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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,
Hon John Kenneth Cobb MP, Mr Patrick Martin Conroy MP,
Mr Ian Reginald Goodenough MP, Mrs Natasha Louise Griggs MP,
Ms Sarah Moya Henderson MP, Mr Stephen James Irons MP,
Mr Craig Kelly MP, Ms Michelle Leanne Landry MP, Ms Clare Ellen O’Neil, MP,
Mrs Jane Prentice MP, Ms Melissa Lee Price MP,
Dr Andrew John Southcott MP, Mr Michael Sukkar MP,
Mr Ross Xavier Vasta 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. Malcolm Bligh Turnbull MP
Deputy Leader—Hon. Julie Isabel Bishop MP
Chief Government Whip—Ms Nola Bethwyn Marino MP
Government Whips—Mr Ewen Thomas Jones MP and Mr Brett David Whiteley MP

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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<td>Wilkie, Mr Andrew Damien</td>
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<td>Zappia, Mr Antonio</td>
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**PARTY ABBREVIATIONS**

ALP—Australian Labor Party; LP—Liberal Party of Australia; NATS—The Nationals; IND—Independent; NATSWA—The Nationals WA; CLP—Country Liberal Party; AUS—Katter’s Australia Party; AG—Australian Greens; PUP—Palmer United Party

**Heads of Parliamentary Departments**

Clerk of the Senate—R Laing  
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>Prime Minister</td>
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<td>Senator Hon Nigel Scullion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Women</td>
<td>Senator Hon Michaelia Cash</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cabinet Secretary</td>
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<td>Senator Hon Mitch Fifield</td>
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<td>Hon Dr Peter Hendy MP</td>
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<td>Hon Warren Truss MP</td>
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<td>Hon Josh Frydenberg MP</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>Senator Katy Gallagher*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Immigration</td>
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</table>
Shadow Cabinet Ministers are shown in bold type.

* Senator Katy Gallagher’s appointment to the Shadow Ministry is effective from 1 November 2015. Senator the Hon Jan McLucas will serve as Shadow Minister for Housing and Homelessness and Shadow Minister for Mental Health, and represent the Shadow Minister for Northern Australia, the Shadow Minister for Health, the Shadow Assistant Minister for Health, the Shadow Minister for Sport and the Shadow Minister for Indigenous Affairs in the Senate until 31 October 2015.

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

**BILLS**

Superannuation Legislation Amendment (Trustee Governance) Bill 2015  
Second Reading

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

Mr COLEMAN (Banks) (12:01): I am very pleased to have the opportunity to speak on this important legislation, the Superannuation Legislation Amendment (Trustee Governance) Bill 2015, which brings in place some very common-sense measures in the governance of superannuation funds. I think it is useful, before getting into the detail of the proposed legislation, to really reflect on what superannuation funds are all about and what is their goal. It seems to me that it is very clear of what the goal of a superannuation fund is—that is, to maximise the returns of investors. It is not overly complex as a goal. It does not matter really whether I am a fireman, a public servant, a lawyer or whatever job that I have; obviously what people who are members of superannuation funds want is for those funds to perform. So it seems to me that it is obvious that the structure of the governance of funds should be focused on maximising their performance.

In the corporate world, when boards are put together, it is customary for people with independent expertise to be appointed to those boards to bring forward their skills, their experience and indeed often their industry experience. A media company might have a number of independent directors and it would be quite typical for those independent directors to have a strong understanding of the media sector and, indeed, that is the case with many independent directors on listed boards.

But we have this curious situation at present—and I suspect this is something that is not widely understood in the Australian population—where industry super funds and corporate super funds, rather than drawing on the broadest possible range of skills in setting up their trustees, who effectively act as board members, have a different rule. The rule is not about bringing in independent expertise to assist in the management of the fund; the rule is basically about ensuring that the trustees represent particular constituencies that might have some interest in the fund. Generally that will be 50 per cent representatives of the employees and 50 per cent representatives of the employers. You may well ask: how can the fact that someone is representative of a particular group be related to their capacity to actually know what is important in managing a superannuation fund?

These are not small funds. We have about $2 trillion in assets under management in the Australian superannuation industry, many funds with tens of billions and more in them. Taking it back to first principles, what would you do? You would say: okay, how do we find people from the broader community with the best possible experience to assist in the management of these funds? The sort of people you would think would be logical would be people that perhaps have managed investment funds themselves or have worked in the funds
management industry or who have other areas of related expertise. But that is in fact not how the system works today.

The way the system works today is someone comes along and says: I will represent the workers or I will represent the employer. Frankly, whether it is the employees or the employer, the inadequacy of that structure is very clear because the fact that somebody can represent employees, whether that is as a union representative or in some other role, has absolutely nothing to do with their capacity to manage a superannuation fund. These are completely unrelated skills. Anyone can put their hand up and say: I understand what employees in this sector are interested in and what their issues are and that is great. But how does that skill actually enable you to maximise the returns of a superannuation fund? It seems to me it is a completely separate skill set. The same applies to corporations as well because you might have representatives who are speaking for that corporation but the fact that someone speaks for a particular corporation does not mean that they have got the appropriate skills to actually manage a fund. Again, we are talking very substantial amounts of money here. It seems to me, as a point of principle, it is self-evident that drawing from the widest possible range of expertise is the way to go.

So what this legislation does is to say: rather than having this half-half system—which, as I said before, bears no relationship to the capacity of people to lead a large investment fund—let us at least ensure that just one-third of the directors—trustees, effectively acting as directors—are independent. That is important because the act of appointing independent trustees means that the narrow interests of the corporation or the industry, or, indeed, the employees, are not so paramount as they are today where in fact the only people who are appointed are people who represent one of those two narrow sectional interests. So what this will require funds to do is to say: 'All right; if we've got, say, nine trustees on our board, at least three of them will need to be independent.' It is very, very hard to understand how, on any objective basis, one could oppose that proposition. It is far from a radical proposal to say that one-third of the trustees should be independent. If they are independent then, presumably, the other trustees will be seeking to find independent trustees who have relevant expertise. That can only be a good thing.

It is also good that the legislation will require that the chair of the board is independent. This is pretty much standard practice in corporate Australia of course. You do not want your chair to be too closely associated with the constituent parts of the entity. And it is absolutely right that the chair should be independent.

Funds will still be able to appoint other directors in the other two-thirds. They might choose to represent employees or employers or whoever, but one-third will be required to be independent. Again, it is very, very difficult to understand why those opposite would seek to oppose such a sensible measure.

The support for this concept of independence is widespread across the community. The Financial Systems Inquiry recommended such a change. A quote that I particularly like from the Murray review is:

… it is more important for directors to be independent, skilled and accountable than representative.

In a sense, as I said before, somebody might represent employees in, say, the construction industry, but how is one's capacity to represent employees in the construction industry in any way related to one's capacity to manage tens of billions of dollars in superannuation assets?
They are completely unrelated. Having to find one-third of the members as independents will require these boards to look further afield.

Of course, as the Murray review said, as more fund members exercise choice, directors appointed by employer and employee groups are less likely to represent the broader membership of the funds, and of course a lot of these big industry funds might have started out representing a particular industry but now have hundreds of thousands of members from all over Australia. So why should the composition of their boards be so limited?

It was good to see Paul Howes, the prominent former head of the Australian Workers Union speak out in support of these changes. He said:

It has been disappointing to see a knee-jerk reaction against the call for a more independent governance model …

… the evolution of the super industry is important and I can't see anything negative in having more independents on boards.

That is really the essence of it. What could possibly be negative about requiring more independent representatives to be on boards?

As we look at the range of support for these measures, it is extremely widespread. National Seniors is a group that represents many Australians, and they see this measure as a step towards international best practice which will instil greater confidence in Australia's big institutions. The chair of Qantas Superannuation, Anne Ward, has spoken out in favour of these reforms, as have many other people.

So it is a real question as to why anyone, really, would oppose the concept of increasing the independence of the governance of superannuation funds. It is a self-evident proposition that it should be widely supported in this House.

There is another important provision in this bill. Whilst only one-third of directors are required to be independent, the legislation does in fact require boards of funds to report to APRA if a majority of trustees are not independent and to explain why. So it is not required to have a majority of independent directors, but it is required to explain the rationale for not so having. Again, it would have to be a pretty compelling rationale, when you think about it, because what the advocate of that position would have to say is: 'Despite the fact that here in Australia there are thousands of people with immense experience in managing large amounts of money in superannuation funds, infrastructure funds and all sorts of sophisticated investment vehicles, what we have chosen to do is actually not to use them for a majority of our trustees and we have instead decided to appoint some employee representatives,' say, who typically would be union representatives. So it would be, I think, very interesting to see how those funds would justify doing that, because there is no relationship between someone's capacity to advocate for employees as a union representative and their capacity to manage tens or hundreds of billions of dollars. I think that point is self-evident. You do not say: 'Someone is a strong employee advocate through a trade union so, therefore, let's make them the CEO of the company.' You do not say: 'They're great at advocating in industrial disputes so, therefore, let's appoint them to the board of the Commonwealth Bank.' As a general principle, you will apply skills where they are most useful.
We have a very odd situation in this sector that I suspect is unique in the composition of boards in pretty much any aspect of the Australian economy. Rather than looking at the underlying skills of the individuals involved, we look at their capacity to represent a particular constituency. Of course, company boards are not structured in that way. People are appointed for their capacity to act in the best interests of the company and there is a strong emphasis on independent directors. There is a lot of skill out there. We are fortunate in Australia to have such a strong financial services sector. Our superannuation system is one of the largest in the world. As a nation I think it is fair to say that we punch above our weight in financial services. Indeed, the financial services sector, as we look at the changes in digital disruption, presents immense opportunities for Australia.

This is not an area in which we lack expertise as a nation; this is an area where, along with agriculture, resources and one or two other sectors, we have a disproportionately strong position. We have lots of expertise to draw upon. This legislation says, 'Fund, we're going to require you to draw upon that expertise for at least one third of your trustees and we're also going to require you to have a chair who doesn't represent the narrow sectional interests of one particular group but represents all members who are part of this fund and has the primary overarching goal of maximising the returns of the fund.' It is very simple, straightforward legislation. It is, frankly, overdue and I commend it to the House.

Mr WATTS (Gellibrand) (12:16): I rise to oppose the Superannuation Legislation Amendment (Trustee Governance) Bill 2015. At its core, this bill is proof that nothing has changed amongst those opposite. The Liberals may have overthrown their former Prime Minister, but bills like this show that the underlying fundamentals of the government, the rotten policies that caused the public unrest that triggered the spilling of the Prime Minister, remain. This bill is ideologically driven. I noted the comments of the previous speaker, repeatedly emphasising that what is really important amongst super fund board members is not who they represent or what their background is but their capacity, skills and experience. It is the skills and expertise that board members bring, not their representation or their background. But that is not what this bill is about. This bill does not require specific skillsets or expertise. It prohibits certain classes of people from forming a component of boards.

This bill is really all about dismantling the government's model of the highest performing superannuation funds in Australia: industry funds. So many Australians choose industry funds to save for their retirement. The Superannuation Legislation Amendment (Trustee Governance) Bill makes amendments to the Superannuation Industry (Supervision) Act to require trustees of registrable superannuation entities to have a minimum of one third independent directors and an independent chair on their boards. Schedule 2 amends the Governance of Australian Government Superannuation Schemes Act. It will restructure the trustee board for the Australian government's main civilian and military superannuation schemes, the Commonwealth Superannuation Corporation board, to comply with these new governance requirements. The bill seeks to amend the definition of 'independent' in a way that all but denies employee representation on industry boards within that definition. This is specifically the case with independence of association from trade unions, where a trustee would not be eligible if they had had an association with a trade union within the last three years. Further, the bill proposes a process whereby the Australian Potential Regulation
Authority, APRA, can assess whether a person is independent, regardless of the definition and regardless of whether an individual has met that statutory definition.

The small print on what constitutes an 'independent' person muddies the waters even more. The pages of this bill that seek to characterise what it is to be independent make one thing clear: this bill wants to eliminate from their boards officials of trade unions representing people who invest in these funds. From a corporate governance perspective, 'independent' traditionally refers to independence from the management of the company. This bill changes that. For industry funds, third, the common trustee framework is for there to be an equal number of employer and union appointed members. This does not mean that so-called 'independent' trustees are not eligible to join these boards. In fact, a review of industry funds shows that around half of the major industry funds have at least one independent trustee on their boards.

The equal representation between employers and employees is a strong and effective governance arrangement that promotes transparency, accountability and appropriate risk management. This bill would seek to remove this central pillar of industry super governance and replace it with an inferior model. The bill is not proposing the replacement of the fifty-fifty split with a third, a third, a third model—one third of boards being made up of independent trustees; rather, the government is proposing that the boards be made up of at least a third independent appointees and then nothing. There are no mandated levels of employer and employee representatives. We have strongly opposed the repealing of the guarantee of employer and employee representation, a governance structure that has worked well for decades. Contrary to the proposed aim of this bill, removing these employee voices from super boards will weaken accountability and transparency.

Industry super funds are run as not-for-profits, meaning that they are run solely to benefit members. They were created in the 1980s to protect workers' superannuation from the high-fee and commission funds that were originally set up to cater for white-collar workers' retirement. Industry super funds do not pay commissions to their staff or financial advisers or planners. They are designed and structured to benefit members. The boards of representative trustees are generally required to make decisions by a two-thirds majority, making them risk averse. There is a particular regard and reverence for workers' retirement savings that comes strongly through the trade union movement. When you have worked your life as a representative and, indeed, as a trustee of the interests of workers, you learn a very healthy respect for that money. The boards of industry super funds are generally considered to be more focused on long-term growth, investing large amounts in infrastructure and long-term investments and benefiting their members indirectly through sustained economic growth as well.

Their governance structures mandate boards that have both employer and employee representation. This is in contrast to retail funds, which, unlike industry funds, use superannuation funds to create profit, which is then returned to their shareholders, not the fund members. While they regularly make significant profits, that money benefits shareholders and not necessarily the fund members. Indeed, over the last 10 years the average retail super fund has delivered $16,000 less to their members than the average industry super fund, despite their often significant profits. They are able to make significant profits because they are inherently more speculative than industry funds.
The chief economist for Industry Super Australia, Stephen Anthony, argues that the culture of deep and long-term investment in infrastructure, brought on by the representative governance models of industry super funds, has had a positive and lasting impact on the economy. Stephen Anthony cites APRA statistics from March this year saying that industry super funds held an average seven per cent of their investments in infrastructure, and 20 per cent in unlisted equities overall, compared to one per cent in infrastructure and three per cent in unlisted equities overall for retail funds.

In 2014, the McKell Institute released a report titled *The success of representative governance on superannuation boards*. This report found that the available evidence shows a strong relationship between non-for-profit governance and a higher return for members. A 2012 Productivity Commission report into default superannuation funds found:

… there is a lack of compelling evidence to suggest that any one model of board structure should be viewed as clearly preferable in all cases.

Contrary to what the government is suggesting, and contrary to what those opposite are suggesting in their contributions in this chamber, there is already stringent governance oversight of all superannuation funds. In 2013, under the then Labor government, governance obligations were introduced requiring all funds to regularly evaluate, through a third party, the effectiveness of their board and directors. This includes disclosures of conflicts of interest, and ensuring directors are fit and able to adequately make the decisions that are expected of them.

The prudential regulator, APRA, has significant enforcement powers to ensure these governance practices are enforced. APRA also has the power to set and supervise the funds to ensure they meet the financial promises they keep. To ensure directors meet the skills and have the experience to make informed decisions, APRA funds are required to report on the makeup of their boards. This is the nub of what the previous speaker was talking about. But this bill does not go to that. It fixes a non-existent problem.

Currently, boards are also required to conduct ongoing performance reviews. These requirements, many set or updated in 2013, should be given further time to be fully bedded down and implemented. They should also be reviewed to assess their effectiveness, before we introduce another change in legislation.

The bill wants to give further, unprecedented powers to APRA, including the ability to determine whether or not a person is sufficiently independent, even after they have met the statutory definition. In short, this bill is about ideology, not evidence. It is huge government overreach and it is aimed at reducing employee and union voices in super funds. That is the only objective of this legislation.

In Australia, at June 2015, superannuation assets totalled just over $2 trillion. It is a staggering amount of money, which must be carefully managed. However, this bill does nothing to enforce stricter standards amongst directors, only to mandate quotas that will see qualified and capable people prevented from joining super funds because of their background. If the government were serious about implementing stricter standards for trustees, this would be a very different conversation. However, removing employee and employer representation on boards does not constitute a change in behaviour, only an attempt to weaken representation.
Independence is a method of achieving good governance, not an end in itself. Currently, the ends are higher returns and trustees who act in the interests of fund members. These objectives clearly are being met at present. This government cannot be trusted to make decisions about superannuation, because deep down the Liberals simply do not believe in it and do not value it. The last two Liberal prime ministers distained superannuation. John Howard infamously called it a 'job killer'. Tony Abbott called it 'one of the biggest con jobs ever foisted by government on the Australian people'. Last year, the now former Treasurer announced that the scheduled increase of the compulsory superannuation contribution from nine to 12 per cent would have to be postponed, blaming Labor for failing to allow them to keep their election commitments. They also scrapped the low-income superannuation contribution, a policy targeted at helping the lowest earners in Australia save for their retirement. A similar story can be told about the Howard government, which, after less than six months in office, scrapped the proposed increase in compulsory superannuation from nine to 12 per cent, after running on it as an election promise.

The bill also goes against the mantra of those opposite about red tape reduction. We know this government talks a good game on red tape reduction—we have all seen the cuttingredtape.gov.au marketing site set up by the member for Kooyong. It is a bizarre site—now much neglected and little updated—where the little red line of efficiency savings continues to rise every time the government changes the word 'facsimile' to 'fax' in the next round of legislation, but never seems to move backwards every time this government implements regulations that imposes direct costs on industries and businesses.

The bill will add more regulatory burden to industry super funds. The government has already admitted that this added regulatory burden will cost $8.5 million in start-up costs and a further $12.3 million in ongoing costs annually. There will be increased remuneration costs associated with the new governance requirements, as well as other significant costs, including search and engagement costs and legal costs. These costs will have to be absorbed by fund members.

Industry super is a low-cost, low-fee super option. Enforcing costly regulations will have a direct impact of less money for people when they retire. The bill does not come close to meeting its proposed objectives. It is inappropriately heavy handed, forcing a 'one size fits all' approach, regardless of a respective fund's business model or membership. Our super system intentionally provides for alternative governance models, which has delivered undeniable benefits for competition since their implementation.

Industry super funds are popular because they have both employer and employee representation on their boards. It is a system that has worked for decades. It does not make sense to abandon the industry fund model of equal representation when it has worked so well for so long. The bill does not try to implement an additional quota of so-called 'independent' positions on boards, but plans to replace equal representation with a third 'independent', and then leave the rest to open slather. It could have disastrous consequences for industry funds, and for competition in general.

APRA cannot interfere in a bank like the government is proposing it can interfere in industry super funds. Giving power to an authority to decide whether a person is independent even if they comply under the statutory definitions really reveals the government's true intent.
here. Superannuation trustees are already regulated by corporations law, financial services law, state and territory trustee laws and superannuation industry statutes.

The new Prime Minister told the Australian people that things would be different, but this legislation was proposed, written and prosecuted by the former Prime Minister. It has the former Prime Minister's ideological obsessions written all over it, and its continuation in this parliament gives us a glimpse into the real member for Wentworth—someone who is just as keen to prosecute similar ideological attacks on the union movement as his predecessor.

This is bad legislation—plain and simple. The bill calls for the arbitrary application of government intervention, the removal of employee and employer representation, and illogical quotas. It will do nothing to influence the behaviour or competence of board members; it will only weaken employee representation. People who hoped that a change in leadership would see an end to the government's agenda will be saddened by the Prime Minister's decision to continue with the policies of his predecessor and the prioritisation of short-term ideological objectives over long-term gain for everyday Australian workers. Of the top 50 performing super funds, 19 are industry super funds and only two are retail funds. Of the bottom 50, seven are industry funds and 40 are retail funds.

The facts are there for everyone to see. This is just another coalition attack on not only the trade union movement but the retirement savings of all Australians. That is why Labor will oppose it.

Mr BROUGH (Fisher—Minister for Defence Materiel and Science and Special Minister of State) (12:31): It is always interesting when you have debates on superannuation, because people—both sides, I guess—like to take ownership. It was a Labor government that introduced compulsory superannuation, and former Prime Minister Keating has a lot to be proud of there. But, when it comes to industry funds and retail funds, it always bemuses me that it is a 'them and us' argument when it should not be. We all get the right to choose—or most of us. There are some small sections of society who still do not have the right to choose because of some legacy issues in their particular industries, but, by and large, the Australian community gets to decide who is best to meet their long-term retirement needs by looking after their nest egg in the form of superannuation. It is a very serious issue because, over time, it is the largest investment that we will all make. It will determine the sort of retirement that our families can enjoy and, in doing so, determine whether we will or will not be a burden on the public purse. Of course, our period of retirement is, happily, growing longer. As I get closer and closer to it, it is something that I pay a lot more attention to. As, on average, Australians now live to 80 or 80-plus, people should be looking forward to a post-pensionable age of at least 15 years. Now, with the preservation age being approximately 55 or 56, depending on your date of birth, it could be a considerable period longer.

That brings me to the point and the purpose of the Superannuation Legislation Amendment (Trustee Governance) Bill 2015. It is about the people you entrust—that is the word here. Trustees are entrusted with the care, the management and the investment of your retirement income. For many of us, we almost do it with blind faith; therefore, we expect legislators, people sitting in this place, to make sure that there are safeguards and provisions that are going to protect our nest egg and ensure that it is there when we need it. This is not about one form of fund—retail versus industry—it is about the qualities, the experience, the qualifications and the diversity of the people whom we would seek to have look after our nest.
That is why this bill is being enacted. It is here to give further assurance that we have that independence—that third-party look-through to ensure that nothing untoward occurs and that the best intellect and experience are brought to bear, along with all of the investment advice that is gathered independently and professionally by the superannuation funds.

When we are talking about a $2 trillion asset, that is a heck of a lot of zeros. We need to say to ourselves, 'Isn't it prudent for the parliament to continue to review the legislation that protects people's assets and retirement income to ensure that we meet community expectations and do everything in our power to give those mums and dads, the workers of Australia, whose superannuation is going into these funds the confidence that their interests are being protected?' Having the existing boards of these organisations look outside for qualified, independent, experienced personnel to add the grunt that they need to their boards to protect that investment is something that we should all applaud.

So you have to ask yourself: why is it that only one side of this House has an issue with genuine independence and agrees that this is strong? I know from personal experience of speaking to industry funds that at least one that I am aware of has independently already taken this step. It has got ahead of the curve and said, 'This is the right and proper thing to do on behalf of our members.' It has reached out to the corporate world, given that diversity to its board and, in doing so, made it a board that can provide more holistic, rounded advice and can protect people's interests.

There is no downside to this. There is no ideological bent on the part of this government. This is about good governance that should underpin the superannuation system, because $2 trillion is a lot of money and it is a big interest that we should all be ensuring that we protect for the long term. I commend the bill to the House. I know that there are other speakers who will add their voices to the debate, but I ask those who come after me to reflect: do we really want independence? What is there to be afraid of with independence? Perhaps you could reach across the aisle and embrace something that is actually good for everyone in Australia who needs their superannuation for their retirement.

Mr HUSIC (Chifley) (12:36): I am keen to take up the invitation from my esteemed colleague opposite, the member for Fisher, to look at some of the issues around, in particular, independent directors on superannuation boards. I do want to make some other remarks in this debate on the Superannuation Legislation Amendment (Trustee Governance) Bill 2015, but, given that the member has extended the invitation to talk about this, I will. When you look at this issue of the value of having independents, you have to put it in the context of the broader reform process, as you call it, that has been launched in this space by this government about the way in which super funds are governed.

If for a moment we had evidence that by changing the ratio of representation on the boards of superannuation funds there would be a distinct lift in return rates or an improvement in the performance of these funds, then I would be all ears to receive that evidence. If there was proof that the post-retirement incomes of those superannuants would be improved by this reform, I would be very keen to see it. But the fact is that there has not been much evidence of that. I have no issue with us having independents on superannuation boards. My issue is that this reform process is not evidence based, that the evidence itself is very light on and that this is more reflective of an ideological determination to not have a particular group of people sit on superannuation boards at the same representation level that they currently do, and that
group of people is union officials. That is basically the argument. What is driving this is not evidence; it is ideology. That is a problem for me and it is a problem for others on our side. This is not about improving governance in a way that will reflect in the rate at which the investments held in superannuation funds for the benefit of members will be improved.

This is all about ideology. If you look at it on the evidence, on the basis of facts, the numbers do not lie: industry super is much stronger in performing its job than are retail funds. That is not seeking in any way to besmirch or undermine the value of retail funds or self-managed superannuation funds by any stretch. But, as the saying goes, if something ain't broke, then don't fix it. And the fix here is claiming to improve the way in which these funds are run by putting more independents on. The existence of more independent directors will not of itself improve the running of those funds. There is nothing there to say that. That relies purely on a numerical reflection of the number of independents on a board. There is nothing in this that will improve the quality of decision making by the independents on that board or in fact by the entire board. There is nothing to say that when you put these people on they will, by virtue of their very existence, change the way in which decisions are made on those funds and therefore lift the return rates. There is none of that here.

It will not achieve its stated goal of improving super fund governance. Rather than focusing on the behaviour or the skills of those directors, it will just basically focus, as I said, on the issue of quotas. It will not address any of the governance challenges in superannuation. In fact, if it does change the governance of the most successful super funds—the representative model—it will fail to address the governance issues associated with consumer losses in, for example, the bank and wealth management industry. What does it do, for example—as we have raised questions about in times past—about the way in which banks that might offer superannuation products in a retail capacity might offer a subsidiary product to lure people in, quite separate to super? Maybe they would give them a discount on some of the other products the business uses in the superannuation offering to its employees. It is that type of questionable practice where you sign up to a bank to provide superannuation products to a business's employees but also get a discount on some of the other banking services you use. This is not a decision based on the best interests of the member; this is a decision based on the best interests of the business that is contracting a financial institution or a bank to provide superannuation.

This is simply wrong. You will not hear anyone on that side of the House raise that issue, but it is a serious one. And we are here talking about this bill, which is supposed to improve governance, while these other practices that we know about out there are occurring. But there is no movement whatsoever to look at that. At the moment we have a supervisory system in place through APRA, which is recognised internationally as being very solid and very robust. There have been very few instances of breakdowns in that system around governance within the superannuation space. If they are there, then put forward a regime that will actually deal with it in an evidentiary way, or rely on the evidence itself, to lead to a series of mechanisms that would improve governance.

Again, I come back to the point that this legislation is not based on evidence; it is based on an ideological obsession driven by some of those opposite. I have seen it at play within the House of Representatives Economics Committee when we have had APRA before us and there has been question after question after question about union involvement on the boards of...
superannuation bodies—trying to pick one little thread here and one bit of string there to see whether it brings down the entire framework and superstructure of superannuation in this country and the way the governance is managed within it. And there is very little evidence to support it. But the evidence is clear: when you look at the returns received by members of industry super funds compared with others, industry super fund members have a reason to have a big smile on their face, because they are getting stronger returns.

