for free trade is not a matter of extreme ideology or unthinking orthodoxy. We do not see the signing ceremony as the end of the game. Our goal is to always ensure free trade, open markets and economic change that works for all Australians. I stress: all Australians. Labor understands that open markets are an excellent way of achieving economic growth and that economic growth is the best way to create good jobs. But we do not just want economic growth; we want quality growth and we want the benefits fairly shared amongst all
Australians. We want market access for Australian firms and we want new jobs for Australian workers.

Secondly, Labor fundamentally believes in an Australia engaged with our region. We are the party of APEC and of the Asian century. We know that more trade with Asia is an essential part of building a high-skill, high-wage future for all Australians. If Australia gets this agreement with China right, everyone can benefit. This is what Labor wants. We want our hardworking farmers to get their high-quality produce onto the Chinese market more easily. We want new opportunities for our growing services sector. And we want emerging industries, like advanced manufacturing, to get a boost too. But the fundamental point remains—we need to get the package right. For Labor, this will always mean doing the right thing by Australian workers. There is nothing for Australia to gain by entering a race to the bottom with our neighbours on wages and conditions. There will always be other countries, Mr Prime Minister, that have more people willing to work longer and for less money. Our goal should be to play on Australia's strong ground.

*Government members interjecting—*

**Mr SHORTEN:** Why is it that the government does not believe in a high-skill workforce, good at doing high-quality work? Why is it that these people opposite are always so determined against safe workplaces and fair wages? This is what Australian Labor has fought for and this is at the heart of our specific factual and legitimate claims. We are seeking 'ChAFTA plus'—plus safeguards for Australian jobs and Australian workers. All of the shouting and catcalling from the rabble opposite does not change the fact that this government has not paid sufficient attention to Australian jobs.

We call upon the government today, including this person who is currently the Prime Minister, to look at enabling legislation which includes—and I will be specific for the sake of the government—mandatory labour market testing for projects over $150 million, ensuring that Australians always get first opportunity before overseas workers are considered. We want an assurance in the legislation that Australian workplace skills and safety standards will be maintained, and we want an assurance that Australian wages will not be undercut. Without these safeguards, the current agreement would allow employers to fly in temporary workers for infrastructure projects worth more $150 million without having to first check whether Australian workers are available to do this job. I repeat: it is a fact that this government are proposing the diminution of labour market testing for projects over $150 million. What has the Prime Minister got against Australian construction workers getting access?

*Government members interjecting—*

**Mr SHORTEN:** These investment facilitation agreements and these arrangements—these IFAs—mean that a company could, for example, build a new hotel in the Sydney or Melbourne CBD and not have to advertise in the local paper or seek.com for Australian workers first. This is explicitly outlined in the memorandum of understanding attached to this agreement. There is a side letter to the deal also outlining the option of removing mandatory skills assessments for temporary guest workers in key trades—carpenters, machine and motor mechanics, joiners, electricians. Why do you not like Aussie carpenters and electricians over there?
The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott): Order or my right!

Mr SHORTEN: I know the impact that poor workplace safety has on Australian workers. I have met too many victims of industrial injuries and too many of their families to be a party to knowingly reducing the skills and safety standards on Australian work sites. This government—

Mr Hutchinson interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Lyons!

Mr SHORTEN: These are Labor's core concerns which the Prime Minister wanted me to articulate, and I will say them again for his benefit: upholding Australian safety standards and conditions and protecting Australian jobs. I invite the Prime Minister and the government to drop the political stunts.

Government members interjecting—

Mr SHORTEN: Look at these people opposite. They must have been pumped this morning. They have gone, 'Fantastic; at last we're going to be on the front foot. We've got the mother of all wedges to give the opposition.' That is all those opposite are good at—politics, never the policy. It is not too late, Prime Minister, to sit down and talk with us. What do you have against negotiating with the opposition? You are the opposition leader in exile. You have never been so happy as when you were sitting here, I think. You should sit down with us and talk about our serious, legitimate concerns. If you have time to play games like this stunt, you have more than enough time to negotiate with the opposition. Why do you think you are the 100 per cent know-all of Australian labour standards? Let me be clear: Mr Abbott, we are not asking you to go back to Beijing; we will come to your office if that helps. Labor's position is crystal clear, and I will repeat it again: mandatory labour market testing for projects over $150 million and an assurance that Australian skills and safety will be maintained and that Australian wages will not be undercut.

Over the last decade politicians from both sides of politics have worked hard for this deal. The real problem with the China free trade agreement is that we have a Prime Minister who would rather have a fight than a feed. What I say to this Prime Minister and his followers—such as they are on the backbench—is: do not confuse being stubborn with being strong. You are a good man at being stubborn, but you confuse it with strength. Put aside politics as usual, Mr Abbott. John Howard was capable of doing it on the US free trade agreement—but you are no John Howard. It is time for you to put aside the persona of the brawler. All I say, Mr Abbott, is put Australian jobs first in the agreement. Your resolution unamended changes nothing, helps no-one and goes nowhere. Grow up, Mr Abbott, and do your day job.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Is the amendment seconded?

Mr Bowen: I second the amendment and reserve my right to speak.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The original question was that the motion be agreed to. To this, the honourable member for Maribyrnong has moved an amendment. If it suits the House I will state the question in the form that the amendment be agreed to. The question now is that the amendment be agreed to. All those of that opinion say aye and to the contrary no. I think the noes have it. Is a division required?
Mr Albanese: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The Leader of the Opposition moved an amendment. It is duly to be seconded by the shadow Treasurer and we then proceed with debate and there is a vote at the conclusion of the debate, so that people can speak in favour of or against the amendment. You do not vote on it now, because—who knows?—they might be convinced by the Leader of the Opposition's excellent speech.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question is that the amendment be agreed to. I call the Minister for Trade and Investment.

Mr ROBB (Goldstein—Minister for Trade and Investment) (12:56): What a sad contribution from the Leader of the Opposition, given the significance of what is being debated here today. He was just parroting a lot of union propositions. The Leader of the Opposition said this morning on ABC radio:

But I didn't become a Member of Parliament just to become a rubber stamp for Tony Abbott.

He said:

Imagine if in the last two years of the Abbott Government the Opposition just rolled over and said tickle us on the tummy …

Perish the thought! He continued:

We've got very clear propositions—

which he then put to us by way of an amendment today.

Mr Mitchell interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for McEwen is interjecting outside of his place in the chamber.

Mr ROBB: The sad thing is that all of the propositions in the amendment have been debated, discussed and examined for weeks on end and there has been no substance found in any of those propositions—not one of those propositions. No-one except those opposite and the CFMEU supports any of the propositions that you are saying are weaknesses of this agreement—not one person. It is fair to say that, if you did have propositions which were questioned by people other than the CFMEU legitimately—

Mr Champion interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Wakefield is interjecting out of his place in the chamber.

Mr ROBB: Not one person except the CFMEU. If you did have legitimate propositions there would be a case for negotiation. When you come up with something of substance we will think about the proposition of negotiation. There is nothing to negotiate. You have brought up nothing to be negotiated—nothing. You just went on with a lot of drivel again today. You have not looked at the arguments. You have not looked at the propositions. I can confirm this. I confirm that you are being led by the nose—because what fell into my hands this morning?

Opposition members interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order on my left!

Mr ROBB: It was leaked by someone on the other side—one of many I suspect who are totally embarrassed by the way in which your leadership is carrying your party in this debate.
They are totally embarrassed by your leadership. So we get leaked, from one of many of you who are embarrassed, the CFMEU written instructions. You have got them all there in your back pockets. You have them there; pull them out. He pulled them out this morning. So what does the CFMEU say?

_An opposition member interjecting—_

**Mr ROBB:** Listen if you want to learn something, you ignoramus! The CFMEU says:

Under EMAs—

That is, enterprise migration agreements, the agreements on which we based the IFAs, the investment facilitation agreements—

_Ms Butler interjecting—_

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The member for Griffith is out of her place in this chamber.

_Mr ROBB:_ It says:

Under EMAs, the project proponent at least had to produce a 'labour market analysis' showing detailed projected shortages to justify upfront the need for 'concessional' 457 visa …

IFAs will be approved with no upfront or subsequent requirement to demonstrate projected shortages of Australian workers.

... ... ...

There is no mandatory obligation for direct employers on IFA projects to undertake Labour Market Testing (LMT).

That was at the heart of the major request and concern of the Leader of the Opposition today. He repeated it on radio this morning. He pulled out his speaking notes and repeated it on radio this morning. But let us look at what went out to business in May this year.

_Ms Butler interjecting—_

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Member for Griffith, you are disorderly. You are out of your place in this chamber and interjecting.

_Mr ROBB:_ These instructions are associated with projects of over $150 million. The department of immigration, the authority that you used for the EMAs, wrote this. What does it say? About IFAs, it says:

Evidence of your domestic recruitment efforts should include details, for each requested occupation, of advertising undertaken within the past six months, including the period the job was advertised; the number of applicants who were hired; and reasons why other applicants were unsuccessful; or provide other compelling evidence of why no suitable Australian workers are available.

That looks to me like labour market testing.

_A government member:_ It is labour market testing.

_Mr ROBB:_ That is labour market testing. If it looks like it, if it says what it is, it is it. That is mandatory. In the EMAs, it was not mandatory.

_Mr Conroy interjecting—_

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The member for Charlton is disorderly.

_Mr ROBB:_ The only thing was labour market analysis. You have been stooged by the CFMEU and you have not bothered to even check the formal arrangements. It is a con. You know it is a con. There is nothing to debate. There is nothing to change. Get on with this. If
you dump this agreement, this will affect our relationship not just economically but in a much wider sense. The damage you will do will be monumental.

Mr Bowen (McMahon) (13:02): Today the Prime Minister had an opportunity to show some leadership, and all we got was a stunt, a typical stunt from a man not up to leading this nation. The Prime Minister could have moved the enabling legislation today. He could have actually got on with implementing a China free trade agreement. But no. What did he do? He could not resist a stunt. A motion is an excuse when you do not have legislation.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr Bowen: Off he goes! Why doesn't he go back to his office and call the Leader of the Opposition?

Honourable members interjecting—

An opposition member: He's declared out!

An opposition member: He's retired hurt!

The Deputy Speaker (Hon. BC Scott): Order! Until there is silence, I will not call the member for McMahon to resume his speech.

Honourable members interjecting—

Government members: Warn them!

The Deputy Speaker: That is gross disorder on my left, and they know it. I issue a warning to all members of the chamber.

Mr Bowen: Let us be very clear. The Prime Minister has abrogated all leadership, as he does right now. I hope he is going back to his office to call the Leader of the Opposition and say: 'Let's get this issue sorted. Let's get the China free trade agreement implemented. Let's make arrangements to meet your concerns,' because, let us be very clear, Australia needs a free trade agreement with China, not least because the poor economic management of this government, and this Treasurer in particular, has given us 0.2 per cent growth and 800,000 unemployed people—and they lecture us about jobs and growth!

I will tell you something else we will not be lectured about, Mr Deputy Speaker, and that is China. We will not be lectured about China by this government. This week, legislation will be debated which reduces the threshold for foreign investment review of investment in agriculture from China to $15 million, when the threshold for the United States is $1 billion. 'Don't you dare engage in a xenophobic scare campaign!?' The Minister for Agriculture goes around the country warning about the dangers of China's investment. Not a week goes by when the Treasurer does not hold an emergency press conference about China's investment in residential real estate. Don't you lecture us about xenophobic scare campaigns. Not a week goes by, not a day goes by, when they do not do that.

Let us be very clear. There is an option here for the Prime Minister to show some leadership. He has got a precedent. The Liberal Party has got form. When concerns were raised about the US free trade agreement, John Howard showed leadership. He reach an arrangement with the Leader of the Opposition, and the legislation passed. Well, does the love child of John Howard and the member for Mackellar have the same leadership in him? Does he have it in him? I have got to say the evidence is looking pretty good. I knew John Howard. I worked with John Howard. This man is no John Howard. He will not show the leadership.
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The point is very clear. If everything the government say is true, if they are confident in everything they say, if there are no plans to water down labour market testing requirements, if there are no plans to make it easier, then why won't they simply agree to a sensible amendment to enshrine it in legislation? The government should have nothing to fear. Instead they engage in cheap politics. Instead they engage in stunts and wedges, because that is all this Prime Minister is capable of—stunts and wedges.

The Labor Party will act in line with our heritage and with our legacy. When Gough Whitlam recognised China, he did it because it was in the interest of all Australians. When Bob Hawke and Paul Keating increased engagement with Asia, it was to benefit all Australians. It was to ensure that all Australians benefited. This side of the House will insist that that same legacy, that same heritage, is implemented as we implement a free trade agreement with China. The China free trade agreement can be passed. The China free trade agreement can be passed quickly if this Prime Minister is up to showing the leadership that the Australian people formed a judgement a long time ago he just does not have.

Mr HOCKEY (North Sydney—The Treasurer) (13:06): This is one of the best trade deals that China has ever offered. We need to recognise that China 20 years ago was the eighth largest economy in the world. Today it is the second largest economy in the world. We have been a massive beneficiary of that. Each year, we export $150 billion of Australian goods to China. In return they export $50 billion. With $150 billion of trade each year, $100 billion to the benefit of Australia and $50 billion to the benefit of China, for every dollar we spend on Chinese goods, they spend $2 on our goods. To put it in perspective, China even with a seven per cent growth rate represents 30 per cent of the world's growth this year.

As I was just informed by the finance minister of China, Lou Jiwei, in discussions at the G20 and as Governor Zhou also advised the G20 and, previously, Chairman Xu, the head of the NDRC, advised Minister Robb and me, the transition in the Chinese economy is going to take five to eight years to go from a focus on investment to a focus on consumption. During that transition of the economy in China, we are going to go from a major beneficiary of Chinese demand for our exports to an even greater beneficiary of Chinese demand for our exports.

The bottom line is this: if you care about well-paid Australian jobs, you will vote for the free trade agreement with China. It is as simple as that. Give us another lecture on growth. Give us another lecture on jobs. It means zero if you vote against the free trade agreement with China, because China is going to be the major driver of global growth over the next decade and we are the best friend China has in trade and services from our region—if we continue down the path of removing the barriers.

And what are those barriers on the ground? They apply 20 per cent taxes to Australian dairy produce. They apply a 25 per cent tax to our beef exports. They apply a 23 per cent tax to our lamb exports and a 20 per cent tax to our wine exports. All are gone under this trade agreement with China, which means we can get more wine, more beef, more lamb, more dairy. In fact, China applied a three per cent tariff to our coal, so, if you care about coal jobs, they are going to abolish their tax on our coal from day 1. If you care about jobs in Queensland, if you care about jobs around the country then support the free trade agreement with China.

CHAMBER
The opportunity going forward is even greater. The services industry represents more than 70 per cent of the Australian economy but just 17 per cent of our exports. It is a huge opportunity for our exporters as China moves from its investment phase to its consumption phase. That means more and better-paying jobs in Australia. The evidence is clear: as a result of the trade agreement that we have negotiated, all of those restrictions that apply to financial services, legal services and key areas of aged services and building and construction, the Chinese are removing the barriers.

Let me say one thing about the political efforts of the Labor Party and the CFMEU. I have absolutely no doubt following discussions with the leadership in China that they will walk away from the free trade agreement if this is held up or if the Labor Party knocks it off in the Senate. Because of the transition in the Chinese economy, where they have massive policy priorities, they will not return to the negotiating table, because they have other priorities in their domestic economy. So this is not a game. I say to the Labor Party and the CFMEU: this is not a political game. It has taken a decade to get this agreement, and you know what? The Chinese will wait at least another decade to come back to the table if the best agreement they have ever offered is rejected by the Australian parliament as a result of the politics of the Labor Party.

Ms PLIBERSEK (Sydney—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (13:12): I think it is incredible that, instead of coming in there with legislation that would enable a free trade agreement with China, what we have got is one more stunt from this government. We have got a Prime Minister who would rather pick a fight than get a result. Any day of the week this Prime Minister would rather pick a fight than get a result. Instead of a methodical approach that would introduce enabling legislation negotiated with the Labor Party, knowing that we have some legitimate concerns about labour market testing and other provisions of this agreement, what does this government do? This weak, empty rhetoric today and a Prime Minister who cannot even see it through. He runs out halfway through the debate. And a trade minister who cannot even see it through, who gives up on his speech halfway through the debate. It is topped off by a Treasurer who is just back from the G20, where he has been claiming that he is responsible for global economic growth. It is not China; it's him alone! As for that little outing by the Treasurer: I reckon I have heard better economic analysis about Australia's future from high school students in my electorate.

Of course trade is important to Australia's future, and of course a free trade agreement with China is important to Australia's economic future. The reason we invested so much time and so much energy in the relationship with China is that we know how important it is to our economic future. It is the reason that we released the Australia in the Asian century white paper with a specific country approach for China as well as for other nations. What has happened to the Asian century white paper? There has been an electronic book burning by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. It has disappeared from view, which would be fine if the government actually had a strategy to replace it, but there is nothing there.

We strengthened our regional partnership, including our strategic partnership with China. We increased the total number of consulates in China to five in addition to our embassy in Beijing, strengthening the relationship with China at every stage. We know—

Ms Julie Bishop: So why are you trashing it now?
Ms PLIBERSEK: I hear from members opposite, 'Why are we trashing it now?', after an outing by the Treasurer that has basically goaded China to walk away from the negotiating table. We have said for many years that this agreement will be critical to Australia's future. We want an agreement that delivers for China but an agreement that delivers for Australia also, for Australian jobs. We know that there are weaknesses in this agreement—

Mr Robb: There are no weaknesses!

Ms PLIBERSEK: The trade minister says, 'There are no weaknesses.' We believe that the Abbott government could have and should have secured a better deal. It is disappointing that a number of agricultural goods are left out of the deal. They failed to win further market access for rice, wheat, cotton, sugar and canola or vegetable oils. And personally, as a former health minister, I am pretty concerned about the investor-state dispute settlement provisions in this deal. Investor-state dispute settlement provisions have us in court in Hong Kong right now, protecting our right to defend the health of Australians by maintaining our current provisions for plain packaging of cigarettes. The government is spending millions and millions of Australian taxpayer dollars. We did when we were in government to defend our right to legislate for the health of our citizens.

But one of the most important concerns that we have in this area is around the ability for ChAFTA to support rather than replace local employment. We want to ensure that this agreement supports local jobs, maintains workers' skills and safety requirements and prevents the exploitation of workers from overseas.

I know that there is an agreement for this debate to conclude at 1.15, so I will take my seat.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott): The question is that the amendment be agreed to.

The House divided. [13:20]

(The Deputy Speaker—Hon. Bruce Scott)

Ayes .................49
Noes ..................82
Majority...............33

AYES

Albanese, AN
Bird, SL
Brodmann, G
Butler, TM
Champion, ND
Clare, JD
Collins, JM
Danby, M
Elliot, MJ
Fecney, D
Fitzgibbon, JA
Gray, G
Hall, JG (teller)
Jones, SP
Leigh, AK
MacTiernan, AJGC
Neumann, SK

Bandt, AP
Bowen, CE
Burke, AS
Chalmers, IE
Chesters, LM
Claydon, SC
Conroy, PM
Dreyfus, MA
Ellis, KM
Ferguson, LDT
Giles, AJ
Griffin, AP
Hayes, CP
King, CF
Macklin, JL
Mitchell, RG
O'Connor, BPJ

CHAMBER
AYES

O'Neil, CE
Perrett, GD
Ripoll, BF
Ryan, JC (teller)
Snowdon, WE
Thistlethwaite, MJ
Watts, TG
Zappia, A

Owens, J
Plibersek, TJ
Rishworth, AL
Shorten, WR
Swan, WM
Thomson, KJ
Wilkie, AD

NOES

Abbott, AJ
Andrews, KJ
Baldwin, RC
Bishop, BK
Briggs, JE
Broadbent, RE
Buchholz, S
Cobb, JK
Coulton, M (teller)
Fletcher, PW
Gambaro, T
Goodenough, IR
Hartseyker, L
Henderson, SM
Hockey, JB
Howarth, LR
Hutchinson, ER
Jensen, DG
Joyce, BT
Kelly, C
Landry, ML
Ley, SP
Marino, NB
Matheson, RG
McGowan, C
Morrison, SJ
O'Dowd, KD
Pasin, A
Prentice, J
Pyne, CM
Robb, AJ
Roy, WB
Scott, FM
Southcott, AJ
Sudmalis, AE
Taylor, AJ
Truss, WE
Van Manen, AJ
Vasta, RX
Wicks, LE
Wilson, RJ

Alexander, JG
Andrews, KL
Billson, BF
Bishop, JI
Broad, AJ
Brough, MT
Chester, D
Coleman, DB
Entsch, WG
Frydenberg, JA
Gillespie, DA
Griggs, NL
Hawke, AG
Hendy, PW
Hogan, KJ
Hunt, GA
Irons, SJ
Jones, ET
Keenan, M
Laming, A
Laundy, C
Macfarlane, IE
Markus, LE
McCormack, MF
McNamara, KJ
Nikolic, AA (teller)
O'Dwyer, KM
Pitt, KJ
Price, ML
Ramsey, RE
Robert, SR
Ruddock, PM
Simpkins, LXL
Stone, SN
Sukkar, MS
Tehan, DT
Turnbull, MB
Varvaris, N
Whiteley, BD
Williams, MP
Wyatt, KG
Question negatived.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott) (13:28): The question now is that the motion be agreed to.

Question agreed to.

COMMITTEES

Treaties Committee

Report


Report made a parliamentary paper in accordance with standing order 39(e).


While there are considerable benefits for Australia and India, the agreement is not without risk. The committee has taken its time to consider those risks carefully and has made a number of recommendations. But first I will discuss the benefits. The agreement has the potential to double the size of the Australian uranium mining industry.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Broadbent): I thank the member for Longman for his indulgence. The debate is interrupted in accordance with standing order 43. The debate may be resumed at a later hour.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Abbott Government

Mrs ELLIOT (Richmond) (13:30): Well, we have had two years of Abbott government lies, and in regional areas that is actually two years of National Party lies. So let's reflect. Two years ago today, we had the Prime Minister promising Australians under his government there would be 'no cuts to education, no cuts to health, no changes to pension, no change to the GST, no cuts to the ABC or SBS'. Well, let's see what has happened in two years since then. When it comes to education, we have seen them cut $30 billion from schools. They have cut funding from universities and training and they have also tried to enforce $100,000 university degrees. Let's look at health. We have seen them cut $50 billion from hospitals, and they have also put in place a GP tax as well by stealth. Then we had the claim of no change to pensions. Well, they have cut over $2 billion from pensions. Then we also heard them say 'no changes to the GST'. Now we hear the Prime Minister saying there is a very powerful argument for increasing the GST. So those were all lies that he said before the election. Let's have a look at ABC and SBS. They have cut funding to both of those by over half a billion dollars. These cuts are absolutely outrageous, particularly in regional areas when it comes to National Party lies.
Mr Keenan: Mr Deputy Speaker, on a point of order, it is unparliamentary to continually accuse members on this side of the House of lying, and I ask her to withdraw.

Mrs ELLIOT: The fact is they have lied, and in regions it's the National Party that continues to tell untruths.

Mr Keenan: There is a longstanding practice in this House not to accuse members on either side of the chamber of lying, and I ask the member to withdraw.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Broadbent): I note the point of order. I thank the minister and I call the member for Hinkler.

Hinkler, Mr Bert

Mr PITT (Hinkler) (13:31): My electorate is named after the great aviator Bert Hinkler. After distinguished service in the First World War, the boy from Bundaberg was the first pilot to fly solo from England to Australia. Last month, on 2 August, a very special memorial and walking trail named the Hinkler Ring was unveiled at the Tuscan crash site in Italy where Bert Hinkler was killed in 1933. The memorial was the brainchild of the Capalaba based aviation history enthusiast Kevin Lindeberg, who helped research a number of historical books about the pioneer. Mr Lindeberg coordinated the Hinkler Ring's establishment from start to finish, first marking out the Italian crash site in 1974. The LNP state government contributed $37,000 towards the relocation of a basalt boulder from Mon Repos beach to the crash site in Italy to become the memorial's centrepiece. The memorial also features a time capsule containing a letter from Prime Minister Tony Abbott, the Prime Minister of Italy and the Queensland Premier, to be opened in 100 years.

In June, President of the Senate Senator Stephen Parry and former Speaker of the House of Representatives Bronwyn Bishop signed a special framed poster celebrating Bert Hinkler's visit to the Australian parliament on 14 March, 1928. Featuring extracts from parliament's visitor books and a photo of Bert being welcomed by the then Prime Minister Bruce, the framed gift was presented at the Hinkler Ring unveiling to be displayed at the Chalet Da Giocondo in Italy. A second copy takes pride of place in the Hinkler electorate office, in Bert's home town of Bundaberg.

Abbott Government

Mr STEPHEN JONES (Throsby) (13:33): This week we are celebrating National Threatened Species Week, and there has been a new entrant on the list of endangered species, and it is this Prime Minister over here, after two years of consistent broken promises and misleading the Australian people. The minister over here said he took offence at using the word 'lies'. Well, I have to say to the minister: what do you say? How do you describe it when somebody goes to the election promising, 'The Nationals will provide increased financial support for doctors who provide health services in regional and remote communities,' and then a year later they cut the support to doctors in rural and remote communities? The minister does not like the word 'lie'. Has he got a preferable word? How do you describe the behaviour of saying one thing before the election and another thing after the election? In hospitals, we have seen $57 billion worth of cuts. We have had the GP tax mark 1, 2, 3 and 4 and cuts to our support for people on medicines. In every area of social service and welfare where you look, there are cuts to things that ordinary Australians are relying on. There is
another species on the endangered list. It is the Prime Minister, and in a few weeks time the
people of Canning—(Time expired)

Ryan Electorate: Local Sporting Champions

Mrs PRENTICE (Ryan) (13:35): In my electorate of Ryan, we are very proud of so many
young people who have such a variety of talents. I am always astounded by the level of
commitment that they put in to achieve their goals. They balance their family life with their
training life and their school education, and they still come out on top.

Recently I had the pleasure of hosting an afternoon tea for recipients of the Local Sporting
Champions grants. Grants are funded by the federal government for children aged between 12
and 17 who are competing in a state, national or international competition situated more than
125 kilometres away from their homes. Successful students in this round included swimmers,
soccer players, aerobic gymnasts, hockey players, an equestrian, a synchronised swimmer and
even a canoe polo player. These students are competing at these very high levels while
maintaining their studies and social life and are to be commended for this level of
commitment. Congratulations to Gemma Carter, Chloe Crust, Katja Dedekind, Tara-Jade
Gamsworthy, Annalise Gowing, Alice Lane, Henry Meland, Grace Porter, Gabby Procter,
Angus Robertson, Darcy Roper, Cristina Sheehan, Gemma Swanson, Aiden Thompson and
Isabella Wilkinson-McIntyre. We are all very proud of you.

Abbott Government

Ms MACKLIN (Jagajaga) (13:36): Yesterday marked two years since the election of this
wretched government—two years since this Prime Minister said:

I look forward to forming a government that is competent, that is trustworthy …

Instead, this Prime Minister has presided over the most incompetent and least trustworthy
government since Federation, and yesterday we saw the government produce its latest
propaganda document: 28 pages of absolute dross. Nowhere in those 28 pages does it mention
this Abbott government's attack on Australian pensioners. There is no mention of the fact that
the Liberals and the Nationals tried to cut pension indexation by $80 a week over the next
decade, no mention that the Liberals teamed up with the Greens to cut the pension of 330,000
pensioners, no mention that the Liberals and Nationals want to increase the pension age to 70
and no mention that the Liberals have cut $1.3 billion from pensioner concessions.

Even now we see in this document that the government has the hide to claim credit for the
current pension indexation arrangement. This Prime Minister went around Australia saying
that he wanted to cut pension indexation. In fact, each and every member of the
government—Liberal and National—voted to cut the indexation of the pension.

Wongan Community Care

Ms PRICE (Durack) (13:38): I am very happy to speak about Wongan Community Care,
which I had the pleasure of recently visiting. Wongan Community Care is a volunteer driven,
not-for-profit organisation that provides education for children with disabilities and special
needs who live in the wheat belt. Two local mothers—Susie Maguire, who has a son with
Down syndrome and a background in education, and Heydi de Waal, who has a son with
high-functioning autism and a background in psychology—combined their experience and
started the group in 2012, following a lack of local education for special needs students in the
town and surrounding areas.
The group holds two classes a week, a therapy fun session and a one-on-one program for a total of two hours, catering for a total of 28 students. The group is run by the executive committee, led by chairperson Sue Middleton and coordinator Lorraine Lobo. This group aims to provide children with special needs with local access to specialist therapy resources, tools and equipment. This fabulous group allows regional families with primary school students with special needs to have an education in their local region rather than having to relocate to the city.

It was a real honour to be invited to see this group in action. I was very pleased to be with the Commonwealth Bank, who were donating some community grant money so the group could buy their own equipment. I was very pleased that I was also made very welcome. I thank them very much for the opportunity to attend.

Centenary of Anzac

Ms McGOWAN (Indi) (13:39): It gives me great pleasure today to rise to congratulate the Commonwealth and the Australian War Memorial, supported by the Commonwealth Bank and Telstra, for bringing the $35 million Spirit of Anzac Centenary Experience to Indi. On Friday, 4 September the Prime Minister launched this significant national touring exhibition in Wodonga. It will now visit 23 locations around Australia. I encourage all of my colleagues to see it.

The Spirit of Anzac Centenary Experience tells the story of Australia's involvement in World War I and the ensuing century of service of Australia's armed forces in all wars, conflicts and peacekeeping operations. On Friday I was enormously proud to be there as the member for Indi. I was accompanied by leaders from all the major schools and all the volunteers who made the day such a wonderful success. I give special thanks to the City of Wodonga for the terrific work they did in making it possible and to the Wodonga Sports & Leisure Centre for all their organisation and putting up with all the bumping in and the bumping out. Special thankyou’s go to Brendan Nelson from the AWM—Brendan and all his staff do fantastic work—Major General Brian Dawson (retired) for the work he did; Alison Creagh, the Executive Director of SACE; Robert Hardie, adviser from Minister Ronaldson's office; Mayor Rod Wangman from Wodonga; Patience Harrington; and all the city of Wodonga staff. I would particularly like to acknowledge and thank all of the soldiers who were guides on the day and all the volunteers who made it such an amazing experience. (Time expired)

Higher Education

Mr RAMSEY (Grey) (13:41): Last week on 31 August in Port Augusta I held a regional higher education forum. I was ably supported by Senator Bridget McKenzie—thank you—and an old friend of mine Professor John Halsey, Sidney Myer Chair of Rural Education and Communities at Flinders University. We had about 50 people attend. It was a high-quality conversation. The attendees were also high quality insomuch as all of them had personal interests in how rural students access tertiary education, whether they were students, prospective students, parents or educators.

It was repeated the frustration about the extra costs of getting rural students into tertiary education—it is $15,000 to $20,000 a year over and above what others pay—the need for a car and lack of family support. It is no wonder that our country participation rate lags so far.
behind the city's. There was great appreciation of the coalition's actions in this area in recent years, firstly, in reversing many of the changes made by the Labor government to access the independent youth allowance and, more recently, the government's announcement to remove the assets test from the family means test. There is still a long way to go. We will be working our way through many other issues raised on the day.

Broadband

Mr ZAPPIA (Makin) (13:42): The NBN rollout is another example of the Abbott government's failures, broken promises and incompetence. We are two years into the Abbott government's term and most people in my electorate of Makin still are not connected to the National Broadband Network and, even worse, have no timeframe as to when they are likely to be connected. This is after the Abbott government promised prior to the 2013 election that the NBN would be rolled out to all homes and businesses within three years. Instead we now know that the rollout timetable has been extended to seven years, the cost of the rollout has blown out from $29.5 billion to $56 billion and it will be a more expensive service for consumers if they ever get it.

Every week concerned residents and businesses in my electorate contact my office seeking information about when the NBN will be rolled out to their area. Their concerns are understandable as many parts of the Makin electorate have very poor internet access, particularly some of the newer areas like Mawson Lakes, Golden Grove and Walkley Heights. The NBN is currently the only solution to get a better service. Connection to a high-speed broadband network in today's world is not a luxury; it is a necessity. The government's failed NBN rollout not only has become a major embarrassment for the Abbott government and Minister Turnbull but, even worse, is adding cost, inefficiency and frustration to communities and businesses around Australia.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Broadbent): I thank you. I call the popular member for Longman.

Economy

WYATT ROY (Longman) (13:44): Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker. As you know, our country has experienced a remarkable almost quarter century of uninterrupted economic growth. Under both Labor and Liberal governments we have seen the benefits of increasing workforce participation and of course the mining boom. If we are to continue this trajectory of economic growth and rising living standards we have to face up to some big challenges—the challenges of technology disruption and what that will do to our economy and the opportunities that that presents and the ageing of the population.

We have to take hold of the opportunities that we have, particularly in a region where we have a growing connectedness to Asia and where we have seen over a billion people join the middle class, who want to buy our services and the products going into that Asian marketplace.

If we are to fully capitalise on this opportunity, we need a country that is more innovative and more entrepreneurial. I want to thank the Labor member for Chifley for agreeing to work with me on policies to ensure that we make this country as innovative and entrepreneurial as possible. We need policies that will see changes in our culture so we can have a new generation of entrepreneurs prepared to take on risk, policies that will see more capital
invested in our start-ups and policies that will ensure cooperation between government and higher education on commercialisation of those ideas. If we do this, we have a very bright future.

Abbott Government

Mr RIPOLL (Oxley) (13:45): This week is the two-year mark of the election of the Abbott government. I think it is timely to place on the record some facts about the Abbott government's record on small business. Despite mountains of rhetoric about being their best friend, Australian small business are suffering after two years of Tony Abbott, whose first budget cut over $5 billion of Labor's direct tax assistance to small business, including the $1.3 billion worth of tax loss carry-back for companies, $3.2 billion in instant asset write-off reductions and special depreciation rules for motor vehicles that would cost $550 million. The hit on confidence from these and other savings' cuts was so great that, in a desperate attempt to save his own job, Tony Abbott had no choice but to bring back Labor's instant asset write-off and tax assistance.

This week we see another broken promise to small business from Tony Abbott, who again decided to indefinitely delay the decision on the introduction of an effects test. So after two years of Tony Abbott, Australian small business people know they cannot trust a man who promises the world but delivers an atlas and three-word slogans. The recent media reports of small business groups announcing their intention to campaign against the government, particularly in marginal seats, should come as no surprise to the government or the Minister for Small Business. It might be useful for the minister to remember his promise to small business people to 'energise enterprise' and to deliver some 'delicious opportunities'. Well, there have been no delicious opportunities for small business from the Abbott government, just the smell of a rotten bunch.

Lindsay Electorate: Penrith Show

Ms SCOTT (Lindsay) (13:47): The end of August saw the 172nd Penrith show. It was a wonderful event and I would like to thank Penrith Paceway for hosting this event, as they do every single year. In fact, the chief executive, Lorraine Pozza, said the show was great and:

The Show created a great family atmosphere and was well attended on both days with over 12,000 people in attendance.

Penrith show president Max Laughton agreed and said:

The weekend made for perfect weather for all to enjoy and step back in time to explore all that the Show had on display.

I would also like to congratulate many of the show winners: Francene Treneman, Vikki Kearney, Eliza Douglas, Holly Burgess and Rebecca Bennett who received awards in the equine section.

I make special mention of the Penrith Anglican School, who won the Printers and Stationers Shield, and Nepean CAPA High School, who won The Talinga Office Supplies Shield. I also commend Ian Mclean, who took out the art award; Bronwyn Campbell, who won the pottery award; Colleen Moss for the porcelain award; and other winners, including Julie Simmons, Joy Myers Creed, Travis Goodshaw and Gloria Galvin, and all the wonderful high schools that brought their animals—cows, goats and alpacas—for what was an incredible display of local agriculture.
Tasmania: Economy

Ms COLLINS (Franklin) (13:48): It was just over two years ago in the lead-up to the last federal election that Prime Minister Tony Abbott came down to southern Tasmania and announced that he would be providing $16 million for Cadbury for a tourism development that would provide over 200 direct job and around 120 indirect jobs. For two years Tasmanians have waited for that money and then in March we heard that this project would not be going ahead but that the money would stay in Tasmania.

It has taken since March with various ministers and the Prime Minister going to Tasmania saying that the announcement would be weeks not months away and that the announcement would be soon. Finally, last weekend we heard the Prime Minister was in Tasmania for the Liberal Party state conference and that the $16 million for Cadbury would finally be delivered—finally, after two years of waiting for this money and those jobs. Of course, what we saw last weekend, whilst I welcome the money going to jobs in Tasmania, was another re-announcement of the $16 million—an announcement, really, just of a process and no idea about when this money would actually flow. We have heard the process will open this year, but there is great concern in the Tasmanian community that this will end up being just another broken promise from the Abbott government. This $16 million of investment in jobs in Tasmania is needed now. It was promised more than two years ago and it should have been delivered to the Tasmanian community before now and Tasmanians are really concerned that they are never going to get it.

Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders Awareness Day

Dr STONE (Murray) (13:50): Tomorrow, the ninth day of the ninth month, is Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders Day. The nine is deliberately symbolic of the nine months of pregnancy when you should not drink alcohol if you want to protect the mental health and brain of your baby. This international reminder is designed to ensure that every pregnant woman knows that it is not safe for her baby if she drinks any alcohol when she is pregnant. FASD is the largest cause of non-genetic, at-birth brain damage in Australia.

People born with FASD or FAS, foetal alcohol syndrome, have an observable abnormality in the structure and size of the brain, a physical condition which changes and disables brain function. The National Rural Health Alliance explains that this can include a baby, a child or an adult with an inability to plan, learn and control impulses. FAS or FASD affected children are often regarded as wilful or undisciplined, when in fact they have little control over their behaviour. Youth end up in jail—often a lifetime in jail. Too often suicide is a result of the lifelong frustration as well as lack of employment for the victims of FAS or FASD.

Australia has in some of our remote communities the highest rates in the world of diagnosed FAS in children. This is a national tragedy. We do not have to have a single child born with this condition as long as no woman drinks when she is pregnant. I commend knowledge of this day to the chamber.

Clean Start

Ms CHESTERS (Bendigo) (13:51): Two years on, it does not matter what you call it—lies, cons, misleading, not-entirely-true, misinformation—but the Abbott government has failed to be honest with the Australian people. It does not understand the many consequences of the decisions that it makes nor the impacts those decisions have on ordinary Australian
people, good hardworking people. And you could get no further how out of touch this government is than the way in which it has misled the Australian people when it abolished the Clean Start guidelines.

The Prime Minister stood up in this place and said that no cleaners would be worse off as a result of this government abolishing the Clean Start guidelines. Well, he was wrong. Within months of the Prime Minister making that bold declaration, the cleaners who clean the Department of Defence copped a $6,000-a-year pay cut. That is a lot of money to somebody who is on a low wage. That is taking money out of their children's school expenses. That is taking money out of the pockets of hardworking government cleaners. We have seen it happen again and again. This government is out of touch. We have had two years of misinformation, two years of misleading conduct, and it is going to continue unless this government starts to listen to the Australian people and the concerns that they are raising.

Tasmania: Economy

Mr NIKOLIC (Bass—Government Whip) (13:53): Contrary to the fairy tale just spun by the member for Franklin, last weekend the Prime Minister announced a reallocation of unused Cadbury upgrade funding, which will mean a potential $72-million boost to the Tasmanian economy. Members may recall the coalition's promise during the 2013 election of $16 million to upgrade Cadbury's tourism activities in Hobart. But in March this year, the company cancelled the project.

That money has now been turned into a $24-million coinvestment fund with $16 million from the federal government and $8 million from the Hodgman government. Successful applicants are required to contribute $2 for every $1 from the fund, which will leverage up to $72 million in job-creating projects. Applications will be encouraged from all industry sectors with an emphasis on tourism, agriculture, aquaculture and advanced manufacturing.

As Tasmanian Premier Will Hodgman said, these are areas of strength in a growing Tasmanian economy. This is a wonderful example of this state and federal Liberal governments working together to promote economic growth and create local jobs.

Under liberal governments in Canberra and Hobart, Tasmania is once again open for business and now is a great time to invest in our state. The Prime Minister has accused his Tasmanian MPs, myself and the members for Braddon and Lyons of chewing on his ears about this issue. Well, we did and I am delighted to advise the House that these funds will now be used to reinforce and strengthen Tasmania's future prosperity.

Perth Electorate: Infrastructure

Ms MacTIERNAN (Perth) (13:55): The Liberal Party has unlimited money to spend on promoting itself in the Canning electorate but it has no money to support the community. This morning the Comment News (Armadale) featured a full front-page ad purporting that the Abbott government was fixing Armadale Road. But of course, reading the fine print, we see that they are not fixing Armadale Road. They are not committing a single cent to this $290-million project, a project that is absolutely critical for the tens of thousands of residents of the suburbs mushrooming along Armadale Road. These communities need to access the job and education rich areas to their north and to their west. They are experiencing up to a nine-kilometre gridlock every morning as residents attempt to access the Kwinana Freeway and the Perth to Mandurah rail line. This is critical infrastructure for the southern suburbs of Perth.
The Community Connect South project, which duplicates the Armadale Road and builds a new North Lake Road bridge, is well designed and well planned. Labor has committed $145 million to this much needed project. We have also committed $25 million to fix Denny Avenue in Kelmscott. And we have committed $3.2 million to help fight the ice epidemic in Canning, guaranteeing funding for two rehabilitation centres.