We are also being invited to embrace a proposition whereby we will see a massive turnover in director numbers. The cost of changing those directors on superannuation boards is estimated to be fairly significant—and a push for red tape at the desire of the coalition to see this change through, not because of evidence or demonstrated problems in the system; rather, they cannot stand unions and they do not want to see unions involved in superannuation. When it comes superannuation, those opposite see superannuation as the preserve of those on stronger incomes and are working out how to have a post-retirement income scheme that benefits higher income earners.

From my perspective, I am happy with that for higher income earners who have had to manage risk in their lifetime, been involved in senior positions, been involved in companies where their jobs can go at a moment's notice if they make the wrong call or started up their own businesses and have been managing them—I totally get it. But, from my point of view, if we are particularly focused on making sure we have a post-retirement income system that is not heavily dependent on the pension, we need to have a system in place that delivers returns for the bulk of Australian employees not just for one end.

One of the best commitments we have been able to see to the superannuation system is to have the people who represent working Australians—unions—sitting on those boards. It is also broadening their view. This is the other thing too. When union officials sit in a director's role, they are very conscious of the fact they have to make decisions in the best interest of members. Unless there is evidence to demonstrate otherwise, that decisions have been made and a vote taken on those boards that runs counter to the interests of fund members, which there is very little evidence of, those directors put themselves in a serious position. They would be making decisions against members' interests.

For those union officials who sit on boards—in full disclosure, and I have been one of those directors—it certainly does open the breadth of vision about the way business operates in this country. I would have thought that it would be far better to involve people to get a much more holistic view about the nature of our economy and the investment decisions made within it, rather than having a bunch of independent directors—and I can just imagine it will be the same small group of people doing the rounds. It is not like we are creating an industry that will pump out independent directors and it will be easy to make selections to these boards to help in governance arrangements. That will not be the case whatsoever. We are requiring a wholesale change that will require greater costs to be embraced by superannuation funds to change the representational arrangements that exist at the moment—all for ideology, not because evidence dictates that this should be the case. This is a big problem.

So we have had the issue of no evidence. We have had the issue that super funds perform much stronger. We have had the issue that related party arrangements will not deal with this in any shape or form—something left unsaid, unspoken and undealt with by those opposite. We have the issue that this will require a lot more cost to be borne by superannuation funds.
When we look overseas, there is no like movement to embrace the type of change that is being foisted on us by this legislation—none whatsoever. In fact, when you look overseas and see, for example, research on American public pensions funds, the proportion of outside trustees has no significant relationship with the excess performance of the funds.

As the member for Rankin and shadow minister has observed, this government have basically said that independent directors are better. Based on international experience, there is absolutely no evidence that that will be the case. If no-one overseas is doing this, if the local funds are performing stronger with a balanced representation between employers, employees or their representatives and independents, if there is no evidence to suggest that they are underperforming relative to retail funds and there is no evidence that this government are serious about tackling some of the other issues that we have concerns about in terms of related party transactions, then you have to ask the question again: why are we doing this, other than for ideology? We should be a lot more responsive and a lot more responsible about how we set policy in this space than what is currently being forced upon this House and ultimately the other place in accepting this legislation.

If we are expecting directors to make decisions that represent the best interests of members, that is certainly not the type of behaviour that is being reflected right here, right now by this government. They are not asking us to make decisions in the best interests of the members of those superannuation funds. They are not asking us to make decisions that will improve the rates of return and therefore the post-retirement incomes of those people being represented. This government are asking us to do something that we would not allow existing board members of funds to do—that is, to make decisions on things other than fact or evidence. They are asking us to make decisions quite contrary to the way that existing directors have to made decisions. They are asking us to make decisions based on their ideology, not on evidence, not on proof, not on the wellbeing of the people being represented. That is the biggest hypocrisy. At its heart, the great hypocrisy of what we are doing here, we are being asked to support legislation that runs counter to a decision-making process that we would require of independent board directors. That is what sticks out in this and it is wrong. For that reason, we raise a series of objections about this bill. It is not about proof; it is about ideology and that is simply wrong.

Mr PERRETT (Moreton) (12:51): I rise to speak on the Superannuation Legislation Amendment (Trustee Governance) Bill 2015—surely a perfect example of the Abbott-Turnbull focus on the past. We can see by the number of speakers opposite lining up to talk about this legislation that it is a dog. The advisers in the adviser's box outnumber government speakers by five to one. This is not a good piece of legislation.

Any time a piece of legislation comes before the chamber we need to ask, 'Why is it here?' Why would you want to change the governance arrangements for industry super funds? I should just explain what industry super funds are for those listening. Industry super funds are where the employer and employee representative groups, mainly unions, of an industry such as the childcare sector, building sector or education sector have come together and said, 'Let's look after our members' financial interests when it comes to retirement.' Industry super funds have a mix of 50 per cent union—that is, employee—representatives and 50 per cent employer representatives. The chair of that board can come from either of those groups.
You might well think that the government has brought on this bill to make governance changes to industry super funds because they have not been performing as well as retail funds. That would be the logical presumption as to why you would bring in this horrible, short-sighted, ideologically motivated and not practical piece of legislation. You might perhaps assume that there have been some issues around the governance of these funds because you have employer groups and employee groups. They are two groups that often have industrial action; you might think they do not get together when it comes to the retirement funds for their members. You would be wrong on both counts.

Do not just listen to me. You can even go and listen to that well-known rabid unionist John Brogden! He represents the peak body for these union funds. Who is John Brogden? He is a former leader of the Liberal Party in New South Wales. So he is not some former union member. He is actually a representative of the right. Industry super funds, as John Brogden will tell you, have consistently outperformed retail funds. Nineteen of the top 50 performing super funds over 10 years are industry super funds. Only two of the top 50 are retail funds. There is no evidence of any governance problems or even performance problems with industry super funds.

I will declare that I am in an industry super fund. I am in QIEC because of my time spent in private school education. At the moment QIEC is chaired by Terry Burke. I should declare that Terry Burke gave me a job many years ago. He is the chair of QIEC who has been outperforming the previous chair of QIEC. Terry Burke works for the Independent Education Union, the union I used to work for. It is a union that looks after private schools around Queensland. They are not usually a hotbed of unionism. Before Terry Burke, who is an employee representative, QIEC was cheered for 20 years by Allan Fazldeen. How does the board make decisions? The chair of the board, Terry Burke or Allan Fazldeen, would look at the majority of views. They always, like any sensible organisation, were able to make decisions in the best interests of their members.

Industry is aware of this, so this bill is a misguided attempt to fix something that is not broken. It could do damage. Industry super funds have had longstanding governance arrangements where 50 per cent of representation is employers and 50 per cent is employees. That is perfectly balanced. And now the government is trying to bring something into the mix that sounds good—‘independent’. We all like independence, even on the floor of this chamber. We respect the concept of independence. However, the problem with an independent person on such boards is that they will not be committed to the members. We want our umpires to be independent. We want them to be disinterested and not have an interest either way. They can then make a fair decision. But when you are talking about decisions for your members, be they an employee or an employer, you want someone who is committed to those members and their long-term interests. That is what industry super funds are. This bill is attempting to change that longstanding arrangement and replace it with a bizarre requirement that one-third of the representation on these boards be independent. But, bizarrely, there are no requirements for the remaining two-thirds of these boards. There will be no guarantee that employers or employees will have any representation. This is in a situation where, as I said, 19 out of the top 50 performing super funds have been industry super funds.

There is obviously at play here an agenda of this government. This is another example of the Abbott-Turnbull government where the Prime Minister is not really leading his team; he is
following the government's short-sighted agenda. I find it quite incredulous that this government would impose a requirement on industry super funds that would tear down a system of governance that has been the most successful governance model.

Industry superannuation funds enjoy a reputation as having a 'members first' culture. Good employers are passionate about the best returns for their employees. That culture flows from having equal representation. That equal representation model of governance makes industry superannuation funds different to retail funds. There is no doubt about that. But there is also no doubt that industry superannuation funds have been more successful than retail funds. That is the motivation for this legislation, I would suggest.

There is no evidence that any one type of governance is better than others. Justice Owens in his HIH royal commission report—we all remember HIH and how good they were; I think they had balanced governance arrangements—released in 2003 said about governance structures that:

I am not so much concerned with the content of a corporate governance model as with the culture of the organisation to which it attaches … the key to good corporate governance lies in substance, not form.

The financial system inquiry report, when discussing the governance of superannuation funds, said:

… there is little empirical evidence about the relationship between quality of governance in Australian superannuation funds and their performance …

The government is trying to fix something that clearly is not broken.

This bill was introduced to the House on 16 September this year. In the explanatory memorandum it says that the measures in this bill are consistent with the financial system inquiry report's recommendations. That report was released on 7 December 2014. Until this morning there had been no response from the government to that inquiry report. There are 44 recommendations in the report. It is curious that, without having responded to the report, the government thought it was urgent to bring a bill before the parliament to address this one recommendation.

The government make plenty of noise about getting rid of red tape. Because they are starved of a legislative agenda, they have these red tape repeal days where they celebrate hunting down commas and jumping on semicolons and stamping out a couple of brackets or parentheses. This bill is a sneaky attack on unions. That is what this piece of legislation is all about, and it costs money. This bill is actually nothing but red tape. It is setting up the over-regulation of an industry that is already performing well and is well regulated, an industry that has no allegations of scandal or impropriety. There is no rational reason for imposing this mandatory change to governance on industry superannuation funds when they are performing well ahead of retail funds.

The members of industry super funds—like me—are in a much better position to fund their retirements because of the performance of their industry super funds. There is real reform that the government could implement in the superannuation sphere, but the government have no reform agenda and no ticker for reform. They have no ideas about real reform. Yet our retirement income system is badly in need of sensible reform. It is unsustainable under the current arrangements.
Australians deserve to have a comfortable standard of living in retirement. By design, tax concessions are an integral part of the superannuation system. But this great Labor initiative—because, remember, superannuation was an initiative of Labor, working with the unions—was not designed to be a tax haven for wealthy Australians. The financial system inquiry found that 10 percent of Australians receive 38 per cent of Australia’s superannuation tax concessions. There are 475 people in Australia with superannuation balances of more than $10 million each. Those people earn tax-free income of $1.5 million each year. That is not a sensible set of arrangements. How can this government continue to hit those who can least afford it—the pensioners, our youth, our schools, our families—when we have our most wealthy earning $1.5 million each year tax free. It is unsustainable and unfair.

Unlike the Abbott-Turnbull government, Labor has a superannuation reform plan. Labor would target superannuation tax concessions to those that need them the most. This is how the superannuation system was designed to be used. It is about providing retirement income for all Australians. Labor’s reforms would affect approximately 60,000 superannuation account holders with superannuation balances in excess of $1.5 million. Earnings above $75,000 from those accounts would not be tax free but, instead, would attract the same concessional rate of 15 per cent that applies to earnings in the accumulation phase. Those people would still be very comfortable in their retirement, and good luck to them. However, such a change would make a huge difference to the retirement income system as a whole.

It is estimated that the revenue from Labor’s proposed reform would collect $9.2 billion in the first 10 years. I know the Treasurer has been prevaricating in question time, but the reality is that the government does have some revenue challenges. This is sensible reform. It is not unnecessary red tape. It is not motivated by a union-busting agenda. This is the type of reform a good government would deliver. Labor is passionate about the superannuation system. It was a creation of the labour movement. Labor wants it to be sustainable and to deliver the outcome it was designed to deliver: to allow all Australians to fund their comfortable retirement.

This bill does not assist people with their retirement income. In fact, it could do the opposite, as I said in my opening remarks. This bill does not make the superannuation system more sustainable. What this bill does is single out industry superannuation funds—the ones that are working well; the ones that are outperforming retail funds—and tie them in knots with red tape. It is compelling them to change the governance structures that they have had in place for decades and that have been operating with no problems. As I said, with 50-50 employer-employee representation there is balance. These are funds that have members that benefit from the performance.

There is no need for this unnecessary red tape and regulatory burden. There is no need for it and, obviously, like any red tape, it comes with added financial burden. The explanatory memorandum to the bill confirms that this amending legislation will result in $8.5 million in start-up costs and a further $12.3 million annually in ongoing costs. That is $20 million that will be thrown away. That is the sort of excess that would make Kathy Jackson blush. This is a financial cost that will be imposed on industry superannuation funds and will impact on the returns that their members receive. The regulatory burden on the funds will include an obligation to report annually on whether they have a majority of independent directors and, if not, to explain their lack of compliance.
This bill gives unprecedented powers to the Australian Prudential Regulation Authority at a time when industry funds are outperforming their retail equivalents. APRA will have power to determine if a person does not qualify as independent for the purposes of the governance of a fund, even if that person meets the statutory definition. Isn't that a great use of members' money—to pay for someone to investigate whether or not this person is committed to the industry! This power goes further than APRA's powers with respect to banks and insurers.

These measures are unwarranted. They will create unnecessary regulatory burdens on industry super funds. They will create added regulatory costs for industry super funds. They will impact on the returns received by members of the industry superannuation funds. For those reasons and for every sensible reason, I would ask the government representatives opposite to look at this agenda. This is an outdated political agenda linked to the Prime Minister who was knocked off a few weeks back. This is not a sensible, forward thinking government. I think what we have opposite is a Prime Minister who has shackled and welded himself to the Abbott agenda but likes to talk about the future. Here is an opportunity for the new Prime Minister to actually do something positive. Why would any sensible business person look at the empirical data and say, 'We need to bring in extra red tape. We need to slam a $20 million cost on the retail funds'? As I said, 19 of the 50 highest performing super funds over the last 10 years are industry super funds. They have the balance right now. It is 50-50. But every single board member in an industry super fund is committed to that industry. That is the difference. By bringing in this independence they will sabotage that strategic focus. That is why Labor will not be supporting this legislation.

Dr LEIGH (Fraser) (13:06): Labor's position is to oppose the Superannuation Legislation Amendment (Trustee Governance) Bill 2015, as previous opposition speakers have noted. The government is proposing to end more than two decades of successful joint governance by employer and employee nominated fund directors and instead force boards to take on both an independent chair and one-third independent directors. It is passing strange that a so-called Liberal Party is seeking to mandate how independent investment funds structure their activity. It is clear, as I will outline in my speech, that the effect of the government's proposals would be to increase administrative costs for funds and thereby drive down member returns. Perhaps we should not be surprised that a so-called Liberal Party that opposes the use of markets in tackling climate change is again wanting additional red tape when it comes to Australia's superannuation funds. The Mckell Institute has nicely summarised the government's bizarre motivations on the issue by asking: 'When a system is working better than the alternative, why tamper with it?' Alas, I am concerned that this is being driven by ideology and not by evidence.

The superannuation industry now has assets valued at $1.6 trillion, set to increase over the coming decades. The 2010 Super System Review, the Cooper review, estimated that Australian superannuation savings will exceed $6 trillion by 2035, The number of Australians 65 and over seeking to access their retirement savings is expected to double by mid-century. That pool of savings has been important. We have compulsory superannuation because of two benefits that superannuation savings bring to the rest of the community. One is reduced reliance on the age pension. The second is that having a large pool of domestic savings can have benefits for the national economy at times when access to overseas funds is limited. We
saw this in the global financial crisis, when Australia's pool of superannuation funds was
important for ensuring that certain loan markets did not dry up.

So it is appropriate that we provide some tax concessions to the superannuation sector,
although, as Labor has argued, those superannuation tax concessions, in our view, are neither
fair nor sustainable. But it is absolutely important that we get our superannuation governance
settings right, and it is vital that we are guided in this by evidence and not by ideology. The
evidence is clear. The studies show that having more independent directors on boards does
not automatically lead to better results.

Mr Laming: It sure helps!

Dr LEIGH: I am afraid it does not, Member for Bowman, and I am happy to go to those
studies in a moment for you. Studies show that Australians get higher returns from
superannuation funds that are governed by employer and employee nominated fund directors.
SuperRatings shows industry funds with employer-employee boards have outperformed retail
funds by 1.66 per cent over the past decade. That means, if you are in the average industry
fund rather than the average retail fund, your retirement savings are $16,000 higher than if
you had been in the average retail equivalent. Multiply that over the course of a working life
and you can see someone in an industry fund ending up with retirement earnings which are
equivalent to what they would have gotten if they had spent an additional year in the labour
market. Put another way, the typical retail fund investor has to work another year to get the
retirement savings that the typical industry fund investor gets. And yet we see those opposite,
as so often, going into bat for the worst-performing part of the sector.

McKell Institute research found that not-for-profit superannuation funds generate 1.8 per
cent higher returns for their members. The institute concludes that not-for-profit
superannuation funds allow investors to retire eight years earlier than if they had invested in a
for-profit fund—even higher than the one year that I mentioned a moment ago. The McKell
Institute concludes:

With superannuation funds, the not-for-profit representative trustee model has outperformed its for-profit
appointed trustee competitors on virtually every important criteria of superannuation performance over
a long period.

The representative governance model in superannuation has promoted higher levels of diversity
amongst trustees, more effectively minimises conflicts and interest and generates higher net returns for
fund members.

According to Industry Super Australia, had all superannuation funds had the same returns as
these not-for-profit funds, Australian retirement savings would be $88 billion higher than they
are today. Over the past financial year, we can look at the top 10 best-performing super funds,
and in that list we find eight industry funds and just two retail funds. But, if we push out the
time horizon further and we look at the past decade, we find 10 industry funds and no retail
funds. This is not just in Australia. Internationally, research on 296 financial firms in 30
countries found that those with more independent directors experienced the worst returns in
the global financial crisis. Given the strong performance of the industry superannuation funds,
it is not surprising that the former Assistant Treasurer—sorry; we need to clarify that, don't
we; we have had three Assistant Treasurers under this government; I meant the member for
Kooyong—recently switched his work superannuation from a retail fund to an industry fund.
These changes are going to mean lower returns for members and higher fees and expenses. A research paper by Monica Tan and Marie-Anne Cam from the University of New South Wales found management fees and operating expenses rise with the number of independent trustees sitting on a fund's board. They found that larger boards are linked to higher investment management fees and expenses, operating expenses and trustee and audit fees. In short, a larger number of independent trustees do not benefit superannuation fund members. Studies in the US have found similar results. Peter Tufano and Matthew Sevick studied the US mutual fund industry and found that larger boards are linked to higher fees for shareholders due to higher bureaucracy costs. A 2006 review of research on the relationship between chair or board independence in the US mutual fund industry, undertaken by the Office of Economic Analysis of the Securities and Exchange Commission, found:

… no consistent evidence that chair or board independence is associated with lower fees and/or higher returns for fund shareholders …

Importantly, the higher fees and expenses that will result from the government's proposals will be paid for out of members' savings. That means that more independent directors will translate to lower after-fee returns.

The importance of fees has been highlighted by a superannuation report, carried out by the Grattan Institute, that finds no correlation between fees and returns. They argue that the policy and rationale in superannuation governance should be to get fees as low as possible. That was the goal of the former Labor government's MySuper reforms, which targeted getting fees down, because we understood that higher fees eroded post-fee returns.

In order to meet the government's proposed rules, industry funds will have to find and appoint 64 new chairs and bring in 295 new directors. Industry Super estimates this would cost up to $168 million and those higher fees and expenses will be paid for out of members' savings. So much for cutting red tape. If having more independent directors on super-fund boards does not improve returns—and may actually reduce them—why is the Turnbull government so fixated on making this change?

Former New South Wales Liberal Treasurer Peter Collins has referred to these changes as 'designed to damage the current industry super fund model, for no good reason' and 'There is no evidence to support that having a majority of independent directors will give rise to better performance or better governance.' He notes these measures 'totally change the game' and 'The current legislation was never flagged in the previous term of the parliament and represents a very significant departure from what they did propose.' Industry Super Australia CEO David Whiteley criticised the bill for 'dismantling the governance structure of the successful non-profit super sector while not addressing the scandals and underperformance of the bank owned sector'.

What these studies have found is that the most important characteristic of corporate governance is not independence, it is representation. Representative governance is seen, widely, as an important way that corporate governance structures attempt to resolve the collective-action problem of ensuring corporations act in the interests of members and shareholders.

The government's motivation is—as always, in superannuation—purely ideological. The coalition opposed universal superannuation in 1992. In 1996 they came to office promising not to touch the pace of the increases and, then, went ahead and froze them. In 2013 they
came to office promising not to slow the rate at which universal superannuation increased but, in 2014, they froze it again. In fact, I cannot recall a single occasion in which coalition members, in this House, have ever cast a vote in favour of superannuation that benefits ordinary Australians.

This ideology does not just apply to their opposition to superannuation. This government has a pathological dislike of unions and wants to weaken the role of unions in every aspect of public life. They do not care that unions play an important role in mitigating wage inequality, in keeping Australians safe at work, ensuring that workers in tough sectors, such as construction and mining, can go home to their families at the end of the day. The government are studiously avoiding the very facts that have been outlined in careful academic research, that combined governance of funds by employer and employee representatives delivers the best outcomes for Australia's super savers.

The proposed superannuation governance changes are being driven by prejudice, rather than by evidence. They will cost Australian households thousands of dollars in retirement incomes. Australia's industry super funds do not need drastic governance changes. What they need is a government that is less focused on vendettas and more focused on making sure that all Australians can enjoy a dignified retirement. Our superannuation system is too important to be left to dogma and ideology.

Ms CHESTERS (Bendigo) (13:18): Let us be frank about what this Superannuation Legislation Amendment (Trustee Governance) Bill 2015 is aiming to do. It is about knocking off union representations on industry super boards. It is another attempt by this government to drive through its anti-union anti-worker legislation. This is a government that is a little jealous of how well our industry super funds have performed.

They have performed really well, as we have heard from previous speakers on this side of the House, compared to retail bank owned super funds. Why? People on industry boards are there for one purpose: to ensure that their members get the best possible returns. They are not driven by commissions. They are not driven by shareholders. They are driven by outcomes for their members. That is why industry super funds continue to outperform retail super funds and continue to do so every single year.

Industry super funds was first established in the eighties to protect Australian workers' superannuation from the high fees and commissioned products that were common in the retail superannuation market. There is a reason they were established. It was to ensure that hardworking people got decent super returns when they retired. Industry super funds have never paid commissions or incentives to their own staff or any financial planners. People who work for them do so—like union officials—to ensure that their members get the best outcomes. Industry super funds are run only for the profit of members. They are governed by a trustee board made up of both employers and employer organisations, including representatives from the trade union movement.

Industry super funds aim to provide above-average investment returns to its members while keeping fees as low as possible. They continue to have lower fees than retail funds. Industry super funds are committed to quality long-term infrastructure and building investments, in Australia, because they benefit their members throughout the broader economic growth as well as in healthy investment returns.
Industry super funds have a proven track record of delivering for their members. Why, then, is this government bringing on this reform? If the industry super funds, with their current board make-up, are performing so well, why on earth is this government driving this legislation and trying to force it through the House? Government ministers and backbenchers cannot hide the fact that it is purely for ideological reasons. Perhaps it is jealousy, because their mates in business and big banks cannot match the profits and the amount of returns that industry super funds are making for working people. Perhaps it is the fact that they have a couple of mates who would like one of these cushy board positions. But we know through what other speakers have said and through the facts and the figures that industry super funds continue to deliver for working people.

And we are talking about the people who are our cleaners—the cleaners who clean here at Parliament House and who have a Australian super fund account. We are talking about the people who work as security guards or as early childhood educators, who many years ago through their union fought to establish industry compulsory super. Let us just remember who created compulsory super in this country—it was a Labor government. Workers were asked to give up a pay rise to create the first compulsory super scheme. And they did so. They saw that it was important that they as Australian workers started to put aside for their retirement. That is why today in 2015 we have more and more people able to retire on a part-pension and industry super—the super that they have. That is why in the future we will have more and more people doing that until we get to the stage where super accounts are large enough for the majority of people to retire on that income.

That is, of course, if we keep the current model, where we trust the industry super funds to keep doing what they are doing. But this government wants to take a wrecking ball to that. This government, through these changes, is trying to impose that one-third of directors are independent of employer and employee groups and of union representation. This government, through these reforms, is going to create more red tape and burden on business. These amendments will result in an increase of $8.5 million in start-up costs and a further $12.3 million in ongoing costs. This is annually.

This government likes to talk about abolishing red tape, but when it comes to industry super funds, when it comes to unions and when it comes to Australian workplaces then time and time again in this place we see this government proposing more red tape—more red tape to increase the cost and the burden on Australian workers, Australian workplaces and their employees.

Just take for a moment what those in this government have done in previous years when it comes to super. They tried to introduce choice. They said that employees could have a choice between an industry super fund or another super fund. It did not result in a big uptake by workers switching to a non-industry super fund. That was one of the previous reforms they brought out. I can remember it coming up in workplaces—the choice form. Nine out of 10 still stuck with their industry super fund. Why? It gave a better return.

Time and time again industry super funds deliver a better return, because the people on those boards care. They are the representatives of the low-paid workers—Australian workers. They are the people who have been elected or appointed in their organisations to care about retirement income. That is what superannuation is: it is a worker's wages that have been deferred—compulsory savings for when they retire. But rather than trusting the people who
have the best interests of those workers at heart, this government wants to take a wrecking ball to that and impose that one-third of the board be independent. Furthermore, the proposed changes are really vague and fraught with danger. As Justice Owen said, speaking in his capacity as the HIH royal commissioner:

… any attempt to impose governance systems or structures that are overly prescriptive or specific is fraught with danger.

The experts out there are saying that these proposals are fraught with danger and that this extra red tape will create more problems and cost in this sector.

Furthermore, the government's proposed changes to the criteria to meet the definition of 'independence' are very broad and are likely to exclude considerable numbers of qualified and expert people from being independent directors. So who do they have in mind to take up these positions? If the definition of 'independence' is so broad, then how on earth are they going to get the expertise and the qualified people to take up this compulsory one-third of independent directors?

These reforms are about one thing. They are not about independence and they are not about delivering better returns for the people who are members. They are purely and simply about smashing a model that works, a model that was created by previous Labor governments with regard to industry super. This was a model that was driven from the workplace—from employees who said, 'I want to take responsibility. I want to be involved in saving money for my retirement, and I want my union and my industry super fund, through my union rep, to make sure that I have a good retirement income.' That is why we consistently see industry super funds outperforming retail super funds.

Retail super funds—I will just spend a few moments on what is going on in our retail super funds. Unlike industry super funds, banks and insurance companies use their funds to generate corporate profits which return a dividend to shareholders, not to the superannuation policy holders. Big banks are behind the big four retail super funds. These include BT super, which is owned by Westpac; MLC, which is owned by NAB; Colonial First State, which is owned by the Commonwealth Bank; and OnePath which is owned by the ANZ bank.

Whilst the banks which are behind the retail super funds regularly make enormous profits for themselves, over the last 10 years the average retail fund has delivered around $16,000 less to their members than the average industry super fund—$16,000 a year less! That just means one thing: if those superannuants do not have that money—that $16,000 annually—it means that eventually the government might have to pick up the tab through pensions. So rather than empowering these workers to have the kind of financial security that we want them to have, they may rely on a government pension. Or it could mean that there is less money that they are able to spend as disposable income in our economy.

This reform before us today is about red tape—increasing red tape and taking a wrecking ball to what is so critical to retirement incomes. It is not about ensuring that we have independence and transparency. That is just a smokescreen. This is about the government's ideological agenda to smash up unions, to smash up industry super and to tear down a system that is working. Industry super is critical. It is about delivering returns, and the current model is working.
The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Craig Kelly): Order! The debate is interrupted in accordance with standing order 43. The debate may be resumed at a later hour.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Racial Discrimination Act 1975

Mr WATTS (Gellibrand) (13:29): Like dogs returning to their vomit, the extreme ideologues of the right-wing of the Liberal Party are at it again trying to gut the Racial Discrimination Act and fighting for the right to be bigots. The Racial Discrimination Act was amended by the Keating government after a number of reports into racially based motivated violence, a royal commission into Aboriginal deaths in custody, the Law Reform Commission's report into multiculturalism and the law and the need to bring our laws into line with international conventions. The result has been one of the most successful multicultural societies in the world.