**National Stroke Week**

Dr SOUTHCOTT (Boothby) (13:56): Next week is National Stroke Week. I am joining the National Stroke Foundation to shine the spotlight on stroke and educating the community on its signs and on how to minimise the risk of stroke. I would like to commend the work done by the National Stroke Foundation and its CEO, Dr Erin Lalor, who I have worked with over the last few years on a number of initiatives including my ongoing push for integrated health checks in primary care.

Stroke is one of Australia's biggest killers and a leading cause of disability. On average, there is a stroke in Australia every 10 minutes. In South Australia last year, 4,500 people suffered a stroke; 1,000 of those died. There are currently almost 37,000 stroke survivors living in our state. The total financial costs of stroke in Australia were estimated to be $5 billion each year.

This year, more than 3,000 activities are expected to be held across country ranging from awareness morning teas, displays and talks to personal and team challenges and health checks. Throughout September I encourage all Australians to take action to reduce your stroke risk, learn more about stroke and help raise stroke awareness in the community. Firstly, be aware of what stroke is, how to recognise a stroke and what to do—face, arms, speech, time. It is on the website. Live healthy to reduce the risk of a stroke and get a regular health check which can reduce the modifiable risk factors.

**Maribyrnong Electorate: Level crossings**

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Leader of the Opposition) (13:58): I wish to congratulate the Andrews Labor government on the announcement today that the level crossings at Main and Furlong Roads in St Albans will finally be removed. This is long overdue good news for people in my community. The level crossings at Main and Furlong roads have claimed no less than 16 precious lives in the past decade and there have been countless near misses.

Christian Dejanovic was killed at the Main Road crossing St Albans in January 2012. Since that terrible day, his mother, Diane, has campaigned tirelessly to have those level crossings removed. Today's announcement simply would not have happened without Diane's efforts and I thank her on behalf of the entire St Albans community.

I also wish to congratulate the state member for St Albans, Natalie Suleyman and all of the state Labor members from the Western suburbs of Melbourne for their efforts in getting a better deal for St Albans residents.

**Berowra Electorate: Men's Sheds**

Mr RUDDOCK (Berowra) (13:58): I am delighted to see the Prime Minister at the chair and I want to commend him and the Minister for Health for their recent guarantee of funding to the Men's Shed program. As a strong supporter of the Men's Sheds network, I am delighted
to be able to report that I will be visiting again those in my electorate, particularly at Wiseman's Ferry and Cowan, which have been particularly well represented by John Hay.

The announcement of support for Men's Sheds reflects the government's commitment to promoting and supporting men's health. I am proud of the effort of my constituents who have supported that effort in Dural, Kenthurst, Cowan, Mount Kuring-Gai, Wisemans Ferry as well as the young women's mental health support organisation through Stephanie Rose and the Hornsby Mount Kuring-Gai women's shelter by Julie Griffin.

This is outstanding work. It is well supported by the government. I am delighted to support the tireless efforts of those who make it work and I thank them on behalf of the constituents of Berowra for the activities in which they are engaged.

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

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE
Asylum Seekers: Europe

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Leader of the Opposition) (14:00): My question is to the Prime Minister. Many Australians, including Liberal and Labor premiers and thousands who attended candlelight vigils last night, have called upon the government to do more to help those suffering because of the terrible crisis in Syria. Will the Prime Minister act on these calls and join with Labor to offer an additional 10,000 places for refugees displaced by the Syrian crisis, on top of Australia's existing humanitarian intake?

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:00): I do thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. As I indicated to the House yesterday, Australia will do more. We have already done a lot. In the 2012-13 year, when the Syrian civil war was well and truly underway, we took under 100 people. In the 2013-14 year, as the civil war became worse, we took 1,000 people from Syria. In the last financial year we took 2,200 people from Syria, and we will do more. We will do more in the weeks and months and years to come, because we are a decent and compassionate people—a decent and compassionate people who always step up to the plate when there is an international crisis where we can lend a hand.

But I do need to say that, as well as a humanitarian response, we also need a security response, because the people of Syria are currently caught between the hammer of the death cult and its mass executions and the anvil of the Assad regime and its chemical weapons. What we need to do is to try to ensure that people can be safe in country as well as trying to ensure that people can be safe out of country and that people who are in camps, particularly persecuted minorities, women and children, have the prospect of a better life.

As members of this House would well know, the Minister for Immigration and Border Protection is currently in Europe; I received a briefing from him this morning. Overnight he met the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. He is now in Geneva and is meeting with the Director General of the International Organization for Migration. He is meeting with the International Committee of the Red Cross as well as other senior UN officials. The government will consider these discussions and the outcome of these talks in making our decision on Australia's contribution to the crisis.
This is a complex and difficult situation. We owe it to the human beings involved to make good and considered, as well as compassionate, decisions for their future. We do need to be prudent; we do need to plan. We should not delay, but nevertheless we do need to be careful, and I expect that within 24 hours the government will have much more to say on this matter.

**Economy**

Ms HENDERSON (Corangamite) (14:03): My question is to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister update the House on how the government's plan for lower taxes, more infrastructure and expanded trade will create jobs in my electorate and around Australia?

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:04): I thank the member for Corangamite, because that is an absolutely great question. I know that is a great question from the member for Corangamite, because I have spoken to significant businesses in her electorate—businesses like Bulla foods and the Australian Lamb Company—that are benefiting from the policies of this government. They have benefited from the repeal of the carbon tax, which has reduced their costs by tens of thousands of dollars; they are benefiting from the duplication of the Princes Highway out to Colac, because that will help their goods to get to market; and obviously they will benefit from the free trade agreements that this government has negotiated. Already businesses like Bulla foods and the Australian Lamb Company are looking at putting on more staff to take advantage of the opportunities that these free trade agreements provide.

On day one and from day one, this is a government which has been open for business. Our plan to be more open for business has meant lower taxes, more infrastructure and freer trade. Every day, that is exactly what we have been focused on—lower taxes, more infrastructure and freer trade—because that means more jobs. I can assure people right around Australia that our plan is working. There are 335,000 more jobs today than there were on election night in 2013. Our plan is working. Not only are there more jobs but housing approvals are also at near-record levels, corporate and company registrations are at record levels, car sales are at record levels and I am very happy to say that bankruptcies are at near-record lows—all because of the policies of this government.

The Australian Industry Group has just reported that Australia's services sector is expanding at the fastest pace since March 2008. The AiG's performance indices show the strongest economy-wide result in over five years, with manufacturing and construction particularly expanding. And it will get better under the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement. Dairy producers know where they stand on the free trade agreement. Wine producers, beef producers and health product producers all know where they stand on the free trade agreement. The only one who does not is the Leader of the Opposition. He was the CFMEU mouthpiece in this parliament earlier today and made an angry, ugly speech about the free trade agreement and, when it came to the vote, he could not say yes and he could not say no, because he is too weak to be the alternative Prime Minister of this country.

**Asylum Seekers**

Ms PLIBERSEK (Sydney—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (14:07): My question is to the Prime Minister. Between 2011 and 2013 Australia provided around $100 million towards the Syrian humanitarian relief effort. Between 2014 and 2015 Australia provided around $55 million. Prime Minister, why has Australia's support decreased as this crisis has worsened?
And will the government support Labor's call for an urgent $100 million to assist Syrians and Iraqis caught in this terrible conflict?

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: Members on my right will cease interjecting. I could not hear the second part of the question. I am going to ask the member for Sydney to repeat the question.

Ms PLIBERSEK: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Between 2011 and 2013 Australia provided around $100 million towards the Syrian humanitarian relief effort. Between 2014 and 2015 Australia provided around $55 million. Prime Minister, why has Australia's support decreased as this crisis has worsened? And will the government support Labor's call for an urgent, additional $100 million to assist Syrians and Iraqis caught in this terrible conflict?

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:08): I know the shadow minister for foreign affairs is desperate to play politics here, but I am going to resist that temptation. I am going to stick to the facts. In the last year when members opposite were in government just 98 people were taken from this particular conflict. Just 98 people from Syria entered this country in the last year that members opposite were in government.

Mr ABBOTT: I know the shadow minister for foreign affairs is desperate to play politics here, but I am going to resist that temptation. I am going to stick to the facts. In the last year when members opposite were in government just 98 people were taken from the Syrian conflict. In the first full year we took 1,000 and in the second full year, the last financial year, we took 2,230 people from the Syrian conflict.

Mr Dreyfus interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The Prime Minister is relevant to the answer.

Mr ABBOTT: Mr Speaker, this is not political; this is simply a fact that, in the last full year when members opposite were in charge, they took just 98 people from the Syrian conflict. In the first full year we took 1,000 and in the second full year, the last financial year, we took 2,230 people from the Syrian conflict.

Mr Dreyfus interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Isaacs will cease interjecting.

Ms Plibersek interjecting—

Mr ABBOTT: She is yelling and shouting. Let me give her the facts, because I am about to concede that yes, members opposite were not much interested in taking people who were in trouble because of this crisis. But they certainly did provide some money; I accept that. They did provide money to the various agencies. Good on them. It was a considerable amount of money and it was certainly done with the support of this coalition when we were in opposition.

I can inform the member who asked the question that, over the last 12 months, this government has provided, all up, some $100 million in humanitarian assistance to the Middle East, mostly to agencies dealing with Syria but also to some agencies dealing with Iraq and other parts of that troubled region. This is a serious issue. I assume—

Ms Plibersek interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Sydney will cease interjecting. The Prime Minister has the call.

Mr ABBOTT: I say again: this is a government which is serious about doing more. We are very serious about doing more. We will do more in terms of taking people from this conflict, we will do more in terms of providing resources to people dealing with this conflict
and we will do more in terms of tackling this conflict at its source. And the source is the fact that people in this troubled country are caught between the mass executions of the death cult and the chemical weapons of the Assad regime. We will do more. It will be a decent and a compassionate response, but it will also be a strong response because that is what people expect from a decent country like Australia.

Trade with China

Mr HAWKE (Mitchell) (14:12): My question is to the Treasurer. Will the Treasurer inform the House how the government's economic plan is helping to create jobs? What will the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement do to further strengthen the economy and create more jobs in my electorate and elsewhere?

Mr HOCKEY (North Sydney—The Treasurer) (14:12): I thank the honourable member for Mitchell for his question. I really do appreciate it. When we came to office, the economy was creating 3,600 jobs a month. Last year we got that up to 16,000 jobs a month. And this year we have got it up to 23,200 jobs a month. We inherited 3,600 jobs a month on average under Labor. We now have it at an average of 23,200 jobs a month under the Abbott coalition government. It bounces around from month to month. But the average best indicates exactly what is happening in an economy and it is not an accident. You do not get that improvement in job creation by sitting in a rocking chair on the porch, chewing a blade of grass. You actually have to do real things. It starts with getting rid of taxes. We got rid of Labor's carbon tax, we got rid of Labor's mining tax, we got rid of Labor's car-manufacturing tax, we got rid of Labor's piggy bank tax and we got rid of Labor's—

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr HOCKEY: Oh, that was a great tax on motor vehicles. That was a brainstorming session from Labor. And we have got rid of Labor's bank deposit tax.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: Members on my left will cease interjecting.

Mr HOCKEY: When you get rid of Labor's taxes, even when you get rid of the Labor Party, you see more jobs created in Australia. And that is on the back of the $50 billion infrastructure program and it is on the back of abolishing 80,000 pages of red tape regulation that we inherited from Labor. Now Labor is opposing more free trade. Labor is opposing the opportunity for Australia to benefit from an improvement in the trade relationship with China.

Each year we have a $150 billion trade relationship with China—$100 billion in Australia's favour and $50 billion in China's favour. Our trading relationship with China is to our benefit at a two to one ratio. What that means is that anything we can do to grow the relationship with China means more jobs with better pay for everyday Australians, because every dollar of trade with China works in our favour at a rate of two to one. Now the Labor Party and the CFMEU are playing games with that relationship.

Mr HOCKEY: China's growth this year accounts for 30 per cent of the world economy's growth. Thirty per cent of the world economy's growth comes from China. As it moves from an investment focus to a consumption focus, the job opportunities as a result of the free trade agreement are going to be rich for every single Australian.
Employment

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Leader of the Opposition) (14:15): My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer to the Prime Minister's statement in Canning last week that claims made by cruise operator Bill Milby—that he was advised by departmental officials to sack his Australian workforce and replace them with a cheaper foreign crew—were 'just not true'. But, given departmental officials last night confirmed that they did provide this advice, will the Prime Minister now apologise to Mr Milby—who is sitting up here in the gallery—who was simply standing up for Australian jobs?

Opposition members: Hear, hear! Apologise!

The SPEAKER: Members on my left will cease interjecting!

Mr Giles interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Scullin is warned.

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:16): We are certainly standing up for the Australian shipping industry.

Ms Hall: Tell the truth!

The SPEAKER: The member for Shortland is warned!

Mr ABBOTT: We are certainly standing up for jobs in shipping. And the best way we can do that is by fixing the mess that Labor's legislation made to coastal shipping in this country.

Let me be absolutely crystal clear about the facts. Thanks to the changes that members opposite put in place when they were in government, the number of ships engaged in coastal shipping in this country halved.

Government members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The members on my right!

Mr ABBOTT: There were 30 ships engaged in coastal shipping in 2006. Seven years later there were just 15. The number of ships halved because of the changes that members opposite made.

Mr Shorten: Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. It is relevance, Mr Speaker. Will the Prime Minister just apologise to the man in the gallery for standing up for Aussie—

The SPEAKER: The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat. The Prime Minister has the call.

Mr ABBOTT: There were 15 fewer ships plying our coastal routes because of members opposite. I want to see those ships back. That is the best thing I can do for jobs in coastal shipping. Now—

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr ABBOTT: If they do not want the answer—

Mr Albanese: Mr Speaker—

The SPEAKER: This cannot be a point of order on relevance.

Mr Albanese: I am concerned he is misleading the House.
The SPEAKER: The member for Grayndler will resume his seat. That is a frivolous point of order.

Mr ABBOTT: Under members opposite, the share of Australia's freight task carried by shipping dropped from 27 per cent to 17 per cent. That is what Labor's economic vandalism did to coastal shipping in Australia. I will tell you what else Labor's economic vandalism did to coastal shipping in Australia: it raised costs by over 60 per cent, not just destroying jobs in shipping but destroying jobs on land as well.

Mr Albanese: It was under your government—

Mr Pyne: It was under you!

The SPEAKER: The Leader of the House and the member for Grayndler!

Mr ABBOTT: As to the claim that members of the opposite have been making, I am quoting from the executive director of surface transport policy, Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development, who said yesterday:

I did not say to Mr Milby that he should sack his crew and that he should reflag his vessel.

This is a direct denial from the relevant official against the relevant claim made by members opposite, so members opposite should just stop verballing people. They should finally tell the truth. Tell the truth, stop verballing people, and agree to our changes which will restore efficiency and employment in the Australian coastal shipping trade.

MOTIONS

Asylum Seekers

Mr WILKIE (Denison) (14:20): I seek leave to move the following motion:

That this House:

(1) express its deep concern that there are now more than 50 million endangered people displaced or on the move globally, including more than four million Syrians on account of the current conflict;

(2) call on the government to act immediately to quickly resettle in Australia 30,000 affected Syrians, all in addition to the current humanitarian intake of 13,750; and

(3) further calls on the government to permanently double Australia’s humanitarian intake from its current figure of 13,750 to 28,000.

Leave not granted.

Mr WILKIE: I move:

That so much of standing and sessional orders be suspended as would prevent the member for Denison from moving the following motion:

That this House:

(1) express its deep concern that there are now more than 50 million endangered people displaced or on the move globally, including more than four million Syrians on account of the current conflict;

(2) call on the government to act immediately to quickly resettle in Australia 30,000 affected Syrians, all in addition to the current humanitarian intake of 13,750; and

(3) further calls on the government to permanently double Australia’s humanitarian intake from its current figure of 13,750 to 28,000.

The parliament must suspend standing orders and deal with this matter urgently. The scale of this humanitarian crisis cannot be underestimated. There are now more than 50 million people...
displaced or on the move around the world. This is the largest number since the end of World War II. There are now—

**Mr Burke:** Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Just to assist the House, if I may: if the suspension of standing orders were to take place after question time, I advise that there would certainly be no objection to that. We are very early in question time, and I just wanted to provide that option to the member for Denison.

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Denison has the call.

**Mr WILKIE:** There are now more than 50 million refugees globally. This is the largest number since the end of the World War II. There are now well over four million Syrians registered with the UNHCR. This is a humanitarian crisis of profound proportions.

We must suspend standing orders and deal with this motion urgently, because Australia has the capacity to act. We are the 12th largest economy in the world. We do indeed have boundless plains to share. If there is one country in the world that has the capacity to do much more, it is this country, it is Australia. With the 12th largest economy in the world, it is shameful that last year we recognised and resettled only 14,350 refugees. Last year, the number of refugees we recognised and resettled—those 14,350 refugees—was less than half of one per cent of all of the refugees recognised and resettled globally.

We like to make much of the fact that we are a generous country. It is said often that we are the most generous country when it comes to recognising and resettling refugees. That in fact is untrue. When you look at the number of people that we recognised and resettled last year—less than half of one per cent—that made us 22nd by raw numbers in order of countries recognising and resettling refugees. When you look at this country's effort with refugees on a per capita basis, we are 27th in the world—not first or second. When you look at this country with regard to GDP, we are the 46th country in the world when it comes to the number of refugees we recognise and resettle.

How on earth can we compare 14,350 refugees being recognised and resettled when last year Turkey recognised and resettled 1,027,137 refugees? How can we possibly compare ourselves to Lebanon, which last year recognised and resettled 364,129 refugees? How can we possibly compare ourselves to Afghanistan, which last year recognised and resettled 283,575 refugees? By comparison we recognised and resettled 14,350 refugees. Surely if there is one country that can do more—much more, and I do not mean an extra 5,000 over the next three years; I mean 30,000 this year—then it is our country. And our country will be all the richer for it, because among that 30,000 will be Syrian doctors, tradesmen, engineers, architects, nurses and social workers and any number of people who will undoubtedly add to this country's very rich multiculturalism.

Standing orders must be suspended and we must deal with this matter urgently, because we have contributed to the problem in the Middle East. You cannot disentangle Iraq from Syria or Syria from Iraq. When we helped invade Iraq 12½ years ago, we helped create the instability which racks the region to this day. When we gave diplomatic support to the Syrian rebels, we effectively gave diplomatic support to Islamic State, which was one of the rebel groups. We now find ourselves in this ludicrous situation where we supported the rebels but we are now going to bomb them; we are now going to bomb the enemy of President Assad. The member for Melbourne gestured a little while ago, 'But what are we doing about
President Assad? We are now going to bomb his enemies and basically become a de facto ally of Russia. How dare we criticise the Russians for having a military presence in Syria assisting President Assad when we are going to be bombing President Assad's enemies.

After the 2010 election when I was in negotiations with then Prime Minister Julia Gillard and then opposition leader Tony Abbott, the then opposition leader—

A government member interjecting—

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Denison must confine himself to why standing orders should be suspended.

Mr WILKIE: Thank you, Speaker. Standing orders must be suspended because we must deal with this matter urgently. In fact, if we do deal with this matter urgently, perhaps the Prime Minister will find it in his heart today to again make the commitment that he made to me after the 2010 election that Australia would double its humanitarian intake, because we not only need to take a one-off large number of Syrians to do our share of the heavy lifting at this point in time; we also have to do a much greater share over years to come. There are 50 million people displaced and on the move at the moment around the world. We need to put in place a longer term solution. We need to be part of a longer term global solution. Surely that means doubling our humanitarian intake. If the then opposition leader could, after the 2010 election, bring himself to suggest that we double the humanitarian intake, surely the now Prime Minister can see it in his heart—and his government can see it in its heart—to do just that right now.

There is an urgent need to suspend standing orders and to deal with this matter right now. There is possibly no more pressing issue facing this parliament right now than the crisis in Syria. We can hold our press conferences, we can put out our press releases and we can come in here and talk till the cows come home, but until this parliament and this government deals decisively with this issue then everything we have done so far is just talk. So the challenge now for the Prime Minister and for the government is to do something strong today and say yes, we will bring in 30,000 Syrians, and not one of them will come from the existing humanitarian intake, we will be part of a long-term global solution, we will be a good citizen, we will work with the community of nations, we will not leave it to Western Europe to shoulder this alone and we will double our humanitarian intake. I can but hope that, although the government saw fit not to give me leave to address this matter now, the government can now see it in its heart to have the debate now and to deal with this matter now, as it must be done.

The SPEAKER: Is the motion seconded?

Ms McGowan: I second the motion and reserve my right to speak.

Mr PYNE (Sturt—Leader of the House and Minister for Education and Training) (14:29): I thank the member for Denison for moving the suspension of standing orders. I know that he has done so fully believing in the remarks that he has made and with a full compassion for the plight of the refugees not just in the Middle East but all across the world. That concern, that compassion, is shared by this side of the House very genuinely and, I am sure, shared by all members of the House. The effects of the media over the last couple of days could not but have had a major impact on every single Australian—every right-thinking Australian—and that is why the government has been going through the methodical, sensible process of
government that you would expect over the last 24 or 48 hours. At the moment, our Minister for Immigration and Border Protection is on his way home from Geneva, where he has been meeting with the appropriate people in the UNHCR. He will then give a report to the National Security Committee, to the cabinet, and decisions will be made to do two things—to ensure that we strike ISIS, the Daesh death cult, as effectively as possible in order to protect not just Australia’s interests but the interests of all good people across the world; but also we will need to have a sensible response to the refugee crisis that is unfolding in the Middle East and in Europe.

The Prime Minister and the Minister for Foreign Affairs have already indicated in answers to questions both today and yesterday the sensible measures the government is putting in place to do our part as a nation to help refugees across the world. We are already, per capita, the most generous country in the world in terms of refugees. That is something that I am very proud of and I think all members of this House should be proud of. So we are responding as a good government should respond, in a methodical, sensible, compassionate and measured way. To rush these discussions, to act with urgency as you suggest, because of the media cycle over the last 24 hours, would not be the actions of a sensible government. The urgency that the member for Denison talks about is an urgency to get the response right, to do it correctly, to follow proper cabinet government and good process. That is the urgency that is required, and that is what the Abbott government is doing in response to what we are seeing in the Middle East.

So we will not be dealing with this issue as a political issue. Therefore the government will not support this suspension of standing orders in the House today to stop question time and deal with this matter as a debate, because, at the end of the day, we want the decisions being made about refugees and about the war in the Middle East to be made sensibly and, if possible, in a bipartisan way, so the entire parliament and the country support the measures by the government and, hopefully, agreed to by the opposition and the crossbenches. For that reason, we will not be supporting the motion. We know the motion is moved in good faith, and we respond in good faith, but on this occasion we will continue with the good government that we are giving Australians and not respond in the political way that has been suggested by the member for Denison.

Mr BURKE (Watson—Manager of Opposition Business) (14:33): I will not hold up the debate for long. Needless to say, as I indicated in a point of order, the issue that has been put before the parliament is an appropriate issue for there to be discussion on within the parliament—absolutely—and, Member for Denison, there is no objection from Labor to the issue being raised. The impact of it being raised at that point of question time is simply that we end up with less scrutiny of the government because question time gets wiped out at such an early point of time. That is why I put forward the option for the motion to be moved at a later hour, which has not been taken up.

That being the case, I would also simply note that there have been other occasions with the crossbench when the opposition has been notified and suspensions have been moved later during question time, and we have been able to support that. I understand, from the comments that were made, that notification was given to the government. It was not given to the opposition on this occasion. That is just how that transpired. But it is the case that everybody here would agree that there is a great import to the issues that have been put before us. There
is absolutely no objection from us to having a parliamentary debate on that. We do not believe a consequence of having that debate should be a reduction in scrutiny of the government and the wiping out of a day's question time.

Mr BANDT (Melbourne) (14:34): Very briefly—the member for Denison has covered most of the ground—I support the suspension motion. I fear that we are moving with great haste towards a decision to bomb Syria but with much less speed towards—

The SPEAKER: The member for Melbourne needs to confine himself to why standing orders should be suspended.

Mr BANDT: But with much less speed towards taking refugees from that country. We do not have, at the moment, in this parliament an opportunity for full debates about decisions about how to respond to this unfolding crisis. We do not have the opportunities that they have in the United Kingdom parliaments, for example, or in the German parliaments or in the US, where these issues will be fully debated and parliamentary approval is necessary. That is why suspension of standing orders is necessary today—because we could well be in a situation where a decision is made to bomb a country before a decision is made to take refugees from there, because we do not have the opportunity to debate these matters in parliament. It is a significant step that the member for Denison has taken, but it is a right one, because events are moving very, very quickly, and people are seeing what is happening and they want the parliament to respond just as quickly. That is why this step is being taken.

Question negatived.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Shipping

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler) (14:36): My question is to the Deputy Prime Minister. I refer to his answer yesterday where he said claims his department advised Bill Milby to reflag the True North overseas and replace his Western Australian workforce with a foreign crew on foreign wages were inaccurate and not possible. Is he aware that last night Senator Heffernan asked his department's Judith Zielke, 'So Milby was telling the truth when he said you had discussed with him the option of going offshore?' and Ms Zielke replied, 'Yes,' and, further, that Michael Sutton also confirmed they discussed the reflagging option with Mr Milby? Why hasn't the Deputy Prime Minister— (Time expired)

The SPEAKER: There was not a question that was asked in the 30 seconds, but, if the Deputy Prime Minister wishes to answer the statement, he is welcome to.

Mr TRUSS (Wide Bay—Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development) (14:37): While the question was asked after the time had expired, I will answer it. I have not corrected the record, because there is no error in the record. The record is correct. What I said yesterday was that Mr Milby was not advised to take any particular course of action. No-one from my department has ever said to Mr Milby that he should sack his crew or reflag the vessel as has been reported. That is simply inaccurate. There were discussions, as confirmed with the transcript last night, between Mr Milby and officers of my department to discuss options and in particular to talk about elements of the report and the sorts of things that might be possible for an operation like his and, for that matter, others in the Australian shipping industry to take with the new legislation in place.
They discussed a range of options. At no stage did the government tell him what he should do. He makes his own decisions as a responsible businessman.

Mr Albanese interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Grayndler.

Mr TRUSS: Mr Milby has been competing with overseas vessels on the cruise routes of north-west Western Australia for many years and doing so successfully, and I have got no doubt that, in the event of the legislation the government has put before the parliament coming into effect, he will be able to do so in the future. And it will be his choice as to how he wishes to operate his business. He will do it in the interests of his employees and his company, and I am sure he will continue to provide a good service to Australians in that area.

The reality is that Labor is trying to make a big noise about these trivial issues—

Honourable members interjecting—

Mr TRUSS: to cover up their own failure in relation to shipping reform. Their own shipping reform was a disaster, as the Prime Minister referred to, halving the number of vessels—

Mr Albanese: Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order on relevance. We believe it is relevant sacking Australian workers and replacing them with foreign workers—

The SPEAKER: The member for Grayndler will resume his seat. The Deputy Prime Minister has the call. The Deputy Prime Minister is relevant to the question. He is on the same policy topic.

Mr TRUSS: Under Labor’s legislation, the number of vessels trading on the Australian shore was reduced from 30 to 15. The number on the transitional—

Mr Albanese interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Grayndler will cease interjecting.

Mr TRUSS: dropped from 16 to eight. The shipping share of the freight industry fell. The cost of many freight rates went up by as much as 60 per cent. The reality is that under Labor the shipping industry would fade away altogether. We are seeking to give the industry a chance. I want a strong Australian shipping industry—

Ms Ryan interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Lalor.

Mr TRUSS: providing freight services right around the country. That is essential if we are going to deliver our freight around our nation efficiently and effectively. It has not happened under Labor’s reforms. We need to give the Australian shipping industry a chance to achieve its potential, and I encourage Labor to support the legislation so that Australians can be employed on Australian ships.

The SPEAKER: Before I call the member for Durack, the members for Lalor and Grayndler continue to interject. I have asked them not to interject a number of times. If they continue interjecting, they will be choosing to eject themselves from the chamber.

Trade

Ms PRICE (Durack) (14:40): My question is to the Minister for Foreign Affairs. Will the minister explain how the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement and other free trade
agreements will provide benefits in the form of jobs and growth in the economy? Are there any threats to the realisation of these benefits?

Ms JULIE BISHOP (Curtin—Minister for Foreign Affairs) (14:41): I thank the member for Durack for her question, for her electorate, like many in Western Australia, has a strong agriculture sector where produce is grown and exported to China. Western Australian agriculture businesses—indeed, exporters across the country—stand to gain enormously from the free trade agreement with China, for it will remove significant barriers to Australian agricultural exports across a range of products including dairy, beef, lamb, wine, horticulture, barley and seafood in particular.

The three agreements negotiated by this government with China, with Japan and with South Korea are an unprecedented investment in Australian jobs and in Australia’s economic future. This trifecta covers an extraordinary 52 per cent of all of our exports, and the benefits are already flowing from the Japan and Korea agreements. Now our exporters and producers, from dairy farmers to pharmaceutical producers, are waiting on entry into force of the China agreement, when tariffs will be slashed on around 95 per cent of our exports into our biggest market.

But the biggest threat to the realisation of all these benefits is in fact the Leader of the Opposition. He has a history of saying one thing privately and another thing publicly. He double-deals on free trade agreements. And let me point this out: as a trade union boss, the Leader of the Opposition led the calls for Australia to deny China market economy status. That is an essential precondition for free trade agreement negotiations, and the trade union leader was leading the calls against China—

Ms Plibersek: How’d you go with the AIIB? How’d you go with the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank?

The SPEAKER: The member for Sydney will cease interjecting.

Ms JULIE BISHOP: as a market economy.

Ms Plibersek interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Sydney is warned.

Ms JULIE BISHOP: And then, on coming to office, Labor terminated the funding that had been allocated by the Howard government to continue trade negotiations with China. Labor ripped out the necessary negotiating resources not only from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade but from the Department of Agriculture, from immigration, from finance, from Treasury, from education, from Attorney-General’s, from communications and from IP Australia. They took the necessary funding away so that our officials could not continue to negotiate the free trade agreement.

If Australians want to know why these vital free trade agreement negotiations went nowhere under Labor, why our competitors were given a head start in the Chinese market and why Labor is now stalling, they need look no further than Labor’s double-dealing on this issue.

Labor fails to realise that we are at an economic juncture. Choose the free trade agreement, back the free trade agreement and Australia will prosper. There will be more jobs, more economic growth. Choose to stall and renegotiate, and the offer will no longer exist. Labor
and the trade unions have done everything possible to prevent the finalisation of a free trade agreement with China, and that affects our prosperity and our jobs.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The SPEAKER (14:44): Before I call the member for Gordon, I wish to inform the House that we have present in the gallery this afternoon former senator and minister Kay Patterson. On behalf of the House I extend a very warm welcome to her.

Honourable members: Hear, hear!

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Royal Commission into Trade Union Governance and Corruption

Mr BRENDAN O’CONNOR (Gorton) (14:44): My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer to revelations today that lawyers working for the Prime Minister's royal commission personally coached the disgraced Kathy Jackson about the issues on which she would be examined. Is the Prime Minister concerned that this special treatment only confirms that his royal commission has been nothing more than a political exercise from the start?

Mr Pyne: Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The Prime Minister is not responsible for the operations of the royal commission, and therefore it is not possible for him to answer this question.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: Members on my left will cease interjecting. I have not called the member for Watson—I am not going to call him while there are interjections.

Mr Burke: On the point of order, Mr Speaker: to claim that the Prime Minister is not responsible for a royal commission is an extraordinary statement. It is right and proper as a creature of the executive and the executive-determined body for questions of this nature to be directed to him.

Mr Pyne: On the point of order, Mr Speaker: if the Manager of Opposition Business were aware of the way government works he would know that royal commissions operate by royal warrant. There is absolutely no basis for the Prime Minister's responsibility whatsoever.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The members on my left will cease interjecting! The member for Moreton is warned. The member for McMahon will cease interjecting. Certainly the first part of the question went to matters for which the Prime Minister is not responsible. I am going to give the member for Gorton an opportunity to rephrase the question.

Mr Perrett: Could he ask the Queen?

The SPEAKER: The member for Moreton will leave under 94(a)!

The member for Moreton then left the chamber.

Mr BRENDAN O’CONNOR: My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer to revelations today that lawyers working for the royal commission established by this government coached the disgraced Kathy Jackson about the issues on which she would be examined. Is the Prime Minister concerned that this special treatment only confirms that the royal commission has been nothing more than a political exercise from the start?
Mr Pyne: Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Now the member is asking for a legal opinion from the Prime Minister. It is not my fault they cannot get their questions right, and it is not your fault, Mr Speaker, but they are supposed to be in the premier parliament of the nation and therefore they should be expected to get their questions right. Perhaps they could come back tomorrow when they have done a bit more homework?

Mr Burke: On the point of order, Mr Speaker: it would be an absurd situation if they were allowed to ask questions about the royal commission and we were not. That is exactly what the Leader of the House is asking to happen.

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The members on my left and right will cease interjecting. I ask the member for Gorton to rephrase the question.

Mr Brendan O’Connor: I did rephrase it.

The SPEAKER: I do not think it was a thorough rephrase—

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: I am not going to rule on this matter with constant interjections—or the member for Gorton will not be here to rephrase the question. After the member for Melbourne moved his motion I gave the call to the opposition when it was the government’s turn. I am keen for question time to move on and I am going to give the call to the member for Wannon. Then I will come back to the member for Gorton if he is prepared to rephrase his question.

Trade with China

Mr TEHAN (Wannon) (14:48): My question is to the Minister for Trade and Investment. Will the minister update the House on his recent visit to China to discuss the China free trade agreement?

Mr Entsch interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Leichhardt is warned!

Mr TEHAN: Is the minister aware of any Australian businesses who are already putting plans in place to capitalise on the opportunities created by the free trade agreement, and what risks are there to these opportunities?

Mr ROBB (Goldstein—Minister for Trade and Investment) (14:48): I thank the member for Wannon, who is a great advocate for trade and has done so much in this field already.

Three weeks ago I led a delegation of 35 chief executives to China to look at opportunities as a result of the free trade agreement. The delegation included Blackmores. Blackmores formalised a strategic partnership with JD.com, and they expect that they will see a tenfold increase in their sales to Chinese consumers.

Mr ROBB: They have already put on 100 jobs on the Northern Beaches in order to cope with the deal—

Ms King interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Ballarat will cease interjecting!

Mr ROBB: and what they expect to happen with the deal in future. Kimberley Kamper owner, Bruce Loxton, in Ballina, has big plans to export his caravans. He is doubling the size
of his premises. He has a DA in to double the size of the premises and is adding 30 to 40 staff on the back of the free trade agreements.

David Larkin, the chairman of the Australian red meat industry, said in Beijing about this FTA:

'It's a game changer and it's critical that we see it implemented quickly.

He said it is the biggest thing to happen in agriculture in 200 years.

The CEO of the National Farmers' Federation, Simon Talbot, was also part of the mission. He warned that if this thing is delayed, let alone stopped, it will cost Australian agriculture $300 million alone in 2016. He also said, 'Many agricultural producers and supply chains are gearing up in preparedness for the agreement being ratified. It's the centrepiece of significant agricultural expansion in Australia. We have only touched the tip of the iceberg in relation to the opportunity.'

There are many other examples, but it is interesting to look back and see the attitude of those in the leadership of the Labor Party, who clearly have embarrassed so many of their members sitting behind. We see what their real attitude is to trade. The Leader of the Opposition, for instance, who spoke at a workers' rally at the World Economic Forum some years ago, said 'Free trade is bullshit'. He said, 'They, the workers, know there is no such thing as fair trade. They only want their jobs.' That was his attitude. That is what his attitude—

The SPEAKER: The Minister for Trade and Investment—

Mr Hockey: It was a quote!

The SPEAKER: I do not want the Treasurer interjecting if he refers to practice. A quote with an unparliamentary word is not a defence. I ask the minister to withdraw.

Mr ROBB: I withdraw. What we are seeing is that all these opportunities and many more are being threatened in no order by a campaign of disingenuous, racist, misleading union and Labor activity. (Time expired)

The SPEAKER: Just before I call the member for Gorton, I wish to—

Mr Pyne interjecting—

The SPEAKER: Leader of the House, can I just finish what I was saying. I want to apologise to the member for Leichhardt. I warned him instead of the member for Lingiari. The member for Lingiari is warned.

Royal Commission into Trade Union Governance and Corruption

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR (Gorton) (14:52): My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer to revelations today that lawyers working for the royal commission personally coached the disgraced Kathy Jackson about the issues on which she would be examined. Does the Prime Minister believe that this treatment is consistent with the terms of reference given to the royal commission, determined by the government? Will the Prime Minister take any action?

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:52): At last, Mr Speaker, he manages to get questions into the right form! The claim that the royal commission—

Mr Mitchell interjecting—
The SPEAKER: The member for McEwen will cease interjecting.

Mr ABBOTT: The claim that the royal commission has somehow gone soft on Kathy Jackson is entirely false. It is entirely false. Let me quote. In his submission to the royal commission, counsel assisting identified the allegations against Jackson, including a series of irregular payments, and he submitted that the allegations against Kathy Jackson reveal 'breaches of union rules, arrangements designed to circumvent the law', 'poor governance' and 'lack of transparency', and he said this 'can only be to the detriment of its members'. He concluded that these matters:

… raise serious governance issues at the Victoria No 3 Branch, during the period Ms Jackson was Secretary.

It is difficult to imagine a more inappropriate series of arrangements.

… … …

This is no model for a modern or effective union.

Plainly, there was no going soft on anyone, no kid-glove treatment of anyone. What we have seen from this royal commission is a relentless pursuit of union corruption, a relentless pursuit of rorts, racketts and rip-offs wherever they are to be found and a relentless determination to ensure that we have honest, clean workplaces and we have honest, clean unions.

Members opposite cannot help themselves. They simply cannot help defending rorts, racketts and rip-offs. There is not a dodgy union official that they are not trying to defend, except this one—

The SPEAKER: The Prime Minister will resume his seat. The member for Watson on a point of order?

Mr Burke: Yes, on direct relevance. He is the one who has been defending Kathy Jackson.

The SPEAKER: That is not a point of order. That is a frivolous point of order. The member for Watson will not abuse standing orders in that fashion.

Mr Champion interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Wakefield is warned.

Mr ABBOTT: I simply make the point that this is a royal commission which is determined to get to the bottom of union corruption. This is a royal commission which is without fear or favour, which has exposed rorts, racketts and rip-offs wherever they have occurred. And the fact that the royal commission has been prepared to go at anyone, including some people who in a different context have been whistleblowers, shows that this is a royal commission which should be supported. This is a royal commission which is determined to do the right thing by the workers of Australia. Why won't the Leader of the Opposition get behind it? Why won't he back it? Why isn't he in favour of honest unionism? (Time expired)

The SPEAKER: Just before I call the member for Flynn—no, the member for Gorton does not have the call. The member for Watson knows that was a frivolous point of order. We have had a number of them creeping in. I need to say to members that, if there is a continuation of this, I will be very strongly minded to adopt a practice of former Speaker Harry Jenkins and other Speakers in the past who have made decisions on points of order very
quickly or, in some instances—as you are devoted to the practice, as I know, Member for Watson—refused to hear points of order.

**Trade with China**

Mr O'DOWD ( Flynn) (14:57): My question is to the Minister for Agriculture. Will the minister update the House on the benefits for Australian farmers of the government’s free trade agreement with China? What threats exist to the delivery of these benefits to rural and regional Australia?

Mr JOYCE ( New England— Minister for Agriculture) (14:57): I thank the honourable member for his question. He is someone who has been a fettler, a farmer and a fuel distributor and is obviously a big supporter of the free trade agreement. It would make sense that he would be, because in his seat there is 2PH, which is one of the largest privately owned orchards in the Southern Hemisphere. They grow mandarins, lemons and table grapes. They now have around 300,000 citrus trees and 550 acres under table grapes. They export 30 per cent of all production to China, their most lucrative market. In peak season they employ up to 400 people.

Craig Pressler of 2PH rang our office today, and he said: 'Tell them if they keep'—and then a very unparliamentary word ending in 'ing'—'around with the China free trade agreement, they will wreck it. We stand to lose our market share to Chile, and you can quote me on that.' Well, Mr Pressler, I just have. It is not merely in the billions in reductions of tariffs over the life of the FTA with China. It is also the sentiment that we would go through a process over a decade, a process supported by both sides of this parliament, and then, at the behest of the child of the BLF, the CFMEU, put at risk all the work and the obvious benefits of this trade deal with our biggest agricultural market.

You were asking about jobs. There are 220,000 people who work in the food-processing sector in our nation, and this deal creates even more jobs. There are an additional 300,000 in agriculture, forestry and fishing, and this agreement will create more jobs. It would not be surprising that when I go to South Australia they say that the transition from car manufacturing to food manufacturing is one of the opportunities for their workers. And who proposes this very logical thesis? The state Labor Party. In Queensland they are concerned about the downturn in the mining, and where do they believe new jobs will be? In agriculture. What underpins about 70 per cent of our agriculture? Exports. And who is our biggest market for exports? China. So you do not have to be Pythagoras to work out where our advantage is. It is about economics—deals that allow our nation the access to $120 billion of rural imports that flow into China each year. We need only glance across the Tasman and note that with New Zealand's trade agreement with China agriculture has increased from $1 billion in 2008 when they signed the FTA to about $6.7 billion today—over a sixfold increase. I hope that we do not have folly trumping what is an obvious deal for our nation.

**Royal Commission into Trade Union Governance and Corruption**

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR (Gorton) (15:00): My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer to revelations today that lawyers working for the royal commission personally briefed the disgraced Kathy Jackson on the issues. My question is: given the government drafted the terms of reference for the royal commission does the Prime Minister support the conduct of the counsel assisting the commission in this regard?

CHAMBER
Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (15:01): All I can say is at least there is one dodgy union official that they do not like. They should not like all dodgy union officials—that is the point. The only reason why they do not like one particular dodgy union official is that she was a whistleblower. It is not dodgy conduct by union officials that they are against; it is whistleblowing by union officials that they are against.

I have been asked: do I think the royal commission and counsel assisting the royal commission have conducted themselves appropriately? Of course they have conducted themselves appropriately. Members opposite are very well connected, as we know, with union officials. They are very well connected with people whose union has been well and truly dragged before the royal commission quite properly because of the dodgy dealings that we have seen and because of the corruption and the criminality that we have seen. If members opposite have any problem whatsoever with the conduct of the royal commission there are obvious procedures that they can take. There are obvious processes that they can go through.

This royal commission was set up because it was absolutely necessary to get to the bottom of rorts, rackets and rip-offs, of corruption and of criminality inside the trade union movement. This was the dark side of unionism that members opposite pretended did not exist. This was the corrupt business model that members opposite were part of but did not want to admit. It is absolutely important and necessary for our country, it is absolutely important and necessary for the union movement and indeed for the Labor Party itself that this royal commission do its job.

I refer to Martin Ferguson—not just a distinguished former member of this place but a former president of the ACTU—a better man than most of the people sitting opposite right now. He said:

I just don't see the royal commission as a political play thing.

He said that this royal commission was a necessary part of the renewal and the reform not just of the union movement but of the Labor Party itself. I say it is high time that members opposite, whether it be on the free trade agreement or whether it be on the royal commission, stop listening to the CFMEU, stop channelling the CFMEU and start listening to decent Labor people like Martin Ferguson and Bob Hawke.

Trade with China

Mr HOGAN (Page) (15:04): My question is to the Minister for Education and Training representing the Minister for Employment. Will the minister update the House on the benefits to growth in jobs of the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement? How has the news of these benefits been received by the union movement?

Mr PYNE (Sturt—Leader of the House and Minister for Education and Training) (15:04): I thank the member for his question. He asked me how the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement has been received by the union movement. I am disappointed to have to tell him that it is not dissimilar to the way that the union movement has always reacted to changing our economy, to expanding, to bringing more changes to our arrangements that grow our economy, that increase exports, that give wealth to the nation by trading—

Mr Snowdon interjecting—

The SPEAKER: I remind the member for Lingiari he is warned.
Mr PYNE: with other nations, and that is with xenophobia and racism. It is a similar to the way they reacted to the White Australia Policy when it was abolished in the 1960s or when they reacted to Chinese immigration to Australia to help grow our economy in the 1890s and in the early part of Federation when they insisted the White Australia Policy—

Ms Butler interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Griffith is warned.

Mr PYNE: be included in our new nation. The problem with the CFMEU and the union movement is they do not change their spots, and one would not expect it of a discredited organisation like the CFMEU. But what does surprise me is that they have been allowed to take over the Leader of the Opposition's response to the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement, because initially Labor used to be in favour of the China Australia Free Trade Agreement. Labor luminaries across the country from Bob Hawke to Bob Carr are in favour of the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement, and the Leader of the Opposition used to speak in favour of it. But what changed? The CFMEU yanked the chain.

Mr Conroy: Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The point of order is on relevance. The question was about the trade union reaction not the Labor Party's reaction.

The SPEAKER: That is a frivolous point of order. The minister is in order.

Government members interjecting—

Ms Claydon interjecting—

Mr PYNE: Unfortunately, the member for Newcastle has just highlighted the exact problem we face in this country today, and that is that the CFMEU and the Labor Party are one and the same. There was a time when the Labor Party supported free trade. They were trying to settle free trade agreements with China, but the CFMEU yanked the chain. They brought the Leader of the Opposition back into the tent and they said 'Listen, there are no more donations. There are no more membership lists. There's no more stacking of the Victorian ALP. You'll do as you're told, and you'll oppose the China free trade agreement.' And because the Leader of the Opposition is so weak, so unfit to be Prime Minister of Australia, he danced to the tune of the inheritor of the BLF, the Builders Labourers Federation—that is, the CFMEU's antecedent was the BLF. What we see today is the CFMEU writing the policies of the Labor Party on free trade, on exports, on trying to make our country a better place with more growth and more jobs. What the Labor Party needs to do is listen to people like Bob Hawke—even Daniel Andrews from the Socialist Left supports the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement; Jay Weatherill, another socialist, from my own state supports the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement—and get on board with Australian jobs and growing the economy.

Road Infrastructure

Ms MacTIERNAN (Perth) (15:08): My question is to the Prime Minister. Last week the Prime Minister said, 'I'll be going out to take a look at the Armadale Road'. Now the Prime Minister has gone and had a look, will he join Labor and commit $170 million to the funding to kick-start the duplication of the Armadale Road, the construction of the North Lake Road bridge and the upgrade of Denny Avenue?
The SPEAKER: The Prime Minister has the call and he might be able to address the first part of the question, if he was able to understand it.

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (15:08): I am absolutely delighted to be the infrastructure Prime Minister and I am looking forward to working with a member for Canning, who will be the infrastructure member for Canning. That is what I am looking forward to doing. I would say to the member who asked the question: watch this space.

Trade with China

Mr GOODENOUGH (Moore) (15:09): My question is to the Assistant Treasurer. Will be the Assistant Treasurer update the House on how the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement will capitalise on Australia's strengths and financial services and stimulate growth in the Australian economy?

Mr FRYDENBERG (Kooyong—Assistant Treasurer) (15:09): I thank the member for Moore for his question and acknowledge his deep commitment to economic growth and free trade. The China-Australia Free Trade Agreement is good news for jobs, good news for growth and good news for the Australian economy. It links us, a nation of 23 million people, to an economy of 1.2 billion people with all the opportunities that that entails, particularly in services—which is 70 per cent of our economy today but just 17 per cent of our exports. The big winner will be financial services, where our expertise in insurance, banking and funds management will all benefit through the liberalisation of the rules under ChAFTA.

I am asked: are there any risks to this approach? The greatest risk comes from those opposite, particularly from the Leader of the Opposition. We heard yesterday that when he was the national secretary of the Australian Workers Union, in 2005—three months before negotiations on ChAFTA had even begun—he was railing against the agreement. But it gets better. He did this interview with Meet the Press on 5 June 2005—four weeks after negotiations began. He said: 'One hundred per cent scepticism is the way to approach this free trade agreement.' But he did not even know what was in it. Then he went on to say it was a 'rushed China free trade agreement'. That was four weeks into negotiations, which have taken a decade to conclude.

The piece de resistance and the reason the Leader of the Opposition is not fit to govern this country is the following statement. In this 2005 interview, he said: 'What is it that we are going to sell China in the future that we are not selling them now?' Prime Minister, you know that in 2005 we had $42 billion worth of trade to China. Today, it is $150 billion. That is nearly four times more. That is because the Leader of the Opposition forgot to take his own advice when he said: 'The future is the present.'

The Leader of the Opposition was doing the bidding of the union movement when he was national secretary of the AWU. He is doing the bidding of the union movement a decade later. But he forgets he is the leader of a political party and his responsibility is to act in the national interest. And the national interest means that the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement becomes law.

Mr Abbott: I ask that further questions be placed on the Notice Paper.
Mr PYNE (Sturt—Leader of the House and Minister for Education and Training) (15:12): Documents are presented as listed in the schedule circulated to honourable members. Details of the documents will be recorded in the Votes and Proceedings.

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Economic Leadership

The SPEAKER (15:13): I have received a letter from the honourable member for McMahon proposing that a definite matter of public importance be submitted to the House for discussion, namely:

The pressing need for competent economic leadership.

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 BOWEN (McMahon) (15:13): In thinking about the Abbott government it is worth posing a question: if the Abbott government were a gameshow, what gameshow would they be? With all the backstopping of each other, the leaks, the dysfunction, they could be Family Feud. That would be appropriate. Or there is all this speculation about whether the Treasurer will be asked to leave or stay or whether he will get a rose from the Prime Minister or not, so maybe it is The Bachelor. Or, when you look at the blank and forlorn faces of the backbench whenever the Prime Minister gives an answer in question time, I reckon there is a strong case for Blankety Blanks. Or, if you look at how the government is always keen to give tax breaks to high-income earners but tax more low-income earners and provide cuts to low-income earners, perhaps Wheel of Fortune or—even better—Who Wants to be a Millionaire. Or, if you look at the entire cabinet, Are You Smarter Than a 5th Grader? comes to mind.

But I think the winner is a show that was around a few years ago; I am sure many honourable members recall it—it was called The Weakest Link. And we know who the weakest link in the government is. It is a pretty senior weak link: it is the Treasurer of Australia. The Treasurer of Australia is the weak link in this government. One of the government's most senior members, the member with the core responsibility of economic management, is the weak link of the government. That is a big problem for the government, but it is a bigger problem for Australia. It is a bigger problem for our country that we have a man as Treasurer of Australia who is simply not up to the job. We know we are not the only ones who think he is not up to the job. We are not the only ones in the House who think that. We know that the Minister for Foreign Affairs thinks that. I think you have a problem when somebody who was not up to being shadow Treasurer thinks the incumbent is not up to being Treasurer—then the Treasurer should know he has a big problem.

We know also that the nation pays a price for this incompetence. The nation is paying a price right now. We heard all the empty promises about adrenaline rushes and surges in confidence and unemployment coming down, and this Treasurer has delivered the opposite. He is the man without a plan. He is the man who has delivered 0.2 per cent growth for the quarter, the lowest growth in a decade—
Mr Frydenberg interjecting—

Mr BOWEN: When you disregard the global financial crisis and Cyclone Yasi, we have the lowest growth in a decade on this Treasurer's watch.

Mr Frydenberg interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The Assistant Treasurer!

Mr BOWEN: Of course, the Treasurer had a cunning plan to deal with this. He went off to the G20—quite appropriately, he represented Australia at the G20—and he was asked about this. He was asked why Australia now has lower growth than the rest of the world after having boasted earlier that Australia had higher growth. He said, 'Well, world growth would be so much lower if it wasn't for me, because at the G20 in Brisbane I told all the other finance ministers they've got to go for growth and they've got to add growth to the global economy.' Of course, they had not thought of that themselves! This came as a great revelation to the finance ministers of the world! They needed the Treasurer of Australia to tell them to go for growth! As he was lecturing the rest of the world, he forgot about his own country. He was in Turkey, but he was behaving like a goose, as he does here in Australia. He lectures everybody else, but he gets it wrong himself. He knows less about the world economy than he does about the Australian economy, and that is a pretty big call, but he was happy to lecture everybody else.

We were always told it was going to be so different. Remember what the Prime Minister said? This is a direct quote—the Assistant Treasurer loves these direct quotes:

Now, I believe that the Coalition I lead understands all of this in the marrow of its bones and that's why I am confident that should there be a change of government later in the year, there will be an instantaneous adrenaline charge in our economy.

An opposition member: That sounds good.

Mr BOWEN: That does sound good, doesn't it? That sounds like a great result—an adrenaline charge. Well, what have we got? Unemployment has increased from 5.7 to 6.3 per cent, and is now at a 13-year high. For the first time in more than 20 years, 800,000 Australians are out of work. Consumer sentiment is 10 per cent below where it was at the time of the last election. We have had the budget deficit double in just the last 12 months. And, of course, growth is lower in Australia than in the United States, the United Kingdom, Europe and Greece. On this Treasurer's watch, economic growth is lower than in Greece. Just today, we saw that business confidence, measured by the National Australia Bank survey, fell again. It has fallen from plus eight to just plus one in recent months. The Treasurer's favourite preferred index, ANZ consumer confidence, has fallen 5.8 per cent, the largest fall in several years, all on this Treasurer's watch.

We know why confidence is so low in the Australian economy. It is because confidence is so low in the Australian Treasurer. There is a pretty clear correlation. When his cabinet does not have confidence in the Treasurer, why should the Australian people have confidence in the Australian Treasurer? We have the mixed messages about the Australian economy. We have gone from budget deficits, a debt and deficit disaster and budget emergencies to now, when the urgent moral prerogative of the age is to provide personal income tax cuts. We have had the insults to the Australian people, in the debate about housing affordability, about getting a better and better paying job. We have had the wrecking of the renewable energy
industry in Australia by this Treasurer, because he drives from Sydney to Canberra—as I do and as many honourable members do—past the wind turbines. They are so unattractive, apparently, to the Treasurer. He says he finds them offensive. Lake George would look so much better with a nuclear reactor in it, the Treasurer always says. That is why he has decided to wreck the renewable energy industry in Australia and wreck the jobs that go with it. We have gone from being the world’s largest and best investor in renewable energy to being way down the league table on this Treasurer and this Prime Minister’s watch. Why? Because of prejudice—prejudice against renewable energy; prejudice against science.

Of course, we have had the insults to Australia’s pensioners, who were told ‘they have never had it so good.’ ‘In net terms out of the budget, it is strongly arguable that pensioners are going to be better off,’ the Treasurer told the pensioners of Australia in August 2014. They will be better off by cutting the pension—he thinks the Australian people are stupid. He thinks the Australian people and Australia’s pensioners will believe that cutting the pension from 27 per cent of average weekly earnings to 16 per cent of average weekly earnings will make them better off. He was astounded to learn that the pensioners of Australia disagree, and so do the Australian people.

No wonder they have lost confidence in this Treasurer. No wonder the government has lost confidence in this Treasurer. No wonder the Treasurer’s tenure is speculated upon—because he is not up to the job. We see this speculation about the Treasurer’s role. We see this speculation about the Treasurer leaving the job, and I say the Treasurer should leave the job at the next election when replaced on the election of a Labor government—not by the Assistant Treasurer, not by the Minister for Social Services and not by the Minister for Communications but by a Labor Treasurer who will actually deliver a budget which implements election promises and which implements a program for which a mandate has been sought at an election. That is what the Australian people so desperately need and what the Australian economy so desperately needs. It needs a Treasurer who does not engage in the insults, in dividing Australians between lifters and leaners and in inaccurate statements about bulk-billing rates in his own electorate and about how Australia’s high-income households pay half their income in tax, as he told us a little while ago. He told the Australian people that high-income earners pay half their income in tax. There is this thing called marginal tax, which the Treasurer has some difficulty in understanding.

Is it any wonder that the Australian people, just like the Minister for Foreign Affairs, have long ago lost confidence in this Treasurer?

No wonder they long ago lost confidence in this Treasurer and this government. But we are paying a price for it as a nation. On this Treasurer’s watch we have seen unemployment up, investment down, growth down and confidence down. The only things that have gone up on this Treasurer’s watch are the deficit and unemployment. It is the complete opposite of what the Australian people were told. The Treasurer must take some personal responsibility for this. When the growth figures in Australia are not enough to see unemployment come down, we do not want to see him lecturing the world’s finance ministers about how they have got to go for growth. Ironically enough, if not for government spending in the last quarter we would have seen a negative quarter on this Treasurer’s watch.

This Treasurer was very strong on rhetoric before the last election. He was very strong at criticising others. He had all the answers at his disposal. It was all going to become so much
better when he became Treasurer—but it has all become so much worse. It is time for the Treasurer of Australia to go—but not by the hand of his Prime Minister withholding a rose from him at reshuffle time. It is time for the Treasurer to go when this government is cast into history as a failure which stood for nothing, delivered nothing and was elected in an election of deception.

Mr FRYDENBERG (Kooyong—Assistant Treasurer) (15:23): The gall of the shadow Treasurer to bring this matter of public importance given his record when he was in office! In fact, business confidence was at rock bottom in 2008 when the member for McMahon was the Assistant Treasurer. But it is now in positive territory. We will never let them forget those famous quotes from when they were in government. On ABC Radio National on 13 May 2010, the member for McMahon said, ’The government has returned the budget to surplus three years ahead of schedule and ahead of any other major advanced economy.’ That must have been a pretty quick surplus, because it came and went at the speed of light.

We do need good economic leadership in this country after the disaster of the Rudd-Gillard-Rudd years. They saw massive blowouts on their border protection policies—more than $11 billion—and the human tragedy of that policy. And the member for McMahon was the immigration minister for a considerable period of time. They saw more than 20,000 regulations being created which strangled both small and big business alike. They wasted more than $29 billion on an NBN which became a bloated bureaucracy. They wasted billions on school halls and they wasted $2.8 billion on Pink Batts, which tragically lead to a loss of life. Who can forget the $900 cheques, the cash stimulus that Labor pumped out to 27,000 people living overseas and to 21,000 people who were already deceased? And what about that press release the member for McMahon rushed out before the last election promising no superannuation changes for five years when we know he was part of a government that brought in 12 adverse changes to superannuation and an additional $9 billion worth of taxes? Of course, we know what they did to defence. They reduced defence spending to 1.56 per cent of GDP, the lowest level since 1938. And we also know that they rotated their ministers and their prime ministers in their six years of government. We had two prime ministers, three deputy prime ministers, five ministers for regional development, six ministers for small business and nine ministers for education. It sounds like a nursery rhyme. But it is not. It is actually the Labor Party's record in government.

That is why we need good economic leadership—and we have had that from the Treasurer and the Prime Minister. Listen to what the Treasurer has helped oversee. The number of job advertisements in this country is now 16.2 per cent higher than the level we inherited from Labor. Retail sales are 8.8 per cent higher than we inherited in September 2013. Exports are now 11.4 per cent higher than the level we inherited in September 2013. The number of residential dwellings under construction is 23 per cent higher than when we came to government. Personal bankruptcies are at a 20-year low. Investment in the services sector grew by 12 per cent in the last financial year. Dunn & Bradstreet noted last week that ‘we are seeing robust levels of optimism across all sectors in the Australian business community’. As the member for McMahon said, we had 0.2 per cent growth in the June quarter. This followed GDP growth of 0.9 per cent in the March quarter, which was much higher than expectations and considerably higher than other G7 countries. The resource-reliant nations of Canada and Brazil have had consecutive quarters of negative economic growth—they have
technically gone into recession—whereas Australia continues to its 25th year of economic growth. Our plan is much more than just plying back Labor’s debt. If you look at some of the numbers in the IGR, if we had not taken drastic steps in the last two budgets, Labor’s debt would have seen us at 122 per cent of GDP, or $5.6 trillion, by 2055. I can tell the House that because of our legislated measures—not our announced measures but our legislated measures—we have halved that debt trajectory to just $2.6 trillion, or 57.2 per cent of GDP, by 2055. We accept that that is too high. And if we are able to get our other measures through the Senate then I am sure that we will significantly reduce Labor’s debt.

There are other positive signs across the economy. More than 330,000 jobs have been created since we came to office. That is four times faster than under Labor. We have seen record female workforce participation. In fact, 171,000 women are in jobs who were not in jobs at the time of the 2013 election. Retail trade is also stronger and service exports are stronger. As well, we saw a large jump—223,000—in the number of new companies registered in Australia in 2014. That was a 10.2 per cent increase on the level we saw in the year before that. And Greg Hunt, as environment minister, has done a brilliant job in cutting red tape and green tape, which has seen nearly $1 trillion worth of projects receive their environmental approval—and since we came to government we have halved the approval time.

You have heard this chamber debate long and hard the importance of infrastructure and the Prime Minister declare that he wants to be Australia’s infrastructure Prime Minister, and he is delivering. The WestConnex project, with a $1.5 billion contribution from the federal government, will create 10,000 direct and indirect jobs. The Bruce Highway, with a $3.6 billion federal contribution, will create another 10,000 jobs. The Pacific Highway duplication, which will receive a $5.6 billion contribution, will create 4,000 jobs in construction. NorthConnex, with a $398 million contribution, is expected to create more than 8,000 jobs. And, of course, regarding a second airport for Sydney, where there was nearly half a century of delay and deliberation, a decision has now been taken by this government. The second airport for Sydney is forecast to create 4,000 construction jobs and 35,000 jobs by 2035.

We all know about the infamous East West Link, which was shovel-ready and was going to create thousands of jobs. The member for Deakin, the member for Corangamite, the member for La Trobe and the member for Casey were all firmly aware of the benefits that would have flowed from that project when those opposite and their brothers in the union movement and in the Labor Party in Victoria ripped up a written, signed, agreed contract and introduced the dark spectre of sovereign risk into my state of Victoria and into our country, Australia.

Then, of course, today’s question time and today’s motion were all about the coalition’s commitment to succeeding in free trade where those opposite have failed. We know that in their six years in government they failed to deliver a free trade agreement with Korea, a free trade agreement with Japan and a free trade agreement with China. We know that tens of thousands of new jobs will be created in agriculture. In places like Broome you will see mining, agriculture and gas production. In areas across the country you will also see our wine growers benefit. In my state you will see financial services and other professional services benefit. Today, services are 70 per cent of our economy but just 17 per cent of our exports. That is the big winner out of the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement. With all of our exports being 95 per cent tariff free over the life of this agreement, it can only be a good thing
for Australia. That is why Labor luminaries like Bob Hawke and Martin Ferguson and the state premiers Daniel Andrews, Jay Weatherill and Anna Palaszczuk in Queensland are all behind this agreement. Even Bob Carr has jumped on the bandwagon and agreed to this agreement. He has supported it while the Labor Party is again singing the tune of the union movement.

As we heard today in question time, the Leader of the Opposition was opposed to the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement before negotiations even began. He called it a rushed agreement four weeks after negotiations began and continues to be an obstacle because he supports the union cause and not what is in the national interest.

We have a very proud record. The Treasurer has led from the front. He has delivered a budget that has been well received by big business and small business and that has created tens of thousands of new jobs across the economy. In Andrew Robb we have a trade minister who is delivering new agreements for us with important economies. We have a Prime Minister whose leadership and commitment to jobs, growth and productivity is actually seeing the light of day. This is a welcome relief after the disaster of Labor.

Dr LEIGH (Fraser) (15:33): I am glad to hear the Assistant Treasurer referring to the MPI as a welcome relief. I certainly regard it the same way. Let's play a game of 'who said it'.

It is the height of hubris to dismiss out of hand dire warnings of a possible downturn from respected observers. It is wise to listen and prepare.

Protracted downturns in economic activity are very damaging in terms of lost output and lost jobs and it can take a very long time for the damage to be made good.

The resources boom has made a wonderful contribution to Australia's prosperity and the mining industry will continue to be an important industry sector but we must prepare for the day when the boom times are gone.

We must Budget for reality rather than hope.

Funnily enough, it was not the venerable Paul Keating who issued those wise words, or even his successor, the workaday Peter Costello. It was none other than the current Treasurer—back in the days before he actually got his hands on the country's economic levers.

It seems incredible to think it now, but back when he was in opposition the member for North Sydney seemed to understand a thing or two about the Australian economy. I do not want to overdo this, but he seemed to comprehend the importance of protecting jobs while supporting growth. He said all the right things about needing to have a plan to grow Australian investment and business beyond the mining boom. He even acknowledged that pie-in-the-sky, Pollyanna-ish positivity does not cut it when you are staring down serious risks in the global economy. What a complete and utter disappointment Treasurer Hockey must be to that shadow Treasurer of two years ago, because protracted downturns are very damaging, and that is exactly what the Treasurer has presided over for the past two years.

GDP growth has been trending downwards ever since his disastrous first budget of 2014. After five quarters of falling growth, the latest figures show the Australian economy is barely expanding at all. While fiscal policy has detracted from growth over the past year, the
economy might well have gone backwards but for a blip in quarterly government spending in the most recent numbers. Unemployment is at its highest level in 13 years. Annual wage growth is at 2.3 per cent—the lowest level since the Australian Bureau of Statistics started collecting those figures in 1998. The Treasurer's solution to housing affordability is to 'get a good job that pays good money'. But under him there are fewer good jobs, and those jobs that are around do not pay as good money as they would if we had stronger wages growth.

Against his own advice in opposition, the Treasurer's budget is built on hope. The Reserve Bank of Australia says the growth figures on which Treasurer Hockey's budget is built are wildly optimistic in the current climate. Growth will need to climb by a full 1.5 per cent over the next few years to meet their projections. We need growth of over three per cent to bring unemployment down. But at the moment we have anaemic growth of two per cent and falling. So far on their watch, growth has been slowing every quarter since their first train wreck of a budget. What is most worrying about all this is that the Treasurer and the government have absolutely no plans to fix any of their problems. They are drifting along hoping that something miraculously crops up instead of knuckling down, putting all their culture war nonsense to one side, stopping fighting the ABC and wind farms and coming up with an economic plan. Jobs and growth are not like Bloody Mary in the horror story; you cannot make them appear just by chanting the words enough times.

Since it seems that the last time Treasurer Hockey actually had anything valuable to contribute on the economy was when he was in opposition, I would submit to the House that Australia would be much better off if he went back there as quickly as possible. Under the Pre-election Fiscal and Economic Outlook we had debt peaking at 13 per cent. Now we have debt peaking at 18 per cent, and the deficit doubled just in the past 12 months. From opposition, the Real Solutions campaign brochure said 'Taxes will always be lower under a coalition government.' Well, in the 2012-13 tax year the tax-to-GDP ratio was 21.5 per cent, and at the end of the forward estimates, under this government, it is projected to go to 23.4 per cent. We have Roy Morgan business confidence at a four-year low and consumer sentiment 11 per cent below where it was in the last election. You will hear from the coming speakers—the members for Rankin, Parramatta and Wills—that there is a pressing need for economic leadership at the moment. If those opposite approved one thing beyond a doubt in the past two years it is that they were utterly incapable of providing economic leadership.

Mr NIKOLIC (Bass—Government Whip) (15:38): There are a lot of talking heads on the other side, all of whom forget that their plan from 2008 to 2014 put us on the road to nowhere.

Dr Chalmers: All we did was save Australia from the recession.

Mr NIKOLIC: It is actually fortuitous that the member for Lilley and his chief abacus counter over there, the member for Rankin, sounding off in the front row, are in the chamber, because I would ask them: how is it economically competent and responsible—the subject of their MPI—to spend every dollar of the economic bequest left by the Howard government? How is it economically responsible to repeatedly promise but never deliver a surplus? They talked about a surplus; they simply forgot that it was the Howard-Costello governments that delivered a surplus in 2008. None of them on that side of the chamber did. How is it economically responsible to put our debt on a trajectory to $667 billion—two-thirds of $1 trillion? How is it economically competent and responsible to entrench legislated spending
beyond our capacity to pay, to the point where we have to borrow $100 million every day just to pay for things our revenue does not cover? How is it competent and economically responsible to trot out poorly considered policy, at great cost to the taxpayer, that did not work?

We can all remember Fuelwatch, GroceryWatch, the set-top box scheme, cash for clunkers, the green car scheme, the solar panels program, the Indigenous housing scheme, a computer for every child. What happened to all the trade training centres and the GP superclinics? They were a huge cost, and, as Australians quickly learned, they never survived the Labor Party doorstop. Then we had the disastrous, overpriced and sort school hall program that wasted $1 billion of taxpayers' money. What happened to the childcare centres and ending the double drop-off that never happened? Remember them unpicking our border protection policies that worked, creating $12 billion of unanticipated expense for the taxpayers? What about the pink batts scheme, and the four deaths, which is the subject of a royal commission? What about the famous back-of-the envelope calculation with Senator Conroy and Mr Rudd—$70 billion on the back of the envelope, with no business plan for the NBN? What about the $900 cheque giveaways to dead people and overseas backpackers, and the mining tax that raised no money but that they promised would raise a huge amount of money? What about the live cattle ban that destroyed our supply chains without notice and damaged our relationship with Indonesia, and the perennial favourite, the carbon tax we were never going to have under a government Julia Gillard led? How is it responsible to cut Defence spending to its lowest level since 1938, ripping $15 billion out of the Defence budget, down to 1.56 per cent of GDP, never making a decision on any ships or submarines—the capability gaps that result? What about Labor pillaging even its own aid budget of $5.7 billion? They diverted $750 million in aid spending to address the out-of-control situation on the border, making the Gillard government the third-largest recipient of Australia's aid budget. Where is the economic and moral value of Labor's 2012 legislation to commandeer people's bank accounts, their hard-earned savings—$550 million stolen from 156,000 bank accounts?

But it gets worse. Having presided over such gross incompetence, they now stand in the way of things that will actually make our economic future better. Perhaps of greatest concern is the Labor Party's appalling attempt to kill off the China free trade deal—the false, xenophobic, irresponsible campaign run by the CFMEU. It should not surprise us, because opposition leader Bill Shorten has form. They have their heads down, but they can remember him clambering onto the back of that flat-bed in Adelaide and giving a speech that the Australian said stank with racist and xenophobic overtones. That is what you do to the greatest trade opportunity confronting our country. It confirms how beholden the Labor Party is to militant unions, yet these free trade deals will provide enormous opportunities for Australia. So, what I say to those opposite, before they bring on another MPI like this, is: stop trying to rewrite history, have a look at your record and do what is right for the economic prosperity of this country.

Dr CHALMERS (Rankin) (15:43): Well, there is five minutes of our lives that we are never getting back, unfortunately. On this side of the House we have our differences with the foreign minister of Australia. We have our differences with her over policy. We have our differences with her in question time from time to time. But if there is one thing we agree with the foreign minister about it is that the Treasurer is not up to the job. And we know she
thinks this, because she went to see the Prime Minister late last year, in December, in a Sydney summer, and said, 'Look, I don't think the Treasurer is up to the job; a lot of our colleagues don't think the Treasurer is up to the job.' So we should start by accentuating in this place where we agree. We agree with the foreign minister that the Treasurer of Australia is hopeless. Since that meeting in December of last year, the Treasurer has staggered around and stumbled around for another nine months. But I think we probably agree that it will not be long now before that side of the House put the Treasurer out of his political misery. When the Treasurer speaks in question time, there is this respectful silence that descends over that side of the House. I was thinking during question time today, when the respectful silence descended, that it was a bit like the respectful silence you get when you make a valedictory speech in this place, and then then I thought that is no coincidence, because it will not be long now before the Treasurer gives that valedictory speech.

On the one hand, it is a bit rough to single him out. It is a competitive field when we talk about economic incompetence over on that side of the House. When I woke up during the trade minister's speech on the FTA today, I thought I had accidently flipped over onto The Muppets or something like that. You have the Deputy Prime Minister of Australia in question time saying that a question about Australian jobs in our shipping industry was a trivial matter. That is a disgrace.

So on one hand it is a bit rough to single the Treasurer out, but on the other hand it is really hard to go past the guy who says that in his electorate of North Sydney they have some of the highest rates of bulk-billing when in reality they have some of the very lowest; a bloke who smokes a cigar and dances to Best Day of My Life on the day that he brings down a horror budget; a guy that says there would be more bulk-billing in this community if people drank a bit less beer; a bloke who, as the Treasurer of Australia, does not understand what marginal tax rates are in this country. You do not need a PhD in economics from the ANU like my colleague here to understand marginal tax rates in this country. Our Treasurer does not have a clue. This is a guy who said that, if we change the indexation for pensioners and extend out the eligibility, the pensioners will be somehow magically better off; a bloke that said that poor people do not drive cars; a guy that said that, if you do not like the house you are in or you cannot crack the housing market, what you need to do is go down the street and put your hand up for a higher paying job, as if there are lots of those littered around; and a guy that lectures the G20 about growth and says, 'Look, if only you all had a GP tax, all of these problems would just be a distant memory in the global economy if you did what I'm doing, which is slug people to go and see a doctor in the best health system on the planet.' You cannot make this stuff up. It is extraordinary.

The Treasurer of this country is the Britney Spears of Australian politics: oops, he did it again and again and again, raining his gaffes and his misjudgements like confetti on the economic debate and this country. This would be a comical thing if there were not consequences. If we could just dismiss him as sort of a lovable buffoon, some sort of endearing clown, we could dismiss this. But the problem is that, as the shadow Treasurer said and as others have said, there are consequences from the Treasurer's incompetence. Every day of the two years and one day since they were elected, he has gone out of his way to smash confidence in our economy. As others have said before me, consumer sentiment is 11 per cent below where it was at the election, after they promised an adrenaline surge on their election.
The NAB Business Survey, which only came out today, is down 11 points—that is us compared to them. When it comes to consumer sentiment, there was a 5.8 per cent hit just in the last week since we had those very weak growth figures come out from the ABS. The Australian economy is stuck at below-trend growth of two per cent. Annual growth has trended down since the Treasurer's damaging first budget last year. We have soft growth in this country because confidence has been smashed by this Treasurer. The consequences of smashed confidence and slowing growth are that unemployment has increased from 5.7 percent to 6.3 per cent, to be at 13-year highs. Eight hundred thousand Australians are out of work. That is why the Treasurer is not up to it.

Ms SCOTT (Lindsay) (15:48): One of the things I find most interesting from the member for Rankin was his admission that he sleeps through parliament. It is an interesting insight, because I think that explains that the former abacus counter to the member for Lilley obviously was sleeping through the last government, and hence they have a record to show that they were definitely asleep at the wheel. There were record deficits. Labor produced the six largest budget deficits in our country's history. They left a massive debt. Labor's government debt blew out $320 billion and was projected to reach $667 billion in 10 years. We had the world's biggest carbon tax. More people were unemployed under those opposite. Definitely, they were asleep at the wheel.

Even now, if you look at those opposite, they are still asleep at the wheel. Bill Shorten, the Leader of the Opposition, does not even acknowledge the support of so many other Labor stalwarts right around the country when it comes around the free trade agreement: Queensland Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk, Daniel Andrews, Jay Weatherill, Andrew Barr and Luke Foley, not to mention Bob Hawke, Simon Crean, Martin Ferguson, John Brumby, Peter Beattie and Bob Carr. But no; Bill Shorten, the Leader of the Opposition, is completely against growth. He does not want to see growth. He has absolutely no economic leadership. Talk about competent leadership—he has no economic leadership. He completely negates what the Financial Services Council says will benefit Australia by $4.2 billion and add an extra 10,000 jobs to Australia. What about the National Farmers' Federation, who state there would be $300 million in benefits to agriculture in 2016 alone? In my electorate, the free trade agreement will bring so many more jobs and so much more opportunity to the people of Western Sydney.

We are part of a government that is delivering for the people of Western Sydney and delivering for Australia with an infrastructure plan that is getting our region moving: $3.6 billion in infrastructure that will start seeing jobs flow to Western Sydney. This is absolutely crucial for our nation's future. We are also committed to getting the debt down. We have already created 335,000 jobs since the last election. We have the highest female participation rate, at record levels, with over 171,000 more women in jobs than at the time of the 2013 election. Bankruptcies are at the lowest levels in 20 years. Environmental approvals have been given to 176 projects, valued at more than $1 trillion. A record 223,013 new companies were registered in 2014. There is a $50 billion infrastructure program to improve road and rail links to reduce travel times and support economic growth. This is a plan. This is competent leadership. But those opposite are not interested. They are too busy falling asleep in parliament. Then there are the tax cuts for small businesses. That 1.5 per cent is going to help
get small businesses back on their feet and creating more jobs for so many Australians. We will see funding for schools increase by 28 per cent over the next four years.

What is Labor's solution? Labor's solution is just more taxes: carbon taxes, mining taxes, bank taxes—you name it. It is all about taxes. We are all about the future of our country. The future of Western Sydney is bright. The Medical Research Future Fund dovetails very well into the emerging Penrith region. We have long been planning to be a centre of health and education. The Medical Research Future Fund fits well into this. The free trade agreement with China also dovetails well with the memorandum of understanding between the Beijing University of Chinese Medicine and the University of Western Sydney. On the day of the Chinese free trade agreement this MOU was signed with the President, the Prime Minister and the vice chancellors of the two universities. This will create the future of our country. This will create so many smart jobs for the people of Western Sydney.

This is competent leadership. This is vision and hope. This is what is going to make Western Sydney the powerhouse it deserves to be. I commend the government for taking a stand, cleaning up Labor's mess and showing the people of Australia what competent leadership actually is.

Ms OWENS (Parramatta) (15:53): I said in the first few weeks after the election of the Abbott government, when their lovely glossy plan started to unravel, that it was easy to make a joke about it. It was easy to laugh because it was actually very funny. Unfortunately, it is too serious to joke about. We have made a lot of jokes today. It is easy when you have a joke of a Treasurer and a joke of a Prime Minister to do just that, but now is not the time. It is not funny anymore.

You cannot afford to push the pause button for two years, or possibly three years, at this time in world history. Maybe 20 years ago—when you seem to think you are governing—you could do that. Maybe you could push the pause button for three years 20 or 25 years ago. The pace of change now and the opportunities in the world we need to exploit are too important and too urgent to push the pause button for three years. There is an urgent and pressing need for economic leadership, and we are not getting it from this government. We have not heard anything from the people opposite in this matter of public importance debate that suggests they even begin to understand the urgency and the need.

The world is changing faster than you can imagine. This is an age change. It has been coming for 20 years. It is the beginning of an age change that is going to profoundly change the way people work, who works, what they need to know and how business operates. We can see it—and we call it disruption—but it is much bigger than that. A wave of change is coming and Australia is going to ride it or drown in it. If this government continues to ignore it, continues to push us backwards and continues to kill off our capacity every day to take those challenges on, we will drown in it and this government will wear it.

I will give an example of a crisis that is approaching very fast. It started with this government two years ago when they dared the car industry to leave. We are already seeing now engineers being laid off in those car companies. I am not going to talk about the car companies; I am going to talk about the global fragmented supply chain that we should be getting into. Capacity is not just teaching STEM in schools; it is actually keeping that capacity in our businesses. Investment went into those businesses and built that capacity and skill. We are about to see thousands of those businesses go to the wall at the very time when global
supply chains are fragmenting and borders within corporations are falling down. We need those companies to survive.

Mr Pasin interjecting—

Ms OWENS: I hear the interjection and I am going to take it. This is a government with so little experience in governing that it thinks that just being open for business is enough. It thinks that opening a door without having companies to go through it is enough. You need companies that have the capacity to go through that door. In the last two years it has killed thousands of them. There has been an 80 per cent reduction in renewable energy investment in this country. I had 13 solar installers and now I have got one. It is a growth industry all around the world. This government killed it off at the very time we should be growing it. It is killing off our capacity to manufacture. We will lose one-fifth of our manufacturing sector when those car industries close. Do the maths, if you are capable. We will lose one-fifth of our advanced manufacturing capacity because the government dared the car industry to leave this country.

This is the government that we have. At the very time when Australian businesses should be developing that capacity and moving into global supply chains, at the time when advanced manufacturing makes labour costs less of an issue when you are competing with our neighbours to the north and when our dollar is back at a reasonable level, we have a government killing off the future. It is killing it off.

Mr Pasin: All the more reason to export to China.

Ms OWENS: Again I hear the interjection. I was talking to the Business Chamber of New South Wales the other day about this government and they were asking, 'Why don't they get it?' I said that it is really simple: their Prime Minister, their Treasurer and their Assistant Treasurer—all the economic people—went into the public sector in their early 20s and they think you become prosperous with efficiency of the spend. They have no understanding of the relationship between spend and growth—none. They think that if you want to prosper you cut your marketing budget. I have seen businesses with far more experience than this lot do it. These people are unbelievable. Business is talking about the lack of experience in this government. Business is talking about the fact that this government does not understand how you grow an economy or a business. We have seen actions by this government in the last two years that will have a devastating effect on our capacity to grow. You are going to wear it. It is going to be sheeted back to you. You can talk about us as much as you like, but for God's sake talk about the country. That is your job.

Mr SUKKAR (Deakin) (15:58): Bruce Billson is very safe if you are the shadow parliamentary secretary for small business. This MPI today on competent economic leadership clearly says to me that no-one would ever look to the absolute abject failure of the member for McMahon for economic leadership, nor would they look to the venerable member for Lilley, the mentor to the member for Rankin. I saw the member for Rankin look really excited when he gave him a bit of a pat on his head after his contribution. We know you were behind his 500 promises of a budget surplus. Where were those surpluses? Where was that wonderful economic leadership?

Here, on the MPI today, we are looking for 'competent economic leadership'. Where was that wonderful economic leadership from the member for Rankin, who was the adviser? He
was the main man advising the venerable member for Lilley, the worst Treasurer this country has ever had—I would say, the worst Treasurer that any advanced economy has ever said. Many members opposite put out newsletters saying that they delivered a budget surplus. In fact, the member for McMahon, the man who put forward this MPI today, said that he had delivered a budget surplus in 2008. Where was that wonderful economic leadership that the Labor Party are now calling for? Well, unfortunately, the Labor Party have not learned their lessons. Quite frankly, until they do learn those lessons, the Australian people will mark them down. They have not shown any contrition for their abject failure over their six years in government.

One undisputed statistic that nobody in this House can argue against is the fact that we have gone from 3,600 jobs on average a month under Labor to last year, where we created 16,700 jobs a month this year, where we created 23,200 jobs a month. You cannot fudge those numbers in any way. We have gone from 3,600 a month being created under Labor to 23,200 a month under this government. On this side of the House, because some of us actually have private sector experience—we are not all union hacks like those opposite—we do not take credit for all of that. We are not so arrogant as to take all of the credit for taking job creation from 3,600 a month under Labor to 23,200 a month. We accept that that is the great work of individuals, small businesses and entrepreneurs in the private sector who have created those jobs. But we created the environment that has enabled them to flourish and we will continue to do so, and there is a much more work to be done.