But this harmony, this success leaves a bad taste in the mouth of some of those opposite. The member for Dawson, in May last year, got up in this federal parliament and declared, 'Multiculturalism has failed,' and somehow implied that an acceptance of multiculturalism in Australia implied that we supported honour killings and female genital mutilation. What a nonsense. He has claimed that Halal certification companies only are linked to terrorist organisations and he has spoken at the ugly and divisive Reclaim Australia rallies. He has made the job of our counter-terrorism officials more difficult by damaging the harmony and unity of our community yet the Prime Minister remains silent. Just like Tony Abbott, he fails to call out the extremists in his own party.

The PM talks a good game on inclusiveness and tolerance but shows his true colours when he fails to condemn members of his own party. He does not lead those opposite; he follows them. And until he calls out the reprehensible, divisive behaviour of those opposite, he can make no claim to leading a united, tolerant multicultural Australia.

Roach, Mr Ronald

Roach, Mr Trevor

Mr NIKOLIC (Bass) (13:31): I rise to pay tribute to two brothers who died this year and who made major contributions to Tasmania. Trevor Roach died in Launceston on 26 June aged 86, having given 40 years of valuable service to local government and numerous community groups. His brother Ronald Roach died in Launceston on 27 September at the age of 95. Ronald was a pioneer of Tasmanian tourism promotion.

Trevor was a cabinet-maker by trade and operated a joinery business before being elected to the Beaconsfield Council in 1970. He was warden for 16 years and when it became the West Tamar Council, he continued to serve as a councillor and mayor. He gave 50 years of service to the Riverside Lions Club, where I am also a member, and was a great supporter of the Exeter Show and many sporting groups.

Ronald was a mechanic by trade and served in the Royal Australian Air Force from 1941 to 1945 before joining Australian National Airways. He was appointed Northern Tasmanian manager for Ansett ANA in 1958 and later became state manager. He was a member of the Tasmanian Tourism Advisory Authority, deputy chairman of the Tasmanian Convention and Visitors Bureau, and served as president of the Launceston Chamber of Commerce.
Trevor and Ronald Roach were remarkable men who made enormous contributions to Northern Tasmania. I express my condolences to their family and many friends.

Racial Discrimination Act 1975

Dr CHALMERS (Rankin) (13:32): On the Saturday just gone, as I drove from the opening of a new Australian Unity Centre at the Slacks Creek mosque in my electorate to the Cambodian temple around the corner at Marsden, I reflected on how and how fortunate I am to represent one of the most diverse electorates in the entire country. From growing up in that area, I know and I have this belief that the great communities, the great countries, the great societies are the ones that admit people who are inclusive and united and give everyone a stake in the national success.

The Prime Minister wants us to believe that he thinks that as well. He wants us to believe that he is more inclusive than the man he replaced. He wants us to believe that the extremists and the crackpots in his party are back in their box, that the days of ministers defending bigotry are long gone. But the reality is very different. We should judge them on them deeds and not on their words. The reality is that there is a serious split in their party when it comes to watering down section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act, the effect of which would be to make it easier to offend people on the basis of their race. That is not acceptable to this side of the House. It is not acceptable in Greenway or Blair or Isaacs or Lalor or Bendigo or Newcastle and nor should it be acceptable to that side of the House. We have an opportunity to be a beacon for inclusion and diversity in the world; instead, we have a Prime Minister who is just as unwilling or just as unable to match words with deeds and put the extremists in his party back in their box.

Adams, Ms Louise

Mr PASIN (Barker) (13:34): I rise today to highlight the exceptionally talented Louise Adams. Louise has made it through to the final eight in this year's X Factor series on Channel 7. Louise hails from my home town of Mount Gambier and spent her formative years in the Barossa, another beautiful region within Barker. Fortunately I had the pleasure of working, albeit for a brief period, alongside Louise during my time as a solicitor with Ryan's Lawyers in Mount Gambier. Louise is married to her loving husband, Andrew, and is mother to a beautiful one-year old daughter, Frankie. Her Parents in law, Peter and Taffy Burchell, are long-term small business operators in Mount Gambier, whose commitment to the community is well recognised.

Her success in music is a relatively recent development in her life as Louise did not sing in front of an audience until she was in her mid-twenties. Louise is an excellent example of the talent spread throughout rural and regional Australia and especially within my electorate of Barker. What a pleasure it is to see her achieving at such a high level, with millions of Australians captivated by her weekly performances broadcast into their living rooms. Louise's experience is testament to the importance of backing yourself and having a go. It is great to see her going from strength to strength in the competition, and I hope her experience inspires others to do the same.

I urge people across the nation, but particularly within my electorate of Barker, to support Louise and vote for her. As they say, vote early and vote often. I am confident Louise can go all the way and win X Factor.
Ms RYAN (Lalor—Opposition Whip) (13:35): It is deja vu in the House of Representatives today as we rise again to defend section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act on this side of this chamber. We rise because Senator Day has a bill co-sponsored by Senator Bernardi and Senator Smith—the Tea Party have gone mad on the other side and they want to have this argument one more time.

When it came up last time, we stood in this chamber day after day and we said 'no'. We said 'do not do that'. The Australian people stood behind us and said 'no'. They came from every corner of Australia, from every corner of the world where they had originated from to say: we love our multicultural country; we do not believe people have a right to be bigots; we will defend the tolerance in this nation.

We need our Prime Minister now to come through those doors at question time to beg your indulgence and to say he stands with us and he stands with every Australian—that he stands with every child in every classroom, no matter their race or their religion. He needs to stand up to racism, be it in his own party or in the streets. We have a great country—a country that cannot afford to have this debate go on and on and on.

Mrs PRENTICE (Ryan) (13:37): I rise to pay tribute to the War Widows' Guild of Australia, who this year celebrated their 70th anniversary. Since 1945 the guild has served as a place for women to come together, support each other and lobby for all matters concerning the rights and welfare of war widows. It was established in Victoria by Mrs Jessie Mary Vasey, widow of Major General George Vasey, as a craft guild to teach handicrafts to members to supplement their meagre pensions. The War Widows' Guild motto—'We all belong to each other. We all need each other. It is in serving each other and in sacrificing for our common good that we are finding our true life.'—was adopted in 1949 from King George VI's 1941 Christmas message, which Mrs Vasey felt demonstrated the harmony and togetherness of the guild.

When we think of war widows, we often think of elderly ladies widowed from wars long ago; however, it is important to remember the young women who have been left widowed due to recent conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. In my electorate of Ryan there are many such women whose husbands have made the ultimate sacrifice, and it is comforting to know that they still have a stable support network in the War Widows' Guild.

Ms CHESTERS (Bendigo) (13:38): On 22 September, Jays, a local cafe owner, called on the PM to join the opposition leaders in his unequivocal condemnation of intolerance, racism and bigotry. Jays said that it was important that our political leaders stand up for grassroots communities and talk about being inclusive and diverse—that they speak about the Believe in Bendigo campaign. To this day, the Prime Minister has not listened to the calls of Jays and the Believe in Bendigo campaign. He has not come out and condemned what has gone on in Bendigo—outsiders coming in and disrupting our town, but, worse still, preaching hatred, preaching intolerance and preaching misinformation about Islam and dividing our community. The worst example of this was when these individuals from the United Patriots
Front came into Bendigo and did a mock beheading in front of the City of Greater Bendigo chambers.

Yet this Prime Minister did not condemn those actions. This Prime Minister did not come to Bendigo and stand with the people of Bendigo and say: 'I believe in Bendigo.' It is time this Prime Minister and this government got serious, stopped talking about watering down the Racial Discrimination Act and stood with those in our community who are trying to rebuild and who are trying to stand together and say that they believe in Bendigo.

**Durack Electorate: Kimberley Girl 2015**

Ms PRICE (Durack) (13:40): Today I am very excited to tell you about a fantastic competition in my electorate of Durack called Kimberley Girl. The Kimberley Girl has become an institution since its inception in 2004. It is the Miss Universe to young Kimberley Aboriginal women to boost their self-esteem, confidence and general wellbeing. I was fortunate to be amongst the hundreds of people who attended this year's extravaganza event in Broome, including the Western Australian Premier, Mr Colin Barnett. Fourteen Kimberley and Pilbara young women worked the catwalk in the finale of the competition.

Darrylin Gordon from Halls Creek was crowned this year's Kimberley Girl, and was truly humble, gracious and, very importantly, happy with taking out the Kimberley Girl crown. The local media reported that Darrylin grew up on a cattle station 50 kilometres out of Halls Creek and felt she had lacked a teenage social life. Darrylin says she wanted to show other young women who are doing it tough that you have just got to reach for opportunities—great advice. Teanne Brown, a proud Nula Yamatji girl, took out this year's Pilbara Girl title. Teanne is currently in year 12 at Karratha Senior High School.

This was a job well done by Kira Fong and Goolarri Media. It was a wonderful event. I would also like to take the time to acknowledge Christine Simpson-Stokes; it was announced on the night that she was the new patron for the Kimberley Girl. Well done to you, Christine, for your support, and congratulations to the winners and everyone involved in this stellar event. Long live the Kimberley Girl!

**Racial Discrimination Act 1975**

Mr HAYES (Fowler—Chief Opposition Whip) (13:41): As you know, I have the honour of representing the most multicultural community in the country. I know the value of multiculturalism, and I know that multiculturalism works because we work at it. That is why I am very concerned about what is occurring in the Senate at the moment. It is okay for those opposite to refer to three maverick senators, but they are all members of the conservative party and they are proposing to revisit section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act, once again, to make racist hate speech legal in this country. There is no point referring to them as being just uncontrollable and saying, 'They're mavericks'—not when the Prime Minister comes out and makes comments like: 'One of the greatest aspects of our nation is the diverse multicultural society that we are—one that is built on a foundation of mutual respect.' If he believes that, he should start taking these so-called 'maverick' rednecks to task. You cannot have people moving, in this House—with the very privileged position that we hold—to make racist hate speech legal. And that is what is occurring. This is anathema to all of us—and when I say 'all of us' I mean all of us who sit here who profess to represent our electorates and profess to believe in the multicultural nation that we are. To tolerate this sort of behaviour
occurring within our Senate is thoroughly reprehensible. If people need that to get a vote, they should go somewhere else. At a time like this in our society, the last thing we need to do is make racial hate speech legitimate.

Flynn Electorate: Wondai

Mr O’DOW (Flynn) (13:43): I want to praise the community of Wondai in the southern end of my electorate for the great event they hosted on the weekend. I spent the weekend listening to the community—I received good feedback—and I announced the NBN rollout for 700 homes in Wondai.

The town hosted a big race day, the Wondai Cup, which coincided with the Caulfield Cup. I had the honour of judging the fashions on the field. The colours of spring was the theme, and they were in abundance as the fashions rolled out. It was a credit to the whole region.

I also want to congratulate local author Errol Bishop on the release of his first book, *Ghost Galleon*. *Ghost Galleon* is about the legend of a 16th century shipwreck known as the Stradbroke Island galleon. I attended the launch of the book at the Wondai art gallery. The gallery was distributing copies of the book and had a lot of paintings on display.

Unlike in the rest of Flynn, in this district I saw green grass flourishing from recent rain. The town looked spectacular. It was very neat and tidy. Wondai is a close community with real spirit, and I am privileged to represent the people of Wondai in my electorate.

Pat Duff, a Brisbane trainer, trained the winner of the Wondai Cup. He had trained his first winner there at Wondai many years ago.

Racial Discrimination Act 1975

Ms CLAYDON (Newcastle) (13:44): This week, we were again unfortunately reminded of the need to protect against racial discrimination in Australia following the very public attack on the 2014 Australian of the Year and AFL legend, Adam Goodes. Goodes is a proud Indigenous man but was subject to online racial abuse following his appointment as a brand ambassador for retailer David Jones. This was just one month after Goodes knocked back the opportunity to take part in the traditional retiring players parade at the AFL Grand Final, knowing that if he did take part he would be booed by thousands of people. Instead, his last public appearance as an AFL player was at the Sydney Swans best and fairest event, an event he preferred to leave the game from as he described it as a ‘very safe environment’. Every environment in Australia should be safe for anyone to be free from racial discrimination and hate speech.

The toxic and racially motivated campaign of hatred against Adam Goodes is proof that we must do much more to guard all Australians from discrimination, not water down one of our most important protections, as was proposed by Liberal senators last week. The new Prime Minister faces a serious split in his government with coalition MPs and senators openly endorsing an attack on the race hate speech protections in the RDA. The new Prime Minister talks a lot about mutual respect, so now it is time for him to step up to the task, show some national leadership, distance himself from the comments he made to Andrew Bolt about the watering down of the RDA and the Tea Party ideology of his own party— *(Time expired)*
**Hinkler Electorate: Community Events**

Mr PIT (Hinkler) (13:46): On the weekend, my family and I attended a range of community events in both Bundaberg and Childers. Firstly we attended ReSTAMPED, which was part of the Crush Festival for 2015. ReSTAMPED linked with other simultaneous Place Activation projects in Toowoomba. The project was a collaborative effort between numerous local businesses, organisations and artists and aims to get the community thinking differently about spaces in our communities. In this case it was Bundaberg's Post Office Lane. This otherwise quiet, ordinary thoroughfare was ReSTAMPED and brought to life with street art, live music, pop up cafes, fun activities and market stalls from 3 pm to 9 pm.

On Friday night we attended Emerge at the Bundaberg Regional Art Gallery. The event featured work from budding artists in grades 10, 11 and 12 from eight local high schools. Over 200 visitors attended opening night. The exhibition was a thought-provoking experience that demonstrated the high degree of artistic talent that we have in our local schools and highlighted the social and political issues of concern to Hinkler youth. A brilliant rendition of ‘Erlkonig’ by Shalom students kicked off the Western Drought Appeal fundraiser at the Holy Rosary Catholic Church. Speaking of drought, I would like to congratulate Barbera Farms on donating 22 tonnes of surplus zucchinis and tomatoes to drought-feed cattle on stricken properties in western Queensland. I am sure more Hinkler farmers will follow their lead. Last but not least, the Ohana Winery and Exotic Fruits in Childers put on a great event on Sunday.

Finally, I would like to thank Darlene Dobson, one of my electorate officers. It is her birthday today. We could not do our job without her.

**Racial Discrimination Act 1975**

Mr DREYFUS (Isaacs—Deputy Manager of Opposition Business) (13:47): Speech that incites hatred and vilifies people because of their race or ethnicity has no place in Australia. The New South Wales government has shown that it understands this in announcing changes to strengthen racial vilification laws. The New South Wales Attorney-General has rightly pointed out that such changes are necessary to ‘safeguard our inclusive, pluralist, and harmonious community’ and that ‘we cannot allow violent race hate speech to fan flames of division and tear our community apart.’ The proposed changes in New South Wales have been welcomed by community groups.

By marked contrast, federal Liberal senators Dean Smith and Cory Bernardi are co-sponsoring a bill that would weaken the longstanding federal protections against racial vilification in section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act. They were joined in this attempt last week by Liberal Senators Back, Seselja and McDonald. Section 18C plays a critical role in maintaining a cohesive, harmonious community. There is no sensible argument for changing this law which has served Australia well for more than 20 years. Given the Prime Minister's recent statements emphasising the importance of 'mutual respect' in combating radicalisation, Labor calls on the Prime Minister to show some leadership and rein in his backbenchers who want to give a green light to racist speech that insults and offends, and to show some leadership and pledge support for section 18C in its current form. *(Time expired)*

Ms SCOTT (Lindsay) (13:49): Firstly, I would like to welcome students from St Marys South Public School here in the chamber today. Today, I would also like to acknowledge the
fantastic work of a local schoolteacher, Helen Minol, who for 50 years has taught at the Our Lady of the Rosary Catholic Primary School, also in St Marys. Helen's story is absolutely brilliant. She started at the Our Lady of the Rosary as a primary school student in 1952. She did her primary school years there, went to high school and then came back. In 1965 she came back as a primary school teacher. They had to pay for her out of the money they raised in the canteen.

Some of the students have said some fantastic things about the teaching of Mrs Minol. For starters:

You were a great teacher 32 years ago when you taught my mum and you are still a great teacher now.

Other students said:

God speaks to me through your smile.

You may not remember me, but I remember you. You always have nice words to say about everyone.

I remember back in 1965 when we always played with her at lunchtime. We were chasing her around the old grey church/school in Putland St.

Mrs Minol, thank you for your service. Thank you for the contribution you have made to Our Lady of the Rosary Catholic Primary School and to all of the school students at St Marys.

To St Marys South Public School: I hope you have a fabulous day.

**Indi Electorate: Community Banks**

**Ms McGOWAN** (Indi) (13:51): Today I would like to talk about the positive outcome being achieved in my electorate of Indi by the network of community banks. These branches, while they are franchises with great support by Bendigo and Adelaide Bank, are locally owned and operated by their communities, all with their own volunteer board of directors. In Indi, I have the privilege of having community banks in Bright, Mansfield, Mount Beauty, Beechworth and Yea. All are making valuable contributions to their communities through the support of groups, clubs, festivals, events and projects, often in partnership with local government.

The Bright Community Bank was established in 2006 and has contributed over $220,000 to the community, including their recent partnership with Alpine Shire in establishing the Bright Splash Park as part of the redevelopment of the Ovens River foreshore.

Today I would like to acknowledge Branch Manager Mark Ditcham—hello Mark—his staff and board members Mark Howard, Jan Vonarx, Stuart Hargreaves, Geoff Tually, Leigh Marlow and Ros Holland for their contribution to their community. The Bright branch was the winner of the Award for Excellence and Professional Services at the Alpine Shire Business Awards and continues to make a really strong, positive impact in Bright and the community, contributing towards local projects, sponsoring events, sporting events, and assisting local students with scholarships. Community banks do a fantastic job in Indi, and I thank the board and the staff for their work.

**Western Australia Education Awards**

**Mr SIMPKINS** (Cowan) (13:52): Recently, the Western Australian Education Awards finalists for 2015 were announced. The Western Australian Education Awards honour and reward the very best teachers, leaders and support staff in public schools across the state, as
well as the schools themselves. This year, as in all years, schools and teachers within the electorate of Cowan are well-represented.

The WA Premier's Primary Teacher of the Year finalists from Cowan include Sandra Dias—whom I have known for many years—the deputy principal and a great teacher at Greenwood Primary School and Alessandra Morrone from Ashdale Primary School.

The WA Premier's Secondary Teacher of the Year finalists from Cowan include Rebecca Lazarus from Woodvale Secondary College and Shaloni Naik from Ashdale Secondary College. Again, Shaloni is someone I have known and worked with for some time.

The WA Beginning Teacher of the Year finalists include Alexandra Myer from Ashdale Secondary College. It is good to see her there, and I wish her all the best. The WA Education Assistant of the Year finalist is Lynda Bailey from Wanneroo Primary School, another good primary school within Cowan. I hope Lynda does very well. Finally, for the WA Primary School of the Year one of the four finalists was South Ballajura Education Support Centre. Education support centres look after the needs of children with a range of disabilities. Cheryl Lennox is the principal there.

Racial Discrimination Act 1975

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (13:54): As someone who worked on the community consultation in the early 1990s for the racial vilification legislation, I rise today to stand against this government's attack on race hate speech protections in the Racial Discrimination Act. Following the shocking and tragic murder of Curtis Cheng in Parramatta, the Prime Minister moved to unite Australia, labelling us the most successful multicultural nation in the world—and I agree, we are. But, while he was saying that, the Prime Minister was at the same time facing a split in his own party as a number of Liberal senators, including one from Canberra, backed a bill to water down section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act.

Continued Liberal support for this divisive bill defies the Prime Minister's commitment to an inclusive Australia. The Prime Minister must lead on this issue and show he is truly committed to a respectful inclusive, multicultural nation.

Watering down 18C sends the wrong message to Australia's multicultural communities and to all Australians. That is why I have launched a petition calling on the government to abandon its plan to remove and water down the current protections under 18C. 18C has served this nation well for more than 20 years. It has not impacted on freedom of speech. 18C protects Australians against the worst cases of racial vilification and worst cases of race hate speech and it must remain.

Boothby Electorate: Voices of the Village

Dr SOUTHCOTT (Boothby) (13:55): On Sunday I attended the annual Voices of the Village event at the Mitcham Reserve. This event is held every year to celebrate the creative diversity of the City of Mitcham, to promote to the community the activities and opportunities at the Mitcham Cultural Village, and to engage with local community groups. There were music and dance performances, workshops and children's activities. Celebrating the cultural diversity of Mitcham, food offerings included Indian, Persian, Afghan, Indonesian and African style foods, as well as Australian cuisine. A number of the Blackwood Players were there in period costume.
This year was a special occasion as we were also celebrating the 175th anniversary of Mitcham Village. The province of South Australia had been proclaimed by Governor Hindmarsh only two years earlier, in 1836, at the time that the village of Mitcham was established, in 1838. At the time there had been a slow take-up of land orders for the new colony. An advertisement on 21 November 1840 in The Register, the forerunner to The Advertiser newspaper, advertised land parcels that were 'Delightful sites for visitors. Close to town, but with the advantages of a country residence.' While Adelaide may have changed since then, that statement is certainly still true for large parts of Mitcham, which extends up through the foothills through Blackwood and Belair, to Crafers West and Upper Sturt. It was a great day, and a great way to celebrate the history of our local area.

Racial Discrimination Act 1975

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (13:57): A couple of months ago, as shadow minister for Indigenous affairs I attended the Garma Festival and saw the young men identifying with Adam Goodes. On their torsos they had the red and white and number 37, identifying with Adam Goodes, the great Sydney Swans star and dual Brownlow medallist. Unfortunately, today we see in The Sydney Morning Herald a man maligned, as tragically in this country racial vilification and racial abuse continue. That is why it behoves the now Prime Minister to stand up to the tea party faction in the Liberal Party. It is time he stood up and spoke up against these people who want to water down the protection of 18C.

Section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act has stood the test of time for 20 years. In the year of celebrating 40 years of the Racial Discrimination Act it is time those opposite realised that in a multicultural society we need to protect. They should have a look at section 18D of the Racial Discrimination Act, which also protects against racial discrimination and protects freedom of speech. But those opposite do not bother looking at the legislation, and we need to stand up for a society that protects all of us. Multiculturalism is important. I call on the Prime Minister to do the right thing by those opposite and by all communities in this country by opposing the watering down of racial discrimination in this country. 18C needs to be protected.

Murray Electorate: Shepparton Relay For Life

Dr STONE (Murray) (13:58): As the patron of the Shepparton Relay For Life for the last 14 years, I want to congratulate the hard-working organising committee and all of the fundraisers for another great relay event last weekend, held at Princess Park, Shepparton. There were over 300 people involved in the 35 teams, who walked 18 hours, from Saturday through the night to mid-morning Sunday, which was a truly marathon effort by all—young children, mums, dads and the elderly.

It is always a privilege to participate in this community event. The first lap of the relay honours were those who are now cancer-free, those who are undergoing treatment, and also their carers. This year’s relay raised nearly $50,000 for cancer research. Over the last 14 years of the Shepparton Relay For Life we have raised over $2.5 million for cancer research. Each year in the City of Greater Shepparton some 345 people are diagnosed with cancer—young children through to the elderly. Funds raised also go to fund our two local support groups, who provide financial support to cancer sufferers in financial difficulty, and to support education and preventive programs.
In the City of Greater Shepparton, 31 out of the 34 primary schools and 30 of the 41 childcare centres also are members of SunSmart schools and early childhood programs, which educate all about ultraviolet radiation and skin cancer. Well done to the Relay for Life. It is a great contribution from a community that really cares.

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

STATMENTS ON INDULGENCE

Questions Without Notice

Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth—Prime Minister) (14:00): I wanted to advise honourable members of a change in the approach to question time that will be undertaken—

Mr Champion: You get to do this unilaterally, do you?

The SPEAKER: The member for Wakefield will cease interjecting.

Mr TURNBULL: by government members, beginning from the next sitting time.

Mr Champion interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Wakefield is warned!

Mr TURNBULL: Honourable members will understand that the object of question time should be to ensure that members are able to raise matters—

Ms Butler interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Griffith!

Mr TURNBULL: of concern to their local electorates. That is what we will be doing from the government side—

Ms Butler interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Griffith is warned!

Mr TURNBULL: and the opposition members can do whatever they like. They can continue asking questions written for them by the Leader of the Opposition's staff—they can continue doing that. What government members—

Government members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: Members on my right will cease interjecting. The member for Lyons! The member for Watson on a point of order on indulgence?

Mr Burke: Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order. Indulgence traditionally in this parliament is granted for issues of significant gravity, not for the sort of contribution we are getting from the Prime Minister. It is something that takes from the rest of question time. I have never seen a situation where we have had something of this nature be used at the beginning of question time to provide a political commentary.

Government members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: Members on my right will cease interjecting. The Prime Minister is speaking on indulgence and, if he so wishes, the Leader of the Opposition can be heard on indulgence too.

Mr TURNBULL: From the next sitting week until the end of the year, government members will trial a constituency question time to run every sitting day as part of questions

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without notice. What this will mean is that, after five questions have been asked from the government members in the traditional way, further questions will be addressed to ministers by government backbenchers on matters of interest to their local constituency. Local issues are absolutely the bread and butter of every member's job. This will typically involve five questions from government members on their local constituency. It is entirely up to the opposition whether they want to give their backbenchers a say or not.

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Watson on indulgence?

**Mr Burke:** On a point of order.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Watson, the Prime Minister has concluded his remarks. Do you wish to address the chamber on indulgence?

**Mr Burke:** Mr Speaker, it is a point of order on your use of indulgence. The Prime Minister just then, when you granted indulgence for, allegedly, a grave matter, was reading from a political media release. He has a media release in his hand.

**The SPEAKER:** The Prime Minister has informed the House of some changes to question time with respect to the—

*Honourable members interjecting—*

**The SPEAKER:** I will be heard without interjection. The member for Moreton is warned. Members on both sides will not interject when the member for Watson is seeking me to respond to a point of order. Would you like me to respond to your point of order? I will do so without interjection. The Prime Minister, on indulgence, has announced a change in approach from the government's perspective at the start of question time in a brief statement. With all the interjections, it has taken less than four minutes. I am happy to proceed with question time now, unless the Leader of the Opposition or the member for Watson wishes also to speak on indulgence. Thank you. As we proceed to question time, I remind those members who have been warned already.

**QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE**

**Climate Change**

**Mr SHORTEN** (Maribyrnong—Leader of the Opposition) (14:04): My question is to the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister stated in 2009:

*I will not lead a party that is not as committed to effective action on climate change as I am.*

But this week RepuTex has confirmed that not one company will be required to reduce its pollution levels under the Liberals' Direct Action Plan. Why is the Prime Minister sticking with such an ineffectual policy to tackle climate change?

**Mr TURNBULL** (Wentworth—Prime Minister) (14:04): The opposition have trawled through the political archives. They are obviously working back from today. Yesterday, we were being asked about the 2014 budget; now we are going back to 2009.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Jagajaga and the member for Isaacs!

**Mr TURNBULL:** He has got a way to go to catch up with the member for Watson. Was it 1993?

*Ms Butler interjecting—*
The SPEAKER: The member for Griffith!

Mr TURNBULL: We are waiting to hear from Stanley Melbourne Bruce's election manifesto. That will undoubtedly be raised soon.

But let me say this. The honourable member says—the Leader of the Opposition says—that the government is not committed to action on climate change. The government is absolutely committed and will take to Paris a 26 to 28 per cent cut in emissions, which is comparable to other countries similarly situated. What the honourable member objects to is that the government does not have as one of its measures an emissions trading scheme. And that is true—we do not. It was repealed. It used to be coalition policy; it is not anymore. But the point is, as I have said many times in the past and am happy to say again: an emissions trading scheme is no more than one mechanism to reduce emissions. It is a means to an end; it is not the end. It is a piece of economic plumbing. And there are many ways to cut emissions. There is regulation of different kinds. There are a range of measures. There are renewable energy targets. If you look right around the world, different policies are being used and the only question that matters is: is it going to cut emissions?

An emissions trading scheme that does not cut emissions is no good. A regulatory system that does cut emissions is very good, because it does the job. The fact is that emissions trading schemes have worked better in theory than in practice over the last six or seven years. That is undoubtedly correct. The mechanisms we have in place and which the environment minister has carefully assembled and carefully explained in this chamber will result in Australia meeting the commitments we are taking to Paris: 26 to 28 per cent cuts in emissions. We will meet those targets. We will meet them with the measures we have. We will review our measures in 2017, and if they need adjustment—

Ms MacTiernan interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Perth!

Mr TURNBULL: then we will adjust them. But our commitment to those targets is absolute, and honourable members opposite should get used to the fact that we are committed to cutting emissions.

Ms Butler interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Griffith is interjecting again. She interjected at least seven or eight times after I asked her to cease interjecting. The next time the member for Griffith interjects will be a time that will see her ejection from this place.

Financial Services

Mrs GRIGGS (Solomon) (14:08): My question is to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister please outline to the House the coalition government's response to the Murray financial system inquiry? And will the Prime Minister also explain how these reforms will strengthen and secure the banking system, protect consumers and provide greater choice to Australians planning for their retirement?

Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth—Prime Minister) (14:08): I thank the honourable member for her question, and I want to thank at the outset—

Mr Champion interjecting—
The SPEAKER: The member for Wakefield has been warned. You will cease interjecting immediately.

Mr TURNBULL: the great work done by David Murray in heading this panel, and the other members of the panel. This has been a very important piece of work, commissioned by the government, commissioned by the then Treasurer, Mr Hockey. It is building on the work of previous inquiries, such as the Wallis inquiry, whose recommendations were implemented by the government of John Howard, with Peter Costello as Treasurer. Over many years—generations, in fact—the coalition, the Liberal and National Party governments, have been constantly improving the prudential management, the security, the choice and indeed the flexibility of our financial system. Our financial services system is absolutely fundamental to our prosperity and the prosperity of our children and grandchildren in the future.

The initiatives that have been announced today and this response will ensure that Australians can have full confidence in our financial system and greater choice and control over how they spend and save their own money. All Australians will appreciate the importance of one of the key measures announced today to ensure that surcharges imposed on customers by business for use of cards, especially credit cards, are limited to no more than the actual cost to the business itself of that card being used. This is a measure to ensure transparency and to ensure that consumers get a fair deal.

These common-sense reforms that have been part of our parties' tradition have delivered one of the world's strongest and most effectively regulated financial systems. We should not forget that one of the reasons Australia did not fare as badly during the global financial crisis as other countries was because of the strong financial services system that we had in place.

Ms Plibersek interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Sydney!

Mr TURNBULL: Our banks were and are among the best in the world, and it is a consequence of good management.

Mr Brendan O'Connor interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Gorton will cease interjecting.

Mr TURNBULL: It is not an accident. It is a consequence of good management. The domestic assets of our banking institutions alone have increased from $560 billion to $3.5 trillion. The superannuation system, from the times of the Howard government, has increased from $300 billion of assets to around $2 trillion today. This is a vitally important industry. The work of the Murray review has been critical in ensuring its continued health. And the response the government has made in accepting almost all of the recommendations is going to ensure that we remain with the best financial services system in the world. (Time expired)

Climate Change

Mr BUTLER (Port Adelaide) (14:11): My question is to the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister stated earlier in question time today that the only thing that matters in climate change policy is: is it going to cut emissions? In March the Department of the Environment found that by 2020 emissions will be 20 per cent higher than they were at the time this Liberal government was elected. So, why is the Prime Minister sticking with the discredited Direct Action policy?
Mr Turnbull (Wentworth—Prime Minister) (14:12): The honourable member makes that assertion, and it is utterly rejected. The premise that emissions are—

Mr Dreyfus interjecting—

The Speaker: The member for Isaacs will cease interjecting.

Mr Turnbull: increasing is simply incorrect, and I will invite the environment minister to explain in further detail why that is the case.

Mr Hunt (Flinders—Minister for the Environment) (14:12): Once again, I would love to thank the member for Port Adelaide, but, sadly, he keeps avoiding. Let me start with a very simple explanation. The Department of the Environment recently released figures that showed that Australia's latest quarterly emissions were the lowest since 2004, in not just trend but also seasonal terms. Let me repeat that: the lowest emissions since 2004 in both trend and seasonal terms. Beyond that, let me say this: as we said—

Mr Thistlethwaite interjecting—

The Speaker: The member for Kingsford Smith!

Mr Hunt: when the target of minus 26 to minus 28 per cent was announced—

Mr Thistlethwaite interjecting—

The Speaker: The member for Kingsford Smith is warned!

Mr Hunt: there is no doubt now that we will achieve our 2020 targets. That is now a done deal. We will achieve our minus five per cent, or the equivalent of minus 13 per cent from 2005 to 2020, and we will do it without higher electricity prices, without a tax on small businesses and without a tax on families. That is now an accepted fact. We have already seen that the conservative figures we put out then did not include the Emissions Reduction Fund auction—an auction that was more than five times as successful as the estimates of the firm they cited with great gusto yesterday. We achieved more than five times what was the best possible estimate of their favoured modeller.

So our emissions are lower. We have had the lowest emissions since 2004, in trend and seasonal terms. We achieved five times the emissions reduction that was predicted by their favoured modeller, at a fraction of the cost, and we are doing this without an electricity tax. So as we go forward, we will achieve 2020 emissions, we will achieve 2030 emissions targets. There is a choice in this country: two roads. One is a path of higher emissions with higher electricity prices. The other one is lower emissions with lower electricity prices. We make no apologies for the fact that when we said we would reduce the cost of living we did, and that means there can be more jobs and we allow Australia to be more productive. We are achieving our targets. We are doing it and, as we said only a few weeks ago, we will do it on time, on budget and without increasing electricity prices.

Mr Butler: I seek leave to table the department's emissions projections, which show that in 2013 emissions were—

The Speaker: Is leave granted? Leave is not granted. The member does not have the call.
Financial Services

Mr WILLIAMS (Hindmarsh) (14:15): My question is to the Treasurer. Will the Treasurer update the House on how the government is further strengthening Australia's financial services sector? How is the coalition government providing greater choice and transparency in financial services?

Mr MORRISON (Cook—Treasurer) (14:16): I thank the member for Hindmarsh for his question. The biggest decisions we make in life, whether it is buying a house, saving for our retirement and living off those retirement savings or running a business, all relate to our financial system. It is important that that system is as strong as it possibly can be. This was a key feature of the Howard-Costello government in their response to the Wallis inquiry, which insulated, quarantined and supported the Australian economy during one of its most significant challenges to ensure that we could see through the GFC. The forward-thinking of the Howard-Costello government ensured that our financial system was as strong as it could possibly be.

In addition to that, part of our plan to ensure a strong economy with strong jobs growth is to have an even stronger financial system. This goes along with what we are doing to improve our tax system and what we are doing with our free trade agreements, our innovation statement that will be coming later in the year, the infrastructure investments, the competition policies and the strengthening of the budget—all of these together with our response to the financial systems inquiry today is about growing the economy and growing jobs.

The government's response to the Murray review embraces, in whole or part, some 42 of the 44 recommendations. As part of that, we are seeking to support the recommendations to increase the resilience of our system through capital adequacy and strengthening our regulators in their oversight of our financial system. We are providing Australians with greater choice and control over their money, because we understand on this side of the House that it is their money. The money that goes into superannuation is money that they have earned, albeit they may be mandatorily required to contribute to superannuation, but that does not make their contributions the ownership of their employer or the union of which they may be a member. Their money going into super should not be used as chattels in negotiations made by unions and employers to direct where their money should go, because they should decide where their money should be invested. It should not be subjected to deals, and we know all about the deals done by those opposite from time to time—Clean Event and all of these things. We do not think that people's superannuation should be used as chattels in the sorts of deals that are done by those—

The SPEAKER: The Treasurer will confine himself to the subject matter of the question.

Mr Thistlethwaite interjecting—

Mr MORRISON: We are providing in our response that the Productivity Commission will immediately move to conduct an inquiry to ensure that there will be greater choice on default funds.

The SPEAKER: The member for Kingsford Smith has been warned.

Ms Burke interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Chisholm will cease interjecting.
Mr MORRISON: The Prime Minister has already mentioned the announcements in response to the recommendation on surcharges that we will be banning unfair surcharges. Currently, the average interest change fee is 0.5 per cent. But we know that there are surcharges charged between one and three per cent and even as high as 10 per cent. Our response is to say, no, that is not fair and we will not allow that. (Time expired)

Climate Change

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Leader of the Opposition) (14:19): My question is to the Prime Minister. Does the Prime Minister agree that the Clean Energy Finance Corporation, established by Labor, has successfully driven investments in clean energy technologies and is assisting to cut emissions intensity in our economy? Does the Prime Minister accept that the Clean Energy Finance Corporation has a crucial role to play Australia's efforts to tackle climate change?

Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth—Prime Minister) (14:19): I thank the honourable member for his question. The Clean Energy Finance Corporation certainly has been making some investments in this area and, in that respect, has been assisting in supporting the reduction of emissions. It is a fair question, however, to ask whether it is necessary as an institution. Indeed, it was the government's policy to abolish it because we do not support government banks for the simple reason that new government banks are performing roles that can be perfectly adequately fulfilled by the private sector and are not necessary.

Mr Shorten: Mr Speaker, a point of order on relevance. I appreciate the Prime Minister describing it as a polite inquiry for information. It really is straightforward, Prime Minister. Are you keeping the CEFC or are you scrapping it?

The SPEAKER: The Prime Minister will continue answering the question he was asked.

Ms MacTiernan interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Perth is warned!

Mr TURNBULL: The final part of the opposition leader's question was: does the Clean Energy Finance Corporation play a crucial part in reducing Australia's emissions? I would say, no, it does not play a crucial part; it plays a part. It is certainly making a contribution. But the reduction of emissions across the board is contributed to by many things. When a business buys a new piece of equipment that is less energy intensive than the one it had before, it is playing its part in cutting emissions. The business of cutting emissions is quite a complex one with many contributions to it. There are no silver bullets. The CEFC has played a role. It has not been a crucial role. It is open to debate whether it is a role that the government need to play, but we recognise that we have not been able to secure the support of the Senate to
abolish it and it is continuing. It is being, as far as I can see, well run within the limits of its mandate.

Mr Champion interjecting—

The SPEAKER: There have been far too many interjections. I have warned a number of members. I have asked the member for Wakefield to cease interjecting. He has continued to interject. He interjected continuously through that answer. I am not going to have the member for Wakefield ignore my rulings. He can leave under standing order 94(a).

Northern Australia

Mr KATTER (Kennedy) (14:23): My question is to the Minister for Resources, Energy and Northern Australia. The ports, roads, rail and airports were built by the people as joint-user service facilities to create development. Is the government facilitating the Darwin Port sale thereby (1) profoundly inhibiting growth on half of Australia's coastline and (2) since the China FTA and TPP allow discretionary port charges and foreign job outsourcing, creating a foreign corporate, unrestrained, monopolistic money machine?

Mr FRYDENBERG (Kooyong—Minister for Resources, Energy and Northern Australia) (14:23): I thank the member for Kennedy for his question, because I was waiting for a question for more than 300 days from the member for Fraser and the member for Brand but they did not have a question in them. I thank the member for Kennedy for his question.

He asks an important question about the port of Darwin. As he knows, the Northern Territory government conducted an open, transparent process which ended in the 99-year lease of that port for a record amount of over $500 million. There were more than 30 parties that registered their interest. What won this tender? We went through all the normal processes. What won this process was the fact that one group was prepared to invest more than $200 million in the development of the port. That means more jobs in the member for Solomon's seat in the Northern Territory. It means a greater ability for northern Australia, including Darwin, to export into China and other economies in Asia.

As for the TPP and the China FTA, as the member knows, there have been no changes to the existing protection for Australian—

Mr Katter interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Kennedy has asked his question.

Mr FRYDENBERG: Since you kindly asked me about northern Australia, let me say how excited the Turnbull government is about the opportunities in northern Australia—that part of Australia above the Tropic of Capricorn in Queensland and Western Australia and the Northern Territory. It has only five per cent of the Australian population but more than 40 per cent of the Australian land mass. Whether it is in the seat of the member for Herbert, the member for Durack or the member for Solomon, this government is absolutely committed to the development of northern Australia. In fact, we were the first government to create a white paper on this—

Mr Katter interjecting—

Mr FRYDENBERG: The member for Kennedy does not like the answer. We are committed to the development of northern Australia and the creation of many new jobs, whether it is at the port of Darwin or elsewhere. (Time expired)
Ms LANDRY (Capricornia) (14:26): My question is to the Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Small Business. Will the Assistant Treasurer please explain to the House how the government's comprehensive response to the Murray report will improve Australia's financial system?

Ms O'DWYER (Higgins—Minister for Small Business and Assistant Treasurer) (14:26): I would very much like to thank the member for Capricornia for her question. The Murray report is, indeed, a very, very critical report that was delivered to the government on a root-and-branch review of our financial system. It is the most extensive review of our financial system for more than 15 years. The government today announced 48 measures in response to the inquiry. Those 48 measures go to: strengthening of the resilience of our financial system; improving the efficiency, competitiveness and choice in our superannuation system; stimulating innovation; supporting consumers fairly; and strengthening the accountability of our regulators and their powers.

Specifically, though, I would like to highlight one aspect of the measures that have been brought forward—that is, making sure that financial advisers have the highest possible ethical, professional and educational standards. We are going to do this in five ways: making sure that they have a degree; ensuring that they undertake a professional year; making sure that they undertake an exam; making sure that they subscribe to a code of ethics; and making sure they have ongoing professional development. This will bring them into line with other professions and make sure that those Australians who go to financial advisers for advice can be confident that that advice will be in their best interests.

Choice applauds the government for working towards a financial system that delivers fair outcomes for all Australians ...

He went on to say that this, with the other measures we have introduced, will see consumer interest considered in every step of the financial product development, from product design to distribution and sale and after-sale processes.

It is not just in this way that we are improving outcomes for Australians. We are also strengthening their choice when it comes to their superannuation, making sure that there will be competition with default funds. We are doing this as well in relation to governance, making sure that we have the strongest possible governance arrangements apply to our superannuation system.

Unfortunately, though, those opposite do not agree and will not be supporting the governance legislation of minimum standards that is before the parliament in this House this afternoon. But I hope that they will have common sense and I hope that they will agree with the former union official Paul Howes, who said:

… I can't see anything negative in having more independents on boards …

It is such a shame that those opposite do not agree with minimum standards. (Time expired)
DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The SPEAKER (14:30): I inform the House that we have present in the gallery this afternoon Ms Laura Ross, Deputy Clerk of the Tasmanian House of Assembly. On behalf of the House, I welcome you.

Honourable members: Hear, hear!

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Family Payments

Ms MACKLIN (Jagajaga) (14:30): My question is to the Prime Minister. In June 2014, when asked if he supported the Liberal government's cuts to family tax benefits, the now Prime Minister said:

I support the changes to family payment reform.

Now it appears that the government is abandoning at least part of its unfair cuts to family tax benefits. Prime Minister, why has there been this backdown?

Mr Nikolic interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Bass will cease interjecting.

Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth—Prime Minister) (14:30): Nothing better illustrates the way in which the Labor Party is unable to break out of the old—

Mr Dreyfus interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Isaacs is warned!

Mr TURNBULL: dying political discourse of blame and abuse. Here you have a former minister for social services who, I have no doubt, cares very deeply about struggling Australian families and was critical of a set of policy measures that were in our last budget that we could not secure passage for when it was taken to the Senate. She believes that the government has reconsidered those changes and examined ways in which they could be made more acceptable so that they can pass through the parliament. Instead of actually welcoming that, she stands up in the parliament and wants to attack the government for that.

Ms Macklin interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Jagajaga has asked her question.

Mr TURNBULL: Let me make a couple of points to the honourable member. Firstly, like the honourable member, we understand that our nation's future depends on strong families. We are considering carefully the reaction of other parties, including those in the Senate, to the proposals previously taken. There are a number of measures, as you know, that were introduced as part of the budget that we know are unlikely to pass in their current form. The Minister for Social Services has been working very carefully with his colleagues in the cabinet to ensure that a revised family payments reform package will strike a balance between achieving significant savings while still providing—

Ms Macklin interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Jagajaga will cease interjecting and is warned!

Mr TURNBULL: sufficient financial support to those families most in need, and that is the object. When the childcare reforms were introduced by the previous minister, now the
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Treasurer, it was the member for Jagajaga who said, very wisely, showing a keen economic insight, that they will have to be paid for somehow. That is true. They do have to be paid for somehow. The task of the government is to work out the most equitable way in which they can be paid for. That is why revisions are being made, and I have no doubt that if the honourable member seeks further information from the minister she will be obliged with a very comprehensive answer.

China-Australia Free Trade Agreement

Mr WHITELEY (Braddon—Government Whip) (14:33): My question is to the Minister for Trade and Investment who, when it comes to question time, is a real stayer. Will the minister inform the House of the outcome of the inquiry by the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties into our landmark China-Australia Free Trade Agreement?

Mr ROBB (Goldstein—Minister for Trade and Investment) (14:34): I thank the member for Braddon both for his observations and, more particularly, for his very strong contribution to the JSCOT inquiry. I would also like to acknowledge other members of that committee, in particular the former chair, the member for Longman, who has contributed in a most outstanding way to not only this inquiry but several others before it. I congratulate him on his elevation to the executive and, of course, I congratulate the new chair, the member for Hume.

Importantly, the committee recommended that binding treaty action should be taken, opening the way for debate in this chamber to begin on the customs bills that will give effect to this treaty. In this regard, the increase in China retail figures for September of 10.9 per cent year on year confirms the timeliness of this free trade agreement as China transforms its economic focus from industrial production and exports into a consumption driven economy. We are seeing already the enormous interest in so much of what we do in consumption products and services. JSCOT conducted a most comprehensive inquiry and received close to 100 submissions. It met in six cities across the country and consulted with a wide range of stakeholders across manufacturing, services, agriculture, academia, major industry groups and trade unions, and the list goes on.

Importantly, the report emphasised the sense of anticipation and certainty among exporters that is engendered by this free trade agreement, leading already to greater business confidence, driving already new investment and new jobs. This is evident in businesses like the Lion cheese factory in Burnie, in the member's electorate in Tasmania, which the committee, in fact, visited. The company has invested $150 million in the factory over recent years to position itself to take full advantage of the Asian market. This is indicative of the dairy processing sector generally, which has now committed almost $1 billion in upgrading existing capacity and establishing further capacity, and that investment is accelerating daily.

A major pipeline of deals across many sectors is well advanced in anticipation of this deal entering into force before the end of this year. The committee's work has confirmed that the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement will play a pivotal role in the country's going for growth strategy and it must be approved by this parliament.

Racial Discrimination Act 1975

Ms ROWLAND (Greenway) (14:37): My question is to the Prime Minister. This year, when asked by Andrew Bolt about removing the words 'insult' and 'offend' from the Racial Discrimination Act, the Prime Minister said he was 'very comfortable about that'. There is
now a bill before the Senate which does exactly that. Does the Prime Minister stand by his comments?

Mr Husic interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Chifley is warned!

Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth—Prime Minister) (14:37): I thank the honourable member for her question. She raises a very good question about the terms of the prohibition in the Racial Discrimination Act, and there has been a very lively debate about whether the words there—'offend, insult, humiliate or intimidate'—go too far; in other words, whether 'insult' and 'offend' are more than is required to achieve the purposes of the act. There has been a very reasonable and legitimate debate about that from people on both sides of politics. There is a bill in the Senate. It has not been considered by the government. I can say that the government does not have any plans to reopen this matter, to reopen consideration of amendments to section 18C, although I imagine it will be a matter of lively discussion in the future.

This was considered some time ago, but I think it is very important for debates of this kind to be undertaken at the right time and place and in the right context. We have to bear in mind—and the honourable member would well understand this, I have got no doubt—that we have in our society, as in all free societies, to balance the demands of free speech, of which we are all in favour, with also ensuring domestic harmony. We have to bear in mind the very wise points that were made overnight by the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, David Cameron, who made the point—and it is a point with which I entirely agree—that, when we talk about extremist violence or violent extremism, terrorism, we have to remember that it has its beginnings in extremist language, in hateful language that seeks to set one group against another. So these are important matters of dealing with these balances of security and speech. I look forward to the honourable member and other honourable members making a contribution on this, but the short answer to your question is: the government has no plans to change the Racial Discrimination Act at all, but it is an important debate that we should have in a free society, about the limits of speech and the way in which we can best ensure that we preserve social harmony and security and at the same time ensure that there is free speech.

Ms MacTiernan interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Perth has been warned!

Mr TURNBULL: It is not susceptible to a simple black-or-white answer. It is a complex equation and it is one that I hope that all honourable members will be able to participate in, as we always should, because, after all, this should be the absolute centre of free speech in our nation.

Innovation

Mr NIKOLIC (Bass) (14:40): My question is to the Minister for Industry, Innovation and Science. Will the minister update the House on the economy-wide benefits of innovation?

Mr Albanese interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Grayndler is testing my patience.

Mr NIKOLIC: And how do innovative business practices help grow the economy and increase jobs, particularly in my electorate of Bass?
Mr PYNE (Sturt—Leader of the House, Minister for Industry, Innovation and Science) (14:41): I am very pleased to get this question from the member for Bass, because he has in his electorate a great business that is breaking into new markets all around the world through the use of innovation. It is a business called Bellamy’s Organic, and it was the first business in the world to offer organic baby formula, which has led to the product being sold not only all across Australia but also in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam and New Zealand, and the business will soon be opening offices in Singapore, Shanghai and Hong Kong. It listed on the stock exchange in August 2014, and the market valued Bellamy’s Organic at more than $120 million. So it went from zero to $120 million of value using innovation, creating new products and exporting them around the world.

It is a great example of the kind of firm that this government will be encouraging through our innovation agenda that we will be announcing later this year. It is the kind of business that is taking advantage of the government’s approach to the economy. As an exporter, it will expand because of the great work of the Minister for Trade and Investment, through the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement, through the free trade agreements with Korea and with Japan and of course through the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement. As an innovator, it is taking advantage of the policies that the government has already implemented over the last two years and will implement at the end of this year and next year to encourage a huge turbocharge to part of the economy, in innovation. And, as a small and medium enterprise, of course, it is taking advantage of the very pro-small-and-medium-enterprise budget in 2015 that the member for Dunkley had so much to do with developing and then selling throughout the country.

On Friday, the government continued its consultations with people in the innovation sector. We had an innovation roundtable at Werrington, in the member for Lindsay’s electorate, where some of the most significant people in the sector gathered with the Prime Minister, the assistant ministers and me to talk about the kinds of policies we could implement that would turbocharge the economy in the innovation sense. It was a very constructive meeting—and the Prime Minister and I were very pleased to take the train from Edgecliff to Werrington to make that occur.

On Saturday, the very energetic Assistant Minister for Innovation, the member for Longman, held a ‘hackathon’—sometimes called a jamboree or gymkhana, depending on your age—and it was a very successful meeting, which brought together almost 300 people from across the sector to come up with new ideas. We are getting on with the job of changing the economy for the better to create the jobs and create the growth that will be the future of our country.

Marriage

Ms BUTLER (Griffith) (14:44): My question is to the Prime Minister. Given the Prime Minister has said he does not want marriage equality to be ‘a live issue all the way up to the next election’, will the Prime Minister allow a free vote on the co-sponsored private member’s bill currently before the parliament?

Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth—Prime Minister) (14:44): I thank the honourable member for her question. I have to remind the honourable member of some answers I gave a few weeks ago. The coalition government’s policy is that the matter of legalising same-sex marriage will be determined by a plebiscite, by a national vote, in which every single
Australian will have a vote. I do not want to make any assumptions about what the honourable member was doing in 1999 but, let me tell you, I was leading the 'yes' case for a referendum. Let me tell you, perhaps, for the benefit of the honourable member. Let me share a bit of my experience.

Ms Butler interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Griffith has already been warned!

Mr TURNBULL: We were arguing for a model in which an Australian President would be chosen by a joint sitting of both houses of parliament—a very good model, indeed, and many of my colleagues, here, supported it. But, I am afraid to say, there were quite a few people who opposed it and said, 'Give the people their say.' I regret to say, that was extremely popular. People like having a say. People like having a vote.

The position that we are taking is one in which this issue—an important issue—will be determined by plebiscite. It is a perfectly democratic approach. Yes, it will take more time. Yes, it will cost more money. Yes, in my view, it will be carried, but time will tell. I will certainly vote for it, but it will be a national vote. On the hustings, the honourable member will be saying to the electors of Griffith: 'None of you should have a say. Vote for me and I will have a say!' And your Liberal opponent will be saying: 'All of you can have a say.' They will be saying every single one can have a say.

Ms Plibersek: Mr Speaker, I have a point of order on relevance. I would like to know if the Prime Minister is going to have a plebiscite on the GST, on increasing—

The SPEAKER: No, you cannot ask the question. The member for Sydney will resume her seat. It is not a point of order. The Prime Minister has concluded his answer.

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: When members cease interjecting, we will resume question time. I remind the member for Herbert, the clock is running or it should be.

Trade

Mr EWEN JONES (Herbert—Government Whip) (14:48): My question is to the Minister for Resources, Energy and Northern Australia. Will the minister update the House on how the government's recent free trade agreements will benefit the Australian resources and energy sector, especially around Northern Queensland?

Mr Husic: Come on, Domingo!

The SPEAKER: The member for Chifley has been warned, already.

Mr FRYDENBERG (Kooyong—Minister for Resources, Energy and Northern Australia) (14:48): I thank the member for Herbert for his question and congratulate him on a great win, for Northern Australia, with the North Queensland Cowboys. I also congratulate him on the hard work that he does for the people of his electorate and I look forward to visiting next week.

Australia's resources and energy sector comprises nearly 10 per cent of our economy, employs around 500,000 people and represents nearly 60 per cent of our goods exports. Australia is a global powerhouse in energy and resources. In fact, we will soon be the No. 1 exporter of LNG in the world. We are the No. 1 exporter of iron ore in the world and we are the second-largest exporter of coal in the world. We are always looking for new markets or to
cut tariffs into existing markets. That is why the fantastic work by the member for Goldstein has been so important in this free trade area.