When the Australia people are looking for competent economic leadership, I can assure them they will not be looking at the member for McMahon, the man who will be remembered for Bowen's black hole, the $13 billion black hole that he left, or the man that he replaced, the member for Lilley, who, quite frankly, is just like a Christmas present every day. When I see the member for Lilley walk into this chamber every day, I just think wonderful: we will remind the Australian people day after day of the abject failure of the Labor Party over their six years in government and the reality that the Labor Party have not learnt one single lesson.

Come election day, the Australia people will be thinking about the security of their job, whether they can pay their mortgage and about their children's future. They will see the party opposite who argues against trade liberalisation. The left of the Labor Party now are large and in charge. Sure, they might have been humiliated at their federal council a little while ago—sorry, member for Scullin, I know that was difficult for you—but they are large and in charge.

The Australian people will not entrust their country to a party who does not accept trade liberalisation. I hate to say it, but those opposite will be taken to ChaFTA kicking and screaming. Otherwise, they will get absolutely marked down. So when the Australian people are looking for economic leadership, I can assure them they will not look at the abject failures opposite—the people who slunk through the university system into a union and now they have their seat on the green leather. Actually, the Australian people will look for people who have real life experience: the ability to understand what they need to do to create the jobs, the wealth and the productivity that will grow the economy in this country. They will not go back to the member for McMahon and the failed member for Lilley.

Mr KELVIN THOMSON (Wills) (16:03): The pressing need for competent economic leadership is a fitting subject for today's matter of public importance. We have much higher levels of unemployment than we did 30 years ago. We have much higher levels of youth
unemployment, much worse long-term unemployment and serious problems of underemployment. We have much larger foreign debt and much larger budget deficits. The distribution of wealth between rich and poor is becoming less equal. The social problems generated by frustrated ambition, drugs, crime, mental health problems and homelessness are on the rise too.

Australia's GDP per capita went backwards in the June quarter, sliding by 0.2 per cent. Reports that GDP increased depend on the use of population creep. GDP increased by 0.2 per cent, but that was only due to population growth. GDP per capita, which is a far more accurate guide to living standards than GDP, declined. Not surprisingly then, real net national disposable income per head, which is the best measure of living standards, slid by 1.2 per cent in the three months to June. This is the fifth consecutive slide in real net disposable income per head, which is now five per cent below its peak in 2011. In fact, our economic growth rate is lower than the US, the European Union, Britain and Greece. But the geniuses who have dug us into this hole want us to keep digging and they say that flat growth means that we should ratify their China free trade agreement.

The government have been doing its best to muddy the workers concerning the changes to the temporary migrant worker arrangements we have with China which are contained in their agreement. They kept these provisions secret during the negotiations. They say it is too late to change them now. But the Department of Immigration and Border Protection just yesterday confirmed that if this China FTA comes into effect, there will no longer be labour market testing for Chinese nurses, engineers and other skills category 3 occupations. In a hearing before the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties, the department acknowledged that, at present, nurses and engineers are required to undergo labour market testing, but that if this China FTA is ratified this labour market testing will no longer be required. This shows that the Prime Minister and the trade minister and others have been guilty of seriously misleading the Australian people about the impact of the agreement.

The Prime Minister says that nothing changes to our labour market laws under this agreement, when the government has expressly said it will bring forward a migration act determination, which will allow the minister for immigration to grant 457 visas without labour market testing in relation to contractual service suppliers. This is defined to mean a natural person of China who has trade, technical or professional skills. The labour market provisions of this deal go far beyond business executives and martial arts practitioners, the way the government has tried to present this. In fact, if this parliament agrees to the deal which is now before us, we are permanently giving away our capacity to require labour market testing in a whole range of trades and occupations.

There is a list of occupations which I have here, which is in total over 200 long, where labour market testing is presently required but will not be if this China FTA is ratified. It includes: engineer, nurse, automotive electrician, motor mechanic, diesel motor mechanic, motorcycle mechanic, electroplater, metal polisher, sheet metal trades worker, welder, aircraft maintenance engineer, fitter, fitter and turner, locksmith, watch and clock maker and repairer, tool maker, panel beater, vehicle body builder, bricklayer, carpenter and joiner, carpenter, floor finisher, plasterer, roof tiler, plumber, gas fitter, electrician general, electrician special class, air conditioning and mechanical services plumber, electrical lines worker, baker, pastry
cook, butcher, cook, dog handler, horse trainer, zoo keeper, animal attendant, shearer, veterinary nurse, florist, gardener and many more.

Make no mistake, if this China deal is ratified as is, everyone who is unemployed will face the prospect of jobs in these occupations and many more going to a Chinese worker without first being advertised in Australia. The government's claim that the requirement to pay market salary rates is an adequate safeguard is absolutely rubbish. We read stories of exploitation of temporary migrant workers every day. This China FTA will put Australian jobs and Australian workers at risk. Yesterday's evidence shows the government's denials of this to be absolutely without foundation.

Mr Pitt (Hinkler) (16:09): It is terribly unfortunate that I have had to sit through the contributions from the other side this afternoon. I note that member for Rankin's complaints about the five-minutes of his life he would like back. I will see his five minutes and raise him to 10. I had to sit through the contribution of the member for McMahon, who is apparently the shadow Treasurer. In the 10 minutes that the member had, he spoke half about TV shows and the other half about the Treasurer.

I have not heard anything about a plan from Labor or what they intend to do or what they will do for the economy or what they will do for the nation but they certainly talked a lot about Blankety Blanks and everything else. If we were to talk about TV shows, the closest we would get to those opposite would be the Muppet Show because we know who is pulling their strings. Every time the Leader of the Opposition speaks, we know who moves his lips and it is certainly the CFMEU, and that is not in the interests of this nation by any way at all.

The member for McMahon also spoke about the nation paying the price. Well, the nation is paying the price of six years of instability of the Rudd-Gillard-Rudd government. That is the reality. Those opposite had literally rivers of gold to play with. The country was in an incredibly good economic position and they blew what was left from the Howard government. Where is the plan of those opposite? We have heard absolutely nothing about what they will do for the economy. The shadow Treasurer does not even know what the tax-free threshold is. Many of the people on this side of the chamber have been in business. We know the tax-free threshold and we know what the correct pay rates are. We know how to make the money that we need to pay those bills at the end of the month because there is nothing more difficult than meeting wages. So I congratulate the people who are out there in the economy doing their best for this country and employing Australians to participate in the economic stability of the nation.

The member for McMahon does have an advantage though. There is one Labor leader in the country who is actually worse, who does not know anything about the economy or how it works, and that would be Premier Palaszczuk, who, when asked what the GST rate actually was, did not know. I guarantee that everyone here knows that it is 10 per cent. It was a very poor reflection on the current Queensland Labor government. Hopefully they will do much better.

What are we doing? We are getting on with it. One of the first things we have sorted out this week is we have got rid of Labor's bank deposit tax. You have not seen too much in the press but that is a 1½ billion-dollar tax put forward by Labor, placed on people's bank
deposits—that is, every business, every pensioner, every single person that holds money in the bank—and we have gotten rid of it. We have got rid of the trouser tax. If you did not use your account for three years, Labor took your money. It was absolute criminality. It was theft. We have sorted that out and put it back to where it should be.

We have approved 176 projects for the environment worth more than $1 trillion. That is where the jobs are. It is not us that produces jobs; it is up to business. They are the ones that employ and we must build the framework for them. It is incredibly important.

The Chinese free trade agreement will affect 95 per cent of exports and be duty-free. It includes seafood at 15 per cent. It will eliminate coal tariffs. In my electorate of Hinkler, it will certainly help the horticulture producers. Do not listen to me about it; listen to someone that actually produces stuff. Trevor Steinhardt, from Macadamias Australia, has provided me a quote. He said:

There are great benefits in the free trade agreements. Japan, China and South Korea will definitely help and they have come at an ideal time. Free trade agreements will give us a better return. The macadamia market is rapidly expanding due to tariffs on the ramp down. This is a great reflection on what we are doing because the more we can put on someone's bottom line, the better the opportunities for them to employ Australians and that is what we are about.

Those on the other side talk about economic management. But this is what they do: they throw all the money in the air and look where it lands and whatever department it falls in basically spends it. The rivers of gold, they certainly roll around in—they turn it into gold body paint and wash it down the river. They do not know how to manage money. Quite simply, they just spend. They gave $900-cheques to people who basically did not need it—some who did not exist, some who were deceased and certainly some who were not even Australian citizens.

On this side of the House, we are about a stronger economy. We are about lowering taxes. We are about ensuring the security of this nation and that there are jobs for our people in the future, including our children. What those on the other side will promote when it comes time for the election will be free televisions. Their economic plan will be to give everybody a free TV, which is what they did previously over and over again.

COMMITTEES

Treaties Committee
Report

Debate resumed.

WYATT ROY (Longman) (16:14): As I was saying before, Report 151 deals with the agreement between the government of Australia and the government of India on cooperation in peaceful uses of nuclear energy. The agreement offers the potential for Australia to become one of the world leaders in supplying fuel for low-carbon emission electrical power for expanding economies.

While there are considerable benefits for Australia and India, the agreement is not without risk. The committee has taken its time to consider those risks carefully and has made a number of recommendations.
But first I will discuss the benefits. The agreement has the potential to double the size of the Australian uranium mining industry, adding $1.75 billion to the Australian economy and doubling employment in uranium mining and export.

These benefits will occur mostly in rural and regional communities.

For India, the agreement will help with the goal of growing electrical generation from a base of just 408 kilowatt hours per capita per year in 2001 to 5,300 kilowatt hours per capita per year in 2052.

It will also provide a reliable supply of fuel, which is important to India's energy security.

India is one of a small number of nuclear-armed countries that have not signed the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. This is a barrier to nuclear cooperation, as the NPT has effectively limited nuclear proliferation.

However, given India's strategic situation, it is not realistic to expect India to dismantle its nuclear arsenal.

The agreement represents a new approach to non-proliferation, effectively treating India as if it were a party to the NPT.

That is, India can obtain uranium if it meets the nuclear safety and security standards expected of other nuclear-armed states.

The committee heard in evidence that some NPT countries object to this new approach.

If the new approach is going to work, India needs to make concrete non-proliferation advances to calm the fears of some NPT countries.

To that end, the committee recommends that Australia commit significant diplomatic resources to encouraging India to become a party to the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and to negotiate a fissile material cut-off treaty.

The committee also recommends that the Australian government consider facilitating the negotiation of a nuclear arms limitation treaty for the Indian subcontinent region.

The committee notes some concerns about flaws in India's nuclear regulatory arrangements identified by the Indian Auditor-General and the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Recognising this, the committee recommends that no Australian nuclear fuel be sold to India until they are addressed.

The committee also examined a number of points of contention with the agreement itself. Many inquiry participants are concerned that Australian nuclear material in India may not be properly accounted for.

The accounting mechanisms for exported Australian nuclear materials are part of confidential administrative arrangements.

To ensure proper accounting of Australian nuclear material in India, the committee held a private briefing with the Director-General of the Australian Safeguards and Non-Proliferation Office to discuss the matter.

The Director-General was able to say that the administrative arrangement negotiated with India would allow him to report the disposition of Australian nuclear material in India, as required by the Nuclear Non-Proliferation (Safeguards) Act 1987.
Based on this evidence, the committee trusts that Australian nuclear material can be tracked and accounted for.

Finally, experienced legal practitioners who participated in the inquiry appear to have differing interpretations of a couple of aspects of the agreement, leaving the committee unable to determine which interpretation was correct.

The committee has recommended in each case that the Australian government outline the legal advice that it has received.

Having regard to these recommendations, the committee considers that binding treaty action can be taken.

I would like to thank the Australian government for its patience while the committee undertook the inquiry, and I would also like to thank the engaged and experienced participants in this inquiry. Finally I would like to thank the other members of the committee, particularly on the Labor side, for their patience in going through this on a detailed basis. It is my belief that the committee left no area uninvestigated, and I think that this is a very significant report. It represents a very positive move for the relationship between India and Australia. On behalf of the committee, I commend the report to the House.

Mr KELVIN THOMSON (Wills) (16:19): by leave—The treaties committee has today handed down one of its most significant reports, and one which shows why the treaties committee is the parliament's most heavy-duty committee. We have recommended that uranium sales to India only commence when: (1) India has achieved the full separation of civil and military nuclear facilities as verified by the International Atomic Energy Agency; (2) India has established an independent nuclear regulatory authority under law; (3) the Indian nuclear regulator's existing policies and arrangements have been reviewed to ensure its independence; (4) the frequency, quality and comprehensiveness of on-site inspections at nuclear facilities have been verified by the International Atomic Energy Agency as being of best practice standard; and (5) the lack of sufficient planning for the decommissioning of nuclear facilities has been rectified.

In recommending to the government that there be no uranium sales to India until these crucial conditions are met, the treaties committee has listened to, and taken into account, the expert advice which was given to us by, for example, John Carlson, the former head of the Australian Safeguards and Non-Proliferation Office. The treaties committee heard evidence that it is essential that any nuclear agreement with India should be at least as rigorous as all the agreements Australia has concluded with other countries, and that there is no justification for Australia to require less of India than of all other agreement partners. So we have urged the government to push India to become a party to the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and to negotiate a fissile material cut-off treaty. In doing so we acknowledge the views of civil society witnesses who felt Australia could have done more in the negotiation process to pursue global disarmament.

We have also listened to the nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency, which undertook a mission to India in March this year to investigate India's regulatory framework. This mission found that the Indian nuclear regulatory agency was still not independent under law; the existing policies and arrangements at the nuclear regulator needed to be reviewed to ensure its independence; the frequency and quality of inspections at nuclear

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CHAMBER
facilities was still not up to best practice standards; and there was still insufficient planning for the decommissioning of nuclear facilities. So the committee has made recommendations to deal with exactly these findings. We respect the work of the IAEA and believe that all countries, India included, need to observe its requirements to the letter.

The committee has also picked up on two areas where there is dispute about the legal position. The Australian Safeguards and Non-Proliferation Office is adamant that Australian consent is required to engage in uranium enrichment of 20 per cent and above. But nuclear treaty experts Ronald Walker and Ernst Willheim have a different view. Given the troubling difference of opinion, the committee has recommended that the Australian government outline the legal advice it has received regarding the consent to reprocessing provisions.

A similar conundrum arises in relation to whether this treaty breaches our obligations under the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty, also known as the Treaty of Rarotonga. The committee was given opposing interpretations presented by very reputable sources. Once again, we have recommended that the Australian government outline the legal advice it has received concerning whether this proposed agreement breaches Australia's obligations under the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty.

The committee has recommended that the Australia-India Nuclear Cooperation Agreement be ratified, subject to the recommendations I have outlined. Let me re-emphasise that point. Our support is subject to our other recommendations. If they are not implemented, then do not expect me to be supporting this agreement.

As we say in our report, 'For the committee, the highest standard of safety in the use of Australian material is a central requirement for the export of that material. Should Australian nuclear material be sold to India, the Australian public will want to be assured that the nuclear material is being used safely.'

The government will ignore these powerful recommendations, which come not only from opposition members but from members of the government, at its peril and at the peril of Australia's reputation as a responsible global citizen, with a strong commitment to non-proliferation and disarmament.

This report should act as an orange light, warning the government not to ratify this treaty precipitously but to tread carefully, aware of the immense and long-lasting consequences of error in this fraught and long-contested area of energy policy.

Finally, I want to praise and acknowledge the chairmanship of this inquiry, by the member for Longman, Mr Roy. In this very adversarial place I am probably not doing him or his career any favours by speaking well of him, but I will all the same. The chair has worked very hard to achieve a consensus among members who come to this issue with widely differing views about whether nuclear power is part of the problem or part of the solution and whether India has been a good global citizen in relation to nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation issues. As a result of the chair's maturity and understanding we have been able to put to the parliament a very significant report. I hope the government listens to this bipartisan call and implements all of its recommendations.

Ms PARKE (Fremantle) (16:24): by leave—As a member of the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties, I endorse the cautious approach adopted by the majority of the committee in its report on the Agreement between the Government of Australia and the
Government of India on Cooperation in the Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy, which I will now refer to as the agreement.

However, I consider that the committee's major concerns, including the need for full separation of India's civil and military nuclear facilities and the establishment of an independent nuclear regulatory authority, are best addressed prior to ratification. The majority committee view that these matters can be addressed after ratification but prior to sale is positive in that it acknowledges the importance of this action before any future transfer of Australian uranium but, in my view, this position is at risk of being overtaken by more narrow political and commercial priorities.

The current agreement is seriously deficient and requires further attention to be strengthened to a standard consistent with both Australia's other nuclear safeguards mechanisms and community expectations. With regard to other matters about which the majority committee has expressed its satisfaction, such as the requirement for India to track and account for Australian nuclear material, I am not prepared to simply accept ASNO's assurances. I would actually need to see the confidential administrative arrangement that, it is claimed, provides for such tracking and accounting.

The additional comments made by Senator Sue Lines and me thus reflect the deep unease we feel at the agreement's departure from the strong safeguards arrangements Australia has with many other countries.

The additional comments are made based upon the evidence the committee received not only from community groups concerned generally about nuclear non-proliferation and uranium exports such as the Australian Conservation Foundation, Friends of the Earth, the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, the Uniting Church and the Gundjejhmi Aboriginal Corporation but also from respected nuclear safeguards experts, such as John Carlson, the former head of ASNO for more than two decades; Ronald Walker, the former chair of the board of the International Atomic Energy Agency; and other experts, including Professor Lawrence Sheinman, Kalman Robertson, Ernst Willheim and Crispin Rovere. Each of these experts stated that they were not opposed to uranium sales to India, but they were extremely concerned that this particular agreement significantly weakens Australia's strong nuclear safeguards as contained in every other agreement Australia has with other countries.

The nuclear cooperation agreement with India raises a number of major issues, as raised by many submissions we received, including: (1) India is not a party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty or to the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty; (2) India is one of only three countries, the others being Pakistan and North Korea, which are still producing nuclear material for nuclear weapons; (3) India has not fully separated its military and civilian nuclear programs and has not placed all civilian facilities under IAEA safeguards and, according to such eminent experts as John Carlson AM and Ron Walker, some civilian facilities outside India's safeguarded program appear to be linked to its military program; (4) the committee heard that India's safeguards agreement with the IAEA gives India the right to use safeguarded nuclear material in facilities that are outside the safeguarded program and also to use unsafeguarded material in safeguarded facilities; (5) in the past India has disregarded peaceful use agreements and the plutonium for its first nuclear test, in 1974, came from the misuse of a reactor supplied by Canada under peaceful use agreements; and (6) the longstanding nuclear rivalry between India and Pakistan continues to directly threaten
regional security and peace, and a new report by the US based Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and the Stimson Center concludes that Pakistan is currently rapidly expanding its nuclear capabilities because of its fear of India.

Therefore, having regard to these circumstances I consider it essential that any nuclear agreement with India should, at least, be as rigorous as all the agreements Australia has concluded with other countries.

Unfortunately, the proposed agreement does not provide strong safeguards and undermines a bipartisan safeguards policy that has operated successfully for almost 40 years. I am particularly concerned that the agreement in its present form fails to provide adequate assurance against the possible use of Australian obligated nuclear material to contribute to a military purpose.

The specific aspects of the agreement that are unsatisfactory include the following: (1) the agreement does not include right-of-return provisions if Australian material is diverted for military purposes, or if the agreement is breached in some other way; (2) the agreement does not limit Australian material to facilities under permanent IAEA safeguards; (3) the agreement's consent provisions for reprocessing and high enrichment are ambiguous and in the views of an eminent legal expert, Mr Ernst Willheim, are legally unacceptable; (4) the agreement does not give Australia programmatic consent rights for reprocessing, unlike with our other agreements; (5) it appears India is not prepared to undertake accounting for and tracking of Australian nuclear material in accordance with international practice and with Australian policy and legislation, including the Nuclear Non-Proliferation (Safeguards) Act 1987—details of the accounting system for nuclear material are said to be in an administrative arrangement that is confidential, so the text is not available to the committee or the public—this is not satisfactory; (6) the agreement does not give Australia the right to the IAEA safeguards' findings with respect to Australian nuclear material, unlike other agreements; and (7) this agreement undermines nuclear arms control and weakens Australia's non-proliferation credentials.

One of the strongest arguments in favour of concluding a nuclear cooperation agreement with India is that it brings India 'into the tent' with regard to international nuclear non-proliferation rules and norms. Far from achieving this outcome, this agreement entrenches India's nuclear deviance and privileges it ahead of Australia's other nuclear cooperation partners, thereby undermining the non-proliferation regime as a whole.

In my view, renegotiation is required to resolve the issues raised by the majority committee and by the additional comments. This could be realised either through amending the text or through an exchange of letters clarifying the text and the shared understanding and intent of the parties. If not resolved, these issues could have adverse consequences for Australia's ability to ensure that Australian nuclear material cannot contribute to any military purpose. If not resolved, there could be adverse consequences for public confidence in the agreement and for the preparedness of future governments to approve supply of nuclear material. There is also the potential for damage to Australia's international reputation and credibility as a proponent of nuclear non-proliferation and a strong upholder of nuclear safeguards.

And, as the member for Wills has said, I also want to thank the chair of the committee for doing his best to reach consensus, as far as it was possible, on many of these issues.
Mr RUDDOCK (Berowra) (16:32): On behalf of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights, I wish to present the committee's report, entitled Twenty-seventh report of the 44th Parliament: Human rights scrutiny report. I ask leave of the House to make a short statement.

Leave granted.

Mr RUDDOCK: I thank the House and you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I rise to speak to the tabling of this report, which is—as I said—the 27th report of the 44th Parliament. The committee's report examines the compatibility of bills and legislative instruments with Australia's human rights obligations. This report considers bills introduced into the parliament from 17 to 20 August 2015 and legislative instruments received from 7 to 13 August of the same year. This report also includes the committee's consideration of a response to a matter raised in an earlier report.

Of the 11 bills examined in this report, seven are assessed as not raising human rights concerns. Four raise matters in relation to which the committee will seek a response from the legislative proponent. The committee has concluded its examination of one bill, has deferred its consideration of one bill and continues to defer a number of instruments. This report follows the committee's usual scrutiny approach to assessing whether a bill or an instrument is compatible with human rights, as set out in the seven core international human rights treaties to which Australia is a party.

Most human rights are able to be limited if there is a proper justification for doing so. The committee's analytical approach focuses primarily on identifying if a proposed measure might have the effect of limiting the enjoyment of a specific right and, second, whether any such limitation may be regarded as permissible or justified. The vast majority of bills and instruments considered by the committee do not engage any human rights or in fact promote them. Of the legislation that may or does limit human rights, the committee is often able to assess the limitation as justifiable under international human rights law. In these cases, the committee generally reports on legislation simply by identifying it as not giving rise to human rights concerns. The committee's approach thus focuses on those bills and instruments which do raise human rights concerns and which have not been previously adequately addressed in the statement that we expect from the proponent—the statement of compatibility.

These remarks, I hope, will draw attention to the great importance to the parliament of the proponent's ensuring that statements of compatibility for bills and instruments provide considered and evidence-based assessments of how any potential limitations on human rights may be regarded as justified. Indeed, in most cases that the committee determines it is necessary to write to a legislation proponent, it is invariably because the statement of compatibility accompanying the legislation does not provide the committee with sufficient information to fully assess the human rights compatibility. For the benefit of those charged with the task of preparing statements of compatibility—and I hope they are all listening to this speech, not being broadcast today—I would emphasise that clearly setting out the objective of the legislation and the manner in which human rights have been considered when framing the
legislation can be crucial to achieving a particular objective—that is, that certain rights be limited.

The committee expects that where rights are limited the statement of compatibility will demonstrate that the limitation is rationally connected to—which is to say, it will be effective in achieving—its stated objective, and explain whether the limitation is proportionate to that objective. The statement should also set out any safeguards that will be applied to ensure that any limitations on human rights are implemented in the least restrictive form. In this context, I note that some of the statements of compatibility accompanying bills considered in this report have fallen well short of the committee's expectations. In particular, a number of these provide simple assertions with no supporting evidence. One example is the statement of compatibility for the Social Security Legislation Amendment (Debit Card Trial) Bill 2015, which provided no empirical evidence of how the proposed measures are likely to be effective in achieving their objective. This is necessary due to the fact that income management schemes, while clearly well-intended, necessarily involve limitations on a number of human rights, such as the right to a private life and the right to equality and to non-discrimination. As in all cases, the committee will request, in a spirit of constructive dialogue, further information from the sponsor of the legislation that supports their assessment that the measures propose only justifiable limitations on human rights.

As always, I encourage my fellow members and others to examine the committee's report to better inform their understanding of the committee's deliberations. I commend the committee's 27th report of the 44th Parliament to the House. I hope that, in preparing statements of compatibility, those ministers who bring these matters forward might draw to the attention of their advisers the importance of proceeding expeditiously with these matters, and they can be proceeded with more expeditiously if these issues have been adequately addressed. I thank the House.

BILLS

Broadcasting Legislation Amendment (Primary Television Broadcasting Service) Bill 2015
Second Reading

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

Mr CLARE (Blaxland) (16:38): I rise to speak on the Broadcasting Legislation Amendment (Primary Television Broadcasting Service) Bill 2015. I am glad to inform the House that the opposition supports this bill. Its clear purpose is to amend the Broadcasting Services Act so that commercial broadcasters Seven, Nine and Ten as well as national broadcasters, the ABC and SBS, can broadcast their primary television channel in either standard definition or in high definition. Currently, these broadcasters are restricted to broadcasting their primary channel in standard definition. This restriction now seems old and anachronistic but it was not always. It was introduced at the beginning of the digital switch-over process to ensure that all Australians could access the television content that they love at a time when only a small but growing proportion of us had access to HD-enabled televisions or set-top boxes. In 2015, this law, enacted to protect consumers, is no longer required.
In February last year, more than 96 per cent of Australian households had access to an HD-enabled television or set-top box. Today it is reasonable to assume that number is now even higher than 96 per cent. Access to high definition television is now nearly universal. Today Australians have access to a range of entertainment options, from SVOD services like Netflix, Presto and Stan to Apple TV and the humble DVD or pay-television services like Foxtel. But the principle of free and ubiquitous access to free-to-air television is still extremely important, particularly for those Australians who cannot afford the luxury of these pay services.

Our free-to-air networks are the home of our big events, and in particular our big sporting events. You can see that by looking at the top five rating shows since 2001 based on the OzTam ratings. At No. 1 is the royal wedding of William and Kate, which attracted an audience of six million; No. 2 is the 2005 Australian Open Tennis final, which attracted an audience of four million; No. 3 is the 2010 Masterchef finale, with four million viewers; No. 4 is the 2003 Rugby World Cup final, with an audience of four million Australians; and No. 5 is the 2009 Masterchef finale, with 3.74 million people watching that program. Another way to look at this is the top five rating programs of 2014. They were, in first place, the AFL Grand Final; in second place, the My Kitchen Rules finale; in third place, The Block Glasshouse finale in fourth place, NRL Grand Final; and, in fifth place, State of Origin Game 2. So you can see that big sporting events like the AFL and the NRL grand finals and State of Origin games are amongst the most popular programs on free-to-air television.

Australians justifiably expect that the shows and events they want to watch will be broadcast using the best technology available, and that means removing this restriction that currently exits and allowing broadcasters to broadcast in HD on their primary channel. Many free-to-air broadcasters already offer high-definition content on their secondary channels. We have seen examples of this. The Ashes as well as round games of the NRL and AFL can already been seen on secondary channels in HD. However, anti-siphoning legislation prevents the major sporting events from being premiered on a secondary channel. So events like the AFL or the NRL grand finals or, for that matter, the Melbourne Cup can at the only be shown in standard definition. This needs to change.

The rapid passage of this legislation through this House and through the Senate will provide the potential for broadcasters this year to show the grand finals in the two major football codes in high definition if they wish. That may not be possible, though. I understand from the briefings we have received that a number of technical upgrades and changes are required. To be fair, this legislation could have and should have been introduced a couple of months ago to enable that to happen. I know that my colleague the member for Chifley, Ed Husic, has been lobbying for this legislation for many months. But this where it is and I am glad that the legislation is finally here.

Whilst once upon a time this regulation was essential to protect the interests of Australian consumers, it has now served its purpose and is no longer required. So I am very glad to commend this bill to the House and, in doing that, I congratulate the member for Chifley, Ed Husic, for his work in pressuring the government to accelerate the introduction of this legislation. I look forward to watching the mighty Parramatta Eels in high definition with him in 2016.

Mr FLETCHER (Bradfield—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Communications) (16:43): I am pleased to speak on the Broadcasting Legislation
Amendment (Primary Television Broadcasting Service) Bill 2015. This is an important bill which amends the Broadcasting Services Act 1992 to allow free-to-air broadcasters to deliver programming on their primary television services in either standard definition or high-definition formats.

In the time available to me, I would like to firstly briefly review the history of digital television and why there was at the time a mandate that the primary channel needed to be in standard definition. Secondly, I want to make the point that times have now changed and the continuation of that requirement would mean that Australians were missing out on the full potential of digital television. And, thirdly, I want to explain, therefore, the rationale for the legislation which is before the House this afternoon.

Let me start with the historical rationale for the requirement which presently applies to free-to-air broadcasters that they must transmit their primary service in standard definition. This is a requirement which was introduced at the start of the digital switch-over process, which was more than 10 years ago. At the time, the installed base of television receivers was heavily dominated by analog television devices, reflecting the fact that for many, many years television had been analog and digital television had only commenced in around 1999 or 2000. Therefore, at the time the switch-over commenced, not all televisions and set-top boxes were capable of receiving high-definition content. Let me explain that point. The earliest digital television receivers were mostly limited to standard definition. Only a minority of people at that time had high-definition devices, and those were very expensive. Indeed, many people were viewing digital television through a set-top box, which took the digital signal and converted it into something which could be viewed on their analog device. So, at the time this requirement was introduced, the majority of people were not able to receive a high-definition signal. The majority of people at that time were experiencing and accessing digital television through a standard-definition device, and it therefore made sense for there to be a requirement that the primary channel was a standard-definition channel.

The context goes back to the introduction of digital television in 2000. At that time, the existing commercial and national television broadcasters were given another seven megahertz of spectrum in addition to the seven megahertz spectrum they had long held which they were then using to deliver analog television, and they commenced broadcasting in digital as well. In the old analog world, that seven megahertz of spectrum was required to deliver a single channel, and consequently Australians, and indeed television viewers around the world, for decades had been used to the notion that a particular broadcaster—such as, in the Australian context, the ABC, Seven, Nine, Ten or the SBS—delivered a single channel into a metropolitan market, or indeed non-metropolitan markets as well. The arrival of digital television created a cornucopia of new possibilities, because that seven megahertz of spectrum translates into roughly 20 megabits per second of capacity to broadcast, and the innovation with digital television is that you can divide up that 20 megabits per second in a range of ways, and you can deliver a standard-definition signal or you can deliver a high-definition signal. The high-definition signal takes up more data but it produces a higher quality picture.

It was this technological change which needed to be reflected in a range of policy settings. As I have indicated, one of those policy settings was the requirement that the broadcasters must broadcast their so-called primary channel in standard definition. Let me just touch on
that for a second. We had had this notion for decades that there was a single channel that a broadcaster delivered, but what happened was that the broadcasters introduced a couple of additional channels. For example, for quite a number of years now Channel 9 has had its primary channel, Channel 9, and its other two channels, GO! and GEM. Seven, for example, has Channel 7, 7TWO and 7mate. But the notion of the original single channel continuing as the primary channel became a commonplace way of thinking about the offerings, and it was reinforced by this legislative requirement that the primary channel must be in standard definition as a means of continuing to ensure the maximum access to that channel, reflecting the fact that, certainly at the time when this requirement was introduced, only a small number of people were able to receive a high-definition service—because, as I have explained, the high-definition television receiver was much more expensive than a standard-definition receiver.

The second point I want to make is that times have changed since the digital television legislation was introduced and took effect in 2000. That is why it is now timely to be updating the legislation to remove this requirement that the primary channel must be broadcast in standard definition. On 10 December 2013 we completed, as a nation, the switch-over process. From that point, there was no longer anywhere in Australia an analog signal being broadcast on a simulcast basis with the digital signal. We had moved completely to digital, following a process which had taken over a decade. During that period, there was an enormous change in the composition of the national fleet, if I can call it that, of digital television receivers and set-top boxes.

We arrived at an outcome where, according to a Newspoll survey conducted in February 2014, 96 per cent of all households had a main television set or a set-top box that was capable of receiving high-definition content. In other words, over that period of 14 years we had moved from an environment in which only a small number of people had a digital television receiver or set-top box and, of those, the majority were standard definition, to a world in which just about everybody had a digital television receiver or set-top box and the vast majority of those were capable of receiving high definition. That, of course, reflects technological evolution, the growth of the market and the very significant increase in scale in the number of digital television receivers and set-top boxes being manufactured by the major manufacturers around the world. We have witnessed over that period of 13 or 14 years a very sharp drop in the price of a digital television receiver or set-top box.

In short, we are now at a point where the concerns which originally motivated the requirement that the primary channel must be broadcast in standard definition—essentially an equity concern that many people would not be able to view a high-definition signal—is a concern that largely no longer exists, because of the very high penetration of high-definition television receivers and set-top boxes.

Yet prior to the change which is embodied in this legislation we have continued to have in the legislation the notion of a primary channel and this requirement that the primary channel must be delivered in standard definition. That has had a somewhat perverse outcome because of the fact that the primary channel typically continues to be the one which is highest rating and therefore continues to be the one on which the broadcasters show their most valuable and attractive content, particularly the marquee sporting events such as the AFL and NRL grand finals. We have therefore had the curious consequence that those highly desirable programs
that millions of Australians want to watch are being seen in standard definition by many people rather than high definition as an inadvertent consequence of a regulatory setting that was put in place some 15 years ago for what at the time was a very good reason.

That does seem a shame. Australians love their sport. We love to watch sporting events of all kinds on TV, and the capacity of high-definition television to give us the richest possible viewing experience is something that Australians very much value, but we have had this curious consequence of the existing regulatory framework that we are not making the highest possible use of the technology. We are not capturing the full potential of the technology, because even though, as the numbers show us, the vast majority of Australians have a high-definition television receiver or a set-top box and are capable of viewing high-definition television, because of this existing regulatory setting, the primary channel has not been used by the broadcasters to deliver high-definition content in a way that it could be. That is the issue which the effect of the bill before the House this afternoon will fix.

The bill this afternoon simply will now give the flexibility to the broadcasters—both the national broadcasters and the commercial broadcasters—to broadcast the primary service in either standard definition or high definition as they choose. To think about it another way, this in effect gives the broadcaster or the licence holder the capacity to choose which channel it treats as its primary channel, which channel it markets and positions as its primary channel. It can do that knowing that, however it makes that decision, it can broadcast in high definition or standard definition as it chooses.

Again I come back to the fact that digital television is a technology with enormous flexibility. There are no technical limitations on slicing up that 20 megabits per second in a range of different ways. Perhaps I will rephrase that: there are some technical limitations on it, but there is certainly much greater flexibility there than existed in analog television days, when your only option was to use the entirety of your spectrum allocation to broadcast a single analog channel. The guiding philosophy behind this legislation is to remove a regulatory burden which no longer does useful public policy work but, on the contrary, in fact constrains the capacity of the broadcasters on the one hand and viewers on the other to take advantage of the full potential of digital television.

This is a measure which delivers considerable consumer benefit. Australians love our sport. We love watching sport on TV as well as going to live events and we like to see the highest possible quality broadcast that we can. We have the technology which allows sport to be broadcast in high definition. We have not been taking full advantage of that capacity. The measures in this bill will remove an unnecessary regulatory restriction and will in turn allow the broadcasters to meet the desire of Australians to see the sport that they want to see in the highest quality standard that is available with the technology that we have. This is a measure which removes a regulatory requirement which is out of date and no longer does useful work, and it will as a consequence deliver a significant consumer benefit. I commend the bill to the House.

Ms ROWLAND (Greenway) (16:58): I am pleased to make a contribution to this debate on the Broadcasting Legislation Amendment (Primary Television Broadcasting Service) Bill 2015. The bill amends the Broadcasting Services Act 1992 to allow commercial and national free-to-air broadcasters to provide their primary television broadcasting services in standard
definition or high definition—SD or HD. Currently, the free-to-air broadcasters are required to broadcast their primary services in SD only.

In January this year the Department of Communications released the consultation paper on digital television regulation, which sought views on future arrangements for digital television regulation. The bill implements the proposed measure from the review to allow free-to-air broadcasters to provide their primary service in either SD or HD, and I think it is instructive to look at some of those key questions in the context of this debate that we are having today.

Firstly, in section 1.3, consideration is given to the primary channel, and it states:

This paper also considers whether the distinction between a television broadcaster’s primary channel and any other multi-channels remains relevant in a digital-only world.

It then turns to two preliminary government positions. Firstly, it states:

The requirement for the primary channel to be provided in standard definition will be removed.

And it states there will be:

No reintroduction of a quota requiring a specified amount of HD content

I also think it is instructive to look at some of the small number of submissions that were made to that review and what their views were on these key questions. For example, in relation to removing the requirement to provide standard definition for the primary channels, Free TV states:

The requirement for the primary channel to be provided in standard definition is outdated and should be removed. In an all-digital environment, this requirement no longer has any relevance.

Furthermore, Free TV also supports the position not to go ahead on the reintroduction of a quota which specifies an amount of HD content, and it states:

There are sufficient commercial incentives for broadcasters to provide content in HD without a quota requirement.

Very similarly in terms of the high-definition issues, the Community Broadcasting Association of Australia supports the position not to reintroduce a quota requiring a specified amount of high-definition content. It further submitted:

Beyond a requirement for primary services, providing flexibility to broadcasters seems the best way to allow agile response to technological changes and maintain an appropriate balance. Soon enough there may be pressure for Ultra High Definition.

And I am sure that is not too far away.

I want to mention the submission by ACCAN. In its comments, ACCAN made a specific reference to deaf or hearing-impaired Australians. They note:

… Australians who are Deaf or hearing impaired, or indeed any Australians who rely on closed captions to enjoy television do not have access to the ‘full range’ of free-to-air broadcast television due to the fact that only primary channels are required to provide 100 per cent closed captioning and this is only between the hours of 6am and midnight.

It goes on to state:

ACCAN’s research indicates that over 30 per cent of Australians use closed-captions some of the time when watching television and it is widely known that many Australians who are Deaf or hearing impaired rely on closed-captions to gain meaningful access to television news, information and entertainment. The numbers will only increase in future decades due to the impact of current demographics.
The reason I specifically raised that is I that want to acknowledge the work that is being done by ACCAN, Vision Australia and a number of other groups with whom they have partnered. Many members and senators would have dropped in today to the session by Vision Australia, an informative event on audio description. Indeed, its heading was ‘How do you watch television when you are blind?’

I want to acknowledge Vision Australia and thank them for bringing this to the attention of members. I have raised this in the House on previous occasions, and I think it is a key issue that we need to address as a parliament, to ensure that we are as inclusive as possible in our broadcasting and general communications regimes.

Turning back to these issues of SD and HD, the explanatory memorandum states:

The proposed measure was strongly supported by both industry and by members of the public who are in favour of watching major events, including sporting events, in HD format.

As a result of this bill there will be a number of consequential amendments to the anti-siphoning regime under schedule 4 of the BSA and a number of other provisions. The explanatory memorandum also states:

The proposed changes would not materially affect the operation of these parts, but take into account the proposed amendment to allow a primary service to be broadcast in SD or HD.

I think it is instructive to consider the difference between SD and HD. It is fundamentally one of resolution. HD allows for more pixels, the miniscule areas of illumination or colour that combine to make up the pictures that we see on various devices. When we view them on the screen, compared with SD broadcasting, they lead to a sharper image.

As I mentioned, we are now seeing ultra-HD broadcasting or 4K broadcasting, which see even more pixels displayed at specific resolution levels. But resolution is not the only difference. There is a difference when it comes to the aspect ratio. In a nutshell, SD can be displayed in both four to three—that is, for every four inches wide the picture needs to be three inches tall—and 16 to nine, which is letterboxed, while HD is displayed in 16 to nine only. Fundamentally, what this all means is that the user experience is better on HD than on SD as it offers a sharper and clearer picture.

This change has been strongly supported by both industry and the general public. It allows commercial and national broadcasters to determine the best mix of services and format for their audiences. I agree that the requirement to provide the primary service in SD is outdated, and this bill is indeed a sensible update to reflect this. It is obvious that the Australian public want to enjoy their favourite content, especially sport, on high-definition television.

It would be remiss of me not to mention the specific advocacy which has been done by the member for Chifley on this issue. Six or so months ago, in February this year, he indeed addressed the parliament, and I think it is appropriate to reiterate some of the content of that contribution in this context. He said:

In 2014 I was staggered that you still could not get, on your primary channel, the main sporting events of this country on high definition. It is something that I raised publicly at the time, and I was very critical of the fact that free-to-air channels do not do this, but they commendably and patiently explained that it was not entirely their fault.

They certainly do feel the anger, the ire, of footy fans. In particular I note this one on the fan site BigFooty, who said:
'In this modern era with billion dollar TV rights it is nothing short of a joke that our sports biggest day is shown in SD.

... ... ...

Some might say "get over it" or "not first world problem" but this is a massive industry and the great game is let down by not being telecast in HD.'

Fair call! So why are we being so poorly done by?