Take, for example, our agreement with Japan. All tariffs on energy and resources products will be eliminated over the next 10 years, including an 11.7 per cent tariff on unwrought nickel and a 3.2 per cent tariff on coke and coal. With Korea, already our third-largest market for LNG, the three per cent tariff on LNG will be eliminated. Last week we saw the first shipment from Santos's LNG project in Gladstone to Korea. With the 12 countries in the TPP, with whom we already export $47 billion worth of resources and energy, we will see the elimination of all tariffs on LNG and refined petroleum to Vietnam, an elimination of iron ore, copper and nickel tariffs to Peru and, in Australia, the significant $90 billion world-leading mining equipment and technology-services sector will benefit from duty-free access to TPP countries.

The Turnbull government is absolutely committed to free trade and open markets. That is why we have struck these free trade deals with Korea, with Japan, with China and with the TPP. This is good news not only for workers in areas like Kalgoorlie or Gladstone or Karratha it is good news for people in the cities as well, because it earns billions of dollars of important export income for Australia.

**Budget**

Mr BOWEN (McMahon) (14:51): When does the Treasurer project the budget will return to surplus?

Mr MORRISON (Cook—Treasurer) (14:51): When expenditure is less than revenue.

**Carbon Pricing**

Mrs McNAMARA (Dobell) (14:52): My question is to the Minister for the Environment. Will the minister update the House on how the government is reducing emissions without a tax on electricity? Are there any threats to this approach?

Mr HUNT (Flinders—Minister for the Environment) (14:52): I am delighted to take this question from the member for Dobell, who raises an issue which was brought with great righteous indignation at the start of question time, but which they seem to have dropped on the other side.

Let me say this: she is a shining example of an effective local member in this House in terms of environmental management. Let me give you the case of Tuggerah Lakes. She came into government with a plan and a pledge to clean up the Tuggerah Lakes. She helped to drive that plan. She helped her local council to put in place the machines that would remove the wrack, and what we have seen is a foreshore which is physically and dramatically, in the real world, cleaned up and which is a great local environmental achievement for which she should be given real credit.

Another thing that is occurring in the member for Dobell's electorate is that the Wyong Shire Council was a successful bidder under the first Emissions Reduction Fund auction. What does that mean? It means that we are seeing them earn money—

Mr Mitchell interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for McEwen is now warned!
Mr HUNT: for reducing emissions—50,000 tonnes of emissions under their first contact. But they are part of a broader Australian success story.

How do you reduce emissions and electricity prices at the same time? Well, the first thing is that you reduce a carbon tax which was failing to do its fundamental job and which was driving up electricity prices. As the ACCC found, the full $550 which we predicted flowed back on average to families around Australia after the carbon tax was repealed. And that was the ACCC that found that—not us.

The second thing is, of course, that the first Emissions Reduction Fund auction was a spectacular success—47 million tonnes, $13.95 per tonne of abatement and approximately one per cent of the more than $1,300 per tonne cost of abatement under Labor's failed scheme. And how do we know it failed? Because they went to the last election pledging to terminate it. Remember that? They pledged to terminate it but they voted to keep it.

Then what do we see in terms of the next auction? Already we have 500 projects registered around the country—

Mr Dreyfus interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Isaacs! This is your final warning!

Mr HUNT: There are 228 from New South Wales alone. And so the signs are a very good prospect for the next auction.

But we compare that with a system that is working, as opposed to what the ALP wants to do. We know that on their own modelling of their own policy when they were in government that the Treasury found it was likely to cost, for their current targets, $600 billion by 2030. So $600 billion is the cost of their policy. They ought to come clean and reveal that cost, because we are reducing emissions; we are doing it whilst decreasing electricity prices and they want to drive them up. (Time expired)

Economy

Mr BOWEN (McMahon) (14:55): My question is to the Treasurer. Can the Treasurer confirm that next financial year gross debt is forecast to be $100 billion higher than when the Liberal government was elected?

Mr MORRISON (Cook—Treasurer) (14:55): Gross debt next year, in relation to the member's question, in 2015-16 is $415 billion. In 2016-17 it will be $477 billion. Net debt, which I know the shadow Treasurer sometimes gets confused with gross debt, next year is $285.8 billion and $313.4 billion.

It is higher, and the reason for that, as we know, is because the tail of structural expenditure increases that we inherited from those opposite will see, in particular, net debt rise to 80 per cent of GDP next year, in 2016-17. And after that it will fall. It will actually fall. And I will tell you why it will fall, Mr Speaker. The reason it will fall is because this government has a program to ensure we get control of expenditure. Expenditure as a percentage of GDP will decline over the forward estimates because we have a plan to control expenditure.

Those opposite have $50 billion and more in unaccounted-for fiscal promises and things they say they are going to change and put back in. They have a budget black hole of over $50 billion. It is $57 billion in total net terms. So when those opposite talk about education
spending and talk about health spending, they need to start explaining to the Australian people how they are going to pay for those.

It is very clear how we are paying for our promises. The social services minister has a clear plan to pay for how we are going to support child care being more affordable for Australian families. We have a plan to better use the family tax payment bundle of funds and reorganise that so we can pay for increased affordable child care for Australian families. That is how you do it; you actually make savings to make important investments in areas where Australian families want to see important services delivered.

That is what the government is doing. What they are doing over there, no-one has any idea.

**Asylum Seekers**

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (14:57): My question is to the Minister for Immigration and Border Protection. Will the minister update the House on the policies that the government has implemented to restore the integrity of Australia's borders and to end deaths at sea?

Mr DUTTON (Dickson—Minister for Immigration and Border Protection) (14:58): I thank the honourable member very much for his question, and thank him for the work that he does as chair of the backbench committee on immigration. He is a very strong supporter of the coalition's border protection policies.

There is a contrast, though, of course, between the resolute stance on this side of the House in relation to border protection issues and that in relation to the Labor Party. I see again today media reports of a split in caucus when it comes to the regional-processing-centre arrangements and the determination to stop the boats, which the Leader of the Opposition speaks about a lot. But he has a divided team, as Kevin Rudd did, and no capacity, if he were to be elected at the next election, to maintain a strong policy of stopping the boats.

The fact is that when the Rudd Labor government was elected in 2007 there were four people in detention—four people in detention, including no children. There were no children whatsoever. It took Labor only a couple of years to see 50,000 people arrive on 800 boats; 1,200 people drowned at sea and over 8,000 children were put into detention, including at the peak almost 2,000 in July 2013. They were forced to open 17 detention centres to deal with the influx of arrivals and it resulted in an $11 billion blowout in this portfolio.

They are hoping and praying that the Australian public has forgotten about the dysfunction of their period when last in government, and, as the media demonstrates today—the reporting out of caucus—they have learnt absolutely nothing.

Yet we on this side of the parliament, with the support of our colleagues, have been able to stare down the scourge of people smugglers. We have been able to stop those drownings at sea. Since I have been in this portfolio, we have not had a successful people-smuggling venture, we have not had a death at sea and we have reduced the number of children in detention down closer to 100, with an absolute determination to get that number closer to zero. As a dividend, we have been able to return $500 million to the budget and we have been able to announce that we will welcome 12,000 people from the Syrian crisis to start a new life in our country. That is what the right policy is about, that is what unity is about and that is what we stand for, in contrast to those opposite.
Cities

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler) (15:00): My question is addressed to the Prime Minister. I refer to Senate estimates testimony yesterday that Minister Hunt has 'overall responsibility' for cities, that Minister Briggs has 'day-to-day leadership responsibility', that Minister Fletcher will 'oversee projects' and that Minister Truss will be 'heavily involved'. Who on earth is actually responsible for cities policy in your government?

Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth—Prime Minister) (15:01): I thank the honourable member for his question. I have to record my disappointment that the question was not the question I have been urging him to ask me; he has been threatening to ask me about that golden age in telecommunications—was it 60 days?—when the honourable member was minister for communications, when Kevin Rudd came back, like Napoleon from Elba, but with Albo by his side as his communications minister. There was a chance the NBN could have been sorted out, but he did not have enough time, and we were left in 'Conrovia'.

Turning to cities, the honourable member has run through the ministers that are involved in cities policy, but it actually goes further than that. Can I tell you that cities policy permeates every aspect of the government. It is like innovation. The fact of the matter is—

Mr Albanese interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Grayndler will cease interjecting.

Mr TURNBULL: that the person that is in charge—and the honourable member has got some aspirations in this regard, I believe—is the Prime Minister.

Mr Brendan O'Connor interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Gorton is now warned!

Women in Sport

Mrs WICKS (Robertson) (15:02): My question is to the Minister for Health, the Minister for Aged Care and the Minister for Sport. What is the government doing to encourage women to participate in sport and what are the benefits of such participation, particularly for women?

Ms LEY (Farrer—Minister for Health, Minister for Sport and Minister for Aged Care) (15:03): It is a delight to take a question from the member for Robertson on an important subject such as women and activity. Today, as many of you know, is World Osteoporosis Day. Osteoporosis literally means porous bones. It is a condition which creeps up on women because of lack of bone density over the years. Bones lay down their mass in early to late puberty, and after that they tend to decline. So today, as our government launches the No Time for Never campaign, it is an important reminder, particularly to women, to take time out for themselves and to recognise that, unless they allocate those valuable few minutes—20 minutes to an hour a day—to exercise, preferably a weight-bearing exercise, they will not look after their bones for the long term.

The message to women today from members in here who are supporting World Osteoporosis Day is: put your health first; get as active as you possibly can. The cost of physical inactivity to the Australian economy is estimated at $13 billion a year. These figures do not mean much, because this really is not about saving money for the Health portfolio but about increasing wellbeing for women, increasing health for the long term over the years.
Today I was joined on the ovals at Parliament House by members of soccer-playing teams in the ACT, of all different ages. One particular woman, who looked a little bit older than the rest, said that she had started playing soccer eight years ago. She had not been particularly good at it but had persisted. She found it incredibly enjoyable and now was doing it regularly.

Through our $100 million investment into sport in schools, we encourage primary school children to join and participate in the sport of their choice, with connections with their club, because we know that, if you build that connection with organised sport early in your life, you can come back to it at any age.

So, from all of us to all of you in the wider world, there is no time for never: get active today.

**Water**

Mr BUTLER (Port Adelaide) (15:05): My question is to the Prime Minister. Can the Prime Minister explain why the minister for cities has responsibility for the return of environmental water to the Murray-Darling Basin and not the Minister for the Environment or the Assistant Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources? Why on earth has responsibility for environmental water, which is held in rural and regional dams throughout the basin, been given to the minister for cities?

Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth—Prime Minister) (15:06): The minister responsible for the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder is the Minister for the Environment.

**Infrastructure**

Ms SCOTT (Lindsay) (15:06): My question is to the Minister for Territories, Local Government and Major Projects. Will the minister outline to the House the role the government is playing in planning for rail connections to our airports, particularly in Western Sydney?

Mr FLETCHER (Bradfield—Minister for Territories, Local Government and Major Projects) (15:06): I thank the member for Lindsay for that very important question. She is a great champion for her electorate and a great champion for Western Sydney. She was pleased, as indeed were all members of the government, that yesterday the government released the environmental impact statement for Western Sydney airport, together with the draft airport plan.

Mr Husic interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Chifley will stop interjecting.

Mr FLETCHER: After the Rudd-Gillard-Rudd government failed to take a decision in relation to the Western Sydney airport, it took the Abbott government to make a decision in a direction that has been enthusiastically continued by the Turnbull government on this vital piece of infrastructure.

The Western Sydney airport will deliver huge benefits to this region which already has some two million people and is growing rapidly. It will deliver a new transport facility and it will deliver new employment opportunities. We have a careful plan to commence operations by 2025. By 2030 there will be some 10 million passengers and by 2063 it is expected that there will be over 80 million passengers as the airport grows over a number of decades.
I want to emphasise that we do have a careful plan in relation to Western Sydney airport and the ground transport connections—

Mr Husic interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Chifley is about to be ejected if he continues interjecting.

Mr FLETCHER: and that plan includes rail at the optimum time. In the early years passenger numbers at Western Sydney airport will be relatively low and will be more than adequately catered for by road connections. There is a $3.6 billion road package already underway, and that package will involve upgrades to the Northern Road, Bringelly Road and Narellan Road, amongst others, and there will be a new motorway connection from the M7 to the airport site ready by the time the airport opens.

It is important that there is also a clear plan for rail in relation to the Western Sydney airport, so the Turnbull government is working closely with the New South Wales government to assess potential rail corridor options to serve the airport and the broader Western Sydney region. The New South Wales government is assessing, for example, an extension of the South West Rail Link from Leppington. As set out in the draft Western Sydney airport plan, released this week, the airport is being planned with space reserved for rail corridors and a train station. During construction there will be excavations for the train tunnels and the space where the station will be built. This will allow for the rail connection to the Sydney metropolitan train network to be added at the optimal time, which is expected to be after the airport opens and as the passenger numbers grow.

Mr Albanese interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Grayndler is warned!

Mr FLETCHER: Let us be clear: the Turnbull government has a rational plan. The plan will get the Western Sydney airport built. The plan will involve rail at the appropriate time and the plan will deliver great benefits for the people of Western Sydney, the people of Sydney and the people of Australia.

Mr Turnbull: I ask that further questions be placed on the Notice Paper.

DOCUMENTS
Presentation

Mr PYNE (Sturt—Leader of the House, Minister for Industry, Innovation and Science) (15:09): 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
Climate Change

The SPEAKER (15:10): I have received a letter from the honourable member for Port Adelaide proposing that a definite matter of public importance be submitted to the House for discussion, namely:

The Prime Minister's support for discredited policies on climate change and renewable energy.

I call upon those members who approve of the proposed discussion to rise in their places.
This is a matter of very significant public importance and has been for a considerable period of time. There has been a growing sense of despair within the Australian community about this country's direction on climate change policy and the spread of renewable energy. Frankly, that sense of despair is no wonder, given the track record of this government over a short period of only two years.

To recap, this was the government that abolished the legal targets, the 2020 and 2050 targets, to reduce Australia's carbon pollution and to start to decarbonise Australia's economy. This was the government that abolished the legal cap on carbon pollution that would act as the discipline on the natural growth in emissions that would otherwise occur in a growing economy with a growing population like Australia's. This was the government that attacked the renewable energy target and talked down every possible expansion of renewable energy—particularly the expansion of wind power—and this is the government that continues to seek to abolish the Clean Energy Finance Corporation, in spite of the Prime Minister's gentle words today in question time, and to abolish the Renewable Energy Agency, ARENA, in spite of a clear election promise to the contrary.

The despair has become even more pronounced as it has become increasingly clear to the Australian community and to the international community that there is growing global momentum in the lead-up to the Paris conference in December—a global momentum particularly led by the two largest emitters, the two largest economies, the two most significant powers in the world today: the United States and China. It has been quite clear for a good 12 or 18 months that those two nations, under the leadership of President Obama and President Xi Jinping, are committed to Paris reaching an ambitious agreement to reduce global carbon emissions.

A great number of Australians held out very significant hope that a change in leadership on the other side, a change in Prime Minister, would mean real substantive change in these policy areas. It was hoped that the change would drag the Liberal Party back to the sensible centre on climate change and we could get to a position, like the one you see in places like the United Kingdom, where there would be a broad consensus between the alternative parties of government that would underpin the real change that we need to see in the face of climate change and in the long-term investments that businesses are going to have to make. Australians were perfectly entitled to hold out that hope, given what the member for Wentworth had said about climate change policy for many, many years—particularly in that painful change in leadership from the member for Wentworth to the member for Warringah only five or six years ago.

It has become increasingly clear in recent weeks just how high a price the Prime Minister, the member for Wentworth, was willing to pay to achieve his lifelong ambition of becoming Prime Minister. There is no price higher than the price the member for Wentworth has paid in the area of climate change and renewable energy policy. It is now clear that this Prime Minister has adopted the member for Warringah’s climate change and renewable energy policies hook, line and sinker. This is no trifling matter. This is not an academic issue for broad debate. In two short years these policies have already been having a very real impact on our ability to deal with the threat of climate change—a very real impact that no amount of
kinder, gentler, more florid language from the member for Wentworth, the new Prime Minister, will be able to change. That impact started very quickly following the election of the Abbott government.

Bear in mind that Labor's policies were driving down carbon pollution levels. They were starting to work significantly. In the last full year of the Howard government Australia's carbon emissions were about 600 million tonnes. In the last year of the Labor government, those emissions had reduced to 548 million tonnes—a reduction of eight per cent in six short years. Since then, all of the trends across the economy have been bad. Most obviously, trends in the electricity sector have been particularly bad as the former Prime Minister launched an all-out attack on the renewable energy industry, in spite of taking to the election in 2013 a promise to keep the renewable energy target in place and a promise to keep the Renewable Energy Agency in place as well. Unsurprisingly, renewable energy investment collapsed last year—it collapsed by 88 per cent in the large scale sector, which obviously led to an increase in coal-fired power and an increase in carbon emissions from the electricity sector, our largest source of carbon pollution. In 2014-15 alone carbon pollution increased by four per cent—four per cent in one year alone in the National Electricity Market.

In the land sector as well, massive reductions in carbon pollution were achieved because of the historic land clearing laws that were put in place by Premier Peter Beattie, with the support of Prime Minister John Howard—Prime Minister Howard understood how important those reforms were to achieving our commitments under the Kyoto protocol in the first commitment period. Unsurprisingly the LNP government of Campbell Newman reversed all of those reforms and we have started to see emissions rise again in that very critical sector. I can go through other sectors where emissions have continued to rise.

The parliament does not need to take my word for this. As we pointed out in question time today, the Department of the Environment's own official projections show that emissions will rise from the time of the election of the Abbott government to 2020 by 20 per cent. Page 32 of those emission projections shows that in 2013-14, when we left government, emissions were 548 million tonnes, and the department's projections are that by 2020 emissions will be 656 million tonnes—more than 100 million tonnes higher.

Mr Hunt interjecting—

Mr BUTLER: The minister says I am behind the times, but these are the latest projections published by the minister's own department. I will be more generous to the minister and just refer to the RepuTex projections which were published in August. The minister had a go, as is this government's wont, at shooting the messenger; the minister had a go at RepuTex yesterday but RepuTex's projections are much more generous than his own department's projections. RepuTex says that by 2020 emissions will only be 12 per cent higher than they were when this government took office, or about 10 per cent higher than 2000. There is no surprise in this, because this is what analyst after analyst after analyst said would happen. All through the five- or six-year history of this policy being in the political marketplace, the policy that the member for Warringah directed the now minister to go and cook up over a summer in 2009-10, this is exactly what every analyst has said would happen. We know the Emissions Reduction Fund is a waste of money. It apparently bought 47 million tonnes of abatement in the first auction, but the minister does not often say that three-quarters of that was from projects that existed before the auction. Some of them were projects that had been
in existence for more than 10 years. There were landfill and waste gas projects that had been established under GGAS under the Carr government for more than 10 years.

This week RepuTex has confirmed that not one single company—not one of the country's largest polluters—will be obligated at all to reduce their carbon pollution levels by the safeguards mechanism. Such is the headroom given to every large polluter in Australia and such are the ways in which companies can renegotiate their baselines under this safeguards mechanism that not one company will be obligated to reduce their pollution levels. That is why Climate Action Tracker, an international NGO that compares policies and the nationally determined contributions that nations are taking to the Paris conference, has found that Australia has the largest gap of any nation between the target it is taking to Paris, which admittedly is a back-of-the-pack target, and the policies that are in place. That is why an emissions trading scheme is the only policy that is going to deliver meaningful reductions in carbon pollution levels in a country like Australia with a growing economy and a growing population. That is why Labor will continue to advocate the interests of an emissions trading scheme up to and during the next election. But the Prime Minister knows all this. He has just been willing to pay the price to assume his lifelong ambition of becoming Prime Minister, and that is a terrible shame.

Mr HUNT (Flinders—Minister for the Environment) (15:20): I am delighted to take on this matter of public importance. What we just had confirmed is a very simple proposition—that the opposition leader and the Labor Party want to take to the next election higher electricity prices as their policy. Let me repeat it: they want higher electricity prices. Let me make it clear that we want lower electricity prices, and we have delivered them. It is as simple as that. If they have a different view, let us hear them categorically rule out higher electricity prices. We have achieved the double of lower emissions and lower electricity prices. They have the ignominious distinction of having had higher emissions and higher electricity prices. How do we know this? Because our fuzzy friend opposite is delighted to quote the environment department, but he has missed one small fact—the latest quarterly inventory from the Australia's Department of the Environment shows that we have just had the lowest quarterly emissions in both trend and seasonal terms since 2004.

What does that mean for our future projections? It means we have come down from a gap of 1.3 billion tonnes, which the ALP said we had to achieve in 2008 for the period 2012 to 2020. When the coalition came into government, we inherited a supposed gap of 750 million tonnes, which I said while in opposition was wildly overstated, which they ridiculed. Based on the analysis they had been doing while in government, strangely enough, we discovered that gap was down to 431 million tonnes. When we did the analysis this year, we found that that gap was down to 236 million tonnes. The latest advice from the environment department is that we will not just close that gap completely but turn, at the 2020 target date, with a surplus in hand. So the whole premise of the ALP's latest foray into this space is flat, plain wrong.

What has changed in the last six months? There are four things. Firstly, that trend in emissions continued downwards, so the write-downs have continued and will be confirmed before the Paris climate conference. Secondly, we have set a renewable energy target which also returns considerable emissions reductions to the national inventory.
Thirdly, we have had the first Emissions Reduction Fund auction, which alone produced 47 million tonnes—and there are already 500 registrations for the second auction. I think that is important to understand. The market has spoken: 500 projects have been registered for the second auction. They cover an enormous range of activities. They cover savanna burning, waste coalmine gas clean-ups, waste landfill clean-ups, soil carbon, and energy efficiency on a grand scale across this nation.

The emissions reductions through the Emissions Reductions Fund are tenfold those ever predicted by the vast majority of pundits. The report which those opposite cite said that the maximum from the first Emissions Reduction Fund auction, the greatest possible outcome, would be nine million tonnes. Do you know what? It was 47 million tonnes, 500 per cent higher than their much-vaunted modellers said. Their modellers also said there would be a shortfall of 300 million tonnes of emissions that we would have to make up. We know that every credible source already realises that we will achieve our targets, and in fact beat them, for 2020.

Fourthly, we have also struck an arrangement with the Landfill Owners Association.

When you put those four things together, over the last six months—as I predicted at the time—we have closed the gap. We have brought it down. When we came into government, there was a gap of 750 million tonnes, then 431 million tonnes, then 236 million tonnes and, by the time we get to Paris, it will be zero, and we will turn with emissions in the bank. In other words, we will achieve our goals.

At the same time, we have taken the pressure off families in terms of electricity prices. We have seen the largest fall in electricity prices in Australian recorded history. We said that we would take the full cost of the carbon tax off electricity and we did. The ACCC has confirmed it: every single electricity retailer in the country has, to the best of my advice and to the best of my knowledge, a clean bill of health when it comes to passing on the full cost of reductions.

What does that mean as we go forward? It means that we now have a system in Australia that is working—and it is not just in Australia. When we look around the world, we see that the Clean Development Mechanism, the principal system in the world today, is based on the same fundamental principles as the Emissions Reduction Fund. We see also that the World Bank has recently adopted a $100 million pilot auction facility which has extraordinary similarities to the coalition's approach. The Australian approach has become the World Bank's approach. But you would never know that, you would never imagine that, if you were listening to the opposition today.

Most interestingly, I recently met with Qantas, and one of the things they said—apart from 'thank you for removing over $100 million from our annual bill and helping us to return to the black in our Australian operations'—was that IATA, the international aviation industry body, is looking at adopting a model with extraordinary similarities to the Australian approach to emissions reductions under this government.

So we have the Clean Development Mechanism, the World Bank and IATA all advocating or adopting systems remarkably similar to this government's approach. It is truly 'an inconvenient truth' for the opposition that our emissions are down, our electricity costs are down and the world is increasingly adopting the approach on our watch, in our time.
By comparison, what do we see as the proposed future approach by the ALP? The people who brought us pink batts, Green Loans, cash for clunkers, citizens' assemblies and the carbon tax, which they pledged to terminate at the last election, now say that we should look to them for best practice in environmental design. Go figure. Their 'best practice'—it has been modelled using the targets that they have said are their targets—is a $600 billion bill for Australian families. Who did the modelling? It was the Treasury of Australia. On whose watch did Treasury do it? It was on Labor's watch. What were they looking at? They were looking at the low end of Labor's current target range, and the accumulated cost to the Australian economy by 2030 was $600 billion. What does that mean for families? It means a 78 per cent increase in wholesale electricity prices. What does it mean in terms of their annual family budget? It means a $5,000 hit overall.

This is not our modelling. This was their modelling of their policy on their watch by the Treasury of Australia. So these are their figures in their times. It is an exceptionally inconvenient moment. If they have different figures, let's see them, because at this stage they have set a target and they have said the tax is coming back. At the low end of their target, their own Treasury modelling shows a $600 billion cost, a 78 per cent increase in wholesale electricity prices and a $5,000 average hit on total family income. These are not trivial numbers but these are their numbers of their policy. So this is serious.

On this occasion, we are playing for sheep stations. We are reducing emissions. We do have the lowest quarterly emissions since 2004 in trend and seasonal terms. We are on track to meet and beat our 2020 targets and our 2030 targets. But, by contrast, they want to bring back higher electricity prices, and it is time they were honest about it.

Mr KELVIN THOMSON (Wills) (15:30): This is a government which has been trashing the future, selling out future generations for short-term gain. This has been true of its cuts in education and health, true in terms of rising unemployment, true in terms of running the car industry out of town, but nowhere has it been more true and more serious than in its attacks on renewable energy and its lack of action in relation to climate change.

This is a government which has attacked and undermined the renewable energy industry to such a point that it has been an embarrassment both domestically and internationally. Investment in large-scale renewable energy projects such as wind farms has fallen by 88 per cent. Under this coalition government, investment in the industry hit its lowest point since 2009 and, as our shadow minister has pointed out, both the Clean Energy Finance Corporation and the Renewable Energy Agency are on the chopping block under this government. We have a government which will not commit to a renewable energy target.

This afternoon I had the privilege of meeting up with people from the University of Queensland Global Change Institute at a forum which they had on climate science, with experts such as Professor Ove Hoegh-Guldberg, Professor David Karoly, Professor David Griggs and others. The sorts of points they were making were that carbon emissions have risen from 280 parts per million in pre-industrial times to 400 parts per million now and that, as a consequence of this, our temperatures were at the highest that they have ever been in recorded history in 2014, will be the highest they have ever been in 2015 and will rise again in 2016. The climate consequences of that are extreme weather events, droughts, bushfires, cyclones and floods. They will be very serious for Australia.
We will also be impacted on by climate events in other parts of the world, too—our Pacific Island neighbours, whom I believe we have a responsibility to look after, but certainly places like Bangladesh. If you have Bangladesh made uninhabitable for over 100 million people as a consequence of sea level rise then the consequences of that in terms of people movement are likely to make the present influx of asylum seekers from Africa and the Middle East into Europe look like a picnic.

We need to understand what is happening and be prepared to take action—evidence based, science based action—to meet the challenge. We need to transition to renewable energy. I am really proud of the opposition’s target of 50 per cent renewable energy by 2030. That is a really important initiative and everyone should get behind that initiative. It will be good for our economy and it is essential for future generations. The second thing we need to do is to be flexible at the Paris conference and be prepared both to push other countries and to make bigger commitments for ourselves. If we do not have commitments at Paris that take the world below the two degrees Celsius increase then the climate consequences of that—the possibility of melting the Greenland and the West Antarctic icesheet—are unknown and uncertain. We have an international responsibility to do everything we can to make sure that that does not happen. Third, we have to support science and technology. We have to support the Clean Energy Finance Corporation. We have to support the Renewable Energy Agency. These are the ways in which we can make change work for us both economically and in terms of cutting greenhouse gas emissions.

It is regrettable that this is a government of climate change deniers who have had to be dragged kicking and screaming towards taking action at all and it is also regrettable that we have a Prime Minister who has effectively sold out on climate change action. We know from his past history that he believes in climate change action, but he has sold out on climate change action in order to attain the glittering prize of the prime ministership. That is a dreadful sell-out of this generation and future generations, and the Prime Minister and this government should stand condemned for it.

Mr HUTCHINSON (Lyons) (15:35): Whilst I acknowledge the member for Port Adelaide for bringing this motion forward, I disagree with much of the premise of the motion. In many respects—and I say this not in any way questioning the science—the notion of climate change is somewhat of a tautology, because climate has been changing for many, many millions of years. It is just unfortunate that we drag into this situation the politics that those from other side bring with it—a sanctimony, a righteousness, that seems only to be visible to those on the other side. I have learned in the short time that I have been in this place to judge those opposite by what they do, not by what they say. Indeed, the carbon tax, home insulation and cash-for-clunkers are the record of the previous government that we have endured.

The MPI has, I think, been framed as somewhat of an attack on the Prime Minister for believing in climate change. Well, I will tell you what the Prime Minister is. He is indeed a pragmatist if nothing else, and he is very much focused on outcomes. Indeed, we are seeing that the Emissions Reduction Fund, as was highlighted before by the Minister for the Environment, is actually working. Electricity prices are indeed lower. It has been confirmed by the department that the quarterly department data—both trend and seasonally adjusted—is the lowest it has been since 2004. Our 2020 target is well ahead of the curve and does not
include the reduction of 47 million tonnes that has been achieved under the Emissions Reduction Fund.

Of course, I come from the island state, where 98 per cent of our electricity is, indeed, generated by renewables—be that by mini hydro schemes or the large scale hydro schemes that generated so much wealth and opportunity for our state during their construction between the 1940s and 1980s. Indeed, the Emissions Reduction Fund has been a huge benefit to my state—as it has been to regional Australia more broadly. In the first auction that was held, agriculture was absolutely the big winner—whether it be soil carbon projects; whether it be, in my own state, avoided deforestation projects that were able to bid into the Emissions Reduction Fund; or whether it be the inclusion, I am very pleased to say, within the negotiated renewable energy target of bioenergy sourced from waste from native forests, which is very important indeed from my state's perspective.

Under the first auction, 47 million tonnes of abatements were achieved. As I mentioned before, the Prime Minister is nothing else if he is not a pragmatist. He understands—and I have heard it from constituents in my own electorate, such as Peter Downie, who, within a consortium, bid into the first Emissions Reduction Fund auction—that the competitive tension that you would expect in an auction, in this case a reverse auction, was absolutely there. They achieved a result that they were very happy with. They achieved a little bit more than $13.95, which was the average. It was a fantastic result for them. It has emboldened them, and I am sure that they will bid into the subsequent auction, as Minister Hunt said. It is interesting to note also that the World Bank has just recently launched a $100 million program which very much replicates many of the aspects of the Emissions Reduction Fund.

Australians want consistency. This government—in opposition and now in government—has had a consistent policy in respect of addressing our emissions target for over five years; whereas those opposite, the Labor Party, have had five policies in that same time. I recently had the pleasure to be down at St Marys in my electorate with Peter Troode. I was invited down there by a passionate group who are looking at expanding solar in their community. Of course, one of the other ways of reducing emissions is through energy efficiency. This is an area that I will be exploring further with the minister, because I think that there are great opportunities for small communities and small businesses to be able to reduce their emissions and, potentially, bid into the Emissions Reduction Fund. Thank you for the opportunity to speak.

Mr CONROY (Charlton) (15:40): This is an incredibly important matter of public importance, and I thank the member for Port Adelaide for bringing it to the House. Let me first deal with a couple of facts, because facts are very inconvenient for those on the other side. Under the first two years of the fixed price emissions trading scheme that we introduced when we were last in government, we saw a 10 per cent fall in emissions from the national electricity market—the equivalent of taking four million cars off the road. We saw 130,000 jobs added to the economy in that two-year period. Whyalla was not wiped off the map; it still existed.

Ms O’Neil: No $100 legs of lamb?

Mr CONROY: We did not see any $100 legs of lamb, and we saw the stock market rise by 33 per cent. So jobs up, stock market up and pollution down in the first two years of the emissions trading scheme. It would have been even more efficient when it transitioned in the
third year to a variable price emissions trading scheme, joining us with the three billion other people in the globe who, by 2016, will live in countries or provinces where an emissions trading scheme operates. That is the sad truth of this entire debate: the coalition, led by that quisling Prime Minister, the member for Wentworth—that quisling on climate change—are moving away from where the rest of the world is heading. The rest of the world is heading towards emissions trading schemes but the quislings on the other side are going in the opposite direction with their farce of a policy.

We heard before the ridiculous contribution from the member for Lyons talking about consistency in policy on climate change from the other side! We have a Prime Minister who has said about their current policy that it is 'a farce', a 'fig leaf to cover a determination to do nothing', a 'con', 'fiscal recklessness on a grand scale', and 'bulldust', to use a polite term. So this is the consistency on the other side. They have a Prime Minister who has poured nothing but scorn and derision on the policy that he is now proudly implementing. What has changed? Just one thing: a dirty deal with the conservative wing of his party to get into power—a quisling who has junked all his beliefs in order to attain power.

The truth is that the first round of their Direct Action dog was a joke. It failed utterly. They spent $660 million to buy abatement, and $200 million of that $660 million went to operations that were already capturing emissions—landfill operations and mines collecting methane. These were operations already going on—some for as long as 15 years. So they paid $200 million to operators that were already reducing their emissions. Another $300 million went to ensuring that farmers who had already promised not to clear the land were paid to not clear that land. So another $300 million was paid to farmers who had already promised not to clear the land to ensure that they did not clear the land. So $500 million of the $660 million in this dog of a scheme was spent on things that were occurring anyway.

Once you exclude that abatement, what you got was a carbon price not of $14 per tonne; you got a carbon price of $66 a tonne, confirming the member for Wentworth's early assertion that it was 'fiscal recklessness on a grand scale'. A carbon price of $66 per tonne of abatement versus $8 per tonne under an internationally linked emissions trading scheme are the choices here. It is no wonder that the Australian Industry Group—hardly a socialist mouthpiece for the Labor Party—have said that, if you want to achieve the 2030 abatement task by direct action, you are looking at a fiscal cost of between $100 billion and $250 billion. Let me repeat that for the members opposite. This is not some wide-eyed greeny group. This is not the Labor Party. This is the Australian Industry Group saying direct action will cost the balance sheet, cost taxpayers $250 billion to achieve the abatement task. Yet they stand by it because, ultimately, they are driven by division. Half the party room do not accept the science of climate change. The other half, the quislings under the member for Wentworth and the joke of an environment minister, will do and say anything to stay in power and do not want to upset the conservative party room.

The truth is the people at the next election will have a clear choice. The Labor opposition stand by an emissions trading scheme that is the least cost way of tackling climate change, because cost absolutely matters in this. We stand with the three billion global citizens who will live under an emissions trading scheme. Those on the other side stand for a dirty deal that pays polluters to pollute and will cost taxpayers $250 billion. They will stand condemned by history for betraying future generations and for betraying the Treasury.
Mr PIT (Hinkler) (15:46): It is always a great pleasure to follow my good friend the member for Charlton. He has actually added to my extensive education in this place. I did not know what a 'quisling' was; I had to look it up. Unfortunately my public school education did not extend to 'quisling' so I now have a better understanding of what he is talking about but it is a very small understanding, I must say.

I had to sit through the contribution from the member for Port Adelaide as everyone in the chamber did. He spoke about the Prime Minister paying a high price. Certainly under the Labor policy, the high price that will be paid will be by the people in my electorate in electricity prices because it will drive up electricity prices—there is no doubt about that at all. Labor's policy will simply drive down jobs as it did previously. I was actually very surprised for him to bring up the smiling assassin, former Premier Peter Beattie, the former Labor premier in Queensland, who was very well known for the things he did in terms of stopping land clearing, particularly on regrowth—you could not clear regrowth or noxious weeds. As a result of that, we lost jobs in the timber industry in places like Eidsvold, Allies Creek and Mundubbera—all in the member for Flynn's electorate. In Bundaberg, we had two sawmills which are now closed as a result of those policies. They were good hardworking people and I would suggest many of them were members of the AWU. So where were their unions then? They were nowhere to be seen. They were happy to see those people lose their jobs, and I think that was a terrible outcome for those people.

The member for Wills spoke about science based action. I think that was a great contribution actually. I would like to see everything based on science. I think that would be a good position for us to put forward. It is a shame the Labor Party does not agree, because one of their last actions before they went out of government was to close the entire Coral Sea to fishing, almost a million square kilometres, something the size of South Australia. Apparently you cannot fish there any more. It is far too hard. I am absolutely certain there was no science to back that up.

When members opposite talk about renewables needing support, well, that equals subsidise. They are asking for more taxpayers' money to subsidise this method of generating electricity. If we speak about electricity generation, the most recent report from the national electricity market actually states that we do not need any more generating capacity for at least 10 years under any risk scenario whether it is low, moderate or high. We need no more generating capacity. But if we are to talk about improving emissions—this is an open debate and this should be debated—if we are to talk about zero emissions then we should talk about nuclear technology. If we look at things like the old mobile phone brick that you used to put in your car that cost $4,000 and compare it to a modern phone, technology has moved on. We need to at least look at nuclear as an option.

I would like to note Senator Sean Edwards from the other place and his most recent contribution he put forward in the public arena. He spoke about this modern technology and in particular PRISM reactors from GE. They are a building to burn previously used waste from other nuclear reactors. This is a real opportunity for South Australia as the good senator has put forward. It is capable of reusing spent uranium, as most of the old technology only uses around 96 per cent of the uranium. There is four per cent left which can be burned in modern nuclear reactors. There is more than 240,000 tonnes of spent uranium out in the world which could be used if we actually looked at the technology. What would that do? That would
provide the ability for us to keep us keep jobs, jobs for members of the ETU, jobs for members of the metal workers union, jobs for members of the AWU, who are in existing power stations, who work predominantly in rural and regional Australia. The location of most of our power stations is close to a source of coal. You could replace the steam producing elements of those power stations with a nuclear reactor. There are options there and we should look at them. The South Australian royal commission is doing that right now as an option for South Australia. If we are to have an adult conversation in this place, we should consider nuclear energy. This should not be off the table simply because things have moved on. There are opportunities for us and this would certainly be an outcome for the environment because it would go to zero emissions—there are no emissions from nuclear technology—and certainly I think there is the capacity to do that.

Currently in Queensland, in my electorate, the price of electricity is unsustainable. We cannot continue to pay more for power. We have farmers right now in very dry conditions who simply cannot afford to pump. As a nation, we have invested billions of dollars in water infrastructure so that we can irrigate, so that we can have rural water use efficiency. All of those things have been thrown out the window so that we can change the method of generation for power. We now have the situation where we have farmers looking to pump water who cannot because they cannot afford to pay power and, if they do, they have to do it during the day when they have the least efficiency for the water that they are using. It is not a good position to be in.

My final message in the brief time I have left is to the children of this country and the people who might be listening: the east coast of the Australia is not going to fall into the sea. It is a terrible position for them at the moment because that is this exactly what they think will happen and we should stop promoting it.

Mr Giles (Scullin) (15:51): What an extraordinary end note from the member for Hinkler, whose contributions I normally enjoy. But I guess it shows the gulf between the parties and within the parties when it comes to action on climate change. Really, the nub of this MPI as demonstrated by the member for Port Adelaide, the member for Wills and the member for Charlton is not really the debate about whether or not we should have regard to the science, as the member for Hinkler suggested but then seemed to reject through the actual content of his remarks, but whether we should stay clear to our principles. Because I have no doubt that the new Prime Minister, the member for Wentworth, like members on this side of the chamber, believes we should have regard to the science and we should also have regard for the advice of economists. He knows that. He knows what he should do but he has chosen not to do so. That is the tragedy at the heart of this debate.

So I think of that famous remark attributed to John Maynard Keynes when he said, 'When the facts change, I change my mind.' Well, the Prime Minister of Australia has a very different aphorism in mind, it appears. He seems to think that he changes his mind according to political convenience, not in accordance with what he believes. He spoke at the outset of his government about leading a government in a thoughtful and considered manner. Nowhere is this less clear than in the area of climate change, where instead he is ruled by the lowest common denominators—by the meanest politics within his party room. I will give this to the member for Lyons: at least he is honest in expressing his views. He is wrong, but he is honest.
The Prime Minister knows better. So it is such a tragedy that, in his first press conference as Prime Minister, the member for Wentworth started as, it seems, he means to continue. On election night he said: 'The policy on climate change that Greg Hunt and Julie prepared is one that I supported as a minister in the Abbott government and it's one that I support today.' That is quite some fig leaf, isn’t it! It is a long way from the farce that he said it was and which it continues to be today. It is a long way from the courage he showed in 2009 when he said: 'I will not lead a party that is not as committed to effective action on climate change as I am.' And now he has warmly embraced the farce that is Direct Action.

It is just so disappointing that the only shift, when it comes to climate change, is a change of style. We have moved from the cheap sophistry of the member for Warringah to the expansive, self-indulgent sophistry of the member for Wentworth. And we saw that in question time today, as he built on his first question time when he was so fond of weasel-word answers, ducking around his positioning—

Mr Hutchinson: You keep focusing on the Prime Minister.

Mr GILES: Yes, I am focusing on the Prime Minister because it is his job to safeguard our future. It is a pretty fundamental responsibility, and it is a responsibility he knows he should be up to, but he refuses to stand up for it. That is why this MPI is so important, and I hope those in his party room who also share our belief in the science will be paying attention to this MPI and paying attention to the Prime Minister living up to his responsibilities.

In question time today he spoke weasel words on the Clean Energy Finance Corporation. I hope people pay attention to the Hansard because that was an extraordinary contribution. It was almost as extraordinary as him deflecting questions to his climate-sell-out mentor—the assistant minister for resources, I think, is his formal title—the member for Flinders. He is his environmental mentor, because Greg Hunt, as we on this side of the House all know, and as he well knows, knows that the government's positioning is not just misguided; it is plain wrong.

The Prime Minister talks about his excitement about the future. But if he is serious about Australia's future prospects, he needs to be building a consensus around climate action. He needs, in the words of the member for Lyons, to be consistent. He needs to be credible. He needs to support an emissions trading scheme, as he well knows. But he has placed his personal ambition above all else. He has mortgaged our future to his ego—and doesn’t he look pleased about that! The weasel words he loves employing dance around all the issues. He does not deal directly with them, but he continues to support policies that he knows are wrong. So I find myself agreeing with his climate mentor, the member for Flinders, the assistant minister for resources, on one thing. This is serious, but it is a tragedy because the minister is not serious about this and neither is the Prime Minister. Both know, unlike the member for Lyons, that there is a different way forward. Labor's approach is to listen to the science; to listen to the economy and to respect our future.

Mr COLEMAN (Banks) (15:56): Those opposite have been proven comprehensively wrong in this area of policy, because you will recall, Mr Deputy Speaker Vasta, that they said that the Emissions Reduction Fund concept would not work. Well, it has worked. It has worked extremely well. You will recall that they said that Australia would not meet its Kyoto based target of a five per cent reduction on 2000 levels of emissions by 2020. Nobody really
speak that now. Nobody really says that Australia is not going to meet its five per cent emissions reduction target on 2000 levels by 2020.

Let us just reflect on that. The overarching thing at issue here is the reduction in emissions. As the Prime Minister says, it is not some sort of matter of religion of how exactly you must do it and that you must do it through a carbon tax because that is the only way that is politically acceptable. It is about achieving outcomes, as all things are. What this government has done, very clearly, is to achieve tremendous outcomes.

It is also worth reflecting back to the Kyoto era, because it turns out that some of the predictions back then of what emissions Australia would produce and, consequently, how much reduction would be required, were quite wrong. In fact, back then, it was expected that Australia would produce around 5,800 million tonnes of emissions in the 2013 to 2020 Kyoto period. For a variety of reasons—the success of the Emissions Reduction Fund; other successful policies of this government; technological change; improved energy efficiency—the conventional wisdom now is that the steady-state amount is about 4,800 million tonnes, not 5,800 million tonnes. So, in other words, the original projections of the amount were about 1,000 million tonnes overstated. So, as a consequence, what that means is: this area of policy is always evolving. It is about being practical and it is about responding in a practical way which minimises the impact on ordinary families.

You can take a sort of massive sledgehammer to this issue. It is called the carbon tax. The member for Charlton just spoke about that with great affection, moments ago. So you can do that, and you can sort of go around and say to every Australian family, 'You're going to have to pay $550 a year because of our policy indulgence,' or you can say, 'We're going to adopt practical measures that reduce emissions but have a minimal impact on you—that do not cost you hundreds of dollars every year.' I can tell you: if you spend some time in my electorate and if you talk to people in Riverwood or Padstow or Revesby or wherever you might be, that is something that people respect and appreciate. It is about achieving the outcome of a reduction in emissions. It is not about some sort of ideological pursuit of political goals—and that is what those opposite think this area is. It is not about ideology. It is about practical outcomes.

When the Emissions Reduction Fund auction occurred, you will recall, Mr Deputy Speaker, much scepticism from those opposite: 'It will not work;' 'No-one will bid;' 'It will all be terrible.' The result of the Emissions Reduction Fund auction substantially exceeded expectations, certainly of the sceptics opposite and, indeed, just about everyone. There was reduction of 47 million tonnes at a price of just $14 per tonne. It was a very significant inroad into our broader task of emissions reductions and at a modest cost to families.

We are in a situation where nobody really contests that Australia is going to achieve its Kyoto goals, and that is pretty significant. If the point of this policy area is to reduce emissions over time and nobody is contesting that that is occurring, that suggests that things are on the right track. We know that we are doing it at a minimal cost and we know that we have taken away from the Australian people the appalling burden of the carbon tax, which those opposite love and admire. They have a strong emotional bond with policy in that area, but it hurt families and it achieved very little. This government is delivering in this area and in a practical way that is good for Australia.
Ms PARKE (Fremantle) (16:01): The question of whether the new Prime Minister intends to make a dramatic shift towards rational, long-term solutions to the big challenges will be answered in large part by whether he is able to turn around the government's disastrous approach to climate change and its short-sighted approach to renewable energy and energy efficiency. It is a relief to have a coalition Prime Minister who actually believes in climate change. However, as far as the climate is concerned, it will not matter whether the Prime Minister is Tony Abbott or Malcom Turnbull if there is no change in the policies, if there is no greater commitment to emissions reduction, if we do not provide more significant assistance to poorer countries through the international climate finance mechanism and if Australia does not support a strong and fair 2020 global climate agreement in Paris.

Labor has always understood that dealing with climate change is an economic challenge as much as it is an environmental problem. Our planet simply cannot survive the accelerating plunder of a limited supply of natural resources. It cannot survive the warming that will soon rise to dangerous and irreversible levels if global cooperation on significantly reducing emissions is not achieved. Economic growth must be decoupled from a growth in carbon emissions, especially as we work together to raise the living standards in those parts of the world that face disadvantage.

Unfortunately, in Australia we have one of the few governments in the world that has chosen to go backwards. As Christiana Figueres, who leads the secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, said:

Where capital goes over the next fifteen years is going to decide whether we’re actually able to address climate change and what kind of a century we are going to have ... What we truly need is to create a ‘surround sound’ where, no matter what sector you turn to, there is a signal saying, ‘Folks, we are moving toward a low-carbon economy. It is irreversible; it is unstoppable. So get on the bandwagon.’

The Australian community is very much on that bandwagon, and that includes business as well as ordinary households, many academics, economists, scientists, local governments and others within the community.

In my electorate of Fremantle, there are many examples of individuals, businesses and local government taking the lead when it comes to reducing emissions and embracing the amazing potential of renewable energy. Fremantle has the first accredited carbon-neutral high school in Australia, at South Fremantle Senior High School. It has only the second carbon-neutral local government, at the City of Fremantle, which has also pioneered an Australian-first shallow geothermal and gas cogeneration plant for heating the pools at its leisure centre. And Fremantle is home to a world-leading wave energy innovator in Carnegie Wave Energy.

Last month Fremantle played host to a working group meeting of the United Nations Environmental Program's Environmental Assessment Group, which is part of the successful framework of action and analysis established under the Montreal Protocol in 1987 to save the planet from ozone depletion. Kofi Annan, the then Secretary-General of the UN, labelled the Montreal Protocol as 'perhaps the single most successful international agreement to date'. We need to follow that model and create an even more successful international agreement, and that process needs to be meaningfully advanced in Paris at the Conference of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol.

Over the past few weeks, I have had a number of meetings here in Parliament House with young people concerned about what Australia is doing on climate change and the
consequences of continued inadequate action, not only for Australia but, more urgently, for our Pacific island neighbours, who face the real and deadly impact of rising sea levels, more frequent extreme weather events, the destruction of crops and the salination of water. The meetings with Oaktree, the Australian Youth Climate Coalition, the Micah Challenge's Voices for Justice, the Medical Students' Association of Australia and Oxfam all emphasised the importance of Australia committing to take stronger action on climate change in the lead-up to the Paris climate change summit, as well as committing to better climate financing of developing countries and support for renewable energy technology.

Today, 10 eminent scientists held a briefing in parliament on the science of climate change and to discuss the impact of Australia's decision to sign the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the upcoming COP21. It was pointed out that mitigation measures bring positive economic benefits through lesser climate change damage and lower risk and that low-carbon systems bring local co-benefits and economic opportunities. It was also noted that technology develops quickly and costs less than expected. The mood of the meeting was hopeful that this is something that can be achieved with the right attitude and the commitment of all people and governments. My community in Fremantle wants Australia to be a leading player in developing a low-carbon economy and participating in global efforts to get serious about climate change. I have no doubt the Prime Minister is aware that he has taken the wheel of a government careering down the path of climate change ignorance and denial. The question is whether he has the strength of belief and purpose to do something about it before Paris.

Ms GAMBARO (Brisbane) (16:06): I am delighted to speak to this MPI. I cannot believe that the Labor Party is actually serious in bringing this MPI into the House when they have had more than five different environmental policies. Our Direct Action policy has been policy for more than half a decade. As a government, we are playing our part in reducing global emissions without increasing electricity bills for Australian families. By implementing our policies, we are creating a cleaner environment without unfairly hindering businesses. Australia has a strong emissions reduction target and we are achieving it sensibly. As part of our policy, this target represents a reduction of 50 per cent in per capita emissions, the highest per capita reduction of any major developed nation. We have one of the most effective systems in the world for reducing climate change.

After first promising to abolish the carbon tax, and then voting to keep it, the opposition has now decided it wants to bring back a carbon tax, and higher electricity prices. The carbon tax will bring more uncertainty for businesses and, even worse, more costs that businesses simply cannot afford.

Labor's carbon tax was a $15 billion hit to the Australian economy. Let's not forget that. The carbon tax failed to reduce emissions, and removing it saved families $550 a year on average. Worse still is what it did to Australian industry and businesses. For example, the Master Grocers supermarket group said at the time that its independent supermarket members would save $70 million a year. That is enormous. An average supermarket of 2,000 square metres will save $51,000. Also, there was an enormous hit to Virgin, which was headquartered in my electorate, of some $52 million.
Australia has a very proud record on renewable energy. My own electorate of Brisbane is absolutely filled with start-ups and innovative businesses at the absolute cutting edge of this renewable energy technology. Right across the CBD we have everything from high-rises to homes adopting green technology to reduce emissions. I want to pay tribute to the Brisbane City Council, which is one of the leading councils with their green policies, particularly their revolutionary building chiller project, which allows buildings to be cooled using a chiller technology that will reduce the demand for electricity.

Families and businesses are all doing their bit at the moment by reducing their electricity bills by investing in solar. This government has reaffirmed its strong commitment to supporting household solar. This has meant a huge influx of investment from overseas into Australia's renewable energies, reflecting strong business confidence both in and out of Australia.

Australia has the highest proportion in the world of households with solar panels: 15 per cent. The next largest is Belgium, with 7.5 per cent, and Germany, with 3.7 per cent. The Renewable Energy Target will see more than 23.5 per cent of Australia's electricity coming from renewables by 2020. This means a doubling of large-scale renewable energy over the next five years.

The department has costed Labor's plan and found that it will cost a staggering $85 billion. This means that Labor is more committed to debt and deficit than they are to reducing emissions. If we do not have a functioning and healthy economy we simply cannot have the funds to effectively battle climate change. Only the coalition has a responsible, credible and mature policy on renewable energy. Never has the hypocrisy of the Labor Party been as strong as it is now. One only needs to cast a cursory look back at the Rudd/Gillard years to see the never-ending list of discredited policies on climate change and renewable energy. So I welcome Shadow Minister Butler's raising of this matter, if only to take another look at their failed years in power. In government they left a legacy of waste and mismanagement of the environment—the carbon tax, the home insulation plan, green loans, clean tech grants, Solar Homes And Communities Plan, Solar Flagship, and let's not forget 'cash for clunkers', green cars, the solar hot water rebate, connectable renewables, carbon capture and Phantom Credits, just to name a few. We cannot be lectured by a party with such a dark history when it comes to the environment and the economy. Labor has categorically been rejected by Australian voters. When they offered a carbon tax at $24 they were rejected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The time allotted for the MPI has expired.

COMMITTEES

Standing Committee on Tax and Revenue

Joint Select Committee on Trade and Investment Growth

Membership

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (16:11): I have received advice from the Chief Government Whip nominating changes in the membership of certain committees.

Mr CHESTER (Gippsland—Assistant Minister for Defence) (16:11): I ask leave of the House to move a motion to discharge a member from certain committees.

Leave granted.
Mr CHESTER: I move:

That Mr Taylor be discharged from the Standing Committee on Tax and Revenue and the Joint Select Committee on Trade and Investment Growth.

Question agreed to.

**BILLS**

**Superannuation Legislation Amendment (Trustee Governance) Bill 2015**

**Second Reading**

Debate resumed on the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Ms CHESTERS (Bendigo) (16:12): As I was saying before debate was adjourned earlier, the Superannuation Legislation Amendment (Trustee Governance) Bill has nothing to do with growing superannuation funds. It has nothing to do with ensuring that hard-working Australians will have increased superannuation. The bill is about red tape. It is about taking a wrecking ball to an industry that is already working well.

Industry super funds in this country already outperform retail funds, and they have done so since their creation. I note, however, that it did not stop the government in question time trying to go after the current leader of the Labor Party. It did not stop them trying to allude to something that happened when Bill Shorten, the current Leader of the Opposition, was involved in industry super. Let us set the record straight about what did happen with the Leader of the Opposition was a director of AustralianSuper, before entering parliament. This is relevant, because, two million Australians, like me, have AustralianSuper funds.