He goes on:

In December 2013, Free TV Australia wrote to Minister Turnbull requesting a change to the law to allow HDTV on the primary channels. They have proposed to the government that we get rid of the restriction on HD on the main channel. This is a quote from Julie Flynn. As she rightly points out:

'This is something they could do tomorrow. Just do it. It’s bleeding obvious.'

This discussion paper was released in January and they are asking the industry to respond by March. As the industry association rightly points out, this could be done tomorrow. You do not need a discussion paper and you certainly do not need the red tape of a discussion paper to do it.

He goes on:

I certainly think the public would appreciate it if we were able to change the law, cut the red tape and make sure our sports are in high definition glory. It is the least we could expect in this day and age …

Certainly the bulk of the public, and those who do not have subscriber TV, should be entitled to see something that in this day and age, in other parts of the world, is freely available. You would expect a country as great as ours to be able to show the sports the public love.

Some six months later, despite the fact that that discussion paper did go ahead, I am sure the member for Chifley would be very pleased with the position that we have arrived at today.

I want to mention briefly the potential human rights implications of the bill. I agree that this bill is compatible with those obligations. It potentially engages a number of human rights, specifically the rights of people with a disability, the right to equality and nondiscrimination and the right to freedom of opinion and expression.

As noted in the explanatory memorandum, rates of HD equipment penetration are very high. In 2014, Newspoll found that 96 per cent of all households had a television set or set-top box that provided them access to high-definition content. I suspect that the number would be even higher if we were to take that poll today. Also, it is likely that people with a disability already have access to HD channels due to a number of schemes and supplements offered by the Commonwealth. As stated in the explanatory memorandum:

To the extent that the measures in the Bill may engage rights … as outlined above, the measures are reasonable and proportionate to the goal of reducing the regulatory burden on the broadcasting industry and providing the Australian community with access to high quality free-to-air programming.

I want to raise in my closing comments some of the minister's own remarks in his second reading speech on this bill. The minister mentioned the transition we are seeing in how video content is being consumed. The minister noted, in part:

As so much more of the program video content is going over the top—that is to say, it is being provided over streamed internet services like Presto, like Netflix, like Stan—and as viewers want to be able to watch episode drama programs, for example, at their convenience, the value of live events, particularly live sport, is of greater and greater importance.

I will take up those points about some of these video-on-demand services. As the minister would know, fast and reliable broadband connectivity is crucial to allowing all Australians to
enjoy these services. Unfortunately, this is something that the minister is actively stifling by pursuing his multitechnology-mix model.

You do not have to take it from me. You only need to look at last week, at comments made by Presto on 31 August. The headline is 'Presto says Australia's internet speeds too slow for 4K content and blames new NBN'. That is precisely what it says: 'too slow for 4K content and blames new NBN'. I quote:

THE country is missing out on the latest television technology because the Federal Government abandoned the original National Broadband Network plan and banished households to inadequate broadband speeds, according to a top Presto executive.

The TV-streaming firm—
that is, Presto—
will officially launch new phone and tablet apps, Apple TV streaming, and high-definition content for subscribers on Tuesday—
that is, last week—
but it will postpone offering 4K content until broadband speeds improve in Australia.

Presto IP services senior product manager Richard Cole said the company had considered offering 4K streaming content but decided broadband speeds in the country were not yet up to the task.

Mr Cole is quoted:
With an NBN as per the original design, it wouldn't have been an issue to do 4K (content) …

The article goes on to note:
Australia's average internet speed is just 6.9 Mbps—
megabits per second—
according to the Akamai State of the internet report, bringing its ranking to 44th in the world, and barely enough to stream 720p high-definition video.

The article ends in part by noting:
Australia's original NBN plan involved connecting fibre optic cable to most homes, while the new plan uses a mix of slower technology, including the old copper … network.

There you have it, Mr Deputy Speaker. While this bill is a welcome move, the minister's handling of our broadband infrastructure is inhibiting the ability of Australians to enjoy high-quality, high-definition, over-the-top services. They are the consequences. They are the facts from the providers themselves.

In conclusion: this bill provides a sensible update to the BSA. It will allow Australians to view their favourite television programs and sporting matches in HD. I want to acknowledge the advocacy of many who have contributed to this important development, specifically the member for Chifley, who I am sure will be very pleased with this. It is just a pity that he and I will not be watching our beloved Eels in this year's grand final, but there is always next year.

Mr BALDWIN (Paterson—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for the Environment) (17:11): I am glad to be able to speak to the Broadcasting Legislation Amendment (Primary Television Broadcasting Service) Bill 2015. Digital television has been the No. 1 point of aggravation in my electorate of Paterson since before the digital TV switchover. I have made more speeches on this topic in this parliament than perhaps any other topic. I am advised by
ACMA that over 50 per cent of all the complaints nationally on digital television reception emanate from my electorate. So I see this as a good process. I see it as a good process because people will be able to receive high-quality, high-definition television in their houses. But I would be less than honest if I did not say that digital television has been the bane of my existence now for over three years. Ever since the previous Labor government switched off the analog TV in my electorate of Paterson back in November 2012 for digital TV, services have diminished.

This bill amends the Broadcasting Services Act 1992 to enable free-to-air broadcasters to deliver programming on their primary television service in either standard-definition or high-definition formats. Currently, free-to-air broadcasters are required to transmit their primary service in standard definition only. This reform arose from a review of the digital television regulatory framework conducted in 2014-15, of which I was in strong support, and the proposal received strong support from the free-to-air broadcasters and the general public alike.

To provide some level of context: prior to the digital switchover in November 2012, I warned the previous Labor government. I met with the then minister, Senator Conroy, and I advised him that the existing self-help transmitters would have to be upgraded, and there would need to be new transmitters installed across my electorate to ensure that my constituents would continue to receive reliable television reception. The last analog services ceased in Paterson, as I said, in November 2012, and a reorganisation of television services, or restack, commenced in my electorate at that time. It was designed to utilise most efficiently the digital dividend spectrum resulting from the switch to digital television, but what resulted was an intermittent or, in many towns in Paterson, nonexistent digital television reception.

My electorate is an electorate of immense topography—valleys and lots of treed areas—and the analog signal transmitted will travel through the valleys. It was not an either-or, which the digital signal is. People would get a fading of a signal. They did not always get sound, but they would not lose their picture entirely. If they were watching the golf, I suppose the ball would get lost in the snow, but they would maintain a picture. There is nothing more frustrating with a digital television signal that is there one minute and not there the next. This is what my constituents, in large part, have had to deal with. In fact, thousands of my constituents over the last three years have absolutely suffered through unreliable digital television reception. Areas like Karuah, the Tilligerry Peninsula, Medowie, Stroud, Gresford and Bulahdelah have either very little service or no service at all. Prior to 2012, as I said, these residents had had a reasonably reliable analog reception to fall back on. Now they do not. This has created an extremely intense environment when, for instance, the cricket is being broadcast or when the tennis or the football grand finals are on TV. My constituents were reconciled to the fact that more often than not their television reception would give way and they would be faced with a blank television screen instead of watching—I suppose in a dream—the Ashes come back to Australia.

I welcome this bill, as it proposes amendments that require the broadcasters to provide their primary service in both high definition and standard definition. I will welcome it even further when all of my constituents can actually receive a reliable television signal. Ten years ago, when the requirement for broadcasters to provide primary services in standard definition was introduced, this was at the infancy of digital switchover processes. At this time not all
televisions were capable of receiving high-definition content. In fact, most of the first range of digital televisions were standard-definition televisions. However, in a contemporary setting this landscape has dramatically changed, even in regional and rural areas such as Paterson. A recent Newspoll survey found that 96 per cent of households have a main television set or a set-top box capable of receiving high-definition content. Naturally, as high-definition television can now be found in almost every Australian home, many Australians now expect premium quality free-to-air programming to be provided in high definition. This is especially true for the sports-mad constituents of Paterson when it comes to live sport. This requirement to provide the primary channel in standard definition is now unnecessary and prevents broadcasters from providing services that respond to audience preferences.

This was only further aggravated for the constituents of Paterson, who, when they thought they could view their favourite sporting matches and could finally get a signal, would suffer from poor-quality television and not receive the high definition that they would prefer. I keep saying it, but thousands of my constituents still suffer from poor digital television reception that regularly drops out, and even more on hot summer days—and, as we all know, it is over the summer period that our television screens are graced with an increase in sporting presence and people are on holidays and at home trying to watch that sport. As I said before, I am informed that over 50 per cent of all the complaints to ACMA actually came from my electorate. My electorate office phones would ring off the hooks for days, and I want to use this as an opportunity to tell my electorate that I have listened and I will continue to listen and, more importantly, this government is listening, unlike the former Labor government.

I also want to take the opportunity to update the House and my constituents of Paterson on what action has been recently taken to advance their cause as we receive some great news of great outcomes for Paterson in relation to digital television. I was and continue to be actively involved in the passionate debate with my local broadcasters, Regional Broadcasters Australia Holdings, which is made up of Prime, NBN, Southern Cross Ten, ABC and SBS. I also deal regularly with the Department of Communications and my ministerial colleague Malcolm Turnbull to try and fix these digital television reception issues that more than a third of my constituency suffer from. There are technical issues that need to be addressed: issues such as convergence of signal, which has a dramatic effect. But I will say that the regional broadcasters, who have a responsibility to transmit that signal in a reception as good as the analog signal was, have failed and they have dragged their heels, kicking and screaming, to come to the position we have been in over the last two years.

Two weeks ago, I welcomed my colleague the Minister for Communications, Malcolm Turnbull, to Paterson, where he announced funding of $827,690 to dramatically improve the issues of digital television for many of my constituents, particularly in the warmer arid months. This $827,000 of funding was secured from both the federal government and Regional Broadcasters Australia Holdings to improve digital television coverage in Paterson. Constituents will experience improved digital television transmissions at three sites under phase 1 of the rollout. One of these will be at Port Stephens—the Gan Gan transmitter. There will be a new tower facility installed at Bulahdelah, and there will be a new tower facility at Wallaroo, which will service Medowie, Salt Ash and the Tilligerry Peninsula. Close to 25,000 people will benefit from this improved transmission. Many will receive digital television for the first time.
But there are still works to be done and negotiations to be completed with the broadcasters for areas such as Stroud and the Dungog Vacy region. The RBAH in all negotiations are committed to the upgrades of Stroud and Dungog Vacy in phase 2 of their infrastructure upgrades, and I intend to keep them to their word to make sure that these areas are not left behind. I want to give assurances to the townships of Dungog, Vacy and Stroud: I will hold the RBAH to their commitment for your towns.

I was somewhat surprised and interested last night in this House in the adjournment debate by a speech by the member for Charlton. He made complaints about digital television transmission for his constituents. I acknowledge that he has only been here two years. That is probably the first time we have heard about it from him. But these problems would have been paralleled over the same timeframe as those of constituents from my electorate, and his former boss, the former member for Charlton, did absolutely nothing about it, even though he was in government and had the opportunity to directly influence Senator Conroy, the then minister, to do something about it. He did nothing. He sat on his hands, just like the current member for Charlton has done for two years. He now wants to whinge because my lobbying has delivered the minister bringing together a package for my constituents. I have been lobbying for this, in honesty, for over five years.

I have had some complaints from other areas in my electorate that their services have not been upgraded yet. I commit to them that I will continue to fight for them. I also want to note that the Paterson-Tocal area recently received funding from the Commonwealth under the Mobile Black Spot Program. Their mobile telephone service was deemed to be the worst in my electorate. Other areas like Port Stephens and the Great Lakes missed out on the first round of funding, as their reception was deemed to be poor but not as bad.

Likewise, the RBAH identified Bulahdelah and Medowie—the Wallaroo area—as the worst areas for digital television. They had no infrastructure at all. The RBAH acknowledged that Stroud, Dungog and Vacy have digital TV reception issues with their existing infrastructure and acknowledged that this needs to be upgraded or moved. The RBAH have committed to fixing this problem themselves after the current phase 1 rollout is completed.

I welcome the implementation of this amendment bill for my constituents in Paterson and for the many ways that its introduction can directly benefit them. It can improve their viewing quality but, as I said, improved viewing quality actually comes with the ability to receive a television signal. I look forward to continuing my work for my constituents in Paterson and receiving real and tangible outcomes for the benefit of all of my constituents that improve their quality of life and recreational enjoyment, such as the recent win with digital television funding. I commend this bill to the House.

Mr THISTLETHWAITE (Kingsford Smith) (17:24): I am pleased to make a contribution to this debate and support the passage of the Broadcasting Legislation Amendment (Primary Television Broadcasting Service) Bill 2015. This is a reform that is overdue for many Australians. It will allow commercial and national free-to-air broadcasters to provide their primary television broadcasting services in high definition as well as the standard definition that is currently legislated for.

The speed of change in terms of technological advancement associated with TVs, high-definition viewing and the uptake of digital and high-definition television in Australia is quite remarkable. I think it is a great example of Australia's fondness for new technology. We are
one of the leading nations when it comes to the penetration of smartphones in our community. We carry more smartphones than many other nations throughout the world. We also have great fondness for digital TV. I think that is a great indicator of Australia's relative wealth and high living standards, because when these new technologies come on the market they are often quite expensive.

When digital TV came to the Australian market many Australians took up the offer. Because many of the primary free-to-air broadcasts were not provided in HD, particularly some of the sporting events, many Australians took up subscription television services. Those who could afford it would pay the additional money each month to take up those subscription television services to be able to watch programs in high definition. It is wonderful to see finally that we are providing the opportunity for consumers to access those high-definition services on a more regular basis through free-to-air. This will allow greater consumer access to high-definition services when it comes to TV.

The other great revolution that has occurred in this space over many recent years has been greater consumer access to alternative media platforms. I am talking specifically of the internet, smartphones and the like. Many Australians now access a lot of their traditional television content, particularly sporting events, through smartphones and the internet. Again, I think it is testament to Australians' uptake of new technologies and new platforms to view these programs that we are one of the leading nations when it comes to viewing programs through this form.

The way the system currently works is that the primary service providers—the free-to-air channels: channels 7, 9, 10, ABC and SBS—are required to broadcast their primary services in standard definition. This has been the case for some years, particularly when we began the rollout of high-definition television throughout the country. To ensure that those who only had standard definition TV sets could continue to access primary TV services when the digital switchover was occurring there was a requirement for the free-to-air broadcasters to continue to provide that content on their free-to-air channels in a standard definition format.

Then we initiated the digital rollout. As I mentioned earlier, many Australians have revelled in the opportunity to install digital TV sets in their homes. I think you would have to say that that switchover, that rollout, has been a great success. In February 2014 Newspoll conducted a survey of Australians regarding the rollout of digital TV services and found that at the time 96 per cent of Australians had access to a digital TV or a set-top box to access high-definition content. Given the speed of the uptake of these services and digital TV technology, you would have to say that that number would well and truly have increased and be close to 100 per cent now.

With the completion of the digital switch-over and the availability of a range of new TV services and programs, many Australians now expect that their primary and their premium free-to-air programs will be provided in high definition, especially live sport. It is a great indicator of Australia's passion for sporting events—big sporting events like the AFL and NRL grand finals, the State of Origin, the Ashes and the summer cricket series, and the national soccer teams—that we now expect to view them in high definition. Some have said that the passage of this bill has a lot to do with the football finals coming up and providing that opportunity for the viewing of those big sporting events in high definition. I would like to
hope that this is not just about that; it is actually about ensuring that Australians have access to the best quality digital TV services and as many programs as possible in high definition.

All manner of programs are now provided through high-definition platforms. Whether through subscription television services or free-to-air, many are now providing those high-definition programs. This is about ensuring the best quality viewing and the best platform that primary providers can provide. It is a fact that those primary providers are now competing with other platforms. Not only is there the need for access to the services; there is the need for primary providers to provide more programs in high definition simply to compete. If you are going to get a better quality service and better quality vision, particularly of a largest sporting event through a subscription TV service because they offer high definition, then many Australians will switch to the subscription service to view a particular sporting event. To ensure that those primary service providers can compete, it is important that they are providing those services in high definition.

There are some consequential amendments that are required to other legislation to ensure this change is possible. I am referring specifically to the antisiphoning legislation, which ensures that certain popular sporting events, high-demand sporting events, are provided on the free-to-air platform so that as many Australians as possible can access them. There is the rule that restricts a broadcaster from premiering an antisiphoning event on a non-primary multichannel. That particular rule would not apply to a broadcaster who offered a high-definition primary service but chose to firstly broadcast the antisiphoning event on a non-primary channel in standard definition. That is a result that we obviously wish to avoid through the passage of this bill. To avoid that result, a consequential amendment is required to the antisiphoning regime to ensure that the current rules continue to apply in the event of broadcasters electing to provide their primary service in high definition. That is a necessary amendment that arises from these reforms.

Many on this side of the parliament have been campaigning for many, many years now for this reform to ensure that Australians have access to the best possible viewing opportunities and the best viewing experiences in the best and latest technology. One of those individuals is the member for Chifley, Ed Husic, who has been a very passionate and tireless campaigner for this reform. Ed has been campaigning for as long as I can remember for this reform to be made by the Australian parliament. It is testament to Ed's work and the effort that he has put in to ensuring this reform is made. Many Australians owe Ed a debt of gratitude for the work he has put in to ensuring this reform is made.

In conclusion, I am very pleased to support what I believe is an overture amendment. It will provide greater access to high-definition TV services on primary channels for a greater number of Australians. That will no doubt improve the quality of the delivery of television services in the country. That is a reform that is overdue but is worthy of support and has the full support of the Labor Party.

**Mr PITT** (Hinkler) (17:35): I rise to speak on the Broadcasting Legislation Amendment (Primary Television Broadcasting Service) Bill 2015. It will be a brief contribution, Mr Acting Deputy Speaker Vasta. We switched to digital fully and completely in December 2014. There were a number anomalies in places and my office, like many other electorate offices, was swamped by any number of complaints. A lot of those turned out to simply be
operational issues where people could not manage to retune their televisions. After a short period of time that all came around. There was one in particular person whom I would like to mention.

This gentleman was aware of ACMA. He had a large knowledge about the broadcasting act and communications legislation. In fact, he was quite demanding about how we might deal with the issue and how it affected him. Imagine my surprise when it turned out to be one Paul Neville, the former member for Hinkler and former chair of the infrastructure and communications standing committee. Mr Neville was well aware of the ways to address some of the issues and we did sort them out after a period of time. He now successfully has some quality digital television reception at his home.

This legislation is responding to an exponential change in the media and how it is working. Many of the people in the House and those listening on other broadcast services would be well aware that the media landscape is changing considerably and at an exponential rate. Regardless of whether you use a portable device like an iPad or an iPhone or whether you use a streaming service or Netflix or you choose to listen to your radio from Sydney, Melbourne or Western Australia, quite simply the landscape has shifted and we must shift with it. This is a common-sense change to legislation and one which is fully supported of course by both sides. It is a good outcome.

The things we do need to consider though are those people out there who it may affect. Currently there is a mandatory requirement for a standard definition broadcast, particularly for the AFL and NRL finals. With your indulgence, Mr Acting Deputy Speaker Vasta, I would like to speak about that just briefly because it is something I am incredibly passionate about. During this NRL season it became very clear that there was a potential for two Queensland teams, the North Queensland Cowboys and the Brisbane Broncos, to actually finish one-two at the top of the table and potentially then go on to play a final. My greatest nightmare would be, as it would be for all local NRL supporters, the fact that those teams would come up against one another in the first week and, unfortunately, that is exactly what has happened. On this weekend, the Brisbane Broncos will play the North Queensland Cowboys. Fortunately it is not an elimination final but it will be a great game of football. I am sure lots of people will be out supporting it. However, we can still keep our fingers crossed, as passionate Queenslanders, that they will end up in the grand final. Imagine having two Queensland teams in the national rugby league grand final.

Mr Neumann interjecting—

Mr Pitt: The Intrust Cup is another great league. Thank you very much for the interjection, Mr Neumann. I am always passionate about rugby league.

Once this legislation is changed, if the broadcaster does choose—it is up to the broadcaster—to transmit in high-definition then those people out there who own HD TVs will get an incredibly clear picture. Television is one of those areas where there has been exponential change. In fact, the price of HD televisions has come down substantially. Many homes now own HD TVs. Whether you support that very strange game of AFL or you support the national rugby league, I am sure there are good opportunities.

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CHAMBER
I notice the member for Herbert has just entered the chamber. I am sure he will definitely speak about the North Queensland Cowboys and how fantastic they will look in HD broadcast when the opportunity occurs. I congratulate the minister for moving on with these things.

I would also low speak about the Save our Voices campaign. This is something which regional broadcasters and other media outlets have been running over a long period of time. I would like to put my views firmly on the record—that is, simply that the Communications Act at the moment will be a Pandora's box. We cannot cherry-pick the elements that one supporter or the other may well like to pick up. But if we do open the box, I think everything should be on the table because, as I said, the media landscape has shifted completely.

You can now read your news from anywhere in the country or in fact from anywhere in the world. You can take your broadcast directly from the US if you so choose. The communications legislation that was put together in the mid-90s is relatively ineffectual and certainly is not up with the times. However, if we are to open Pandora's box, we must ensure it is not an exercise in futility. It may well be, because if we cannot gain Senate support for changes which might be proposed, it will be a significant waste of time and resources of the parliament to even look at it.

There are also some amendments to the VAST service—that is, the free-to-air satellite—which also has a regulatory provision for standard definition broadcasts for local news—another mandatory requirement. There is a common-sense change that the broadcasters may elect to broadcast local news in HD if they so choose, so there is more flexibility. This is certainly a well supported piece of legislation. For those people in regional Australia, their No. 1 priority is actually getting reception of digital TV, to have a service that works consistently, one which is not washed out by storms or trees that move or wind that blows. Quite simply, they are the things that we must ensure happen with some urgency and as a No. 1 priority.

This is a common-sense change. I support the legislation fully. There will be an opportunity to broadcast those finals in HD. I look forward to seeing the Queensland teams out and running in positions one and two and then it will not matter—whichever to team gets up, Queensland will still be a winner. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr EWEN JONES (Herbert) (17:42): I rise to speak on the Broadcasting Legislation Amendment (Primary Television Broadcasting Service) Bill 2015. I got a Facebook message from Cam Laird, a fantastic professional photographer in my electorate, who wanted to know when we are going to be able to broadcast in high definition into Townsville. To be quite honest with you, I thought digital TV was digital TV; I did not know about standard definition and high definition.

So it came to pass that I plonked myself down towards Malcolm Turnbull's office, I sat down with his staff and I said, 'What is the caper with this thing?' They said what happened was when everybody switched over to digital TV, the government wanted to make sure it was as simple as humanly impossible. So someone in your electorate might have bought a set-top box or someone might have gone out and bought new digital television set. The government wanted to make sure the broadcasts were put through on standard definition so that we all got the picture right from the word go so that there was little as little disruption as humanly possible. Most people, by the time we had actually done the switchover to digital, were able to see the broadcasts. But now we have all got TV sets capable of transmitting high definition.
Just the other night in this place, Samsung gave an innovations display. They had their big curved screen high-definition set. Whilst I love my TV, to watch something in that high-definition and to see what TV can actually do, it felt almost like you could step into this picture.

So when Cam came to me and wanted to know what we could do in this space, it was because, with his trained eye, he knew what was capable of being presented, he knew what we were trying to do, he knew what was out there ready to go and he knew we were not getting it.

The Minister for Communications, Malcolm Turnbull, said to me this is the perfect example of red tape reduction that we should be looking at. This is a common-sense move because everyone now has digital TV or if they do not then it is about time that they did, so there would be very few people inconvenienced by this. It means that free-to-air networks and Foxtel will be able to transmit in high definition into our homes. As the member for Hinkler said previously, it is fantastic for watching sport. It is also fantastic for watching films and documentaries and for the kids to watch The Wiggles. That is what it is all about. It is about us not being disadvantaged by being in the regions.

The pressure is now on the free-to-airs, especially with the football finals coming up, to ensure that they are prepared to broadcast in high definition into our regions. In my city of Townsville, 200,000 people want to be able to watch the Cowboys beat the Broncos this weekend.

Mr Neumann: Point of order!

Mr EWEN JONES: A point of order, says the member for Blair. But in Townsville we also want to see the Townsville Blackhawks beat the PNG Hunters in high definition and win the Intrust Super Cup, and to see the Townsville Fire and the Townsville Crocodiles in high definition. We want to see those things, but we also want to see these things go.

This bill amends the Broadcasting Services Act 1992 to allow free-to-air broadcasters to deliver programming on their primary television service in either standard definition or high definition formats; currently, free-to-air broadcasters are required to transmit their primary service in standard definition. This reform arose, as I said, from the review of the digital television framework that was conducted in 2014-15. The proposal received strong support from free-to-air broadcasters and the general public. Of course the general public is going to be right on this, and it will be good if we can get this.

Each free-to-air broadcaster has a specified television service as their primary service for the purpose of meeting the regulatory obligations. These obligations relate to matters such as Australian content, captioning and anti-siphoning. The primary services include Channel Nine, Channel Seven, Channel Ten and the main ABC and SBS television channels, and primary services generally attract higher audiences than multichannels. The requirement for broadcasters to provide their primary service in standard definition was introduced at the start of the digital switchover, over 10 years ago. At that time not all television set-top boxes, as I said, were capable of receiving those.

Does this bill require broadcasters to provide their primary service in high definition? No, it does not. Broadcasters will not be required to broadcast their primary service in high definition; they will have the option of providing the service in standard definition or high
definition. So it is up to us, the population in our regional centres, to make sure that we are putting as much pressure as possible on Channel Seven, Channel Nine, Channel Ten and the rest to make sure that they are putting it through on high definition—especially if we can do it for September-October, with the football finals coming up and coming into another cricket season where, hopefully, we will not capitulate in a two-day test again. We will be using a decent cricket ball this time, instead of those dodgy cricket balls that they use in England that are shaped like an egg. But I do not think that is parliamentary.

The reform will provide broadcasters with greater flexibility to make decisions about the types of services they offer in response to consumer demand. Greater access to newer technology is driving consumer expectations that free-to-air broadcasters transmit higher quality content. As we go around the world and as the world gets smaller and smaller, we understand that we want this stuff and we are capable of receiving this stuff in the best possible format that we can have. High-definition content is available to pay TV services such as Foxtel and streaming services such as Netflix. While free-to-air broadcasters provide high-definition content on their multichannels, they are currently prevented from providing their primary channels, which are often the highest rating channels, in high definition.

While I have got us on this topic, I would really like to address the basic issue of this campaign that is going around about 'save our local news services'. When WIN News in Townsville approached me and asked, 'Do you support local journalism and local news services?' my answer was, 'Of course I do.' But, when we have a situation where the two-out-of-three rule, the reach rule and all the things around media reform are in play, I feel some of the executives in the TV stations are in their space for nothing other than self-interest and trying to get the best possible value for their company and that sort of thing—which is what they are paid to do. When I come to speak to the Minister for Communications about my local news services, I do not come at it out of any altruistic goal; I come at it purely out of self-interest. I come at it because it is every bit as important to Townsville that the football from the weekend—Centrals versus the Burdekin, or Herbert River in the grand final next weekend, going up against the Burdekin—is on our news. If we lose our local news, our local sport goes with it. Our local people and our local stories go with it.

When you look at local news on a regional level, you can see it is not just about 'what bleeds leads'—it is not just about fires and road accidents. It is about the texture of our society. I think that is what regional news is all about, and the roles that the journalists and the camera crews and our regional news play in providing that service are so hugely important to the fabric of our society—to be able to get a story up about what our local council is doing, to be able to get a story up about what is happening in a local park, or to get a story up to tell people that it is magpie season and that we have to watch out, because these are the things that matter to our community. If we lose our local TV news then we lose that service, and we are never going to get a run out of Channel Seven on a national news service. We are going to be in a spot where we are being held over a barrel. If we lose it—if WIN TV is going to say, 'We are no longer prepared to run this service'—then I want it to be said that I have done everything I can in that space to make sure that we have done what we can as a parliament to make sure that we can save these services, because they are every bit as important. I see the member for Blair sitting down there. He gets *The Queensland Times*. *The Queensland Times* is a great local newspaper, but it carries what is important to Ipswich and its surrounds. The
Townsville Bulletin is a great local newspaper; the only problem with it is that it does not do exactly what I ask it to all the time.

The transition that newspapers and print media have had over the years with the divergence of online news and internet and that sort of thing is what TV, including regional TV, is going through right now.

There are massive challenges out there. When you put it up there in relation to the NBN, people say they want NBN purely so they can access Netflix. Is Netflix really a luxury or a necessity? It is a necessity. Have you seen free-to-air television? It is slightly disingenuous but very much a matter of self-interest. When it comes to my local community and what we want out of broadcasting, our newspapers and radio, we want what is local. The highest rating program on our local TV stations is the news. It has always been said if you win your news, you set up your evening's viewing. I do not know what is actually going on in that space.

What we in this place have to be able to do is ensure that every TV station that broadcasts in Townsville is given the opportunity to broadcast its specific programs or its major content in high definition. I would ask that the free-to-air TV stations covering the football finals ensure, as soon as is humanly possible, that we are at least receiving sport and documentaries in high definition. I do not think that is too much to ask.

I applaud the government in removing this red tape. This is now superfluous legislation. I do appreciate the effort of people like Cam Laird, in Townsville, in raising this issue with me and ensuring that I was following it up. When people in Townsville ask us stuff, we as members in this place go to our ministers and leadership and ensure that, if we can do something, we do.

This is a great bit of legislation; it is common sense legislation. I hope that we are able to watch the football finals where North Melbourne will be playing Fremantle for a glorious win by the Shinboners in the AFL and that the Cowboys come through for a maiden premiership this year, all in high definition and all in Townsville! I thank the House.

Mrs PRENTICE (Ryan) (17:54): September is indeed a cherished month on the Australian sporting calendar.
It marks the commencement of the Rugby League and AFL finals series, a time to gather with friends and family to barrack for your team as they pursue end-of-season glory. Indeed, sometimes it is known as 'white line fever,' which is contagious. Or, in my case, as a Brisbane Lions season ticket holder, to look on enviously at the success of others, although we have still had a pretty good century so far!

We truly are a nation of sports lovers. And the great thing about Australian sport is that the biggest matches of the most popular sports are free and accessible to all on free-to-air television. This is no accident. It is only made possible by Australia's strict antisiphoning laws. These laws protect Australian viewers from pay television broadcasters buying the rights to iconic major sporting events, such as the NRL and AFL grand finals, before free-to-air broadcasters have the opportunity to purchase the rights.

And, importantly in the context of this bill, the Broadcasting Legislation Amendment (Primary Television Broadcasting Service) Bill 2015, the laws require that any listed events be televised first on the broadcaster's primary service.
Antisiphoning laws are just one small part of a suite of laws that regulate the programming that can be shown on free-to-air television. Other examples include the mandating of Australian content and of a captioning service. These laws exist for a reason and are broadly popular.

As Chair of the Standing Committee on Infrastructure and Communications I can attest that communications technology is evolving at a rapid rate. Two decades ago it would have been inconceivable to access television on a personal computer. A decade ago it would have been inconceivable to access television on a mobile phone. And we are still just beginning to scratch the surface with respect to what can be done to harness this technology.

Regulators and government do not possess crystal balls. Try as we might, we cannot foresee the future. We can only react to the circumstances of the present. And so, as a natural consequence, we sometimes find ourselves with laws that are rendered obsolete by the progress of technology.

This bill deals with one such example. It removes the requirement for free-to-air broadcasters to provide their primary television service in standard definition. This law once had a valid purpose. It dates from a time when most viewers did not have access to high-definition formats and thus sought to protect those viewers from losing access to free-to-air programming.

These days, high-definition television equipment is commonplace. In his remarks the Minister for Communications noted that, by February 2014, 96 per cent of Australian households had a television or set-top box capable of receiving high-definition content. Clearly, there is no longer a need for primary television services to be broadcast in standard definition.

There are also clear implications for the broadcast of sporting events on free-to-air television. This bill means that, for the first time, sporting events on the antisiphoning list will be able to be shown in high definition.

The benefits of this are twofold. There will be an obvious benefit to viewers who will enjoy better picture quality on the primary service, which is particularly important for sporting contests.

However, for free-to-air broadcasters themselves this is just as important. In a rapidly changing entertainment market, having the choice to broadcast their primary channel on high definition will help them stay relevant and competitive with pay television and, increasingly, with internet-based television providers such as Netflix, Presto and Stan.

This bill removes red tape by liberating free-to-air broadcasters from obsolete restrictions and providing them with increased freedom—freedom to choose to broadcast primary services in high definition or, if they prefer, on standard definition. Other restrictions, such as mandated local content and captioning, are unaffected by this bill.

The timing of this bill is no accident. The government has brought it forward with the express intention of having it passed in time to enable broadcasters to show the NRL and AFL grand finals in high definition on their primary channels.

Whether their teams win, lose or draw on the day, all football fans, including the member for Herbert, will be winners in the long run from this bill, and I commend the bill to the House.
Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth—Minister for Communications) (17:59): I thank all honourable members for their contributions to this debate. I want to thank the honourable member for Ryan for her contribution. I also want to note the cooperation of the opposition in ensuring that this bill is speedily passed through the House and, indeed, that it will be passed speedily through the other place so that at least there is no legal impediment to the football grand finals being broadcast in high definition. Of course, it is entirely a matter for the broadcasters to do that.

Thanking honourable members for their contributions and recognising the importance of this bill being passed as quickly as possible, I commend the bill to the House.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Third Reading

Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth—Minister for Communications) (18:01): by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

Social Services Legislation Amendment (No. 2) Bill 2015

Consideration of Senate Message

Bill returned from the Senate with amendments.

Ordered that the amendments be considered immediately.

Senate's amendments—

(1) Clause 2, page 2 (table items 2 to 5), omit the table items, substitute:

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<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Schedule</th>
<th>Part</th>
<th>The day after this Act receives the Royal Assent.</th>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Schedule 1, Parts 1 and 3</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Schedule 1, Part 5</td>
<td>The day after this Act receives the Royal Assent.</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Schedule 2</td>
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(2) Schedule 1, Part 2, page 4 (lines 1 to 19), omit the Part.

(3) Schedule 1, page 5 (after line 5), after item 9, insert:

9A Paragraphs 123UF(1)(g) and (2)(h)

Omit "1 January 2016", substitute "1 July 2017".

(4) Schedule 1, item 32, page 11 (lines 7 to 9), omit paragraph 32(a), substitute:

(a) the person's qualifying savings period ends on or before 28 December 2015; and

(5) Schedule 1, item 33, page 11 (lines 16 to 18), omit paragraph 33(a), substitute:
(a) the person's qualifying savings period ends after the day this item commences, but on or before 31 December 2015; and

(6) Schedule 1, item 33, page 11 (lines 21 and 22), omit paragraph 33(c), substitute:
   (c) the person makes a claim, in writing, for the payment on or before the later of the following days:
   (i) 28 days after the day this item commences;
   (ii) 31 December 2015.

(7) Schedule 1, item 34, page 11 (line 23) to page 12 (line 3), omit the item.

Mr HARTSUYKER (Cowper—Deputy Leader of the House and Assistant Minister for Employment) (18:02): I move—
That the amendments be agreed to.
Question agreed to.

Water Amendment Bill 2015
Second Reading

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

Mr FITZGIBBON (Hunter) (18:02): I will begin by indicating that the opposition recognises the government's desire to provide certainty to basin communities by placing a cap of 1,500 gigalitres on water purchases. On that basis we will not be standing in the way of this government initiative.

As with the Basin Plan itself and many aspects of it, there are conflicting points of view on the issue of water purchases versus infrastructure measures as the best means of achieving the outcomes of the Basin Plan. Labor has consulted with various stakeholders and with people with divergent points of view on these issues, and we have very carefully considered all of those views. We have also carefully considered the position of the basin states and, again, on that basis we will not be opposing this bill. Again, given the support of the basin states, we will not be standing in the way of this bill in the interests of bipartisanship—which has always, of course, underscored the strength of our progression to the point we have reached today.

The bill proposes to amend the Water Act 2007, to impose a duty on the Commonwealth not to exceed the 1,500 gigalitre limit on surface water purchases in the Murray-Darling Basin at the time of entering into the Water Purchase Agreement contract. Secondly, it amends the Murray-Darling Basin Plan 2012 to provide increased flexibility in the recovery of some 450 gigalitres of water through efficiency measures funded under the Water for the Environment Special Account.

The success of the Basin Plan has always rested on the bipartisan support I referred to. At the federal level, that has been very important, and of course we have strived to—as best we can—extend that to the states. Again, given the support of the basin states we are happy to support this proposition today. As many in this place will know, disagreement over the management of our most important river system and the food bowls which rely upon it actually predates the Federation. In the early years, the importance of the basin to agriculture in South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales led to the construction of numerous dams,
weirs and locks. By the late 1960s drought, the overextraction of water for irrigation and rising salinity began to put the health of the Murray-Darling system on the radar of politicians and users alike and—of course—of the community more broadly.

By the drought of the early 2000s—otherwise known as the millennium drought—it had become clear that much more needed to be done and that politicians needed to act. Under the Howard government, the National Water Initiative was agreed and the Water Act 2007 was passed through this parliament. So both sides of this place can take credit for the significant reforms which have taken place in recent years. Now—in part at least, if not entirely—thanks to the good work of the former minister for water, the member for Watson, we have a plan that is restoring our rivers to health, supporting strong regional communities and ensuring sustainable food production.

The Murray-Darling Basin Plan has enjoyed bipartisan support—as I said—at all levels of government and across the political parties. Importantly, it has also had the support of farming, environmental and Indigenous groups. Not everyone has had their way, of course. Restructuring and reform in such an important area as this is always very difficult. I suppose it can be said that the bill before the House tonight is about redressing the issues still held by some of those basin communities in particular.

The Basin Plan brought into force in November 2012 will set basin-wide sustainable diversion limits and return 2,750 gigalitres to the environment. Basin states are required to prepare water resource plans that will give effect to the sustainable diversion limits from July 2019. Under the sustainable diversion limit adjustment mechanism, up to 650 gigalitres can be provided through supply measures and projects that deliver environmental outcomes with less water. Proposals for these supply measures are, I understand, in varying states of preparation and assessment. There is a bipartisan commitment to bridge the gap between what these supply measures can provide and the 2,750 gigalitres to be returned to the environment. On top of the 2,750-gigalitre target, an additional 450 gigalitres will be returned to the environment. Funding was provided through legislation in 2013 for this additional 450 gigalitres, which must be obtained through projects that ensure no social or economic downsides for basin communities, such as on-farm irrigation projects. There is $1.78 billion in the Water for the Environment Special Account, including $200 million for the removal of constraints identified in the constraints management strategy.

To date, more than 1,900 gigalitres has been recovered for the environment. This includes more than 1,160 gigalitres of water through water purchases, over 600 gigalitres through infrastructure investment and over 180 gigalitres through other basin state recovery actions. This is water that can be used at appropriate times and where it is needed to improve flows and help restore health throughout the system. Already, we have seen successful water releases overseen by the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder and the state and regional water management agencies. Importantly, there has been significant Commonwealth investment in ensuring that farms remain productive as the plan is delivered. Indeed, $2 million a day is being and will be spent on efficiency and infrastructure measures out to 2019.

Progress on these environmental objectives is very significant. The system includes approximately 30,000 wetlands, over 60 species of fish, 124 families of macroinvertebrates, 98 species of waterbirds, four threatened water-dependent ecological communities and hundreds of plant species supported by key floodplains. It is obvious that this is a very
important system to Australia. The health of the river channels themselves and the flora and fauna they support is not only vital in its own right but also vital for the economic and social wellbeing of basin communities.

Also related to the environmental needs and environmental flows, the Aboriginal nations and communities in the basin want and should have access to the flows they need to ensure the continuation of their culture and their social and economic wellbeing. Aboriginal people feel a deep connection to their land and the waters that flow through and across them. This needs to be recognised and provided for, not as an exercise in imperial patronage but by ensuring Aboriginal people are empowered through water rights.

I now want to turn to agriculture and its implications, which of course is of paramount interest to me. It is well known in this place that the basin supports around 40 per cent of Australia's agricultural production. According to ABS figures, in 2012-13 the basin accounted for more than 50 per cent of Australia's irrigated produce. There are some fascinating figures here that will surprise some in the House who have not had the opportunity to look at these issues in such detail, and I of course exempt the member for Riverina from that group. Almost 100 per cent of Australia's rice, 96 per cent of Australia's cotton, 75 per cent of Australia's grapes, 59 per cent of Australia's hay, 54 per cent of Australia's fruit, 52 per cent of Australia's production from sheep and livestock and 45 per cent of Australia's dairy come from the basin. Around two million people live and work in the basin, in communities ranging from centres with fewer than 1,000 people to large urban centres, such as Wagga Wagga, in the member for Riverina's electorate. A further 1.2 million people depend on its water to survive. All of this agricultural production and the two million people living in the basin rely on a healthy, functioning river system.

Many people in Australian agriculture do not have the benefits and advantages of a river system or an underground water system. Many of them, well into their third year of drought, are starting to understand the challenges of that more and more. With the growing prediction of another El Nino, we fear relief is not coming any time soon. It is now almost two years since the Prime Minister and his agriculture minister went to Longreach to tour around affected areas of that part of the world and therefore almost two years since the Prime Minister announced his first tranche of assistance for drought affected farmers. Two years on, sadly, the farmers are still wondering what it is all about.

Various attempts at utilising concessional loans have been abject failure. As much as they might like to, few in this place would challenge that proposition. As at April less than half of the money allocated for the Drought Concessional Loans Program has been taken up—much less than half, in fact—and less than three per cent of the drought recovery loans had been allocated. That latter point should not be too surprising to many in the House, because the title indicates that they are drought recovery loans and very, very few people in those parts of the world would consider themselves, or be deemed to be classified, as in recovery mode, unfortunately.

The tragedy of this is that the outcome goes beyond the obvious failure of the policy. In fact, farmers have been misled to believe that the government is providing all this drought assistance money when that is certainly not the case. The government has been claiming that up to $790 million is being provided or put on the books to assist drought affected farmers. But this is a bit of a cruel hoax. It makes the six o'clock news okay, but it has not helped the
farmers. Why hasn’t it helped the farmers? There are a number of reasons. Farmers either have not been able to qualify for the loans or, because of the nature of things, find that the loans do not extend to them any real benefit. In other words, the differential between the loan rates is often not sufficient to motivate them to go through the pain and the grief of the bank relationship and the paperwork—and of course many of them just do not qualify for the loans, particularly, as I said, those drought recovery loans.

In my view, the misrepresentation got worse recently when the government had the audacity to inflate the value of its agricultural white paper by including in the white paper the total value of every loan that might be lent out—or might not be lent out—over the course of the next 10 years. Have a think about that. It was the total value of the loans. If I loan the member for Corio $100—

Mr McCormack: You won't get it back!

Mr FITZGIBBON: I say to the member for Riverina: I am very confident I will get it back. If the member for Corio is borrowing some money off me and the interest rate is two per cent, the cost is the interest rate, not the value of the loan. It is not the $100. The government is including in its white paper the total value of all these loans—hundreds of millions of dollars. That is if they are ever lent out, and, given what I have just said, they are not going to be lent out—and we hope the drought recovery loans are not going to be lent out, because it would mean that our people are going to be in drought for another 10 years. That is what it would indicate. But the government has taken the total value of the loan, rather than the cost of delivering the loan, over a 10-year period, and it ends up with a very big number—very, very clever.

But, to make it worse, the bond rate now is still just over two per cent, so the government is borrowing money at just over two per cent and it is lending money out, depending on which concessional loan scheme we are talking about, at somewhere between three and four per cent. You do not have to be a mathematician to work out that this is a win situation for the government. That is a little bit cute of me, because there are other costs. There are provisions for doubtful loans—obviously the government might not get some of this money back—and there are also administrative costs. But the cost of delivering these loans for government is very, very low.

To further exacerbate the problem, the last tranche of loans has still not been rolled out in some states. Why? Because the Commonwealth are insisting that the states pay for the administrative costs of the loans, at least in part. Have a think about that. Different state governments invest varying amounts of money in their own drought assistance programs. The Commonwealth are coming along and inflating this big figure, saying, 'We've got $720 million we're going to give away to farmers,' basically, but they do not tell us that they are borrowing at two per cent and lending at three per cent. Then they impose the administrative costs of delivering the loans—that is, those which are taken up—onto the state governments.

I struck this same problem in the period I was Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. We were still then trying to implement the farm financing loans, and I struck the same thing. A number of states had not been signed up. With the stroke of a pen, I said: 'This is ridiculous. Let's just pay the admin costs for the states and get this money out into the pockets of the farmers, where it is needed.' Now people have been suffering three years of drought, but, no, that is not what is happening, particularly in Queensland—
Mr McCormack: Most of it is man-made drought.

Mr FITZGIBBON: It is man-made drought? I see. That is an interesting intervention from the member for Riverina. The drought that our farmers are facing in Queensland and New South Wales is all man-made—and yet he is a climate change denier. We will return to that point later on maybe.

But this government had the audacity to say, 'We're handing out more than $700 million,' knowing that they are making money on the loans, that half of the loans are never go to be handed out and that, when they are handed out, the government are going to charge the state governments to hand them out. This is not providing much assistance to drought affected farmers.

Then, in the budget, knowing this, they decided that they probably should do a little bit more. There was one initiative in the budget which I support and I will give the government some credit for, and that was some further improvements to the Farm Management Deposits Scheme, because it does provide farmers with an incentive to put away in the good years for the bad. Pre the budget, the government had another good scheme, which provided a rebate for farmers who might want to invest in a new water infrastructure scheme—it might be to sink a new bore, for example. The problem was that the government put such a small amount of money into it that it was oversubscribed on about day two. Then Minister Joyce robbed some money from, I think, New South Wales to send some more to Queensland and made a complete botch of the whole thing. But on budget night they decided we should do more, so they did a couple of things. They introduced some accelerated depreciation initiatives around, for example, investment in fodder and other infrastructure projects to be depreciated over a much shorter period of time—in some cases fully in the first year. That is a hard policy to criticise, but the obvious springs to mind: first of all, you have got to have the money to invest, and, second, you have got to have a profit to offset the deduction from. If you been in drought for three years, you are not likely to have either. That is the truth of it. And on budget night we learnt that it was not going to come into force until 2017, something Minister Joyce was forced to correct—at our urging. But the fact remains that, without the profit and without the cash to invest in the first place, it is of limited benefit.

Then there was the $35 million project entitled Drought Communities Program, which we were told on budget night was going to allow all these local councils to spend money on shovel-ready projects in drought affected communities. This would stimulate the local economy. People would be buying fencing equipment, fence wire and all these things—maybe water infrastructure projects, maybe just a road in the local shire because the council does not have the money needed to do these projects. But there were a couple of problems with this. First of all, the money was much less than the money the government had cut from the same councils by removing the indexation on the financial assistance grants to local councils. They took a big bucket of money off them and gave them a much smaller bucket back. But here we are, four months on and not a project to be heard of—not a project nominated, let alone a sod turned or indeed a project completed. Four months on and we have heard nothing. This was an initiative to immediately stimulate local economies adversely affected by drought. Immediate stimulation and here we are, four months on and we have not even had a project approved, let alone started. What a farce that was.
That takes me to the national water infrastructure development fund. This was announced not in the budget but rather in the white paper. We were told in the white paper that this was going to be a great program to establish new water infrastructure projects around the country. There seemed to be an emphasis on north, which sounds like a reasonable thing to do. I indicated my support for the water infrastructure rebate. But where is the national water infrastructure development fund? We were told about it all those months ago in the white paper. We have not heard a word about it since. It was highly qualified; it indicated that projects would require the support of state governments and/or the private sector, and we all know how cash strapped state governments are, so we are not holding our breath for that to be forthcoming. But what projects are these? Where is the money coming from? How much is the Commonwealth going to contribute? Who is responsible for this fund? We do not seem even to know who is responsible for these projects. But it has been a long time coming, and we are waiting for the details.

On a related matter, I note that in the northern Australian white paper there was a $500 billion infrastructure fund. Five billion—did I say $5 billion? I meant to say a $5 billion. I hope I did not say $500 billion; I certainly meant to say $5 billion.

Mr McCormack: You can correct the Hansard!

Mr FITZGIBBON: Minister Joyce has led the way on Hansard corrections! I have learned a lot from him—not that I intend to pursue his guidance.

There was a $5 billion infrastructure fund for northern Australia. This would imply, of course, that many of these would be water projects. They could be road projects or others, but the government likes to put dams in brackets after everything just to let people know they are the builders of dams. But the questions are: who is eligible to borrow this money, who is going to borrow this money, what are the projects that this money is going to fund and what will be the interest rate? Given that we are living in a very low interest rate environment, what will be the differential between what, for example, a business can raise elsewhere or indeed debt finance from a bank and what is going to be offered? Here we are, all these months on from the release of the northern Australian white paper and we do not know the answer to these questions. In fact, on many of these matters we do not even seem to know which ministers are responsible. I know it gets shuffled around a bit, because Minister Joyce has a go at a few things, it does not work out all that well and then it gets flicked over to Minister Macfarlane to tidy up et cetera.

There are many out there who are asking these obvious questions. When are some of these announcements going to come to fruition? There might be a simple answer to that. It may be that they might come to fruition just in time to become part of an election campaign but not in time to be spent—just in time to make some announcements during an election campaign but not enough time to be spent prior to the election. In other words, by the time the election comes around, primary producers in this country will have had three years of receiving false hope from this government and lots of talk about a whole range of projects, many contained within a failed white paper which has disappeared without a trace overnight because it was so lacking in substance. But there is one plan here and it is a very obvious plan: ‘We'll just string Australia's farming community out a little bit longer. We'll keep promising all these things. In particular we'll keep promising drought affected communities we're there to help them.’ But the bad news for the government is that they are starting to work it out.

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CHAMBER
You cannot continue this facade and this pea-and-thimble trick for a whole three years. Eventually they find you out, and people are finding this government out in the agriculture sector. Expectations were raised and raised very substantially. We heard a lot about farm-gate profit. The only thing this Minister for Agriculture has been able to claim is the final signature on free trade agreements for which the Labor Party has more ownership than this government, and that is the truth of it. The sad news—

Mr McCormack: How can you stand there and say that?

Mr FITZGIBBON: I will tell the member for Riverina how I can stand here and say that. The former Labor government spent six years developing these agreements. They do not appear overnight.

Mr Marles interjecting—

Mr FITZGIBBON: I see the member for Corio nodding. He was the last minister to be working on them. Those opposite know that we were so close to securing those deals. Maybe another month or two might have got the set. Of course, it was not so difficult for those opposite, because they were prepared to sign at any cost. They just wanted to take the trophy. That is what it was all about for them, and that is why, sadly, we are having a debate about the China free trade agreement, a wonderful opportunity for Australian agriculture. There is only one group of people putting any of that at risk: those who sit opposite, who are not prepared to concede that there are deficiencies that can easily be fixed with the stroke of a pen without in any way offending the agreement which has been reached with our friends in China. It is about time they got out of the way and allowed those benefits to flow to Australian agriculture.

I close by accepting the invitation of the member for Riverina and simply ending where I began. That is to say that in our determination to maintain the longstanding, bipartisan approach to the development of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan we will be supporting this bill, and certainly from my perspective we also do so in the interests of those basin communities which have been seeking such change.

Mr McCormack (Riverina—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance) (18:30): I am pleased to hear that the shadow minister for agriculture and the Labor Party will support this important legislation before the House, the Water Amendment Bill 2015.

This has been coalition policy since the morning of Tuesday, 27 November 2012. I remember it well because I had a one-on-one meeting with the then opposition leader the night before to discuss this very policy. It is an important policy, because this bill gives effect to the government's commitment to legislate a cap on surface water purchases in the Murray-Darling Basin to 1,500 gigalitres. The coalition has been committed to a triple-bottom-line approach, recognising that there are social impacts, economic impacts and environmental impacts with whatever we do with the Murray-Darling Basin. We know as much as anybody that you are never going to get 100 per cent satisfaction from all sides of the argument when it comes to water. You are always going to get people who disagree with you. Some will say there is not enough water for the environment. Many will say there is not enough water for the irrigators to grow food and fibre.

I represent Riverina, one of the best food and fibre producing areas in the nation—

Mr Fitzgibbon: Hear, hear!
Mr McCormack: 'Hear, hear,' I hear the shadow agriculture minister say, and he is right to support me on that! As of March 2015 there are 1,162 gigalitres of the 1,500 gigalitre cap already obtained, leaving 338 gigalitres of headroom for the strategic purchase of gap-bridging surface water. I hope that strategic purchase is such that it is in fact not 338 gigalitres but much less, with the water infrastructure on-farm and off-farm that we are investing in right now. I hope it is much less and I certainly hope that it is not coming out of the Riverina, which has already given so much. The Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder, David Papps, is already the nation's largest irrigator.

This legislation has been warmly received. The National Farmers' Federation water task force chairman, Les Gordon, said in March 2015:

We look forward to working with the Government to secure the passage of legislation through the Senate to enshrine the Cap as law as soon as possible.

It has taken a bit longer than Mr Gordon would have liked, but it is here. John Dal Broi, the mayor of Griffith, said:

I've been an irrigator all my life and I distress at what is happening in this area. They've forgotten about why the water was there in the first place.

Echoing calls from around the region for a major change in water policy, Councillor Dal Broi said:

Nothing annoys me more than listening to governments of either persuasion saying we are the foodbowl of Asia … They're saying you can grow all this food, but we'll tie one hand behind your back. They agree with you but are they doing anything about it? No.

Tonight I can inform Councillor Dal Broi—and I will call him as soon as I have finished this speech—that we are in fact getting on with the job of capping water buyback, and I know he will be pleased.

I am now going to read from a 1946 edition of the book *Water into Gold* by Ernestine Hill, first published in 1937. I have referred to this excellent work previously in this House because it is such a valuable reference and provides an insightful snapshot into some history pertinent to the Riverina and aspects of this debate. Here is what the author writes of the Riverina from the early 1920s:

New South Wales, the mother-State, and still the rightful owner of the Murray, had many thousands of soldiers to repatriate, but it was wealthy now beyond the dreams of avarice, three times the size of Victoria, with three times the fertile lands of South Australia, and infinite resources to command. Since Federation it had suffered no relapse of the old-time jealousy. Indeed, it had, with the most amazing magnanimity, allowed Victoria to adopt the Murray for mallee irrigation farm schemes innumerable that were not, it must be admitted, a conspicuous success, and even with railways constructed across the stream, to serve its townships on the northern bank that were geographically, if not politically, more closely in touch with Melbourne than with Sydney.

New South Wales, as a matter of fact, was busy with schemes of its own. The great major tributary, the Murrumbidgee, was wholly within the boundaries. On this energies were concentrated for the time being, in yet another miracle of irrigation, that would restore a lost world, and transform the scorched sand-wastes of "Hay, Hell and Booligal" to a garden paradise yielding a million a year.

New South Wales cheerfully spent very nearly £8,000,000 in the construction of the magnificent Burrinjuck Dam, on the upper Murrumbidgee, east of Gundagai, with a capacity of thirty-three and a half billion cubic feet, the Berembed Weir, west of Wagga Wagga, the Yanco Weir, and in a thousand
miles of channelling, advances to settlers for homes, towns, and railroads to build for them, factories for
their produce, roads and electric supplies, to bring into being a thousand farms.

Burrinjuck opened 300,000 acres for settlement within a hundred miles of it, regulated the flow of
the river for 730 miles, assured constant water supplies for a million grazing acres, and bejewelled the
darkness of the Australian night with the electric lights of Canberra, Queanbeyan, Gundagai, Tumut,
Wagga, Junee, Cootamundra, Temora, Murrumburrah, Harden, Yass, Young, Grenfell, Cowra and
Wyangala.

Two thousand settlers on the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Areas occupy 318,000 acres, many of them
being returned soldiers, and there is unlimited scope for more. A note in the prospectuses of the Water
and Irrigation Commission of New South Wales informs us that "Further farms will be made available
as demand requires."

Eight thousand people are living on the Yanco Irrigation Area, with Leeton as the chief town, and
9,000 on the Mirrool area, the centre of which is Griffith. Fat lambs, dairying, fodder crops and fruit are
the mainstay of the Murrumbidgee area, now exporting its excellent canned peaches and apricots to
England. One co-operative canning factory alone in Leeton treats 120 tons a day. Practically the whole
of the New South Wales production of canning peaches is grown in the district, with nearly 300,000
bushels of citrus a year, fresh fruits and vegetables for the Sydney market, and three-quarters of the total
State production of grapes from 21,000 acres of orchard and vineyard.

For the rest, the advancement of settlement may be estimated by the fact that there are now four
towns of considerable size—Griffith, Leeton, Yanco and Yenda—three distinct railway lines—
And it goes on and on and on.

The book goes on to talk about the miracle of rice production in the Riverina. It was first
planted in Yanco, when the New South Wales Water Conservation and Irrigation Commission
began to take an interest in the enterprise. The book states:

Until 1923, Australia imported all her rice from the East, but in that year three varieties planted
experimentally on a large scale at Yanco proved successful—Javan, Californian, and the seed obtained
from Mr. Takasuka, of Nyah.

His hobby was rice. It continues:

The American adapted itself ... to Australian conditions, and from the first twenty tons of seed
distributed to settlers by the Government as an experiment, to-day—
we are talking early 1920s—
20,000 acres of "padi" fields have sprung up, adding their wealth to that of the dairy pastures and the
orchards, in country that was once considered worthless save for sheep.

I should have said that that was actually when the book was reprinted in the 1940s. It says:

To-day the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Areas are producing sufficient table rice to supply Australia, 313
growers, on an average 80 acres each, reaping an annual ... 368,000—
pounds—
from rice alone.

The ever-present problem of markets and the fear of overproduction are the only factors that hold the
progress of the settlements in check.

Well, if only today markets and overproduction were the only impediments!

Indeed, our government has successfully negotiated preferential trade agreements which
have opened up unprecedented opportunities for the Riverina and other regional areas. The
previous Labor government, despite what you might have just heard from the previous
speaker, at the behest of the Greens in the lower house in the 43rd Parliament forced a man-
made drought on the Riverina and other irrigation areas and did very little by way of trying to
forge new trade agreements.

This legislation goes some of the way to making things right. There is still more to be
done—much more to be done. I was pleased to be able to read from that book Water into
Gold, written 70 years ago, as I say. When you look at what was made available from the
precious resource of water then and how it has transformed to today, you get a bit of a
snapshot of just why the Riverina is such an important fibre and food bowl.

Jenny Ryan, the Administration Officer, Economic Development and Tourism, of
Narrandera Shire Council today told me that two of Narrandera shire's businesses produce
6,510 20-foot-equivalent units in annual containerised freight. This does not include figures
from the nut plantations in the Narrandera shire, one of which is an operation which will have
more than a million trees under harvest within the next few years. It can also be noted that the
Riverina produces 129,000 TEU, of which 72 per cent currently is transported by rail. They
are 2013-14 figures.

If we look at the Griffith regional overview, there is more than $2 billion annual production
in agriculture and horticulture just out of the Griffith City Council local government area
alone. It is Australia's largest producer of wine. One out of every four glasses of wine comes
from Griffith.

Mr Marles: Really?

Mr McCormack: Yes, really—to the member opposite. Absolutely. About half of the
region's wine production is exported. It is the largest chicken meat producer in Australia. It
supplies three-quarters of New South Wales's wine grapes. It supplies 70 per cent of the New
South Wales citrus production, worth $98 million. It is the largest prune-growing area in
Australia. In almond production it is going absolutely amazingly well. Its gross regional
product in manufacturing—and these are just 2010 figures from the Australian Bureau of
Statistics, so they would have gone a long way further since then—is $281 million;
agriculture, $294 million; finance and insurance, $189 million; and retail trade, $86 million.
That is just out of Griffith alone. You can imagine, when you include the Murrumbidgee
shire, Leeton shire, Narrandera shire and Carrathool shire, just how valuable the Riverina is.

I was a little bit sorry that I had to come down and speak because Minister Joyce was
unavailable to speak at that particular time, because I was very interested to hear what the
Greens member for Melbourne was going to say about this. I hope that he gets on board,
because, by goodness, we did not hear too much positive coming out of the Greens during the
whole time that the Murray-Darling Basin issue was an absolute political hot potato in the
43rd Parliament. Indeed, what we saw from the Greens was totally destructive. They wanted
all the water to go to the environment. To hell with the farmers; to hell with the irrigators; and
to hell with those people who grow food and fibre for this nation. Never mind the bright city
lights of Swanston Street. All he cared about was the environmental concerns.

The world's best environmentalists are the irrigation farmers I represent. They are the
world's best environmentalists because they know, much more so than the member for
Melbourne, that, if their river is not protected and does not flow, they are not going to have an
income. But they cannot continue to do what they do on 17 per cent allocations. They cannot
continue to do what they do for our nation and other nations besides when they are getting
totally screwed over by man-made droughts forced upon them by what sometimes might seem
to be well-intentioned governments but certainly were not when it came to putting what the
Labor-Greens alliance did in the parliament from 2010 to 2013.

I was pleased that the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for the Environment, Bob
Baldwin, came to my area on 5 August this year to announce $263.5 million for on-farm
irrigation in New South Wales. That is going to be a game changer for the Riverina. It is also
going to dovetail in well with this Water Amendment Bill that we are debating tonight. The
Minister for the Environment, Greg Hunt, congratulated the successful funding recipients of
round 5 of the On-Farm Irrigation Efficiency Program. He said:

Under the Coalition's Clean Water Plan, we're investing more than $12 billion in managing our
waterways and key water infrastructure …

… This latest $263.5 million investment will assist irrigators in the southern Murray-Darling Basin
modernise their on-farm irrigation infrastructure.

That money is going to be put to such good use to maximise every drop.

Farmers in my area have been accountable for a long time and will continue to be
accountable—and they are accountable now. They have to be accountable for every single
drop of water that they use. Never mind the water icon sites and the greenies and the
Wentworth Group and all these other people who think that all the water needs to go down the
river and straight out of the mouth of the Murray. Never mind the fact that they are not that
accountable for the water. They are not, but I tell you what: the farmers in my patch are. They
have to be accountable not least because it costs them money but also because they are made
to be accountable by the innumerable bureaucracies that they have to answer to, more's the
pity. But I am pleased that that quarter of a billion dollars worth of on-farm irrigation
infrastructure is going to make a difference.

On 24 June this year the Senate resolved to establish a Select Committee on the Murray-
Darling Basin Plan. The committee will enquire on the social, economic and environmental
impacts of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan on regional communities. Public submissions may
be made and will close on 20 September. I would urge that any Riverina irrigators listening to
this speech make a public submission—and there will be many listening. I encourage
members to pass this Water Amendment Bill unanimously, because that is what is required.

Ms CHESTERS (Bendigo) (18:45): This is one of those, I guess, rare moments for people
in the country who may be listening or may be watching this debate unfold, where we have
bipartisanship on this issue. I believe it is because this is one of those issues that have come
before the House where we have consulted the stakeholders. The stakeholders have been to
see us here. The stakeholders have invited us out to their communities—all the stakeholders.
People have engaged with the farmers and the farming communities. People have engaged
with the environmentalists and the environmental organisations, with the relevant state
agencies and with the relevant federal agencies, as well as with our Indigenous
communities—all associated with the Murray-Darling Basin Plan. No plan is perfect, and it is
right and proper that it be reviewed. It is right and proper, as we see before us in the Water
Amendment Bill 2015 tonight, that we revise the plan to reflect the social, economic and
environmental purpose and needs of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan. The Murray-Darling
Basin Plan, or Basin Plan, has bipartisan support at the federal level as well as support in the
basin states, and that is a critical point, because for as long as we have been a Federation there has been struggle and conflict over water. We are a country that relies on this system of rivers for so much of our agricultural product but also so much of our environmental and social wellbeing and the communities that live in this area. So it is good to be able to stand here and say that through this consultation, through the work that has been done by lots of members of parliament, we have reached a bipartisan situation on this particular bill.

My own electorate, the Bendigo electorate, is part of the southern gateway to the Murray-Darling Basin. We have several rivers in the Bendigo electorate that feed into and contribute to the River Murray, and they flow through north and central Victoria. These are from as far down as Woodend and Kyneton in my electorate, all the way up through to the north. My predecessor Steve Gibbons was actively involved in the consultation and reform that occurred during the last parliament. So we know in Bendigo the importance of water. We also know in Bendigo, as well as the neighbouring electorates, what happens when we do not approach this in a methodical and bipartisan way to come to an agreement where all stakeholders have been engaged. We remember the water wars. We remember the conflict, which did not deliver a good outcome for the community; it just delivered not only conflict but heartbreak. And it is great to be able to stand here today to say that we have not gone through that to reach this bill and this position that is before us today.

I would also like to acknowledge the other electorates, particularly the Murray electorates, and I know how important this piece of reform before us is to their communities. I had the great privilege earlier on in the year to spend a couple of days up in the Murray and was hosted by the Murray-Darling Association. I want to particularly acknowledge and thank tonight Councillor Greg Toll, who is the president of the Murray-Darling Association, and the CEO of the organisation, Emma Bradbury, who were very kind to take this new MP on an engagement tour to learn firsthand from locals—whether they be farmers, the state or federal based organisations and authorities, or the environmental groups—about the impact and the rollout of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan. In many ways it was an education tour, and I would like to thank them for giving me the opportunity to learn from their constituencies the importance of a bipartisan approach to help bridge the gap in supply that can be provided, and making sure that reform that comes before this House does meet all those criteria—economic, social and environmental.

During my time, I learnt firsthand about the importance of water for rice farming. I know that rice farmers can sometimes get a bit of a bit of a bad rap. They seem to be big users of water, but what I learnt from being on the farm and meeting with rice farmers around Echuca is that the water that they use for their rice crop and the work that that does with the soil allows them to have high yields for the other crops that they have post the rice crop. It is something that I do not think a lot of Australians would understand. Yes, the rice crop might use a lot of water—and they only they only use the water if it is there—but there is yield potential for future crops because of what happens to the soil post the rice crop. That, to me, is a story that is not told broadly enough. They talked to me about the future of cropping that they can have on their land by having the rice crop—the fact that it does help them with other yields. I think that is an important point that we should note.

Also during this visit, I got the chance to see the production facility of Kagome Australia and learn from Kagome Australia, who are an integrated producer—not just a tomato grower
but a manufacturer—about their relationships with their farmers but also their growing business model and economic markets. Currently they are the largest single grower of processing tomatoes and the largest Australian tomato-processing company. In fact, they supply 45 per cent of Australia’s domestic consumption of processed tomatoes and assist many other large food manufacturers with the supply of tomatoes. You may not see Kagome when you walk into the shops, but what you do see is MasterFoods. What you do see is their product going into many of the big name brands that we see in our supermarkets. When I met with Kagome and I asked them, ‘What would you like to see from your parliamentarians in this space?’ they put water at the top of their list—making sure that water was available at a price that was relevant to their cost of production. They raised in this meeting how, because of the water market that had been established, they could not tell from year to year what the price of water would be. They worried about the cost of their production with that fluctuating water price.

Kagome, like many of the other people I met with, have actively engaged with the Commonwealth, whether it be through inviting local MPs and other MPs to come and learn their story or writing a submission for the Agricultural competitiveness white paper. This is one of the great success stories in Australia. They have put out there clearly the support that they need in terms of lowering their costs of production, and they put water at the top of that list. The Kagome example highlights a number of issues that need to be addressed, whether through this reform or other reforms, if we want to not only remain competitive but continue to be a vibrant food manufacturing area.

The Murray-Darling Basin Authority had many more examples and were quite keen to ensure that any MP who took the time to visit them met with a number of their stakeholders to learn firsthand why this bill that is before us today is so necessary. They talked about the Swiss cheese effect that is occurring in some parts of the Murray-Darling Basin. The Swiss cheese effect happens when dairy farmers choose to leave the land and sell their water rights. When that gets to a critical mass, when a number of them have sold their water rights, there is then pressure on the water authorities—will they continue to irrigate that part of the country? This issue is not just related to the Murray. It is an issue I could identify with, because it is a live issue we have in Harcourt, an apple-producing region in my electorate. The ongoing battle is whether the water authority will continue to deliver irrigation water to the area, because it comes down to the market—do they literally have enough people buying irrigation water to keep the service going?

They spoke about their concerns about that but, most importantly, they asked us to consider the bill before us today. This bill talks about bringing forward a cap. As we have heard from previous speakers, the Murray-Darling Basin Plan is delivering outcomes. It has recovered quite a lot of water for the environment. This has been done through water purchases, infrastructure investment and other basin state recovery action. It is important to acknowledge the role that all the basin states have played in this space.

This water can be used at appropriate times when it is needed to improve the flows and help restore the health of the system. We cannot underestimate—and we need to all stand and say this—that our farmers, like our environmentalists, acknowledge that we need a healthy environment. What I respect about the farmers in central and northern Victoria is that is the first thing they say to you. We all agree we need a healthy natural environment. It is how we
get there and make sure we acknowledge that social, economic and environmental approach to water management.

Importantly, there has been significant Commonwealth investment to ensure that these communities and farms remain productive as the plan has developed. This occurred in the previous government and the current government. As I have mentioned, the basin supports agriculture on a grand scale. Up to 40 per cent of Australia's agricultural production is associated with the basin. I have mentioned the experience of my area and just to the north of me. I mentioned rice farming. The basin accounts for nearly 100 per cent of our rice farming, 96 per cent of our cotton, 75 per cent of Australia's grapes, 59 per cent of Australia's hay, 54 per cent of Australian fruit, 52 per cent of Australia's sheep and livestock production and 45 per cent of our dairy—and I have mentioned what we hope we can avoid occurring in dairy if this plan goes through.

Almost two million Australians live and work in the Murray-Darling Basin and its communities. It is everyone from the paddle steamers, the small businesses, the cafes, the public sector employees, the farmers and the associated workers. We know how important a healthy Murray is to these communities.

There are of course the environmental needs of the river. This system has some of the most beautiful natural land we have in this country from the north in Queensland and northern New South Wales through to Victoria and South Australia. We have an obligation to keep this area healthy and environmentally preserved for not just this generation but every future generation.

Then there are the cultural flows and acknowledging the deep connection that Aboriginal people feel towards land and water. There is a lot we can learn. Knowledge is passed on through generations and that can help us guide any policy we have in managing our river systems. I want to acknowledge the work of the Northern Basin Aboriginal Nations and the Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations. They have offered advice on not just the ongoing rollout of the plan but how to improve the plan. I acknowledge the Aboriginal people of my own local area—the Dja Dja Wurrung. They have been vocal about the need for healthy river systems.

Labor recognises that the government wishes to provide certainty to basin communities by placing a cap of 1,500 litres on water purchases. This is a sensible measure that will give those communities that I have spoken about tonight certainty to be able to plan, to move forward and to start working on how they can continue to grow so that they have got a future.

We have consulted with various stakeholders, some of whom I have recognised tonight, whether in my electorate, in parliament, on the road, on their properties or in their communities. We have carefully considered the position that has been put forward by the states and believe that only through working constructively together in this bipartisan way will we be able to achieve what all of us want to achieve: a Murray-Darling Basin Plan that delivers for the environment, that delivers for our communities, that delivers for our farmers and that delivers for all Australians.

Mr Joyce (New England—Minister for Agriculture) (19:00): It is a great pleasure tonight to discuss the Water Amendment Bill 2015 and the implementation of the cap. In opposition, I was shadow minister for water and this was a key objective and a key promise
that we made, and something that is vitally important to Australian agriculture not just in the Murray-Darling Basin but across our nation for its agricultural output.

We must note at the start that it is not just the Murray-Darling Basin Plan that has returned water to the river. A lot of people think that the only time water has ever been put back into the system has been under the Murray-Darling Basin Plan, but that is not the case. During the Living Murray, $700 million was put aside and invested to recover 500 gigalitres of water. Water for Rivers, a joint initiative between the New South Wales, Victoria and Commonwealth governments, recovered 282 gigalitres—70 gigalitres for the Murray River and 212 gigalitres for the Snowy River and for environmental flows. There was the Loddon River sales deal and the water recovered as a consequence of the unbundling of prior water rights. The Northern Mallee Pipeline and the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline provided a mixture of regulated and unregulated water savings of 75 gigalitres.

What we had at the start of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan under the previous government was something that got very close to a riot in Australia. It was actually quite startling how out of control it became. They were even tempted to go into partnership with the Australian Greens. They were logical; they wanted about 6,000 gigs put back into the river. This would have brought destitution for any of the farming communities.

Mr McCormack: And floods.

Mr JOYCE: Yes, and floods in certain areas.

Dr Leigh interjecting—

Mr JOYCE: I wouldn't be flippant because this absolutely drove people to the edge, that they would have a government that was so completely out of touch and out of control that this issue had raised it head. At that point in time, it was role of the coalition to make sure that if they had a choice between Sarah Hanson-Young and the coalition that we played our part. So we went into partnership with the Labor Party to try to mitigate the effects that they would otherwise have caused. They were in partnership at that point in time. There was a Labor Green Independent government and that government was discussing at one point taking 6,000 gigs out of the system. It would have been an absolute nightmare. We went to work to make sure that we could bring about a better outcome.

That better outcome is here tonight with a cap on buybacks being limited to 1,500 gigalitres. We want to make sure we change the objective so that we focus on the proper triple bottom line, which is economic, social and environmental. What we had before was environment, daylight, daylight, forget about everybody and then make excuses for the social and economic outcomes. That is not what we wanted. We wanted to make sure we maintained the fabric of the towns—the fabric of the Dirranbandis, the St Georges, the Milduras, the Berrys, the Deniliquins and the Griffiths—because the people in these towns have a right to an economic future. Water is wealth. It is so fundamentally important that we get this right.

Tonight, I listened to the member for Hunter's contribution. I diligently waited for their policy going forward. The Australian people have a right to hear their policies. It is getting to that time in the electoral cycle when we should start hearing what the alternative policies of an aspirant government might be. But we are not getting that. The only thing we get from the Labor Party on agriculture are comments on us, because we are the only ones with policies.

Dr Leigh: How about the white paper?
Mr JOYCE: I am glad you bring up the white paper because we have it and I want to go through it. It took us to put a further $500 million towards the National Water Infrastructure Development Fund. The facilitation letter has now been sent to me and Agriculture will be taking that forward and making sure we get the process underway. We have already been in discussion with state governments, including state Labor governments, about the rollout of this program. That is just one part.

We have also started discussions with the Productivity Commission regarding regulations affecting agriculture. We have also made sure there is country-of-origin labelling. It never happened under you guys on the other side, but it is happening under us. We have progressed this. We are going to give people a form of labelling that is diagrammatic, that reflects proportionality, that is compulsory and that is simple.

Dr Leigh: When?

Mr JOYCE: The process will be rolling out at the start of next year. It never happened under you on the other side. It is easy for you because nothing ever happens under the Labor Party in agriculture, not a thing except bad news. Although they did do one thing: they shut down the live cattle trade. They managed that. That was a great day in the office, that one!

We are streamlining the regulation of agricultural and veterinary chemicals. That is part of the white paper and that is underway. We are standing behind cooperatives. We have been having the discussions with cooperatives. We had CBH in the office today as we start that process of trying to make sure that that runs out further. We are going through the selection process right now for a commissioner to sit with the ACCC so that farmers get a fairer deal. That is a policy that has happened under us. It never happened under Labor because no policies for agriculture happen under Labor. They do not believe in agriculture. All Labor can ever do is comment on our policies because this is the only side that has policies.

We brought forward opt-in for income tax averaging. We had opt-out and now we have opt-in. Once you got out of income tax averaging, you were unable to get back in. We are putting it back in so that after 10 years you can get back in. We are doing this.

We have already brought forward 100 per cent write-off on fences, 100 per cent write-off on water reticulation, a write-off over three years on fodder. These are the processes that are already happening, that we have already done, that are already there. We have done freight modelling for agriculture expansion to try and attract money into agriculture, to attract money for the construction of major nation-building infrastructure. We are already starting the process of better seasonal forecasting. We are putting $29.9 million towards trying to get multi-peril crop insurance up and running. We could go on.

Those opposite pooh-poohed the drought recovery loans because that is nothing. They only ever comment on our policies because they have got none of their own. They said what have we been doing? At this point in time, the total value of loans that have been allocated is $354.87 million—so I am informed right now—between farm finance, drought concessional and drought recovery. What is also important here is 675 applications have been approved. Do you know how many were approved under them? We had eight approved under the Labor Party-Greens-Independent coalition and 675 under us. That is a vast difference. You have to look to the government as to who actually does something in agriculture. We are actually doing it.
The Labor Party got farm household allowance, which is not a loan but a direct payment to those doing it tough, out to 367 people. Under us, 4,522 customers have received the payment. We can see the difference a government makes. We heard from the shadow minister for agriculture, the member for Hunter, that I had died without a trace. What do you call that? A block of flats? It is on the front page. It is not a bad 'look at me'. It is quite obvious that not only did we work hard but we got the respect back from people because they knew we had gone into bat for them.

We heard from the shadow minister for agriculture. It is like a booby prize for the Labor Party—anything agriculture, they hate it. They always wish they had something else, anything—a trip overseas. It is a bad-luck day when they get the Minister for Agriculture. But for us, it is the centre of government. We love it because it represents our work, our key constituency and the things that we need to do, the things that we are doing right now.

The member for Hunter said that the China free-trade agreement had more to do with them than us. I had a look. It started back in 2005. I was trying to remember who the government was back then and I thought, 'Hang on, it was the coalition that started it and the coalition that delivered on it.' Or we are going to do deliver on it if the Labor Party ever decide to come out and publicly state they will support it like the Premier of South Australia, Jay Weatherill, wants it supported. The Premier of Victoria, Daniel Andrews, wants it supported. The Premier of Queensland Annastacia Palaszczuk wants it publicly supported like the premiers of every state. Other people I have some respect for like Bob Hawke wants it supported. Martin Ferguson wants it supported. Simon Crean wants it supported. Who does not want it supported? The love child of the BLF, the CFMEU, does not want it supported. Who do those opposite listen to? They listen to the love child of the BLF. Norm Gallagher, he is back. He is running Labor Party policy.

I know the shadow minister opposite knows full well it is a very bad look for a prospective government to look at its biggest client in the face and say, 'We are considering whether we want to do business with you.' That is a very peculiar thing for a prospective government to say out there away from the sensationalism of the BLF. You would probably do better to listen to the VFF or the NFF or AgForce. They would be better people to listen to than the BLF, but, anyway, you have made your choice. You have built your cross and now you are happily climbing up on it.

What we are doing is making sure that agriculture is at the centre of government. What we have done is made one of the most major policy deliveries in my time in parliament. What we are waiting for is that at some point in time, when all the angels are aligned, when all the things are right that a Labor Party member will come into this chamber and actually deliver what their policy for the future is going to be, any policy, any idea or maybe a question at question time about policy rather than a grab bag of gotcha moments. Because that is what competency does.

You should be spending your time in opposition—and the way you are going, you may be there for a fair while—developing policy. That is what we did. And then when we came to government, we delivered the white paper and we delivered the policy outcomes. If you cannot deliver any sort of vision, any sort of plan for the future in agriculture then when are you going to deliver your plans?

Mr Stephen Jones interjecting—
Mr Joyce: We have heard his agricultural policy is now family violence. That is incredible. We will run that one out there. I will take the interjection. The interjection from the member opposite was that his plan, as close as he could get to agriculture, was an issue about family violence. Family violence is extremely important and it needs proper diligence but it has nothing much to do with agriculture. Until you are able to come in here and talk about agriculture then we are going to call you for what you are. It is a pastime. You are incompetent. You have no hope because, if you do not have the acumen to come up with agricultural policy after two years, I believe you do not have any agricultural policy.

We will continue working as hard as we can on the policies that we have delivered. We will start rolling out the infrastructure, which we are already doing. We have got Chaffey Dam under way. We have got Tasmanian irrigation schemes underway. We are rolling forward now with the 1,500 gigawatt cap on the Murray-Darling Basin. This will put some form of security back into the Murray-Darling Basin, which was absolutely decimated by the previous governments and their interaction with the Greens and the Independents, which left us in a bizarre position. There is only one group of people that the Australian people need to listen to if they want to hear agricultural policy and that is the coalition, because the Labor Party, the Greens and the Independents have offered and do offer nothing. (Time expired).

Mr Katter (Kennedy) (19:15): I consider us very lucky, and it is very timely, to have Minister Joyce in a key portfolio with respect to water. I thought the minister might like to hear this. We deeply appreciate his presence there and we hold high hopes that he will be able to bring to fruition where we want to go with water, which is where the water is, which is of course in Northern Australia and specifically in North Queensland. We want to add that Minister Lynam has the makings of a very good minister in the state government. We are uniquely placed at the present moment to move aggressively forward in this area.

The history is pretty simple, and I suppose I am a major player. The two great leaders are a bloke called Harry Clarke who was the Chairman of the Dalrymple Shire, an area as big as Tasmania, and Freddy Tritton the long-serving—30 years, I think—chairman of the Richmond Shire Council and the great pioneer in water in North Queensland, particularly inland North Queensland. They told me to go out after the Bradfield Scheme, so I did some checking up and found this Bradfield was a pretty smart bloke. He built the Sydney Harbour Bridge. He built the underground railway system in Sydney that is still being used today. It won the international prize—

Mr Joyce: Story Bridge.

Mr Katter: He built the Story Bridge. He built the Burrunjuck Dam. He built the weir that supplies Sydney with its water supply even to this very day. He was not a fool. The Bradfield scheme, of course, in every way was an excellent proposal. It took a little tiny bit of the giant floodwaters of North Queensland and turned it inland into Lake Eyre. Lake Eyre would then evaporate—if it is full of water, it will evaporate—bringing 30 million megalitres across the Murray-Darling Basin, which is only 22 million megalitres, and it would make it rain in inland Australia, specifically over the Murray-Darling Basin. The other way he proposed that it could be done—but it was the day before big D9 dozers and heavy earthmoving equipment—was to dig a ditch up from Spencer Gulf and fill it that way.

In 1986 a professor from the University of Queensland who would prefer not to have his name mentioned, a bloke called Roy Stankey, who is the smartest man I have ever met in my
lifetime and a very great Australian, and I drew up the revised Bradfield scheme. Roy Stankey's family were pioneering—drilling bores—back in the 1890s. Instead of sending the water down to Lake Eyre we said, 'We'll use it in inland Queensland on the great rolling black soil plains of North Queensland,' and we said that you would fill Lake Eyre from Spencer Gulf. Have we lost our vision in this country? Can't we think big anymore? Have we become intellectual pygmies? Is our vision restricted by closed lenses?

Let me move from the area of what should be to the area of what will be. Through the machinations of the democratic system, my little tiny political party that I belong to now has immense power. We have an extremely close relationship with the Speaker of the House, Peter Wellington, and he has said that he will back us on irrigation. We remain very confident that Minister Joyce will achieve big things down here for us as well.