AustralianSuper featured in the 10 top-performing funds every year for a decade, including when Bill Shorten was a director. Overall, AustralianSuper fund is ranked 5th of the 10 top-performing funds for the last 10 years. This is what is relevant to this debate. Industry super funds are already doing a great job ensuring that the working people of Australia have decent retirement incomes. Yet what the government is proposing is to take a wrecking ball to a model that is working—to take away the 50-50 per cent representation and impose this new model of one-third independent directors. That is so loosely defined and gives absolute power to a body to decide what independent is.

AustralianSuper, however, is not the only industry super fund that is performing well. They are in good company. Of the 10 top-performing growth funds for the last 10 years, we also have CareSuper, AustralianSuper, which I have already mentioned, Cbus, QSuper, UniSuper and Hostplus. These are all industry super funds that are doing well for their members. The government's agenda is clear. They want to take a wrecking ball to everything that is associated with the words 'trade unions'. They are not interested in standing up for Australian workers, whether in the workplace or when it comes to their retirement incomes.

The amendments before us are also bad policy because they will impose more red tape in this space. This red tape will result in an extra $8.5 million being imposed on these funds for start-up costs and a further $12.3 million in ongoing costs. The government admits this in its own explanatory memorandum that accompanies this bill. If the government was serious about supporting working people and making sure they had healthy, decent retirement incomes, it would back down on this proposal. It would not proceed with breaking a model...
that is working. Who are the people at the centre of this? They are who the government has forgotten. They are our cleaners and our security guards—people like John, a security guard from New South Wales, who simply says:

When I get older and reach retirement, I worry if I will … have enough money to support myself and my wife.

He supports industry super funds. He is on track to a good return. The government's plan is just going to smash that dream.

**Mr CONROY** (Charlton) (16:16): It is a pleasure to follow the member for Bendigo's passionate contribution to this debate in defence of industry super funds and their ability to pick their own boards. I rise to speak on the Superannuation Legislation Amendment (Trustee Governance) Bill 2015. This bill is important because it is an acknowledgement that the superannuation system needs reform. Both sides of politics agree that the system needs reform and is unsustainable in its current format, but the great issue is: what is that reform? The great issue is that the different approaches of the two sides of politics demonstrate the focus, the values and the real core beliefs of those political parties.

There is a clear choice here about how we reform a system that is clearly unsustainable. It is unsustainable because the cost of superannuation tax concessions in this country exceeds $40 billion a year. In a couple of years time, it will exceed the cost of the pension. Currently, 40 per cent of that massive tax concession goes to the 10 per cent of wealthiest Australians in this country. The system is clearly in need of reform. There are two choices here for reform which I will go to in a minute, but I want to talk about why the system is in need of reform. It is in need of reform because of one of the worst decisions that the Howard-Costello government ever made— a decision that, at the time, was pointed to as something that would haunt future governments. Not only is it haunting future governments; it is haunting future generations. It is the decision to make income from superannuation funds tax free for everyone once they reach the age of 60. It was a decision made at the height of a mining boom that was flushed away by Peter Costello in tax cuts. It was a decision that has built a massive structural imbalance into our budget that now the government are trying to confront. They are failing to confront it properly, but they are trying to confront it. It is a burden that a future Labor government will also need to address. That one decision has completely skewed the budget. It is disproportionately skewed, with benefits going to the wealthiest Australians. The current system is something that I know will no longer be there when I retire, because it is clearly unsustainable. It has set generation against generation. It has set baby boomers and the generation preceding baby boomers against gen X and gen Y and whatever we call the next generation after that.

It needs change, and that is why I am proud of Labor's policies in this area. The choice here is between Labor's policy and the coalition's policy. Labor's policy is that, for those over the age of 60, once you earn more than $75,000 in a year from your superannuation, you pay 15 per cent tax on additional income. This is designed to address the issue that, for example, we have 475 Australians in this country who have over $10 million in superannuation and earn, on average, $1½ million a year tax free. The objection from the coalition government is, 'They've earned that superannuation. That has been built up by them selling a business or earning income. That's their own money and they should be able to spend that freely.' No-one is touching their superannuation—I agree with that premise. The issue is that they do not own...
those concessions. Concessions are tax expenditures. Concessions are a choice by a federal
government to give them a tax break. Effectively, the government are robbing taxpayers of
that money to award it to those superannuants. It is an area in need of reform.

Why should a retail worker in my electorate—a checkout operator at Cardiff Woolies—pay
19c tax once they have earned their first $18,000 but someone over the age of 60 not pay a
single cent in tax on, for example, $1½ million of superannuation income? I submit that it is
unsustainable and, more importantly, inequitable. It is saying that that income is different
from other incomes and it repudiates a fundamental value of our taxation system that income
should be taxed the same regardless of its source. That is the choice of the Labor Party. That
is our plan.

Those on the other side, the coalition government, have chosen to go on another path. They
have chosen to terminate the low-income superannuation contribution, effectively cutting a
superannuation concession to 3.6 million Australians—increasing the tax on super for 3.6
million of our lowest paid workers. That really shows the choices of the coalition
government: giving a tax break to our wealthiest Australians while cutting superannuation
concessions for 3.6 million Australians. In the area of superannuation, there is a clear choice
between the true social justice, egalitarian values of the Labor Party versus the class warfare
being practised by the coalition government.

This bill goes further to that choice. This bill goes to how we govern superannuation and
what, effectively, is the model for superannuation in this country. The proponents of this
change say it is sector blind—it is not attacking one subsector of the industry; it is sector
blind, merely providing that a minimum of one-third of the directors on boards of
superannuation funds should be independent. But that is not what is happening. This is a clear
ideological attack on industry superannuation funds, for a variety of reasons. One is ideology,
in that they have always been suspicious of superannuation funds that are owned by the
industry itself and that have an employee-employer representation model. So they attack it
from an ideological point of view that they do not want employee representatives to have a
true say in these bodies. Secondly, it is an attack on the purported links between trade unions
and superannuation funds. Thirdly, it is my heartfelt belief that it also reflects trying to do the
bidding of people in the retail finance industry who are threatened by industry super funds
that constantly outperform them in any sort of measurement in this area.

Let's go to some of the facts of the performance of retail superannuation funds against
industry superannuation funds. On the matter of fees, retail superannuation funds, in the past
year of data collection, which is the APRA Annual superannuation bulletin of 2013, collected
$449 million in fees. Compare that with industry super funds, which collected $88 million.
The share of fees collected by retail super funds compared with total fees collected was 82 per
cent, yet the share of assets held in retail super funds was only 26 per cent. So, they have 26
per cent of assets under their administration, but they collect 82 per cent of the fees. That is
grossly disproportionate, and that is reflected in the fees per member: $7 fees per member in
superannuation and industry super funds versus $31 per member in retail funds.

You just have to ask: is this massive fee difference reflected in performance? Well, it is
reflected in performance, but not in the way you would expect. In terms of 10-year average
annual returns—the return on investment over a 10-year span at an annualised figure—retail
superannuation has performed at 4.9 per cent per annum and industry super funds have
averaged 6.7 per cent, an almost two per cent difference in performance of superannuation funds going to the low-fee provider. Retail funds charge much higher fees, they manage far fewer assets and they constantly underperform industry super funds and other not-for-profits.

This is not to say that there are not good retail super funds; there are. And it is not to say that every industry super fund sets the world on fire in terms of performance but merely that retail super funds should not be held up as the paragon of governance and performance in this country. In fact, industry super funds should. Not one of the top 47 individual super funds that are in the top league table in terms of performance are retail funds. If you look at payments to related service providers, which goes to conflict of interest, where you have accusations of directors on one super fund directing payments or purchasing services on behalf of their members with a related entity—whether it is insurance, legal advice, financial advice, broking or asset management—with retail super funds the average payment per member to a related service provider is $485; with not-for-profits, of which industry super funds are a subsector, it is $185.

If you are really worried about governance of superannuation funds in this country, you should be looking at the sector that charges more fees, that underperforms the rest of the sector and that charges triple the amount for related service providers, not the other model. But that is not what this bill is about. This bill is about ideology. This bill is about an attack on a coalition government on a bastion of our superannuation system, a bastion of providing decent retirement incomes to low-paid Australian workers, and that is the industry super funds model.

There is a requirement for all superannuation boards to have the right skills mix. They must satisfy APRA that their board, as constituted, has the appropriate skills mix to act in the best interests of their members. There is already a requirement around skills mix that does not need to look at independent directors. APRA already has a responsibility to make sure the boards have that mix. If the government was truly serious about improving superannuation governance it would be encouraging APRA to make sure that boards have the right skills mix, rather than embarking on this ideological crusade around independent directors.

I should note at this point that having independent directors on the boards is not a bad thing. It is to be encouraged. But ultimately it should be up to the boards to decide. Mandating that at least one third of board members must be independent is a silly way of going to this issue. It should be left up to the boards themselves. Many industry super funds have independent directors, and most super funds—and I think all of them in terms of chairs—have independent board members as well. Hostplus, for example, has a third independent directors. But that does not mean you mandate that model for every board. There are significant benefits to having an equal representation model between employers and employees. They bring wisdom. They bring a deep commitment to their members' interests that goes beyond just simple performance of the super fund. And that attitude has informed choices of investment asset allocations that has rewarded those funds in the long term.

For example, typically with industry super funds the board members are very committed to long-term returns. They are not worried about short-term fluctuations in share markets, because their bonuses are not dependent on it. They are not coming out of the banking industry with that short-term mindset. So they have invested more than average on long-term assets, like infrastructure assets, which provide good, stable, long-term returns and can deal
with the fluctuations in the share market. That is one of the reasons—besides low fees—that industry superannuation funds consistently outperform retail super funds that chase the quick buck on the share market.

So, the equal representation model works. It provides stability for boards. It provides stability for investment choices. It reflects the outlook of their members. And I would submit that it is actually a much more sustainable model for guarding the trillions of dollars of retirement savings in Australians' superannuation accounts. This is where we really need to focus: what is in the interests of members, what is in the interests of sustainability of a trillion-dollar industry—a trillion-dollar industry started by visionary Labor governments, led by Hawke and Keating and continued in policy announcements of other Labor governments and Labor oppositions. That is what we should be focused on—not narrow ideological attacks, not attacks on union bogeymen, not attacks on the performance of super funds that are doing a good job.

On superannuation, there is a clear policy choice. The coalition government are intent on rewarding high-wealth individuals who have millions of dollars in their superannuation accounts. As recently as yesterday, the coalition rejected our attempts to get a bipartisan approach on reforming taxation concessions that are not sustainable, taxation concessions that are grossly inequitable because they accrue to the top 10 per cent of the wealthiest Australians, that are grossly inequitable and will soon outweigh the pension in terms of cost, that are grossly inequitable that say to a Cardiff Woolies checkout operator, 'We're going to take your income once you have earned 19 grand but someone can have 1½ million in superannuation and we're not going to tax them at all.'

On the Labor side, we stand up for a sustainable superannuation system that is based on treating everyone equally, that is based on giving a dignified retirement to all Australians, that is based on saying that the wealthiest Australians should pay their fair share and that industry super funds have a clear future in this country. The coalition's approach is class warfare, saying that the wealthiest Australians should get a tax break but the 3.6 million low-paid Australian workers deserve to get their tax concessions cut. I proudly reject this bill. I proudly reject what is yet another attack on industry super funds and another attack on the millions of Australians who depend on industry super funds to deliver their retirement incomes.

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (16:30): With all due respect to those proud servants of democracy who are sitting in the advisers' boxes and the hard work they have put in to create and draft this bill, in my view, it is a complete farce. That is why I rise today to join my Labor colleagues in opposing the Superannuation Legislation Amendment (Trustee Governance) Bill 2015. This legislation makes amendments to the SI(S) Act 1993 to enforce super funds to ensure that one-third of directors, including the chairperson, are independent.

Regarding the lack of women on boards, I think we recently received the figures from the ASX on the representation of women, and it is still undone. I note my colleague did a review of the recent reports of representation on Commonwealth governance boards. Even though there is a target of 40 per cent on those boards, unfortunately, under this government that has slipped. I want to underscore the need for representation of women and diversity more generally on boards.

Labor have a number of concerns with this legislation. First and foremost, it is not needed. It is redundant. It is, in many ways, farcical. There are no issues with super fund governance. I
I do have a strong interest in governance. I am a member of the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit. I used to be deputy chair of that committee. I am a former director of a number of boards in Canberra and I was also a former audit committee member on those boards. I do have a very strong interest in governance and I am always looking at ways to improve governance of private boards, governments boards and not-for-profit boards. I do have a strong interest in governance and I want it to be as best as it can be.

At this stage, there are no issues with super fund governance. The notion that this legislation has been created to address that issue is completely nonsensical. As my colleague the member for Charlton has just mentioned and other colleagues have mentioned, this legislation is purely ideological. On this side of the House, we do not support it for that very reason. It will not achieve its stated goal to improve super fund governance. Rather than focus on the behaviour or skills required of directors, the bill introduces a quota of so-called independent directors based upon the relationships a director may have with the fund or its sponsoring employers and unions. There is no evidence whatsoever to support that having a majority of independent directors will give rise to better performance or better governance. That said, as the member for Charlton has mentioned, if people choose to have independent directors, well and good. If the board chooses to have a mix of independent directors and they deem that that is worthwhile for the board in terms of the culture and behaviour of the board and if they think it is going to end up with a better bottom line, then bring it on. But that should be the decision of the board. It should not be mandated.

Secondly, this bill creates unnecessary red tape for super funds and it is heavy-handed in that process. To those opposite, what happened to reducing red tape? We have had much fanfare from the other side on that. From memory, it is usually in the Autumn sitting that the government come into this place and outline how they are reducing red tape in so many different ways, when quite often it is just about changing a few semicolons and dot points in legislation. If this government are deeply committed to reducing red tape then what are they doing introducing this piece of legislation?

This legislation adopts a heavy-handed, one-size-fits-all approach regardless of the super fund size or the circumstances of its membership. Corporate governance, as we know, is not something where one-size-fits-all. Yes, we do have corporate law that governs that. We have codes of ethics and codes of behaviours through the AICD that help guide directors. In terms of one-size-fits-all, there is broader legislation that does provide some degree of governance, but it really is up to the boards to guide what is best for the organisation. That is especially true in our super system, which has intentionally provided for alternative governance models. This has delivered undeniable benefits for competition over the past two years, and I will speak more on that later.

Labor are also concerned that a considerable number of people who are qualified and experienced to be independent directors will be excluded due to the criteria in this legislation. As I said, the member for Charlton highlighted the fact that a number of boards do decide to bring on independent directors; they do see merit in that. That is a good thing and bring it on. Surely, representative trustee boards and their shareholders are capable of making decisions in the best interests of beneficiaries and it should not be mandated. It should be up to those boards to work out the appropriate decision for the mix on the board in accordance with good
governance outcomes, good investment outcomes for superannuation funds and good bottom-line outcomes, should it be a business.

Our final concern with this legislation is that, as I said, it is simply not needed. It is redundant. The existing legislation is only two years old and it provides significant rigor around governance. There is already significant regulatory oversight of superannuation funds. The Australian Prudential Regulation Authority, APRA, has the power to set and supervise compliance with and enforce prudential standards so that funds meet the financial promises they make to beneficiaries. APRA funds are required to continuously report on the composition of their boards and whether boards and individual directors have the required mix of skills and expertise. Boards are also required to conduct ongoing performance reviews, manage conflicts of interest and make sure that directors are fit and proper. This is already happening.

As I said, many of these requirements are new. They were only introduced in July 2013, so they are just over two years old. Further time should be allowed to assess their effectiveness before changing legislation. These are very, very new laws. They are still in many ways, I imagine, being bedded down. So, as I said, this legislation is not needed. It is redundant. There are already enough checks and balances in place to ensure that there is good governance.

The relevant APRA prudential standards are making sure that funds are well governed. This is already out there. This is already in existence. Some of the requirements of SPS 510 require an RSE licensee: to ensure that the chairperson of each board committee that has responsibility for activities related to prudential matters is a director of the RSE licensee; develop and implement a policy on board renewal to ensure that there are succession plans and that they are refreshing constantly; and have procedures for regular assessment of board performance to ensure that the board is achieving what you want it to achieve—that is, the best bottom line or the best investments.

As I said, this is already in existence. The standard requires a remuneration policy that aligns remuneration and risk management and covers all responsible persons of the RSE licensee, excluding approved auditors and actuaries. It requires a board remuneration committee and a board audit committee, each of which is comprised of only non-executive directors. Also required is an internal audit function that can be either operated in-house or provided by an outsourced service provider.

It is also already in existence that you have to make sure that directors are fit and proper. SPS 520 requires the RSE licensee to have a fit and proper policy with certain minimum features, including a process for assessing the fitness and propriety of each responsible person of the licensee and a process for dealing with any responsible persons who are found to be not fit and proper.

Another point is on managing conflicts of interest. This is dealt with in SPS 521. This requires a licensee to develop and implement a conflict management policy that is approved by the board and to develop and maintain up-to-date registers of relevant interests and duties.

Aside from these standards, super funds are also required: to maintain adequate financial resources to address losses from operational risks; to have systems for identifying, assessing, managing, mitigating and monitoring material risks to ensure that all outsourcing
arrangements involving material business activities entered into by an RSE licensee be subject to appropriate due diligence, approval and ongoing monitoring; and to implement a whole-of-business approach to business continuity management that is appropriate to the size of the business. It acknowledges that there are businesses with different business models. Super funds are also required to implement a sound investment governance framework and to manage investments in a manner consistent with the interests of beneficiaries. The governance and business operations of super funds are already extensively supervised and extensively governed by that list of requirements I have just outlined.

We, Labor, have proud track record on superannuation. We introduced universal superannuation and we also introduced the compulsory superannuation guarantee. Superannuation is part of Labor's DNA. We created it. We are always looking for ways to improve it and to ensure that Australians enjoy a comfortable retirement. I am particularly concerned about women, because they are way behind the eight ball with where they are at with their super when they retire. Super has been part of our DNA. We introduced superannuation. We introduced the compulsory superannuation guarantee. We are the party that wants to ensure that Australians retire comfortably.

That is in contrast to those opposite. Those opposite never believed in a universal superannuation scheme. They opposed the creation of superannuation. They opposed every increase to the compulsory superannuation guarantee, and they are opposed to industry superannuation. That is where we arrive. That is the nub of this issue—industry superannuation. Their opposition to industry super is purely ideological.

This legislation attacks a model that is clearly working. It seeks to change the representative model of governance of industry super funds which can only be called successful. Every single year, industry super funds are the most successful and highest performing funds in the sector. The numbers prove it. The average performance of industry funds for the year was 10.2 per cent compared to 9.6 per cent for retail funds. As the member for Bendigo said earlier, nine out of 10 industry super fund members have expressed satisfaction with their super fund.

I want to go to Money magazine. It is something I subscribed to when I set up my own small business. When you set up your own business you have to make your own contributions. There is no-one making a co-contribution. I went to my financial adviser and she told me how much I needed to put in to reach my superannuation target for my retirement. Then I had to go about the business of working out the best super fund to invest in. I turned to Money magazine. The beauty of Money magazine is that at the back of every edition is this thing called 'databank'. It has your guide to super data. I will go to the October edition. It lists the best super funds and balanced options, which is what most people default to. I will go through the top 10. No 1. is Telstra Super, which is a corporate fund. Then we have UniSuper, which is an industry fund. Then there is AustralianSuper, which is an industry fund. Then there is CareSuper, which is an industry fund, Hostplus, which is an industry fund, REST, which is an industry fund, Equip, which is an industry fund, Kinetic Super, which is an industry fund, Cbus, which is an industry fund, HESTA, which is an industry fund, and AustSafe, which is an industry fund. Of the top 11 balanced super funds nominated by Money magazine, 10 of them are industry funds.
Then, if you want to look at diversified funds, which are also another option for people who want to take a bit more of a risk with their super, we have the top seven here. Hostplus, which is an industry fund, is No. 1. Then we have AustralianSuper industry fund at No. 2 and Statewide Super, an industry fund, at No. 4. We have CareSuper industry fund at No. 5, AustSafe Super industry fund at No. 6 and REST super, which is also an industry fund, whose bond option is No. 7.

In concluding, I again call out this legislation for what it is, which is nothing more than ideology. I have just listed where Money magazine rates industry super funds. In the case of balanced funds, 10 out of the top 11 are all industry super funds. In the case of diversified funds, six out of the top seven are all industry super funds. So, I think that the jury has spoken in terms of their performance. This legislation is nothing more than ideological. The bottom line is that the representative super model is working and does not need to be changed. It is an attack on industry super and I completely oppose it. (Time expired)

Mr BANDT (Melbourne) (16:46): There is a fair bit that we need to discuss in this place and elsewhere about superannuation. We are getting to the point where the cost to the public purse of maintaining the super system is about to overtake the cost of the age pension itself. Given that super was there in the beginning to be a supplement to the age pension system and to take the burden off the public purse, it now turns out that we are on the verge of potentially spending more in tax concessions that we know are going to those who already have a lot of money. It is going to cost us more to keep the super system alive as it currently is framed than it will to keep the age pension alive. So there is a very good argument for saying let's go back to basics and work out whether the super system is doing what it was intended to do, or whether we need to be looking at some other broader reforms.

The Greens have certainly put some proposals on the table about how super might be reformed with respect to perhaps amending some of the concessional marginal tax rates that exist. There would also be some sense in having a discussion about how the savings in superannuation funds that we have in Australia at the moment, currently worth between $1½ trillion and $2 trillion, could be put to better use. Given that we have such a huge need to invest in key public infrastructure in Australia, we have to ask the question: why aren't we getting more investment in some of that from our super funds and what could we do to open that up? I am not a fan of the measure that some super funds have taken of advocating for asset recycling—that is, flogging off some state assets and letting us and the super funds own them—but there is so much greenfield investment and infrastructure that needs to be built. Surely, that is something that we could turn our minds to. Not being exposed to having to borrow from overseas quite so much would also assist Australia. We could use some of the money that we have here already—that is, people savings—to invest in infrastructure here in Australia. Those measures are not on the table from this government. What is on the table from this government is a bill about governance, and so we have to deal with that.

As the Treasury spokesperson for the Greens, which has a number of members in the Senate, I have not exactly been subject to a sustained lobbying campaign from people saying this bill is very important and must be passed. In that context, we have decided to have a look at the problem ourselves to see whether, in fact, this is a problem that is worthy of this parliament spending its time on and, if so, whether this is the solution. This is something that I
and the Greens come to with an inquisitive, open mind, looking at the evidence to see whether it is a problem.

As anyone who looks at the parliamentary register of interest would know, I have money not only in an industry super fund but also in a fossil-fuel-free private fund, Future Super. That is done for varying reasons, including ethical reasons. So we are not coming to this with a particular point of view about the best of setting up funds. But what you see when you look at the evidence is that, first of all, from the point of view of returns, the industry super funds are consistently good and have been so for many, many years. They have been returning funds to members on a not-for-profit basis but with good returns.

But, more importantly, given that this is a bill about governance, when you look at the history of the governance of industry super funds, in particular, but also some across the board, it is difficult to find a big, glaring problem in the governance that somehow requires this parliament's attention. Some have said, 'If it ain't broke, don't fix it.' Perhaps that might be a little bit too glib. In this parliament we should always be vigilant about making sure that when so much money is at stake the governance arrangements for that money are the best ones. We should not necessarily wait for a problem to arise before going and fixing it. But are there any warning signs going off? No-one has come and put any before us.

Are there any reasons to think that the current strong regulation from APRA is somehow inadequate? That really ought to be the question, and I think the government ought to be demonstrating that somehow what APRA is doing at the moment is not good enough and that some structural change to the way superannuation boards are governed is required. It is difficult to see what it is that APRA is supposedly doing wrong at the moment. Indeed, one might say that part of the reason why industry funds and other funds have been able to perform so well over many years is that APRA has been doing its job. That is a conclusion that is available to be drawn on the evidence in front of us at the moment. So I do not think this is a bill where the government has made out a case, nor is there a big public clamour for us to take action.

What makes me sceptical also about why we are spending time on this and whether governance really is a question of concern for the government is that, if you look at what they are doing here and you compare it with what the government did with financial advisers and financial planners, with financial advisers and financial planners they ran the other way. When it came to the private sector and financial planners, the government said: 'In the last parliament, you worked together to put in some protections for consumers that regulated how financial planners behaved. That is a great imposition. People should be able to decide things for themselves. We should let the market rule.' This was despite the scandals—where there was a massive case, with strong evidence, made out that people had lost a lot and that many people had been fleeced and had lost their life savings—despite a crying need there for regulation and despite some very, very basic conflicts of interest that do not exist when you have member-led super funds. There are some very basic conflicts of interest that exist when financial planners get money for selling products to people—from the banks who benefit from the products—whether or not it is in the person's best interest. When I look at what the government has done in the financial planning sector, there is a dissonance with that and what it is trying to do here, which again makes one sceptical about the government's motives and wonder whether the government is really trying to just break open a model that is working so
that there is more custom available to the blanks—to be blunt. That seems to be what the
government is doing.

As I say, this question of superannuation is something that we as the Greens come to with
an open mind and without perhaps the same kinds of vested interests or allegiances that others
in this place might have, and yet there has not been a strong case made to us to seek our votes
to support this legislation. So, for the reasons that I have just outlined, it is not a bill that we
will be able to support here or in the Senate.

There is ample opportunity in this place for us to have a sensible debate about
superannuation and to go back to basics and say, as I said at the start, 'Is this system doing
what it was designed to do?' I am hopeful that perhaps a change of leadership in the
government will open up space for some more sensible debate about that, because I think it is
a debate that people are prepared to have. I know the last leadership said that superannuation
tax concessions were off the table. They said: 'We're not going to touch them. We're happy to
talk about making you pay more to go and see the doctor, but we're not happy to talk about
getting rid of super tax breaks for the very wealthy. We're quite happy for those still to be
used by some very rich people at the end of their life as, essentially, a tax haven and a way of
washing money through it. But we won't talk about that.' Well, I hope that the government
does talk about that, because, if the governments puts those things back on the table, then
maybe there will not be the suspicion about motivation.

But, at the moment, in the absence of any case being made out, and when you compare
what the government is doing here with the complete lack of action about financial planners
and the response today to the financial systems inquiry—where, again, the big banks and their
financial-planning model are just being given a small pat on the head and being told, 'Look,
you might have done something wrong in the past, but, as long as you do a bit more
education, it will all be all right'—you do wonder whether this government has at its core the
interests of consumers and people who are trying to save or simply the interests of the banks.
On the available evidence, you would have to think it is the latter, and, for that reason, we will
not be supporting the bill.

Mr BRENDAN O’CONNOR (Gorton) (16:55): I too rise to oppose the Superannuation
Legislation Amendment (Trustee Governance) Bill 2015. This bill has, I think, a dishonest
motive. The ostensible purpose of the bill as it is drafted is to somehow provide better
regulation for superannuation funds—in particular, not-for-profit funds—and supposedly to
ensure better regulation and more independent advice, which would lead to better outcomes
for members of superannuation funds. Unfortunately for the government, the evidence belies
the presumptions that motivate this bill, because, if you look at all the evidence in relation to
this matter, you will find that, generally speaking, over the last 20 or more years, the facts are
that the not-for-profit industry funds have had better outcomes for members, they have been
cheaper and there have been fewer, if any, scandals in relation to those funds when compared
with some of the for-profit funds. So it is quite a remarkable proposed piece of legislation,
when we are looking to change the governance arrangements for better funds rather than look
at and examine more closely some of the deficiencies of other parts of the super industry.