I suppose it is a political point, but in the 26 years since Bjelke-Petersen was stabbed in the back there has hardly been a single irrigation licence issued in Queensland. In North Queensland, with 220 million megalitres of Australia's 380 million megalitres, we use just a little over one million megalitres. Out of 220 million megalitres we are allowed to use just one million megalitres. In the Murray-Darling, which covers a fifth of Australia's surface area, they have 22 million megalitres and even now they are still allowed to take seven million megalitres out. We have got 10 times that amount of water and we are only allowed to use one tenth of the water that they are using. What is wrong here? For 25 or 26 years—whatever it is—in Queensland there has been no water development whatsoever except the dirty, filthy corrupt thing which no-one else is going to talk about, and I am not going to talk about either. The one exception in that period of time is a disgrace to government.

After 25 years, the LNP gets elected and they then move to do something about it. This is their idea about doing something about it. This is according to the newspaper, because they will not give us any information—and the incoming government will not either, I might add. They issued three licences: one to the person who owns the biggest cattle station in Queensland, one to the third-biggest cattle owning corporation in Australia and the third one to an absolutely great bloke. He is a good mate of mine and one of the most fantastic blokes, but he also happens to be the fourth- or fifth-biggest cattle owner in Australia. We give a golden handshake to three giants, and nobody else gets anything.

Shortly, we will be releasing the KAP policy. That will synthesise and bring together all the great ideas that have been going around and distil them into a working framework from which we can move forward, and I hope we enjoy positive attitudes from the LNP and the ALP towards these water development programs. We are uniquely placed, and I served for almost a decade as the northern development minister. For those critics of where we have been going, I might add that we secured the Bradfield Scheme. Bjelke-Petersen announced it and put up $5 million to start engineering work immediately. That was back in the eighties. Some three months later, Liberal Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser also announced that they would be involved in the building of the Bradfield Scheme, so we got it. Within eight months both of them were gone, which tragically is what happened when Bradfield first put it up. Edward Theodore, of course, was a wildly enthusiastic backer, and he was gone eight months later because of the Great Depression. So we have not had a lot of luck.

That is the record, but let us forget about the past. Let us now say that the ALP has a positive attitude and the LNP has a positive attitude. I must thank both of them in this House,
because the ALP decided to contribute $3 million for an update on the figures on the key dam for all development in North Queensland. The Hells Gate Dam is the key dam for Bradfield and for any movement forward. It is just west of Townsville on the third biggest river in Australia, the Burdekin River. The ALP allocated $3 million. They lost government, and the Liberal Party, after some consternation, sent the $3 million cheque through. So both parties in this place now have a positive attitude towards water development in the north. And this is a very big scheme.

Let me start where the scheme should start. Instead of the very rich and powerful, we have four—and one of them is a great mate of mine. There are few people on the planet I admire more than him. But why did you not give it to everybody? This proposal would give it to everybody. Some 1,500 families would benefit, not four and not a corporation, which is not even a person. In fact, everyone who would want water would be able to get it. Every single person would benefit at the first level.

There is a second level. I was heavily involved in negotiations to get the live cattle trade reopened. The Indonesian ambassador in the discussions with me said, 'We are paying $4 to land in Jakarta, and your cattlemen are being paid only $1.80. What is happening to the $2.20?' We were only getting $1.20 at that stage. The cattlemen were getting $1 and Indonesians were paying $4. What was going on here? I thought it was price gouging, and there is a lot of price gouging, but it really was not. It was just a hopelessly inefficient system we had for transferring live cattle out of Australia to Indonesia, the Philippines and everywhere else.

They hold them in a yard for a week and have to bring hay, in the case of Townsville, 500 or 600 kilometres from Clermont. In the case of Darwin, I do not know. But, in the case of Townsville, no-one is going to take cattle—if they have any brains—in a truck from Queensland nearly 1,000 kilometres across to Darwin. They just cannot afford that. They are only getting paid $1,000 for the beast and it probably costs them 160 or 170 bucks to get it there, so their margin would be gone.

All I can talk about with authority is Townsville. You have extremely valuable land being used for holding cattle. You do not hold cattle in the middle of a big city. That is the last place you would do that. The inefficiencies of doing that—having to bring the hay in to feed them for a week, keeping them under veterinary conditions and then bringing in the hay for the boat—are quite crazy. So we will be proposing 30 or 40 medium-sized irrigation projects that will see cattle walk from irrigation block to irrigation block, onto a ferry and out to a big boat, so that instead of $2 out of every $4 going to this inefficient system it would be in the range of 30c or 40c. This would benefit the people of Indonesia and would benefit the people of Australia. It would honour, from our side, my undertaking, as the self-appointed chief negotiator, to fix up the efficiencies, so they do not have to pay $4 but $3. Our cattlemen, instead of getting $1, would get $2 a kilogram. That is the second rung.

The third rung concerns towns like Mareeba, Georgetown and Charters Towers as well as the mid-west towns of Cloncurry, Richmond and Hughenden. These towns will have microdevelopments of from 7,000 hectares up to maybe 15,000 or 20,000 hectares. We call them microschemes because they are very small, but they will create tremendous benefits for the people of those areas. In the case of Richmond and Hughenden, it almost certainly will
double the population. On their population figures, they are both dying at the moment, and Cloncurry is not faring much better.

I will conclude on this note. We have a map, which I should have brought to the parliament—I will table it later. It has Cape York Peninsula in red and Victoria in red, and they are both about the same size. There is a big difference between Cape York and Victoria. Cape York gets a nearly 70-inch rainfall, nearly three times the rainfall of Victoria. Victoria has 4½ million cattle, and you might say, 'Well, Victoria is half sheep and half wheat, so Cape York, which is all cattle, should have maybe six million head of cattle.' It does not have six million head of cattle; it does not have four million; it does not have one million—it has 150,000 head of cattle. And it is not only about irrigation here; it is about title deeds for the first Australians, which I have spoken on 100 times in the House. But if you do this for us and give us these schemes, not only will you create 10,000 or 15,000 jobs but you will also provide an extra $7,000 million a year in income for the Australian people. (Time expired)

Mr COULTON (Parkes—The Nationals Chief Whip) (19:30): I would like to speak on and endorse the Water Amendment Bill 2015 and gladly bring the debate back to the Murray-Darling Basin. This bill has been introduced to legislate the limit of buybacks at 1,500 gigalitres. I am pleased to say that, at this stage, this bill appears to have bipartisan support and it also appears to have the support of the basin states—and that is very important. Legislating the buyback cap was a promise that was made by the Prime Minister prior to the last election, and it forms part of the Australian government's commitment to the Murray-Darling Basin communities. The legislation will deliver further certainty to farmers and irrigators in the basin.

I can proudly say that I represent 25 per cent of the Murray-Darling Basin. The border rivers of the Macintyre, Barwon and Darling, through to the Gwydir, Namoi, Macquarie and Lachlan major rivers, make up the Parkes electorate. This bill will ensure that future environmental water recovery to achieve the 2,750-gigalitre target under the Murray-Darling Basin Plan occurs through infrastructure investment and system efficiencies, providing a win-win for the environment and regional communities. We are seeing some of those infrastructure works happening in my electorate, and probably the standout are the three off-river modernisation schemes in the Macquarie. I attended the official opening of the Trangie-Nevertire scheme, where I represented the minister. It is a remarkable piece of engineering. That scheme was originally designed to, basically, drought-proof a traditional grazing area that had morphed into an irrigation area, which, because of its size and original design, was incredibly inefficient. So that group of farmers agreed to reduce the size of the scheme to allow the farmers on the periphery of the scheme to go into a stock and domestic system and allow for the lining of the channels and modernisation of individual farms through centre pivots and lateral-move irrigators to reduce the wastage in that scheme. Last year, in a very dry, low-allocation year, record crops of cotton were grown in the Macquarie valley.

This proves that this government is focused on recovering water through investment in infrastructure as a priority rather than through buybacks. This legislation will provide further definition of what has been carried out on the ground. We have prioritised infrastructure over water. In the past, we have seen what indiscriminate purchases can do in the basin. The purchase of the Twynam Pastoral Company water from Collymongle Station has led to the devastation of the town of Collarenebri. One hundred permanent jobs have come off that one
farm with the purchase of that water, and the economy of Collarenebri, I believe, will never recover to where it was before that purchase.

So it has been a rocky road through the last years to get to this point with the Murray-Darling Basin Plan. This plan has come on top of water-sharing plans that happened previously, brought in by the basin state governments. We have seen reform for the irrigation industry and for the river communities in my electorate that has been going on now for probably more than 20 years. This legislation will certainly give some certainty that the indiscriminate buybacks will cease and that we will see a focus on investment and engineering. But we have a way to go and we are going to require a level of maturity in this. We are going to need a level of goodwill and we need to understand the complexities of the Murray-Darling Basin.

Because of the complex nature of this vital river system, when we try to explain what can be done in simple terms we can end up with a lot of misinformation and a lot of people marginalised in the process. The Murray-Darling Basin is the food bowl of Australia. The communities in my electorate rely on this water. When we look at restructure and what might replace some of the water that has been lost to protect the environment, the reality is that there is nothing you can put into a western town that will generate interest and wealth like a megalitre of water. There is nothing that compares to water to put life into these towns. We should acknowledge the great sacrifice and contribution by these communities and these farmers in an attempt to make the Murray-Darling Basin environmentally sustainable.

But there are some more things that we need to do. I believe there is a real desire for the communities to have a clearer justification for some of the water that has gone to the environment. This is happening at the moment. I believe the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder is committed to having an audit of where the water has gone and the benefits that water has had for the environment. A lot of this is the responsibility of the states, but we need a level of communication and cooperation so that, with the management of the rivers, environmental water and productive water can piggyback with each other so that we can get a better outcome by having both systems working in cooperation, not independently. Over the years, we have seen environmental flows caught in with productive flows, in the Gwydir and Macquarie valleys in particular, leading to indiscriminate flooding of crops and, through that, a loss of production. So we do have a way to go to get to a better understanding of that.

When we speak of engineering works, we really need to be progressing the issues around Menindee Lakes. The Broken Hill water supply is a particularly difficult situation. The amount of water that is lost through evaporation, not only in the delivery of water down to Menindee but what is lost in that system, is unacceptable. We are going to have to bite the bullet on Broken Hill’s water supply and on getting some efficiencies in the system around Menindee. I do not think the irrigators and the communities in my area have a desire to go back to the start of this process. They are committed to this process, but not at all costs. They want to see that we are auditing where we are up to to make sure that the modelling that was done earlier on can be backed up by actual figures and measurements of where we are going with the environmental water compared to the productive water.

The reality at the moment is that, bar the Lachlan River catchment, which has had some good rainfall, most of the dams in the northern basin are empty or nearly empty. But regardless of what sort of a plan we have, if we do not have rainfall and water in the dams,
those communities are going to suffer. I should acknowledge that things are looking particularly bleak for the border rivers—the Barwon and the Darling—and for the Gwydir, Namoi and Macquarie rivers when it comes to this coming irrigation season. So we are desperately hanging out for some rainfall. For the benefit of my southern colleagues and those further down the river in southern New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia, it should be remembered that the rivers in the northern basin are ephemeral streams. They do not have regular snow melt and there is not a constant supply of water coming into them. Traditionally they go from flood to drought on a regular basis. We had a flood in 2012, then we had a couple of good irrigation seasons and now we are back in drought. I think there should be an acknowledgement that sometimes there is just not the water to contribute further down the basin. I think we are going to see that this year. The northern basin is having a particularly tough time of it. We can only hope that we see a wet summer coming up.

I am very proud to have played a part in pursuing this bill. I acknowledge the work done by Parliamentary Secretary Baldwin and, before that, Parliamentary Secretary Birmingham and the support from Minister Hunt. I also acknowledge my other colleagues in the basin who have worked very hard to make sure that we have this legislation that can give some comfort and certainty to communities and irrigators right throughout the basin that the era of willy-nilly buybacks on an ad hoc basis has come to an end.

We are going to focus on productivity, engineering and a triple bottom line for the communities in the basin. We are going to get to an end point where the communities, farmers and irrigators in the Murray-Darling Basin can have some certainty which they can base their planning upon into the future. At the moment, they are fatigued by this reform that has been going on for many years. Hopefully, this legislation will give them some comfort when it comes to their future endeavours.

Mr ZAPPIA (Makin) (19:45): The Water Amendment Bill 2015 effectively amends the Water Act 2007 to impose a statutory limit of 1,500 gigalitres on voluntary water purchases across the Murray-Darling Basin as part of the restoration of 3,200 gigalitres of water to the system.

This year marks the 100th anniversary since the signing of the first River Murray Waters Agreement in 1915 and the formation of the River Murray Commission two years later, in 1917. The importance of the river system to Australia's future was well understood by our forefathers 100 years ago, when Australia's population was five million, and well before the establishment of the basin irrigation communities, including the soldier settlements that were developed after World War I and World War II. Indeed, towns like Murray Bridge in South Australia, South Australia's Riverland region, Mildura, Swan Hill, Shepparton, Griffith and so many others along the river, grew subsequent to World War I and World War II.

Today, the basin is home to some two million Australians, of which 1.2 million rely on the water to survive. It covers an area of about one million square kilometres. It accounts for 40 per cent of Australia's agricultural production and over 50 per cent of Australia's irrigated produce. It also produces 100 per cent of Australia's rice and accounts for 96 per cent of Australia's cotton production and 75 per cent of Australia's grape production. Importantly, it is still home to a substantial number of Australia's Indigenous people, who live along the river system. The basin is equally a national environmental asset, being home to some 30,000 wetlands and hundreds of species of fish, birds and plant and animal life.
The reality is that the 1915 agreement was not effective in securing the health of the basin or the livelihoods of the basin communities, as was evident from the effects of the decade-long millennium drought which began in the late 1990s. As a member of the House committee that visited and met with basin communities in 2010 and in the early parts of 2011, I saw firsthand the disastrous effects on families, on whole communities and on the environment that mismanagement of the river system had caused. I saw farmers who had gone broke, the economies of towns collapsing, with numerous businesses closing down, and environmental assets, including Ramsar-listed wetlands in South Australia's Lower Lakes, reaching catastrophic conditions. Given the severity of the millennium drought, even the best basin plan would not have averted some of the dire consequences that we saw. However, a responsible plan would have lessened the consequences, perhaps would have prevented the parochial bickering between the states that occurred at the time and certainly would have provided a much clearer direction and more certainty for the hundreds and perhaps thousands of growers who were directly affected by the drought.

The basin plan that was brought together by Labor under the leadership of the membership for Watson, who was the relevant minister at the time, ensured that, finally, after about 100 years, there was a science-based plan agreed to by each of the states, the ACT and the federal government. It was a plan that was also based on extensive community consultation, including with the Indigenous communities, and discussions with scientists, growers and environmentalists. It was a plan that had the input of all of the people who had a stake in the basin system. The critical outcome of the plan, as I saw it, was the return of 2,750 gigalitres of water to the system and then the return of an additional 450 gigalitres to the environment, subject to there being no negative impact on communities. In total, 3,200 gigalitres of water would ultimately be returned to the river system in the years ahead.

This bill does not change the 3,200 gigalitre target. What it changes is how we get there. I personally accept that we can reach the 3,200 gigalitre target with a 1,500 gigalitre cap on voluntary buybacks. Already, 1,900 gigalitres has been returned, with some 1,160 gigalitres having been returned through water purchases and 600 gigalitres having been returned through infrastructure improvements.

During the work of the committee, I was always of the view that most of the returns should come from efficiency measures, even though, initially, it may be more expensive than securing the water through buybacks. In the long term, however, securing the water from efficiency investments makes much more sense, because it does not constrain productivity by taking water from farmers or cause the exit of farmers from the land, in turn affecting the viability of regional communities. Furthermore, it makes no sense at all to continue wasting water because of the use of inefficient irrigation systems. Work over recent years has shown that achieving the water returns through efficiency measures is possible. Both on-farm and off-farm water savings measures can be found across the basin. Indeed, the work of the committee identified many opportunities for water efficiency investments that could be made. Those, from memory, appear in appendix E of the committee's report.

No group understands better or has invested more money into efficiency measures than our farmers. They understand that water efficiency is important to their future. From open-furrow irrigation systems, the farmers have invested in highly efficient sprinkler systems, dripper systems, moisture-monitoring equipment and expensive land-levelling processes that avoid
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water wastage through run-off. Having made those investments, often running into hundreds of thousands of dollars, those irrigators are entitled to some certainty about their future, and that is why the basin plan was so important.

However, we should not become complacent because the drought is behind us, because good rains have restored the general health of the basin in recent years and because farmers themselves have learned from the drought and made important and necessary adjustments. We do not know when the next drought will come, but at some stage, I suspect, it will. When it does, basin communities will be much better prepared because of the work done in recent years and, in particular, because we now have a basin plan in place. Of course, the plan needs to be constantly reviewed and, if necessary, adjusted as required. That is exactly what this bill does. It looks at where we are at right now and it looks at what is possible in the years ahead and how we can change from achieving that 3,200-gigalitre target through water purchases to achieving it through efficiency investments.

There is no doubt in my mind that food production will continue to be a major economic driver for Australia in the coming years. It is a subject that is often referred to in this place and a subject referred to when we talk about the growth of Asia and indeed the global population. Global markets create export and growth opportunities for Australian food producers, particularly because of the clean, green, good-quality food Australia produces. That point was well made only last night by Taiwan's trade minister when he addressed a gathering here at Parliament House. Additionally, the now-lower Australian dollar, global population growth, the rising middle class across Asia, the loss of existing agricultural land in other parts of the world, water shortages in other parts of the world and water and land pollution in other countries, combined with Australia's agricultural expertise and CSIRO research, all add to Australia's natural advantages and growth opportunities in food production.

I want to divert for just a moment to talk about the water shortages that are occurring in other parts of the world. In China, India, Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East, the water systems are already stressed. In many parts of the USA, the water systems are already stressed. It is clear from an analysis of what is happening around the world that water shortages in years to come are going to have a severe impact on the ability of nations to continue to produce food, including Australia if we do not manage our water systems better. The Murray-Darling Basin Plan is doing exactly that. It is a national effort at managing one of the nation's most important water resources better than we have done to date. Yes, there has been some pain in getting to this point, but we are getting there, and if we need to finetune it, as I said only moments ago, then that is what we should do.

There is no better opportunity, given the water shortages that are emerging in other countries of the world, for Australia to capitalise on the opportunities that food producing offers this country. We already have communities that are established, where infrastructure is already in place and where the farmers have settled in and have the know-how, the skills and the ability to increase their food production. And we should give them every opportunity to do so, not only because they have already made substantial investments in their properties and their farms but because it is in the national interest for us to do that. The Murray-Darling Basin has it all in terms of the infrastructure that has already been established there. Water
security is the single thing that will provide the greatest confidence to the growers who are already there.

In closing, I want to speak very briefly about the importance of the system to South Australia. Because South Australia is at the end of the system, we are very reliant on water inflows and extractions that occur upstream, particularly in the states of New South Wales and Victoria. We saw, at the height of the drought, the absolute devastation that was caused to the Lower Lakes and to Riverland communities, including Renmark, Berri, Barmera, Loxton and Murray Bridge, as a result of no water being available to many of the growers there. These communities were all established about 100 years ago—in fact, straight after World War I in most cases; Loxton was established after World War II. But they are communities that have for decades and decades existed through their reliance on the River Murray water system, and they are communities made up of real people. Some 30,000 people live in what we call the Riverland area of South Australia—real people who have put their life savings and their work into their properties. They too have entitlement to continue to have water security. It is sometimes disappointing to hear comments made about the fact that the water falls interstate and that therefore the first rights to that water should go to the people who live where it falls. That is certainly the interpretation I draw from some of the comments I hear.

The other point I make is about a question that is occasionally asked: what is the point of allowing water to flow through the Lower Lakes and out to sea and seeing it just go to waste? A river dies if it does not flow. We saw the emergence of that at the height of the drought. Two things happen. Firstly, the waters from the sea come inwards and the salt levels continue to go upstream further and further. We saw them moving upstream right through to I think Blanchetown in South Australia, which is probably halfway up the river system in South Australia. The second thing that happens if the river does not flow is this: each year, through the Murray Mouth, somewhere between 1.5 million and two million tonnes of salt are washed out and carried out to sea; if the river does not flow, that salt remains in the system, and slowly the whole system dies. So it is important not just because we want to try and preserve and save the environmental assets of the lower lakes; it is important for the whole river system to ensure that the flows continue because, if they do not, everybody loses out. So to those people in the eastern states who think it is simply a waste of water to see it flowing out to sea I say: 'Think again.'

As the member for Hunter made clear when he opened the remarks on behalf of the opposition with respect to this legislation, we support this legislation. It is legislation that largely keeps intact the plan to return 3,200 gigalitres of water to the basin, and that is, in my view, the key target that we should be aiming for.

Mr BROAD (Mallee) (20:00): Can I commend the opposition for their support for the Water Amendment Bill 2015 and thank the member for Makin for some of his wise words. He talked about a confidence, which I think is very important for irrigators. There are times when we need to amend legislation to make it better, so it is nice to see some bipartisanship around what I think is an essential topic—the water within the Murray-Darling Basin.

What is so special about the Murray-Darling Basin? Not only is it essentially our largest water supply but, complementing that large water supply, it also has the great soil. When you combine water and soil, that gives potential. When you put that with confidence and people, you create productivity and growth and wealth. Water is the key ingredient to growth and
wealth in a very, very dry country. We do live in a very dry country, and we do need to have very good water management. If we look at the Murray-Darling Basin system over the last 100 years, we see that as we developed opportunities through the early 1920s and 1930s we saw that a great dream of turning water and labour into food could be realised. However, through the 1950s and 1960s a lot of allocations were attributed to people who wanted to extract water out of that system. It needs to be stated that, if you look over the last 100 years at Australia's average annual rainfall in the Murray-Darling Basin, you can see that the 1950s and 1960s were the wet years. There is no doubt that there was an overallocation attributed to the Murray-Darling Basin. Then, as we saw things come back into the 100-year average, we realised that there is some work that needs to be done around trying to find that balance—a balance between good river health and extraction for food production and so that we can grow those communities.

I think the Murray-Darling Basin Plan is a very rough attempt at that, and it is going to require amendments. It is going to require changes as we attempt to get it better. But, if I think through the issue here, it is all about confidence. If we can instil confidence in our irrigators—and producing food is risky—then we can instil better environmental outcomes. I will explain this: if you are not confident that you have certainty in your water then you are not going to spend what is sometimes hundreds of thousands or sometimes up to a million dollars in piping, in tape-and-drip irrigation and in better water management principles. If you are not confident, you are not going to invest in better genetics—be it genetics in horticultural crops or genetics in livestock. If you are not confident, you are not going to put in a new rotary dairy that is going to drive productivity, because you are nervous. What we saw when the Murray-Darling Basin Plan first came out was a stripping of confidence. There was a nervousness. I attended Murray-Darling Basin meetings—I was president of the Victorian Farmers Federation—and the question people were asking then was: 'Are you going to take away my water? You're not going to take away my water!' And it would become very adversarial. I think that robbed confidence.

Of course, we do have to find the balance between good environmental health and irrigation communities being viable, but we will not take away people's water. We need to instil some confidence, so attempting to put a 1,500-gig cap on buybacks is the first step towards restoring legislative confidence for our irrigation producers. It is saying that we still have a commitment to establish 2,750 gigalitres of water, we still have a commitment of 1,500 gigalitres of that being part of the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder, but we are going to achieve the rest by investing in major infrastructure, by investing in environmental infrastructure and by doing things that are necessary to get to that figure, but also growing our wealth and opportunities.

I see great wealth and opportunities in our region, but I also see that we need to put some rigour around how we manage the 1,500-gig cap of that Commonwealth Environmental Water Portfolio when we get to that level. The principle that an environmental entitlement is the same as an irrigation entitlement is very sound—so when things are wet we all have more water, and when things are dry we all have a little less. And it needs to be understood that we no longer have a natural system. We have a working river, but a working river does not necessarily mean it is an unhealthy river. If there is one thing I have learnt about irrigation communities, it is that they are often the great environmentalists. They are people who live on
that river. They are people who are passionate about good river red gums. They are passionate about ensuring that our rivers have good fish life. They have great suggestions. If there is one thing I think we can take out of the lessons from a poorly-consulted Murray-Darling Basin Plan, it is that we need to listen more to irrigation communities and talk at them less. What we saw in those Murray-Darling Basin Plan meetings were very well-skilled bureaucrats speaking down to people who may not have been as articulate but who actually knew more than those bureaucrats would ever know, because the people in those rural irrigation communities—those country towns on the river systems—had generations of knowledge around the river system, and they have a lot to offer.

I think what we have learnt in our irrigation communities, because water is expensive, is how to manage it frugally. My hope is that the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder will put a deemed rate on the 1,500 gigs that they hold so that they can then put some financial rigour around an environmental water holding assessment. For example, if they choose to water a wetland and they say that a megalitre of water to water that wetland costs $75 a megalitre, they can then say, 'We could water that wetland for, say, $300,000,' or 'Perhaps we could sell some of that water for, say, $50,000 and use some of the money from the sale of that water to build some environmental infrastructure to also achieve the same level of outcome in that environmental wetland.'

You can see what I am getting at. By putting a deemed value on the 1,500 gigs and seeing it as a resource that belongs to the government we can then, over time, and with the knowledge of our rural irrigation and river communities invest in things like fish stairways, environmental infrastructure—the odd pipe and pump here and there—and actually achieve good environmental outcomes, just like we do with our irrigation infrastructure.

The Murray-Darling Basin Plan does not currently allow the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder the freedom to sell water onto the temporary water market and then reinvest in environmental infrastructure. A change to allow this would provide an improved basin over a number of years, at little cost to the Australian taxpayer. It would also allow the government to work with communities on project suggestions, implementations and the restoration of some of the trust between governments and water users. I think that is something that really needs to be talked about.

I have a strong belief in the future of irrigated agriculture. I have a strong belief in the ingenuity and the mindset that is out there. I would like to reflect on some things that have taken place in my electorate, for example, the Hattah Lakes project, which has just been an amazing sort of thing to watch. Substantial money was put into pumps. Water was then moved through Hattah Lakes. It was given a watering and then it drained off those lakes so not only is it watered but it then freed up environmental water to come back and rewater other patches. There is some stuff that can be done and I think there are some great opportunities.

But one way of achieving the management of good environmental water is going to require those who manage the asset to be living in the communities where that asset is managed. I have a strong belief that, if you cannot look out of the window at what you are managing, you do not manage it very well. It does concern me that the Murray-Darling Basin Authority is based in Canberra, as opposed to being based in those communities.

We can argue all day about where the spots should be located, but the more people you have living in irrigation, river towns and those communities who are managing the Murray-
Darling Basin, managing our environmental water, the more organically they will feel the needs of that river system. If they can organically feel that, they will then, in turn, manage it better. Those who live in Wodonga, for example, have a greater understanding of the river health. Those who live in Renmark will understand the river health. Those who live in Mildura will understand the river health and those who live down in the Lower Lakes will understand the river health. Having that managed out of Canberra I do not think necessarily achieves the best outcome—no aspersions thrown against those who work in that department! However, by living in those communities you really do feel it.

The Murray River is a fantastic river and so is the Darling River. I think the challenge for the Murray-Darling Basin Plan needs to look beyond the 2,750 gigs as a number because, ultimately, river health is not just about a figure. River health is measured in many other ways. I think we need to be very careful that we are mindful of the constraints within the Murray system to achieve that amount of water, when there is no water coming down the Darling River.

The river is a natural river and there is the Barmah Choke, which will put restrictions on it. And we simply do not have the physical ability to take water out of Hume, all the way down to South Australia without having some constraint issues to tackle the Barmah Choke.

That is why I think there is a strong argument for further investment in Menindee Lakes. Menindee of course is a high-evaporation storage and there is no doubt about that. Its location is in a hot area. It is not far from where I live. When I am bored, I often get in my little plane, fly over it and have a look at it. Engineering works can be done there. Whilst it is not the greatest and most efficient storage, it is a storage and the last storage within the Darling River. Looking at how we can do some engineering works within the Darling River and Menindee affords us the opportunity, when the Murray and Darling join up at Wentworth, to ensure some surety around the Lower Lakes, and some security of water for the Riverland. And that is an area of prosperity that I want to see grow. I want the Sunraysia and the Riverland to really capture the opportunities that we have found through the free trade agreements, particularly around citrus, table grapes and almonds, which we are seeing expand. But the only way we are going to do that is to look at some of those engineering works. That will require real dollars from the government but, ultimately, the thing that separates us and should separate us as a great government is how we are prepared to invest in the major water infrastructure that will address one of the greatest challenges in the dry country that we live in.

I think we can do it. I think the best outcomes are only achieved when you work with real communities. And the best outcomes are only achieved when a level of bipartisanship and understanding is achieved in this place. It is pleasing that both sides of the parliament are recognising the need to put a 1,500 gig cap on the buybacks. It is pleasing that we recognise that when you instil confidence in people they will then invest, grow their business, grow their wealth, manage water better and we will get river health. That is why I am really happy to speak on this bill. I look forward to it going through the Senate, being implemented and getting some confidence back in the Murray-Darling Basin and the communities who live there.
Ms McGOWAN (Indi) (20:14): I welcome the contribution of my colleague, the member for Mallee, the great work that he does in his community and his real concern for the river. Thanks for your comments.

I am pleased to speak to the Water Amendment Bill 2015. By way of introduction, I would like to inform the House that 50 per cent of the water that falls in the Murray-Darling Basin falls in the electorate of Indi. This figure has been verified by a number of reputable sources, including the Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority and the North East CMA. This water falls as rain—obviously—but also as snow in the mountains of the great Australian Alps.

From the Murray Valley in the north of the electorate of Indi down to the Goulburn in the south, Indi is in fact a watershed electorate. Indi is a catchment electorate—it is the catchment for the Murray-Darling Basin. This water flows into the rivers and creeks of Indi, the tributaries of the Murray river. Let me name them: the mighty Goulburn, the Broken, the King, the Ovens, the Kiewa, the Mitta, the Dart and, the grandest of all our rivers, the mighty Murray. Embedded in these valleys and on these rivers are the dams of the Dart, the Hume, the Nillahcootie and the Eildon—the places where we store this environmental water.

Right across the electorate—in every community and in every valley—the people care deeply about how our water is used. We care that our water is needed and used efficiently and effectively. We care that our water is used for the environment and is used well. Water is used for farming, for our towns and for our regional centres. The water is for our industries and manufacturers. The water is for our recreation, for our wild life and for our wellbeing. Water to drink and to cook and clean with. Water for our parks and gardens. We care about its use.

Currently, a very large percentage of our water is exported. It is exported to our neighbours in the Mallee, to the flat landers, to the irrigation lands and to the cities and towns of South Australia. It is of use and benefit, I am sure. However, the rules for this export are outlined for us by this parliament in the rules around the Murray-Darling Basin Plan. They have been well-debated and argued, and compromises have been made and agreements reached. This legislation before the House tonight is proposing to change some of these rules. Following consultation and negotiations with the minister and relevant staff, I am pleased to support these changes. But in doing so, I would like to draw attention to a number of issues raised by members of my constituency—issues relevant particularly to the implementation of the plan. These issues centre around the constraint strategies. How will the environmental water get from the rivers and dams of Indi to the environmental sites in the west? Who will bear the cost? How will compensation be made?

On the Goulburn River the Goulburn Broken CMA is the key authority responsible for this planning. The Murray-Darling Basin Authority, with technical support from Goulburn Broken CMA, is developing a business case for addressing environmental flow constraints along the Goulburn River. Funding for the development of the business case is being provided by the state of Victoria from the Australian government’s water special account as part of implementing the Basin Plan. The development of the business case commenced in May 2015 and the final business case is required to be completed by November 2015. The business case will assess the feasibility of delivering increased environmental flows along the river to inundate the lower Goulburn River floodplain—overbank flows would benefit the network of billabongs, wetlands and river red gum forests on the floodplain and the many native animals
they support; what land, businesses and infrastructure could be affected by delivering increased environmental flows, which may include farms, fisheries, caravan parks, roads and bridges; and the options to mitigate or offset potential impacts and their costs, which include easements over private property and modifying or building new infrastructure.

In the north of the electorate a similar process will need to be carried out on environmental flows released from the Hume dam. However, I understand this work has not yet commenced. I look forward to working closely with the relevant authorities.

Let me proceed by reading a letter from a farmer and community leader from the Yea community in the shire of Murrindindi, Jan Beer. Jan Beer expresses her concerns strongly:

Dear Cathy,

As my Federal representative in the electorate of Indi, I'm writing to ask you to make representation to the Minister for the Environment, Mr. Greg Hunt, the Parliamentary Secretary for Water, Mr. Bob Baldwin and the Murray Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) regarding my concerns on the Constraints Management Strategy (CMS) under the Murray Darling Basin Plan.

Jan goes on to outline her concerns:

(1) The river channel capacity of the Goulburn River at Molesworth in the Upper Goulburn Catchment is 9,500 Megalitres/day (ML/day). The MDBA are proposing environmental flows of 20,000ML/day, which they describe as "small overbank flows", but are in reality over double the channel full volume. This flow completely inundates the high value agricultural river flats at Molesworth and cuts access in many other properties downstream. Flows of 15,000ML/day and 20,000ML/day are totally untenable.

(2) No extensive Cost/Benefit Analysis or Socio-Economic Impact Study on proposed flooding of the Upper Goulburn catchment have been undertaken. The MDBA have commissioned at least 22 socio-economic reports in the Murray Darling Basin and all but one of these reports were on impacts of reduced irrigation, with the other one covering flooding in the Northern Basin—we need it for our community in the Yea area.

(3) The Constraints Management Strategy 2013-2014 Page 32, states that during Phase 2 there would be "a property-by-property assessment with regard to landholder impacts and mitigation options." The MDBA and Goulburn Broken Catchment Association (GBCMA) now state there is insufficient time and insufficient money for this to take place. Instead, saying there will be "limited opportunities to work at farm-scale levels". Now only 2-3 case studies of farms will occur and 2-3 "specialist case" studies, that is, trout farms, caravan parks.

(4) The Victorian Government is required to acquire easements as a mitigation process, over land that will be intentionally flooded. Mitigation means to alleviate, lessen the pain or impact. An easement is NOT mitigation for landholders. It devalues the affected land and total farm value.

An easement is in reality mitigation for Goulburn Murray Water and GBCMA who are the government agencies deemed to be legally liable and responsible for damages caused by flooding.

Phase 2 of the Constraints Management Strategy states that evaluation and analysis of the proposed project must be based on extensive investigation and research to support the decision-making process.

Jan writes:

I do not believe that this process, which should demonstrate that the Strategy is viable and technically and economically achievable, is being undertaken.

As part of the Murray Darling Basin Plan, this is a multi billion dollar project, involving the expenditure of tax payer's money, therefore who will be liable and responsible when it is found that decision-makers have not been fully informed of all aspects with a detailed risk analysis.
Indeed, who will be liable? Who will take responsibility and how will compensation be paid?

In conclusion, while I do support this bill, I call on the minister and the parliamentary secretary to work closely with farmers such as Jan Beer, to clearly and accurately communicate with them and to address their concerns. I call on the minister and the parliamentary secretary to make that special effort to work with catchment farmers and with the people and the communities right across Indi. After all, it is our water and it is 50 per cent of the water in the basin.

Mr PASIN (Barker) (20:24): I was reminded recently by the chair of the Murray-Darling Basin Authority, a former Speaker in this place and former member for Wakefield, Neil Andrew, of a famed quote by humourist Mark Twain. Mark Twain is credited as having said, 'Whiskey is for drinking and water is for fighting over'—and isn't that so true in this nation with respect to the history surrounding the Murray-Darling? But I am pleased to say that in recent times we have had a proud history of bipartisan support when it comes to the Murray-Darling Basin, the Murray-Darling Basin Plan and the bill that is currently before the House, which will cap water buybacks to 1,500 gigalitres. So I congratulate this place and particularly those on the other side for what has been a bipartisan approach with respect to the plan and, importantly, on the bill before us, the Water Amendment Bill 2015, and the plan to legislate a buyback ceiling. I take this opportunity to acknowledge the contribution made by the member for Indi. Whilst she ended by indicating that it is water—and I think the term might have been 'our water'—can I encourage the member for Indi to accept that this is the nation's water resource. I think it is important as we stand here in the national parliament to understand that.

Why was I so energised and why have I worked so hard to deliver the legislation which sets the cap? Quite frankly, it is because buybacks kill communities. If you as a federal government come into a community with—pardon the pun—a big bucket of cash and buy up water to meet the targets in the plan, you do, in my respectful and humble opinion, irrevocable and long-term damage to the community itself. As the member for Barker, I have a heavy burden in this place. I am, in a sense, the South Australian who represents the river and river communities. In the House tonight we have the member for Mayo, who also represents some portion of the river, and the member for Wakefield—who succeeded David Fawcett, who succeeded Neil Andrew, who is now the authority chair, as I mentioned earlier with respect to the famed quote from Mark Twain.

The heavy burden is that you come to this place knowing that it will be your responsibility to stand up for river communities in South Australia who face the difficulty of a geography that is against them, with respect. That is why I am so pleased that this parliament has, over some considerable time, come to a bipartisan approach when it comes to the Murray-Darling Basin Plan. We were fighting over this before Federation. Indeed, some people in my community often quip that we would have been well placed in the early 1900s to give responsibility for the Murray to Western Australia and Tasmania, because self-interest is something that has held us back and has created difficulties.

Regarding the heavy burden I spoke about, I think I am ideally placed. I represent the communities on the river but I do not come from the communities on the river. I am an irrigator. Some of the favourite times of my childhood were spent carrying irrigation pipes around our property in the south-east of South Australia on those hot summer nights and...
laying those aluminium pipes down with my now late brother and father. So I understand the
importance of irrigation entitlements and the need for certainty around them. But I do not
come from the river communities in Barker; I come from the south-east, where we irrigate
from aquifers. So, in a sense, I understand their plight but I am not tarred with any particular
interest along the river. I am not, for example, from the irrigation communities of the northern
parts of my electorate in the Riverland—Renmark, Loxton, Berri, Waikerie and other
communities. Equally, I am not from the Lower Lakes. So I am ideally placed to advocate on
behalf of the South Australian river communities and to bring balance to my judgement.

This government, I am proud to say, understands the importance of the river in terms of the
lifeblood that it literally pumps into communities. It always takes my breath away when I
travel into the Riverland, whether it is via the Barossa or up from the southern regions. You
are surrounded by land that is marginal. You come up close to the river and you see these
great orchards of green, these great productive environments, these hotbeds of community
activity. Meeting with people there, first of all I saw the relief in their eyes when they came to
realise that the Murray-Darling Basin Plan had been secured. I congratulate all who were in
this place before I came here for having achieved that. It was a significant achievement, one
that I remind this House we had been seeking to secure for close to a century—an
independent authority with responsibility for the whole of the Murray-Darling Basin system. I
saw their relief and now I see them clamouring for certainty. They hear from us—from people
on both sides of this place—that it is the stated desire to ensure that this plan is implemented
on time and in full. I spoke earlier about that heavy burden, and there it is—‘on time and in
full’.

But, while we are talking about certainty, here is an opportunity to deliver some certainty.
We said, in the lead-up to the last election, that we were going to work towards this cap, that
we were going to prioritise water efficiency investments in lieu of purchases. It has always
been a target. As a result of this bill, it will be a legislated cap. I remind the House that this is
not where we want to end up, but it provides certainty to communities to say that we will not
go past this level of buyback, reminding everyone that it is clear that buybacks kill
communities.

‘On time and in full’ is effectively the macro aim, but there is some work that we need to do
in addition to the work that we are doing tonight—and I congratulate the parliamentary
secretary for having, pardon the pun, negotiated the waters to get us to where we are. We
heard from the member for Mallee—and, goodness, he is right—about water storage. In a
nation as dry as ours, which enjoys the rainfall that we do, we allow far too much of it to
escape. We have not invested in the type of water storage infrastructure that will provide for
us insurance in times of drought, and we must do that. Again, that is something that is some
way off, but I know it is something that the parliamentary secretary and this government are
focused on.

But there is something that we can do sooner than that, and I think it is important that we
do it, and it is this. Members of this place might not know, but the Commonwealth
Environmental Water Holder, the largest single water holder in the nation—who, in my view,
holds those water rights on behalf of all of us effectively on trust—is entitled to trade. You
heard it from the member for Mallee. Indeed, in my respectful submission, the
Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder ought to trade where he can. But unfortunately
the legislative framework at the moment prevents him from using the proceeds of those trades for any endeavour other than purchasing more water rights. That kind of runs contrary to what we are seeking to do by this bill. So I encourage all in this place—and I know the parliamentary secretary is working towards this as a response to the review—to come to a point where the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder, referred to in this place as the CEWH, is able to trade water: inject that water, if you like, back into productive infrastructure, given the right environmental settings, and take the revenue from that transaction and invest it in some of the works and measures that perhaps the member for Mallee was talking about.

We take our commitment to this plan seriously. We are investing $2.5 million every day to 30 June 2019 in the future of the basin. We know that this basin is ideally placed to meet the food tasks that will come out of Asia. There are 500 million Asians living in the middle class today. By 2020 it is anticipated that 3.5 billion Asians will have achieved that status. They crave the types of foodstuffs that will be delivered out of regions like Barker but particularly out of the Riverland, products of irrigated horticulture. We must secure the future of those communities today, to ensure that they can service that demand long into the future.

On a day such as this, I would be remiss if I did not turn briefly to the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement. Farmers in my electorate are ecstatic about the prospects on the horizon as a result of the three free trade agreements that this government has secured—with Korea, with Japan and, of course, with the globe's most populous nation, China. They see the opportunity. They are excited about the opportunity. But I began by talking about certainty. Just like irrigators on the river want the certainty that comes with legislated protections, so too do my farmers up and down the electorate, not just those who live between block 6 and the mouth of the river but all of them. They want the certainty to know that people in this place want to secure the future of Australian agriculture by providing for them access to markets like China that are, again—pardon the pun—ripe for the picking.

I have watched them in the last month or so go from elation, understanding the opportunities finally on their doorstep. It is the current minister who refers to agriculture in this way. Bullish prospects are a bit like free beer: a shingle that hangs above the bar in your local pub, an enticing prospect—free beer tomorrow—but one that never seems to realise itself. That is why I have watched them go from optimism to despair. The despair they have arrived at is because all of a sudden, for base political purposes, those on the other side of this place have decided to play politics with the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement.

It has been a difficult thing to watch these farmers who have endured drought, who have endured every difficulty the world and the environment can throw at them, go from optimism to despair. I ask those on the other side to consult their consciences and support our efforts to secure the ChAFTA.

Ms MARINO (Forrest—Government Whip) (20:39): Most people have no idea of the hardships inflicted on people in the Murray-Darling Basin by federal and state Labor governments. I will give a brief history to show where Labor failed so badly. The National Water Initiative was pioneered by Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson in 2004, triggered by the New South Wales Labor government's attack on New South Wales groundwater licensees. The New South Wales government had invited a cross-section of people to assist in the drafting of water management plans. However, in 2003, when these plans were published
in the government gazette, they bore no resemblance to the plans as drafted and recommended to the New South Wales minister. The plans as published provided for a 49 per cent across-the-board cut to all groundwater licences in New South Wales without compensation.

As most irrigated properties in the New South Wales Murray-Darling Basin are not viable without water, the value of the land is also dependent on that water. Many farmers faced bankruptcy as their farms dropped below the value of the mortgage on their land. Whilst the water-sharing plans were challenged in the courts, Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson stepped in to insist on the irrigators. One of the outcomes was the 2004 National Water Initiative, which amongst other things enshrined the concept of permanent tradeable water entitlements that cannot be compulsorily acquired without compensation on the whim of a state government.

Remember that state governments by the late 1970s had virtually ceased major maintenance and renewals on government owned irrigation schemes, many of which had been constructed by hand by soldier-settlers in the 1920s. Irrigation assets had been actively allowed to deteriorate past the end of their useful lives, and government owned schemes often had water losses of up to 48 per cent as well as financial losses under state government management. As a result, the Keating government pressured state governments to transfer these loss-making irrigation schemes to local grower-irrigator ownership to reduce the pressure on state government finances.

In 2006, a group of irrigator owned schemes formed the Bondi Group to promote a greater awareness of their work to improve water efficiency and how these schemes operated with the NWI. The majority of the Bondi Group members owned and operated what had been loss-making schemes when they were under government control. The irrigators—the farmers—actually turned these into financially sustainable systems. Harvey Water in my electorate was a member of the Bondi Group. Others were Ord Irrigation and Gascoyne Water from WA; Coleambally Irrigation, Murray Irrigation and Western Murray, amongst others in the Murray-Darling Basin; Clyde Water Trust from Tasmania, the oldest continuously operating irrigation scheme in Australia, established in 1832; North and South Burdekin boards from Queensland; and Pioneer Valley in Queensland, the newest irrigation scheme in Australia, which in 2006 was and still is in the process of being transferred to irrigator ownership. The Bondi Group met with the then parliamentary secretary for water, Malcolm Turnbull, in 2006-07, focusing on the latest ideas in water efficiency being introduced by those irrigator owned schemes such as total channel control and new channel lining technology. Harvey Water and Coleambally in particular were recognised worldwide for their groundbreaking work in irrigator funded water-saving infrastructure upgrades.

The Bondi Group was proud of the progress their members had made in infrastructure upgrades and water saving—improvements that would never have been made if they were still in state government ownership. These were practical water savings being made at a time when state governments were in general not even doing routine maintenance and renewals.

In January 2007, Prime Minister John Howard delivered what is known in the water industry as the Australia Day Speech, setting out a $10 billion national water plan. The then Minister for the Environment and Water Resources, Malcolm Turnbull, in the second reading speech on the Water Bill 2007, stated:
This Water Bill is the first water reform program introduced into this parliament in 106 years. It is truly a nation-building bill, not only for this generation but also for the generations to come. It will ensure the sustainability of one of Australia’s great natural assets. It will underpin our nation’s water resources and it will secure the future for the industries, the communities and the environments that rely on them.

While the Howard government focused on providing better outcomes not only for the environment but also for basin communities, the incoming Labor government decided to take a wrecking ball to those basin communities. The Labor government guide to the Murray-Darling Basin Plan was prepared without public consultation, largely in secret by the members of the Wentworth Group. The guide was met with shock and distress by basin communities. Even ABARE felt compelled to raise serious concern about the guide. ABARE calculated the gross value of irrigated agricultural production based on a figure of 3,500 gigalitres, or a cut of 29.1 per cent of total water use. The ABARE report found such a move would cut production by 15 per cent, or $940 million each year. The worst-hit areas would be the Murrumbidgee, Gwydir, Goulburn and Murray regions of New South Wales, with at least 88 towns across the basin affected in some way.

An inquiry into the impact of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan in regional Australia made a series of recommendations that, needless to say, Labor totally ignored. There were also a series of Senate inquiries on problems relating to the Murray-Darling Basin that exposed Labor’s underlying problem. The problem was that the Labor government had absolutely no idea at all about irrigation and had no clear understanding of the nature of water entitlements or allocation, or the difference between high-security water and low- or general security water.

Let me explain the differences and the impact that lack of understanding would have on Labor’s buyback. Water entitlements under the Water Act come from the definition used by irrigator owned schemes across Australia. It means the right of access to a certain maximum number of megalitres of water in an irrigation year. It is the right to the water, not the water itself. One water entitlement equates to the right to access one megalitre. Water allocation under the Water Act again comes from the definition used by irrigator owned schemes across Australia. Allocation is the percentage of volumetric water actually available in an irrigation year. For example, if you held 100 water entitlements and the allocation announcement was 40 per cent, you would be entitled to take 40 megalitres of actual volumetric water in the irrigation year.

The definitions were drawn from the privatised irrigation schemes because similar concepts under state law all use different terminology, while privatised schemes throughout Australia use consistent terminology. Irrigation allocation in the basin is prioritised based on different levels of security. For example, town water has the highest priority and has 100 per cent allocation. Water for industrial and commercial use has the next level of priority. High-security irrigation water, usually acquired for permanent planting, is next. General or low-security water has the lowest priority and is used for annual crops. Supplementary water covers a range of different levels of security and in some cases is water only available in flood events. In other cases it relates to water entitlements that are being cancelled in the future. In some instances the concept of separate environmental priority water has been introduced. These water entitlements are converted based on a specific formula from high- or general security water. It is not a one-for-one conversion.
So why was a sound understanding of these concepts so important? Because the water target is not the total number of water entitlements but the allocation that needs to be available in any given year. During the peak of the drought, allocation announcements in the Murray for the general security water were often nil, and in the Murrumbidgee allocation for general security water was usually less than 10 per cent. On the other hand, the high-security allocations in the Murrumbidgee were usually 85 per cent. In many circumstances it was generally believed that there would never be an allocation for supplementary flow. So what was the focus of the Labor buyback? To buy water entitlements for the lowest price possible, focusing on general security water. There are many examples of millions of dollars being wasted in the Labor buyback, and one of the best known is the Toorale Station debacle.

The Labor minister at the time announced that Toorale Station had been purchased for $23.75 million and that Labor believed it would return about 20,000 megalitres of water to the environment in an average year. However, Ross's Billabong only held about 10,000 megalitres. More importantly, the water entitlements were supplementary flow entitlements that flow naturally into the land depression in a flood year. The water entitlements are listed on the Department of the Environment's website as 9.720 gigalitres of unregulated river special additional high-flow entitlement. This 'recovery' is not shown in the table because there is currently no long-term diversion limit equivalent factor available to estimate the long-term average annual yield recovery volume for this entitlement.

So $23.75 million dollars of public money were spent without one drop of water effectively being able to be credited to the Labor buyback program. The Labor buyback program focused on water for the lowest possible price for entitlements, not on volumetric yield—the actual water. Nor did it take into account the cost to infrastructure assets as water entitlements were sold away from expensive irrigation infrastructure.

The Labor government was creating a massive stranded assets problem for irrigator owned schemes and state government infrastructure operators. Minister Wong treated the local communities concerned with contempt, decimating the Gwydir community in 2009 with the purchase of 240 gigalitres of general security Gwydir water entitlements for $303 million from Twynam Agricultural Group. At that stage, the New South Wales Labor government finally issued a carefully drafted notice in the Government Gazette of the State of New South Wales that embargoed the purchase of water entitlements by the Commonwealth whilst leaving open water trading by irrigators.

New South Wales was embittered by the fact that almost all of the buyback had focused on New South Wales, as the Victorian Labor government had largely stymied buybacks in their state. The socioeconomic damage and stranded asset problem at that stage was almost entirely happening in New South Wales. The embargo lasted for almost four months whilst negotiations raged between the Commonwealth and New South Wales. The outcome was a change in Labor government policy on the buyback approach, if not the buyback itself. More lessons were learned the hard way when Commonwealth environmental flows caused serious flooding in the Murrumbidgee in 2010.

A great deal has been learned over the years since the introduction of the Water Act in 2007. The Water Amendment Bill we see before the House refocuses government policy on water saving through infrastructure upgrades and efficient water use, in accordance with the original intention of the National Water Initiative 10-point plan. New methods of delivering
water more efficiently by water shepherding and the award-winning Computer Aided River Management system, CARM for short, developed by Water for Rivers, has been developed to meet the new challenges. Water efficiency now is not just a goal for the irrigation community but is also a goal for environmental water holders, as it should be, so that everyone in the basin treats water as the precious resource that it is. It is certainly worth more than gold in my view, and in a country like Australia the importance and quality of water cannot be underestimated. On that I conclude my remarks.

Dr GILLESPIE (Lyne) (20:52): It is with great admiration that I would like to compliment the member for Forrest for her speech. She stole most of my thunder there, but I will digress and go back to a bit of the history of irrigation in this country. Several explorers, such as Oxley in 1821, found the south-west of the state a very inhospitable place. Charles Sturt similarly found the south-west of the state and the Murray-Darling Basin very inhospitable. In fact, the Murray and the Darling and areas of the Murrumbidgee were best described as a chain of ponds, with many dry riverbeds along the exploration routes of all these explorers. In fact, when Oxley first visited in 1821, he thought he would be the last man to visit this area because it was so inhospitable.

Go forward 150 years to the flourishing period of the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area. You could, as a start-up irrigator and farmer, move down into the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area, purchase licences for irrigation and purchase land, which was—I digress—dirt cheap, no pun intended. Land in these areas without water is worth probably a dollar an acre at the most because without water it is worth nothing. You can run a few sheep, live off the saltbush and rely on a few waterholes. But with water the vast breadbasket of the Murray-Darling all of a sudden assumes a huge beneficial property, and that is that you can grow stuff—stuff called food, stuff called fibre; primary production. All of these are ancient terms that seem to be forgotten! Whether it was the Tigris and the Euphrates or the Tiber, civilisations rose out of water assets. It is fundamental to civilisation. That is why water is so important.

The founding fathers of this nation worked that out pretty quickly. It is inhospitable in vast areas of our wonderful nation, but, if you add water, all of a sudden you turn it into a food bowl. There is a lot of conversation happening about the potential of the north of our country. It goes without saying that there is more water there than you can poke a stick at, more water than you can imagine. But what it does not have is the infrastructure to store and distribute it. We have huge amounts of water in the Ord River scheme, but do we have the irrigation system that we have in the Murray-Darling, in the Murrumbidgee or in the other tributaries? At this stage we do not, and we are going piecemeal in developing it. We also have the extremes of nature up there. We have cyclones. We have destruction. We have remoteness.

But in the south-east of this nation we have the Murray-Darling Basin, which is developed and which has the other ingredients for primary production. It has population. It has the infrastructure. It is close to its markets. And it has 150 years of blood, sweat and tears of the pioneers of our nation.

If we go backwards into recent history, we all remember the drought that ravaged the south-east of this nation for about 10 years. As the Government Whip has so elegantly outlined, there is a big difference between water licences and the nominal figure attached to them and the allocation that is given to the irrigators that hold the licences. There is high-security water. There is general security water. The general security licences were a lot
cheaper to purchase because the water was not guaranteed. The high-security licences were developed for people with permanent rather than annual crops, like citrus, like grapes—like all those things. Once you grow a plant, you need to have some certainty that you are going to be able to keep it alive, whereas, if you have an annual crop and there is no water and it fails, you have lost and burnt an awful lot of capital, but it is not the end of your enterprise. There is always another crop next year.

During the drought we saw all those horrible images of dry riverbeds. The general impression for those people not living in the area or not involved in irrigation, the stated cause of those dramatic pictures, was that there were these wicked people called irrigators sucking the life out of the rivers. What most people do not realise is that the amount of water allocated to the licences is not what irrigators ever receive. They receive an allocation. During the drought years, people with licences worth $10 million, $15 million or $20 million were getting one per cent or zero per cent of their licence value because irrigators did not have the water either. That is what happens in a drought, for goodness sake. Sure, on paper there might have been overallocation of resources, but at least in Australia we have managed irrigation systems, and they are generally pretty well managed. The water initiatives by the former Deputy Prime Minister, which were referred to, were a really great initiative. They led to a much more sensible allocation of resources. But, having established that, we have a history in the south-east of the country of the Murray-Darling Basin developing huge areas of otherwise useless land into highly productive land, and we should not necessarily look at the far North as the solution to us becoming the food bowl of Asia, because we have a food bowl of Asia already in New South Wales, Victoria and southern Queensland.

Debate interrupted.

**ADJOURNMENT**

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott) (21:00):** Order! It being 9 pm, I propose the question:

That the House do now adjourn.

The honourable member will have leave to continue his remarks when the debate is resumed.

**Pensions and Benefits**

**Ms KING (Ballarat) (21:00):** In my electorate of Ballarat, we are home to some 17,670 residents on the age pension. That is not an unusually high or low number. With about 2½ million pensioners across Australia, it is around the average. It is also home to some 7,200 part pensioners. Again, this is not an unusually high number. Each week I undertake mobile offices or town visits across my electorate and I meet, as do many members of this House with pensioners at birthdays, at community events and as volunteers at community organisations across the region. Most days I will have one or two pensioners stop in my office to talk about their concerns. Quite often, we will also receive calls from pensioners who might find it a bit harder to stop in, whether it is because they are finding it a bit harder to get around than they used to or because they live just that little bit further away and they cannot travel into the town of Ballarat.

Many of these pensioners have been increasingly struggling to understand just what this government has done to their pensions. These are people who have worked incredibly hard all of their lives, have paid into the system and were promised for support for their retirement,
particularly those who are on part pensions who might have put something aside and worked hard to make that they do not put any more burden on the system because there are those who might need it more.

So these 7,200 part pensioners are all starting to realise that they will increasingly be receiving less every fortnight to pay their bills. In the case of a single part pensioner, they could be losing as much as $8,000 every year. Some of these part pensioners are on incomes as low as $15,000 a year, and many of them are incredibly tightly geared, with every single dollar being accounted for. Understandably, these pensioners are asking why they have been targeted by the government and why a government which came to power on a very solemn promise of no cuts to pensions in fact has done exactly that.

As I said at the outset, my electorate has a similar number of pensioners and part pensioners to other electorates across the country, so I am therefore pretty sure that the questions that pensioners are coming into my office with are also being asked of those members opposite, with pensioners going into other electoral offices. This raises the question as to why not a single member of the Abbott government appears to have any problem with what has been done to thousands of pensioners whom they represent and who they promised would not be targeted by the Abbott government. I find it remarkable that those on the other side have not raised this issue and have not been honest with people about what it was that they intended to do and are now doing. Have there not been the same questions in those offices that I am getting in my electoral office about what has happened to those part pensioners? What is truly unusual is that the members of parliament opposite have stood side by side with their Prime Minister in sticking to a plan that has seen some 330,000 part pensioners worse off. Members opposite have argued that the pension should only be worth 16 per cent of the average weekly earnings—members who, it would seem, are simply not interested in how tough pensioners in their electorates are doing it and who have been complicit, frankly, in Tony Abbott's broken promise that there would be no cuts or changes to pensions. The shadow minister for families and payments has made absolutely sure that none of these moves by a tricky government have gone unnoticed, and she has been holding forums across the country. People, and pensioners in particular, are incredibly angry.

Yet these concerns and many more seem to fall on deaf ears when it comes to those opposite. The cuts to pensions, frankly, are just emblematic of the significant damage this government has done in its two years to date. It was elected on a solemn promise of no cuts to pensions, but all pensioners in Ballarat have seen a cut to their pensions. It promised no cuts to health, and yet in my own electorate Ballarat Health Services is losing some $348 million over the next decade. We are seeing increasing numbers of patients losing access to bulk-billing and paying increasingly high fees as a result of Tony Abbott's GP tax by stealth. We have seen the government promise no cuts to education, yet we have seen billions ripped out of funding for schools—funding that would have gone to, particularly, some of the most disadvantaged students in our communities—and also an attempt to impose $100,000 university degrees on our children. There have been cuts to local government and cuts to mental health. This is the true legacy of this government. If the plan is working, goodness help us if they are here for another three years.
Ms GAMBARO (Brisbane) (21:05): The Australian government is committed to jobs and growth in Queensland. In my home state of Queensland, Labor came into office with no plan and they have proven themselves to be absolutely hopeless. What is their solution to the economic and jobs crisis hitting Queensland? It is to impose an ill-conceived freeze on infrastructure until they can work out what they are doing and how they will pay for it.

The business community in Queensland is crying out for action from Labor. Yet Queensland Labor, just like their federal colleagues, seem incapable of anything. Premier Palaszczuk says, 'Let's talk,' and the business community says, 'Please act.' But it falls on deaf ears. All the Queensland Labor government have been able to muster is 60 reviews in seven months. That is roughly two reviews a week—no plan, no idea and no policies.

Thanks to Labor, unemployment is on the rise in Queensland. In fact, seasonally adjusted unemployment in Queensland increased by 0.4 per cent and Queensland's unemployment rate continues to be above the national average on both measures. Here are some unacceptable facts. Fact 1: under Labor, Queensland lost almost 22,000 full-time jobs in July alone—more than any other state. Fact 2: Queensland has fewer full-time jobs than in February, when Labor was elected. Fact 3: 10,000 Queenslanders joined the unemployment queue last month. Lastly, fact 4: Queensland's unemployment rate is at 6.3 per cent, the third highest in the country. No amount of spin from Premier Palaszczuk can change these figures. She is out of her depth and she is not up to the job. Queenslanders certainly did not vote for this.

Queensland desperately needs a government with a plan to develop job-creating projects—major projects like the Adani Carmichael project, which will create jobs and drive economic growth for the people of Queensland. What is interesting here is that bizarrely—and in contrast to Bill Shorten and the Greens—Queensland Labor says it recognises the value of major projects like this. In The Courier-Mail on 5 August this year, Queensland Labor minister for mines, Anthony Lynham, stated:

We, like the people of Queensland and Central Queensland, want this mine to go ahead.

Mr Lynham also told The Australian Financial Review on 9 August this year that the Queensland government were ‘doing everything in their power to prioritise approvals’ and had sent the environmental impact statement on the Abbot Point expansion to the federal government. He said:

The Palaszczuk government supports the sustainable development of the Galilee Basin because we want the jobs and the economic development for Queensland.

On 31 August this year The Courier-Mail reported that Queensland Labor Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection and Minister for National Parks and the Great Barrier Reef, Dr Steven Miles, told the Queensland Labor state conference that Labor did not want to be the party that jolts the economy through a crackdown on coal. He specifically said:

We can mine coal in Queensland, where we have the highest mine safety record in the world, we mine coal with environmental rigour, and we mine coal that’s very efficient and economic to burn.

If we don’t allow this to go ahead, coal is one of the most prolific minerals on Earth; there are many other sources of coal, but none as good as the coal we mine here.

... ... ...
We are not going to be the party that jolts the economy by closing down coal without a transition that adequately shifts the economy and takes workers with us.

I say to the Palaszczuk Labor government: 'Talk is very cheap. Act—get on with it. The business community in Queensland want you to act. Jobs depend on it. The economy depends on it. Get Bill Shorten and your federal Labor mates on board and work constructively with the federal coalition government to make sure we have jobs in Queensland for our tens of thousands of young people. The 30,000 businesses in my electorate crave the economy to expand. Get on with doing the job you were elected to do.'

Asylum Seekers: Europe

Mr HAYES (Fowler—Chief Opposition Whip) (21:09): If any good can be drawn from the devastating images of a toddler's lifeless body being washed up on a beach in Turkey, it is that the world is finally paying attention. We are seeing the consequences of the conflicts in Iraq and Syria for what they really are—the largest, most devastating and overwhelming humanitarian crises since the Second World War. Many European countries have now opened their doors and taken in tens of thousands of refugees. The UNHCR is estimating that so far this year more than 366,000 refugees and migrants have crossed the Mediterranean to Europe. Almost 3,000 people have died or disappeared during the perilous journey. The numbers are truly staggering. Germany alone is expecting as many as 800,000 people by the end of the year.

More than half of the United Nations' aid budget is now being directed to assist the displaced people of Syria. Domestically we are at last having a conversation about Australia's contribution in assisting people in this crisis. In addition to our responsibility as a global citizen we have a responsibility to the people of the region as we were part of the coalition of the willing, which contributed to unintended consequences that led to the instability impacting the Middle East today. I hope that global initiatives soon eventuate in a more coordinated and effective response to the Syrian crisis.

Australia currently takes in 13,750 refugees per year. Earlier this week we sought a bipartisan position for this country to accept an extra 10,000 refugees from Syria. Given the magnitude of this crisis and the number of people seeking refuge, I know that 10,000 additional places is a drop in the ocean, but as part of a global effort it would be significant. Our current contribution must be reconsidered as it simply does not allow us to make a dent in the burden now faced by the global community, particularly by the countries that neighbour Iraq and Syria.

More than half of Syria's 23 million citizens are currently displaced. An estimated five million people initially sought sanctuary in the neighbouring countries of Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon. These countries are certainly carrying more than their fair share in this humanitarian crisis. The number of refugees flooding into Lebanon almost equates to half that country's population, while Jordan has accepted 600,000 refugees, which is close to 20 per cent of its population. Turkey also is continuing to play a very substantial role and make a significant contribution. These countries are certainly carrying the heaviest load in this humanitarian crisis. They are struggling to deal with the overwhelmingly high and growing number of refugees. As a consequence they are now heavily managing their borders.

Last November I visited refugee camps in Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon and what I saw will stay with me forever. The refugees I spoke to, mainly women and children, told me they just
wanted to go home. There was not a lot of hope or certainty for their future. The despair was absolutely palpable. They were living in crowded tents or shipping containers. These refugee camps were initially constructed for short-term occupancy. It was initially thought that the Syrian crisis would not last more than three months. Four years later there is no end in sight and they are still there.

Frustration over the conditions in the camps, the desperation, the uncertainty about the future and the now heavily managed borders all contribute to thousands of people making the extremely dangerous sea crossings. Australia should continue to work with other countries and the United Nations Security Council in developing strategies to resolve the conflict and allow people to return home, as that is what they want to do. This would certainly be the best long-term solution. Meanwhile, however, we must do more. We must try to save as many innocent lives as possible and give them a chance at a better life. The right thing is not simply to care; the right thing is to be compassionate. I strongly urge the government to address this matter.

Trade with China

Ms HENDERSON (Corangamite) (21:14): It is my great pleasure to rise and speak about the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement. This is an incredibly important agreement not just for Corangamite, a great dairying and agricultural region, but for our nation. Under the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement, more than 95 per cent of our exports to China—wine tariffs of up to 30 per cent, beef tariffs up to 25 per cent, seafood to 15 per cent, dairy tariffs of 20 per cent, our lamb, our cheese and our services as well as our resources—will be entirely duty-free. This is a once-in-a-generation game-changer of a trade agreement, which will open up thousands of jobs. The independent modelling has shown that over the next 20 years some 178,000 new jobs will be created.

It gives me no joy to raise what is perhaps the most reckless campaign we have seen in the life of this government from those opposite. It is a deceptive and dishonest campaign against this agreement that Labor members know deep in their hearts is going to deliver great opportunity, particularly for our exporters, our farmers and our small businesses. I call on Bill Shorten, members opposite and even the Labor candidate in Corangamite, who is working hand in glove with the CFMEU, the most discredited union in our country, to end the damaging campaign against this agreement.

With more and more Labor leaders coming out to support this once-in-a-generation trade deal, members opposite need to get a grip. They need to start telling the truth. They need to start telling the truth about this agreement.

Mr Champion interjecting—

Ms HENDERSON: We hear from one of the members opposite who—

Mr Champion interjecting—

Ms HENDERSON: I do not even want to acknowledge who he is, actually, with all of his interjections. He spends far too much time outside the chamber than inside.

We have a situation again today where Bill Shorten has been caught out peddling CFMEU lies about the investment facilitation arrangement linked to our landmark free trade agreement. Mr Shorten said on ABC's AM program:
Currently it's proposed that for projects of over $150 million it's not mandatory that the jobs market in Australia has to be tested so that Australians get first crack.

This is completely and utterly false, and Mr Shorten knows it. During yesterday's Joint Standing Committee on Treaties hearing on the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement it was again made crystal clear that under the IFA, Australian workers must have been provided with first opportunity for jobs through labour market testing.

I make this very clear: proponents must provide evidence of their domestic recruitment efforts for each requested occupation, including advertising undertaken within the past six months. Senior immigration officer David Wilden told the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties that under an IFA proponents must:

… absolutely, mandatorily, have to test the labour market.

These requirements are outlined in black and white in the guidelines under which the IFA will be implemented. The IFA was modelled on Labor's enterprise migration agreement, except the IFA has far more stringent safeguards to ensure Australians have the first opportunity at jobs available under projects covered. Under the EMA, the only thing required was labour market analysis, whereas under the IFA both labour market analysis and then labour market testing are required before any workers are permitted to enter Australia.

Instead of continuing to peddle CFMEU lies, the Leader of the Opposition and every member opposite, and Labor candidates, including in Corangamite, need to start telling the truth. They need to stand up for jobs. They need to stand up for this game-changing trade agreement that will fundamentally transform our economy.

Ms BUTLER (Griffith) (21:20): What a pathetic display from the member for Corangamite. What an outrageous slur against the people in this parliament who are standing up for working people, not like the people on that side of the parliament. Let us not forget the party of Work Choices, the party of dividing and conquering the Australian workforce, the party responsible for the slowest wages growth that we are now seeing since the wages price index started being kept in the 1990s. What an utter disgrace for them to lecture us for our decision, for our responsibility, for our obligation, for our moral obligation to stand up for the rights of working people in this country because we are the only party that will do that.

You people on that side carry on against the union movement of this country, the hardworking union movement of this country, with slurs against the CFMEU. The CFMEU have more integrity in every single officer of the CFMEU than anyone on that side of this parliament. Every official of the CFMEU spends their life standing up for working people, standing up for pay and conditions, standing up for the rights of working people to organise for safety. Anybody who has ever been to a work site immediately after a worker was killed on that work site with the CFMEU, with the officials who have to go and talk to the widow of that worker, know exactly what it means to be a CFMEU official or a CFMEU delegate.

Those silver-spooners on that side of the parliament do not care about working people. They would rather stand in here and abuse the hardworking officials who represent the interests of working people every day than actually look at the national interest. They should be ashamed of themselves, and I know that they are going to be because the people of this country will not put up with their rubbish. I think the member for Corangamite is going to
find out pretty soon that the people of Corangamite are not going to put up with this sort of behaviour.

Look at them. What do they want to do? They want to cut penalty rates. They want to weaken collective bargaining in this country. Look at WorkChoices. What was that but the privileging of individual bargaining—so-called—ahead of collective bargaining. It was a disgrace then and it is a disgrace now.

Fancy this ridiculous campaign against us for having the temerity, as we have the right to do, as we have the responsibility to do, to stand up and say: when it comes to free-trade agreements, we want to see free-trade agreements, we want to see trade liberalisation but we want to do it in a way that ensures that the benefits of that liberalisation are shared by everyone in this community and that means standing up for Australian jobs. No-one on this side of this House is ashamed of standing up for Australian jobs. No-one this side of the House is ashamed of standing up for skills, qualifications and safety. In fact it is our obligation.

Those people on that side of the House, on the government side of the House, should take a good hard look at themselves when they criticise us for doing our jobs, for asking questions about the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement. To call us racist, to carry on as though somehow the party of the initial visit to China—the visit that occurred before Kissinger's visit—the party of the introduction of the integration of the Chinese iron markets for example, the increase in 1984-85 in the export market to China under Bob Hawke, the party of Paul Keating, the party of Kevin Rudd and the party of Julia Gillard and her Australia in the Asian Century white paper is racist is as ridiculous and insulting as it is irresponsible because we are not xenophobic and racist merely because we stand up for Australian jobs. We will always stand up for Australian jobs.

If you want to look at an example of a ridiculous approach to China, just look at the government's dithering on the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. Those opposite could not work out what to do with it. They were utterly hopeless and embarrassed us in front of the entire world. They finally saw the light and did what Labor had been suggesting for many months, which was to sign up to the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, not before time.

Why were those opposite behaving that way? Perhaps it was because they are the party that is from the intellectual tradition of Billy McMahon, who thought that our support for the relationship with China was an asset to the Liberal Party because the Australian people would not want to see a relationship with China. It is utterly ridiculous to criticise us for doing nothing more than our job, which is to look after Australian jobs. We actually make sure that in this country—one of the richest, one of the wealthiest countries in the world—we do something about the increasing income inequality, the increasing accumulation of capital, about the fact that wages growth is slow, about the fact that there are 800,000 unemployed country in this country for the first time in about 20 years and about the fact that unemployment has had a six in front of it since their first appalling budget from May 2014. Those are things from which we do not resile. Those are things from which we will never resile. We will always stand up for working people. We will always stand up for a strong economy and nothing that the people, those craven people from the Liberal Party will ever stop us from doing it.
Dr GILLESPIE (Lyne) (21:25): I rise to bring to the attention of the House that the Lyne electorate is receiving record funding under the federal coalition government. In the two years of the Abbott-Truss coalition government, the Lyne electorate has secured tens of millions of dollars in extra funding for the Manning, Gloucester, Hastings and Macleay areas for local roads. This has all been done while addressing significant budget debt and deficit that we inherited. We are increasing funding in well targeted programs that invest in infrastructure and create jobs.

First of all, in the 2014, 2015 and 2016 budgets, the coalition is investing $1.05 billion to complete the Pacific Highway upgrade through the Lyne electorate. That is generating 933 direct jobs and 2,900 indirect jobs. The 37-kilometre section will be completed within two years. There is another $2 billion in the upgrade between Kempsey and Coffs Harbour. In total $7 billion is being spent.

Other funding achievements in the Lyne electorate include the joint health facility in Port Macquarie courtesy the funds set aside by the Howard government in the Higher Education Endowment Fund that was rebadged and used to fund this wonderful facility for the University of New South Wales Rural Clinical School. It will also be used by Charles Sturt University, the TAFE and Newcastle University. There is $9.6 million allocated from the federal coalition government towards water infrastructure upgrades to the Nabiac aquifer supply system, a backup to the Manning River supply system. This will allow a 32½-million-dollar upgrade to proceed finally.

We have got the Bucketts Way upgrade of $16 million, which I fought for in the 2010 and 2013 elections and were coalition commitments before the election. We have $10 million rolled out for the Dyers Crossing and the Dickinson Bridge in the Manning region. The $10 million that I got for the northern gateway that did not go ahead has been rolled over for the Manning Point Road and the Gloucester Road. We have got an 18½-million-dollar spend by Charles Sturt University courtesy of its regional loading, a legacy of the Anderson-Howard government that the Nationals fought for that gave regional universities with multiple location campuses extra funding. That has all been rolled into this project along with money from the Higher Education Endowment Fund.

We have got $18 million of extra Roads to Recovery funding from the coalition government. This is going to change the burden of many local councils. There will be $3.9 million for extra Roads to Recovery in Hastings, $2.85 million for Macleay Valley roads, $3.7 million for the Manning roads and an additional $1.3 million for Gloucester Shire roads. So that is 11½ million dollars to Port Macquarie Hastings council, 7½ million dollars allocation to Kempsey council, $10.8 million to Greater Taree City Council and $3.7 million allocation to Gloucester Shire council. Overall, that is a total of 33½ million dollars for extra Roads to Recovery money in the Lyne electorate.

We have got an expansion of aged care funding, another $10 million. It used to be $90 million a few years ago but with this coalition government we have got an extra $10 million for aged care. We have got $250,000 for the Sporting Schools program. There are 25 schools in my electorate that are getting funds from that. We have got black spot funding for local mobile black spot upgrades. We have got five new or upgraded base stations in the Lyne electorate. Combined with the money from the telcos, that is $3.47 million.
We have got the eagerly awaited upgrade Port Macquarie indoor stadium, with $2.8 million from this coalition government. I had to bring in all my political favours from the Prime Minister and the infrastructure minister to get that money across the line. And that was before we get the benefits of the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement, the jobactive program, workforce subsidies for long-term unemployed young people, Work for the Dole and the Korea and Japan free-trade agreements.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: It being 9:30 pm, the debate is interrupted.

House adjourned at 09:30

NOTICES

The following notices were given:

Mr Briggs: to present a Bill for an Act to amend maritime legislation, and for related purposes.

Mr S. P. Jones: to move:

That this House calls on the Government to:
(1) acknowledge that the impending loss of 500 jobs from the steelworks in Port Kembla will hurt the economic security of a region which already has unemployment numbers at two per cent above the national average;
(2) recognise that Australia should be a country that continues to make things and that steel making is vital to the future of the Illawarra and other regions including Whyalla in South Australia;
(3) properly resource the Anti-Dumping Commission so that it can get on with the job of identifying and prosecuting cases of dumping, including subsidised steel;
(4) promise not to repeal or weaken the Australian Jobs Act 2013 so that Australian workers are given a fair chance when job vacancies arise;
(5) reinstate the Local Employment Coordinator in the Illawarra so that workers who lose their jobs at the steelworks in Port Kembla and elsewhere can retrain and find alternative employment;
(6) locate entrepreneur advisers in the Illawarra to help local businesses in improving their competitiveness and allow retrenched workers and contractors from the steelworks to qualify for higher level job seeker assistance; and
(7) support the #IllawarraDigital strategy and facilitate a Digital Enterprise programme so that small to medium businesses and young entrepreneurs can train and seek advice on taking advantage of high speed broadband.

Ms Bird: to move:

That this House calls on the Government to:
(1) acknowledge that:
   (a) the drop in apprentices currently in training from 417,700 in September 2013 to 319,700 in March 2015 will impact on the future availability of skilled workers in Australia; and
   (b) apprenticeship commencements and completions are down approximately 20 per cent for the 12 months to 31 December 2014;
(2) recognise that the $1 billion in cuts to apprenticeship support, including Tools For Your Trade payments and mentoring and access programs, have had an impact on apprentice numbers;
(3) implement strategies as a matter of urgency to encourage more apprentices into training to prevent skills shortages in the future; and
(4) invest in skills and training young Australians to ensure that Australia does not have to rely heavily on Temporary Work (Skilled) visas (subclass 457) resulting from a lack of investment in skills and training.

Mr Hayes: to move:
That this House:
(1) notes that:
   (a) National Police Remembrance Day is observed on 29 September; and
   (b) this year marks 100 years of women in policing;
(2) acknowledges the:
   (a) significant role police officers across Australia make to our local communities and the great deal of risk and sacrifice that comes with their duty; and
   (b) ultimate sacrifice that has been made by police officers who have been killed in the course of their duty and honours their lives;
(3) recognises the good work of Police Legacy who look after the loved ones of police officers who have died as a result of their duty; and
(4) reaffirms its support for the nation's 56,000 police officers whose dedication and commitment ensure peace and safety of our communities.

Ms MacTiernan: to move:
That the House:
(1) recognises the failure of the Western Australian and Australian governments to manage the Western Australian economy;
(2) notes that under the Western Australian and Australian governments in Western Australia:
   (a) unemployment reached its highest rate in 13 years at 6.4 per cent, with 59,000 more Western Australians out of work since the Liberal Party formed government in Western Australia;
   (b) business investment dropped 12.7 per cent over the year to June 2015;
   (c) state final demand fell by 3.6 per cent in the year to June 2015;
   (d) the state's credit rating was downgraded by Moody's and Standard & Poor's;
   (e) business and consumer confidence are at record low levels;
   (f) state net debt has blown out from $3.6 billion in 2008 when the Liberal Party formed government in Western Australia to $30 billion in 2015; and
   (g) cost of living increased sharply by 54.3 per cent; and
(3) condemns the:
   (a) Australian Government for:
      (i) cutting $3.1 billion from Western Australian schools and $5.8 billion from hospitals over 10 years; and
      (ii) removing the level playing field from Western Australia in the manufacture of offshore patrol vessels; and
   (b) Western Australian and Australian governments for squandering the mining boom and failing to diversify the Western Australian economy and create a jobs and growth plan for the future.

Mr Simpkins: to move:
That this House:
(1) celebrates:
(a) 16 September as the anniversary of the 1963 Malaysian federation; and
(b) the long term friendship that exists between governments and people of Australia and Malaysia; and
(2) acknowledges:
(a) the 23 Australian servicemen who died and 8 who were wounded during the Indonesian-Malaysian confrontation and the establishment of the state of Malaysia;
(b) that our security partnership, including defence cooperation and our joint participation in the Five Power Defence Arrangements, remains a key component of our bilateral relationship; and
(c) the efforts of the Australian Government to further strengthen ties between our two countries through stronger trade links and other initiatives such as the New Colombo Plan.

Mr Wilkie: to move:
That this House:
(1) acknowledges that:
(a) in the previous Parliament (31 May 2012), on the motion of the Member for Denison, the House resolved to:
(i) acknowledge the large number of mothers and fathers with serious grievances with family law and the child support system;
(ii) note that there had not been a comprehensive review of the child support system since the 2005 report In the Best Interests of Children—Reforming the Child Support Scheme;
(iii) call on the Government to undertake a comprehensive review of family law and the child support system; and
(iv) recommend that the terms of reference of this review be formulated to ensure that the safety and wellbeing of children is paramount;
(b) the Member for Denison gave notice of a further motion of this nature this Parliament (26 February 2015); and
(c) a review has not taken place;
(2) notes that, although the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs in this Parliament conducted an inquiry into the Child Support Program (CSP), it was not an holistic and detailed review of both child support and family law; and
(3) calls on the Government to honour the will of the previous Parliament and commission a comprehensive root and branch review of family law and the CSP with sufficient mandate to effectively consider the interaction between these systems.
QUESTIONS IN WRITING
Department of Employment: Staff Contracts
(Question No. 853)

Mr Conroy asked the Minister representing the Minister for Employment, in writing, on 17 August 2015:

In respect of recruitment, training and service contracts undertaken by the Minister's department(s) in 2014–15,
(a) how many new staff contracts were entered into, and of these, what are the relevant staffing levels, and
(b) what total sum was spent on recruitment, and of this, what is the breakdown for
(i) recruitment agency fees, (ii) advertising, (iii) assessment processes, and (iv) other associated costs.

Mr Pyne: The Minister for Employment has provided the following answer to the honourable member's question:

Between 1 July 2014 and 30 June 2015, 265 new staff commenced with the Department of Employment. Details of their classification levels are set out in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification level</th>
<th>Number of commencements in 2014–15</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SES</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Level 2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Level 1</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APS 6</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APS 5</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APS 4</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APS 3</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APS 2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APS 1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Decision and budgets for recruitment related activities are largely devolved to line areas in the department and manually collating agency expenditure on these items would involve an unreasonable diversion of departmental resources.

The exception to this is recruitment related activities for an annual graduate intake, portfolio statutory appointments and senior executive positions in the department which is corporately funded and set out in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Corporately funded department expenditure on recruitment - 1 July 2014 to 30 June 2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment agency fees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other associated costs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Department of Employment: Consultants
(Question No. 943)

Mr Conroy asked the Minister representing the Minister for Employment, in writing, on 17 August 2015:

In respect of the use of (a) consultants, and (b) contractors, by the Minister's department(s) in 2014–15,
(i) what total sum was spent,
(ii) what services were provided, and
(iii) which firms provided the services.

Mr Pyne: The Minister for Employment has provided the following answer to the honourable member's question:

Information on consultancies and contractors is available on the AusTender website at www.tenders.gov.au.

Employment: Ministerial Media Events
(Question Nos 1351 and 1352)

Mr Conroy asked the Minister representing the Minister for Employment, in writing, on 17 August 2015:

In respect of ministerial costs for media events and photo opportunities in 2014–15, what
(a) date was each event held,
(b) location was each event held at,
(c) sum was spent on each event,
(d) announcement and/or issue did the event relate to, and
(e) was the expenditure for.

Mr Pyne: The Minister for Employment has provided the following answer to the honourable member's question:

There were no ministerial costs for media events and photo opportunities in 2014–15 for either the Minister for Employment or Assistant Minister for Employment.