That is of great concern to the opposition. But it comes as no surprise to us, because we
know that the government has an ideological predisposition in relation to industry super. It
has never supported industry super. The Liberal Party in this place has never, ever voted for,
for example, employer contributions to super. It has always, when elected to government, reneged on its earlier commitments to increase the contribution. We had that most recently with the recently disposed of Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, who made a commitment to increase superannuation prior to the election, and, upon election, reneged upon it. Prime Minister Howard had made, before the 1996 election, a commitment to increase the employer contribution, and he reneged upon that when coming into government. So there is a long, long history of enmity towards compulsory super but also, in particular, a keenness by Liberal governments to attack the arrangements for not-for-profit superannuation funds. As I say, this is hard to countenance, given the history. The history is that, over the last many years, the dividends have been better; the scandals, if any, have been fewer—certainly less scandalous than in the for-profit area; and the fees have been lower.

This bill does not achieve its stated goal. The changes will not improve super-fund governance. Rather than focus on the behaviour or skills required of directors, the bill will introduce a quota of so-called independent directors, based upon relationships a director may have with the fund or its sponsoring employers and unions. Drafting has proven problematic and has resulted in a large number of unintended outcomes.

The bill is unnecessary. Two years ago new governance obligations were enacted. These require all funds to regularly evaluate—by using an independent third party—the effectiveness of their board and directors, to manage and disclose conflicts of interest, to ensure all directors are fit, proper and capable of making decisions expected of them, and to regularly review their board-renewal policies. APRA has robust enforcement powers and has admitted that these new requirements are still being bedded down within funds.

The bill is inappropriately heavy-handed. Unlike the regulation of company boards, the bill adopts a heavy-handed one-size-fits-all approach, regardless of the super fund's business model or the circumstances of its membership. The bill does not address the governance challenges of super funds. If enacted, it will change the governance of the most successful super funds, the representative model that applies across the not-for-profit sector, while failing to address the governance issues associated with consumer losses in the scandal-ridden bank and wealth management industry. That is why you have to be sceptical of the government's intentions, in relation to this matter. It seeks to punish the most successful funds and leave alone the funds that have left many of their members worse off. It is unjustifiable for the government to contemplate that.

When you are advocating change to public policy, particularly in a sensitive area like superannuation, there needs to be confidence that the government is doing it in the interest of the beneficiaries—in this case, superannuation funds. There is no evidence to suggest that these policies will, in any way, improve the lot for members of industry funds. If you look internationally, the representative model has been more successful than having a board full of independent directors. If you look at domestic arrangements, the same is true. If you look at the level and degree of regulation of current super funds, there is no reason for the government to be going down this path.

Is this about diminishing the role of employer bodies and unions in industry funds? The answer to that is: unequivocally, yes. This is about diminishing the representative model and, in particular—happy to sacrifice employer bodies, along the way—diminishing the role of unions in superannuation. That in itself is a remarkable thing. In this country, even in the pre-
accord years, many of the ideas for the existing super industry emanated from the union movement. In fact, the ideas for striking the accord and intention to deliver on employer contributions to super commenced in about 1986. It did not take effect, by way of parliament, until six years later, but it was driven by the Labor movement to make sure that people who were seeking some security in their retirement would have decent savings.

If you go back to the mid-eighties, the only people who could say they had any adequate superannuation savings were public servants—I would not suggest their conditions were as good as they are now, but they had some security when it came to retirement savings—and managerial staff in the private sector. I know that many blue-collar workers in the private sector had no superannuation, whatsoever, 25 years ago.

The efforts of Labor to make sure we provided access to savings beyond the pension for people retiring has been a 30-year journey. It emanated in the mid-eighties. The federal Labor government joined the ACTU to make submissions, before the Industrial Relations Commission, to have employer contributions inserted into awards. This culminated in 1992 with the first parliamentary enactment providing minimum contributions by employers. Often, these were in lieu of wages. This was to not only build national savings but also to ensure that people who were not making a great deal of money were able to have a reasonable nest egg upon retirement. That has been a 30-year journey.

Throughout that entire journey, there is not one point where the Liberal Party, whether in government or opposition, has supported the advancement of those contributions to millions upon millions of Australian workers. Not one. They did not vote for the 1992 enactment. They did not vote for the increases to employer contributions. Indeed, they attacked the intentions of the then government and, upon election, reneged upon any commitment they had made about increasing that contribution, even though they were quite happy to use it as a commitment—it ended up being a broken promise—in, at least, two elections.

So there is a history of neglect and disregard for universal super retirement savings for Australian workers. And, of course what we see now is that their most interested focus is allowing it to be one which provides enormous concessions for the very well-paid and very high-income superannuants in this country. That seems to be where they focus their intentions. They have abandoned the co-contribution for 3½ million low-paid workers. They have resisted the opposition's efforts to find some bipartisanship on reducing some of these remarkably high concessions to the most fortunate and very high-paid superannuants. It is unfortunate that there has been that divide between the two major parties.

But despite that divide, because it is so popular and because the Australian people warmed so readily to this policy, the government today and the Liberal Party generally have not been able to dismantle it—as they would like to have done. They would like to take a wrecking ball to superannuation generally. They do not like the idea of it; they have never liked the idea of it. That is manifest in every decision they have made with respect to it. But it is so popular that they just have to find another way to affect the benefits that flow on to many millions of workers.

One of the ways they have considered affecting it was to bring in this legislation that will diminish the role of employer bodies and unions sitting on those funds and representing the beneficiaries of those funds. Of course, that is one of the reasons why we cannot support it. And the other, as I have outlined already, is that if we compare the not-for-profit super funds...
with the for-profit super funds, when it comes to outcomes the evidence shows that the not-for-profit funds have been superior. In some cases, that is by at least a full year's salary more than the for-profit funds.

When it comes down to the fees, we have seen them to be generally lower than those of the for-profit funds. And, of course, when you look at some of the scandals that have happened in our financial sector, they have not involved industry super funds. Unfortunately, they have involved other types of funds. And yet the government has tended to focus its energies and its red tape on industry super funds.

This piece of legislation as proposed is targeting unions and employer bodies ideologically. It wants to smash up what has been the most successful arrangement in so far as representation on boards goes. And, of course, the Assistant Treasurer is very much motivated to take on unions. Like her old boss, Peter Costello, she is from the Dollar Sweets clan. They are really into this sort of stuff!

But the reality is that everyone knows what they are doing. They are trying to attack hardworking people. And they are willing to attack unions to do it because they do not believe in unions or, indeed in this case, in employer bodies governing super funds. This is despite the fact that they have been more beneficial than any other fund that we have seen in this country.

Ms O'DWYER (Higgins—Minister for Small Business and Assistant Treasurer) (17:11): Firstly, I would like to thank those members who have contributed to this debate. The Superannuation Legislation Amendment (Trustee Governance) Bill 2015 will amend the Superannuation Industry (Supervision) Act 1993 to align governance and superannuation more closely with the corporate governance principles applicable to ASX-listed companies.

This will increase the level of independence in the management of superannuation funds and ensure that directors with the best experience and expertise are represented on superannuation trustee boards, enhancing decision making and producing better outcomes for members, whilst minimising the costs to the superannuation industry.

The bill fulfils an election commitment of this government. As a result of this bill, the governance of super fund boards will move from an outdated model that has applied since 1993 to an international-best-practice model whereby at least one-third of directors are independent. Our key objective is to have the best people governing the retirement savings of Australians.

Superannuation balances at over $2 trillion now represent, after the family home, the biggest part of Australian households' net assets, accounting for around 27 per cent of Australian household net wealth. This amount is only going to increase, and by 2040 the size of Australian household superannuation overall balances is estimated to reach around $9 trillion.

Superannuation is a key pillar supporting the retirement incomes of Australian workers. Superannuation represents a long-term investment and, in general, employees cannot access their funds until retirement. Apart from self-managed super funds, Australians rely on others to manage these balances. Only governance arrangements that are international best practice can be appropriate for the management of monies that are paid in a compulsory manner, concessionally taxed, greatly depended upon and invested for long periods of time.
There has been some suggestion from those opposite that there is no reason to change. However, international-best-practice governance involves the presence of independent directors on boards. Independent board members bring different skills and experience, and different expertise. They hold other directors accountable for their conduct, particularly in relation to conflicts of interest. APRA, the prudential regulator of the Australian financial services industry, has a mandate to mitigate systemic risk to the financial sector. One way it does this is by requiring the boards of banking and insurance companies to have a majority of independent directors, as independence helps to ensure that decisions are made in the best interests of the depositors or policyholders.

In APRA's words—in fact, from a speech given just this morning—there is more on the reasons for change:

APRA's long-held view is that independent directors play a very important, positive role on boards … APRA's experience, over many years and across all our industries, is that having at least some independent directors on boards supports sound governance outcomes. Independent directors broaden the skills and capabilities that can be brought to the board table, and improve decision-making by bringing an objective perspective to issues the board considers. They are also well placed to hold other directors accountable for their conduct, particularly in relation to conflicts of interest.

Under ASX corporate governance principles, shareholders of listed companies benefit from governance arrangements with independent directors. For those opposite who are still looking for a reason to change, I remind them that both the Cooper Review into Superannuation in 2010, which was commissioned by the previous Labor government, and the more recent Financial System Inquiry into the financial system in 2014, which was released today with the government's response to the recommendations, concluded that superannuation fund members would benefit from having a greater number of independent directors on fund boards.

This bill will protect the interests of all members of APRA regulated superannuation funds including members of corporate, industry, public sector and retail funds. It will bring the governance arrangements in line with international best practice and require independent directors on their boards. The bill will help ensure that decisions are made in the best interests of members and not in the best interests of others. While the bill will require super fund boards to have a minimum of one-third independent directors and an independent chair on their board, boards will be able to choose to have the remaining two-thirds of their directors split between member and employer representatives if they consider it appropriate.

Despite what those opposite say, the government is in no way preventing funds from enshrining equal representation in their constitutions. Beyond a minimum of one-third independent directors, it is appropriate to leave it to boards to structure themselves in a manner they believe will best serve their members' interests. The existing definition of 'independent' is being replaced because it currently relates only to whether a person is independent of the members and the employers of the fund and does not cover any other relationship. The new definition will look at ownership or structural arrangements relating to the RSE licence as well as the relationship an RSE licensee might have in determining independence. In addition, APRA will be able to determine whether someone is independent or not based on whether they have the ability to exercise independent judgement. This will allow APRA to respond to situations where a person's circumstances and his or her capacity to exercise independent judgement are not clear; for example, where somebody does not meet the technical definition of independence but they have the ability to act independently.
APRA’s determinations are reviewable so someone affected by the decision will be able to ask APRA to reconsider as well as seek a review by the Administrative Appeals Tribunal. This type of power is consistent with other regulators’ powers; for example, ASIC can make a declaration that something is not a financial product. There will be a three-year transition period for existing trustees commencing when the legislation receives royal assent.

In addition, the bill will amend the governance of Australian government superannuation schemes at 2011 to restructure the trustee board for the Australian government’s main civilian and military superannuation schemes, the Commonwealth Superannuation Corporation, to comply with the new governance requirements by the end of the transition period. The CFC board will comprise a majority of independent directors and the board will be reduced from 11 to nine directors to better align with the principles of governance best practice.

I thank all of those people who have been involved in the various exhaustive consultation processes of these reforms and I commend the bill to the House.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Mitchell): The question is that this bill be now read a second time.

The House divided. [17:23]

(The Deputy Speaker—Mr Mitchell)

Ayes ..................... 76
Noes ..................... 53
Majority .................. 23

AYES

Alexander, JG  
Billson, BF  
Briggs, JE  
Broadbent, RE  
Buchholz, S  
Christensen, GR  
Cobb, JK  
Coulton, M (teller)  
Entsch, WG  
Frydenberg, JA  
Gillespie, DA  
Griggs, NL  
Hastie, AW  
Henderson, SM  
Hogan, KJ  
Hutchinson, ER  
Jensen, DG  
Joyce, BT  
Kelly, C  
Landry, ML  
Ley, SP  
Marino, NB  
McCormack, MF  
McNamara, KJ  
O’Dowd, KD  
Pasin, A  
Porter, CC  
Price, ML

Baldwin, RC  
Bishop, BK  
Broad, AJ  
Brough, MT  
Chester, D  
Ciobo, SM  
Coleman, DB  
Dutton, PC  
Fletcher, PW  
Gambharo, T  
Goodenough, IR  
Hartsuyker, L  
Hawke, AG  
Hendy, PW  
Howarth, LR  
Irons, SJ  
Jones, ET  
Keenan, M  
Laming, A  
Laundy, C  
Macfarlane, IE  
Matheson, RG  
McGowan, C  
Nikolic, AA  
O’Dwyer, KM  
Pitt, KJ  
Prentice, J  
Pyne, CM
AYES
Ramsey, RE
Roy, WB
Simpkins, LXL
Stone, SN
Sukkar, MS
Tehan, DT
Varvaris, N
Whiteley, BD (teller)
Williams, MP
Wood, JP

Robert, SR
Scott, FM
Southcott, AJ
Sudmalis, AE
Taylor, AJ
Van Manen, AJ
Vasta, RX
Wicks, LE
Wilson, RJ
Wyatt, KG

NOES
Albanese, AN
Bird, SL
Brodmann, G
Burke, AS
Butler, TM
Chalmers, JE
Chesters, LM
Claydon, SC
Danby, M
Elliot, MJ
Feeley, D
Fitzgibbon, JA
Gray, G
Hall, JG (teller)
Husic, EN
Katter, RC
Leigh, AK
MacTiernan, AJGC
O'Connor, BPJ
Owens, J
Perrett, GD
Ripoll, BF
Rowland, MA
Snowdon, WE
Thomson, KJ
Watts, TG
Zappia, A

Bandt, AP
Bowen, CE
Burke, AE
Byrne, AM
Champion, ND
Clare, JD
Conroy, PM
Dreyfus, MA
Ellis, KM
Ferguson, LDT
Giles, AJ
Griffin, AP
Hayes, CP
Jones, SP
King, CF
Macklin, JL
Marles, RD
O'Neil, CE
Parke, M
Plibersek, TJ
Rishworth, AL
Ryan, JC (teller)
Thistlethwaite, MJ
Vamvakinoou, M
Wilkie, AD

Question agreed to.
Bill read a second time.

Third Reading

Ms O'DWYER (Higgins—Minister for Small Business and Assistant Treasurer) (17:29): by leave—I move:
That this bill be now read a third time.
Question agreed to.
Bill read a third time.
BUSINESS
Rearrangement

Ms O'DWYER (Higgins—Minister for Small Business and Assistant Treasurer) (17:29):
I move:
That business intervening before order of the day No. 28, government business, be postponed until a later hour this day.
Question agreed to.

BILLS
Treasury Legislation Amendment (Small Business and Unfair Contract Terms) Bill 2015
Consideration of Senate Message

Bill returned from the Senate with amendments.
Ordered that the amendments be considered immediately.

Senate Amendments—
(1) Clause 2, page 2 (table item 2), omit "6 months", substitute "12 months".
(2) Schedule 1, item 8, page 4 (line 7), omit "$100,000", substitute "$300,000".
(3) Schedule 1, item 8, page 4 (line 10), omit "$250,000", substitute "$1,000,000".
(4) Schedule 1, item 31, page 9 (line 21), omit "$100,000", substitute "$300,000".
(5) Schedule 1, item 31, page 9 (line 24), omit "$250,000", substitute "$1,000,000".

Ms O'DWYER (Higgins—Minister for Small Business and Assistant Treasurer) (17:30):
I move:
That the amendments be agreed to.

Ms ROWLAND (Greenway) (17:30): I rise to support the Treasury Legislation Amendment (Small Business and Unfair Contract Terms) Bill 2015 and the amendments that have come back. I note that this has arisen today, whereas the minister issued a media release on the government supporting these provisions a week ago. I am glad we have come here today, a week after the media release was issued, and we are actually dealing with this legislation.

I point out a couple of provisions that are relevant to this matter. Firstly, I note the minister's statement on 13 October included:
The Government has worked with crossbenchers and stakeholders to secure the support of this change to enable protections for small businesses throughout Australia.

The reality is that the government voted against these amendments in the Senate. I am very happy that they have accepted the amendments and they are going to be put through, but it is imperative to recognise that, on some of the key provisions relating to matters such as the threshold levels to which the protections apply, the government voted against them.

I note that the minister liked to point out, in her answer to a question last week, the comments by COSBOA, for example, heralding this bill. I will point out an alternative point of view on that matter. It is a very intelligent one put by Robert Gottliebsen on 14 September
in his column. It relates to exactly this issue and is the exact opposite analysis to that provided by the minister on this point. It is instructive to note that Mr Gottliebsen said:

Today in the Senate—

that is, on 14 September—

the ALP and the Greens signalled they would target a big section of small business at the next election. They gave the signal, with the support of most of the independents, by making a significant amendment to the government’s fair contracts legislation.

The government via Senator Mathias Cormann has signalled the Coalition will not support the amendment. In effect, Cormann has turned the government's back on a million people in the small business community.

The history of the Coalition’s betrayal of small business in Australia is very sorry one. They are not my words, but I will happily echo them; they are the words of Robert Gottliebsen. He talks about the 'promise to extend the fair contracts protections available to consumers into the arena for small businesses'. He says:

In theory, it kept the promise by introducing fair contracts legislation.

But under pressure from the public service, big corporations and franchisers ... it capped the limit to contracts involving less than $100,000. That $100,000 meant almost no small or independent contractors will be covered by the legislation. It was a total breach of promise under the guise of honouring the undertaking.

The ALP, the Greens and most independents amended legislation in the Senate today, lifting the cap to $300,000. A cap at that level will cover most IT, engineering and other independent contractors, including those in the public service. It will also cover small owner-drivers.

I end with this quote from Mr Gottliebsen:

Tony Abbott might have the China free-trade agreement to batter the ALP with but, in the end, the Government’s complete small business betrayal at the behest of its big supporters will be a very valuable weapon in the election.

I raise these matters because they are indeed relevant to some of the issues that have been raised in the financial services inquiry response that has come out today. I note, for example, the amendments that were put forward by the Greens—I give credit where it is due—to increase the threshold from $100,000 to $300,000 for contracts up to 12 months long and from $300,000 to $1 million for contracts greater than 12 months.

I will quote Peter Strong, who is the person whom the minister quoted the other day. Peter Strong, the chief executive of the Council of Small Business Australia, said the government's support for increased thresholds is 'very encouraging'. I quote from him again. He said:

It was a surprise given it was an amendment from the Greens supported by Labor ...

It is important to recognise that, while we have these provisions—which the ALP will support here, just as we supported them in the other place—the issues were pointed out when they originally came up for discussion in the Senate.

I look to the comments of Senator Kim Carr on 14 September. He rightly points out:

Labor senators have received many representations from the business community who have noted their strong concerns about these costs—

he talks about particular costs involved—
along with other substantive issues ... They include ... the $100,000 up-front price threshold for a small
business contract ...

He ends by saying:

These are matters that we believe the government has an obligation to take on board.

(Time expired)

Ms O’Dwyer (Higgins—Minister for Small Business and Assistant Treasurer) (17:35):

While I was listening to the contribution by the member for Greenway, it must be the longest
agreement with the government going. We have stood in this place and said that we were not
only prepared to legislate unfair contract provisions for small business, extending the
consumer protection laws to small businesses, but were also prepared, very happily, to listen
to the crossbenchers and to listen and discuss the thresholds with those in other parties. This is
a government that is committed to listening but also doing, which is why we are bringing
forward this legislation and passing it here today.

The member opposite is part of an opposition that had six years in government to do
something for small business and actually put forward the legislation that we will be passing
in this place today. Unfortunately, they did not do that, but we have. I am happy to stand here
on this side of the table to commend the legislation and commend the amendments to ensure
that the more than two million small businesses in this country will be able to take advantage
of the provisions that we are making available to them today.

Ms Rowland (Greenway) (17:37): The minister might like to talk about these unfair
contract provisions and try to assert that Labor did nothing when in government, when in fact
it was Labor that introduced a national law to regulate unfair contract terms between
individuals, consumers and businesses. This was introduced in 2010 under the reforms
underpinning the Australian Consumer Law. While the government might like to
conveniently forget that, they also might like to conveniently forget some of the words of
Senator Cormann in this very debate. These are his words:

We have said that a certain category of transactions—transactions of up to $100,000 in value for
contracts of 12 months or less or up to $250,000 in value for a period of more than 12 months—will
come within the scope of this extended protection, which historically has been available only to
consumers. We are making that available to small business, consistent with the commitments we made
in the lead-up to the last election.

... ... ...

In the end, when you put in this additional regulatory mechanism, you have to draw the line
somewhere. We have made judgement, based on consultation, having considered all of the outcomes of
that consultation very carefully. ... All I would say is that the government is very confident that we
have got this right.

Then they ended up voting against these provisions. They come in here today and say that
they will support the very things they voted against in the other place.

I am very happy that these provisions are going ahead. They cannot figure out what they
are doing. They are still divided over myriad issues to do with big business versus small
business and franchises versus employers. Bring back Bruce to give some certainty to this
portfolio!

CHAMBER
I will point out that we have a government that does not quite know what it is doing here. We know they are having an internal argument about some very key issues that are a very significant concern to the sector, including matters such as reform of competition law. We will let them have all those bun fights internally. But, since the minister rose to speak on this issue and stated they have gotten this right, it is a sorry timeline that has led to this over the last couple of months. I look, for example, at some of the comments of the independent contractors and their peak group, the ICA. It points to the hypocrisy of this government, which likes to talk big on small business but, when it comes to actually making decisions that are in the interest of small businesses, but they have to be dragged kicking and screaming by Labor, the Greens and a number of crossbenchers. I am happy for them to be dragged to this point, but we need to get some facts on the table. Have a look at the views of the independent contractors on 26 August. The ICA said:

Since 2010 ICA has campaigned hard for the unfair contract protections available to consumers to be extended to small business people. The Abbott Coalition promised to do this when in opposition and again repeated the promise on winning government.

The Bill is now in Parliament. Yet we’re opposing it! It’s been sent to a Senate Committee for review. Here’s our detailed submission to the Committee.

Our grounds for opposition?
This part is important:

There’s been a simple ‘trick’ inserted into the Bill: the protections against unfair contracts are limited to contracts under $100,000.

This theme of sneaky behaviour and trickery is one that permeates these comments by the independent contractors. On 2 September they stated:

Politics works like this. You make big election promises. Then, once in government, appear to deliver the promises. But in the detail kill off the promise. The suckers in the electorate won’t notice!

That’s the situation with the Coalition’s key promise to small business people to extend consumer unfair contract protections to them. We expressed our shock last week. They quote a commentator who is not usually kind to our ilk of politics, Grace Collier. These are Grace Collier’s words in *The Weekend Australian*:

This bill was supposed to extend some basic rules about commercial contracts (for small businesses) … the government put an exemption in, which pretty much exempts everyone and makes the bill meaningless.

Where has the minister gone? Speaking of trickery, she has left the chamber.

Mr Mitchell: We lost Bruce, too.

Ms Rowland: We lost two of them. I hope the member for Mitchell can step up. The ICA website quotes:

A lynch pin of Tony Abbott’s 2013 election campaign was that he would introduce legislation to make standard, non-negotiated contracts fair to the small business person. But his government … is putting through legislation that protects absolutely no one.

It goes on— *(Time expired)*

Mr Craig Kelly (Hughes) (17:42): It was very interesting listening to the member for Greenway, with her new-found enthusiasm for small business. I would ask the member for Greenway: where were you during the last six years of the Labor government when no less
than 500,000 jobs were lost in the small business sector? Where was the member for
Greenway then? And where was the member for Greenway's new-found enthusiasm for the
unfair contracts legislation applying to small business?

Member for Greenway, I can well remember that that was actually a promise of the Labor
Party, back in 2007. I remember what happened in the chamber here. Although I was not here
I was following it very closely from home. I can remember that the now member for
McMahon was rolled by one Craig Emerson. They deceived small business. They promised
that they would introduce the unfair contracts legislation and extend it to small business, but
when they got into office they rolled back on that promise and never did it.

This government has achieved a lot. I would rate the achievement of this unfair contracts
legislation as perhaps the third most important achievement of this coalition government,
behind stopping the boats and repealing the carbon tax. The genesis of this goes back to
1997—to the 'finding a balance' inquiry held under the Howard government, where it was
recommended that unfair contracts legislation be brought in. For all the great things the
Howard government did, unfortunately the recommendation from that committee was watered
down and, instead, they extended it only to unconscionable conduct. Over those 17 long years
we have seen the unconscionable conduct provision in our Trade Practices Act prove
inadequate.

It is important that we give small business in this country, the entrepreneurs of this country,
the job creators of this country and the innovators of this country protection if they know they
are going to put their own capital on the line, as small businesses normally do. If they go into
a market and are exposed to a larger company that is misusing its market power against them
and is trying to extort them for unfair rebates, unfair discounts, unfair trading terms, unfair
common-law penalties or changing contract terms, we will now have legislation in this
country that prohibits that. To those people in small business, this is one of the greatest
achievements of this coalition government, something we should be very proud of.

Often we criticise the process of this government, but, in this case, we have to give credit
where credit is due. We should give credit to the Senate for raising the threshold to which
these contracts apply to $300,000. Personally, I believe that there should have been no
threshold limit because this is not about the value of the contract; it is about the imbalance of
market power that enables those unfair terms to be put into a contract where that small
business, because of the market power, does not have the ability to negotiate fully. Our
contract common law has long recognised this. For over a century, we have had provisions
against unfair penalties. Where a contract term implies a liquidated damages term and that
liquidated damages term is greater than the genuine pre-estimate of the loss, our common law
allows our courts to rule that term out and deem it unfair. That common-law provision has no
threshold of $300,000.

I welcome the amendments from the Senate. I welcome what it has done. I welcome the
way the parliamentary processes have worked. I thank the crossbenchers, who went forward
and enabled the raising of that threshold from $100,000 to $300,000. Those crossbenchers
should be congratulated on their efforts. Ultimately, it is about the imbalance of power. In our
country, we have so many markets that are overly concentrated, where one or two large
players have immense bargaining power. This is exactly the type of legislation that we need
for our small-business community.
Mr BANDT (Melbourne) (17:47): The Greens secured amendments in the Senate to give the Treasury Legislation Amendment (Small Business and Unfair Contract Terms) Bill 2015 some teeth. It is very easy to talk big on business, but then what we find most of the time with the government is that they talk big on small business and then they vote for big business. We have seen it happen time and time again. In the same way that the Nationals come in here and talk up the country and then vote with their city counterparts, the Liberals come in here and talk up small business and then vote for big business.

The bill before the Senate was trying to sneak an election promise under the radar and turn it into a Clayton’s election promise. The government was called on it by people like Senator Peter Whish-Wilson, who is a small-business owner and understands what this bill would have meant. He moved amendments in the Senate on behalf of the Greens and we managed to give this bill some teeth and put a meaningful threshold into this bill. What the government wanted to do was be seen to be delivering on an election commitment but do it in a way that would have meant not that many businesses would get the protections from these unfair contract terms. So we moved amendments to lift the threshold and we are very pleased for the Greens to have delivered a win for small business in this bill.

I hope that this House accepts the amendments and gives this bill some teeth so that the unfair contract provisions apply to a greater range of small businesses who need them. Everyone knows that, when it comes to small businesses dealing with big businesses, there is very often an imbalance—an imbalance that, in many ways, is similar to that which workers face when they try to deal with their employers. Small businesses often need some protection when dealing with those larger businesses. We have been able here to deliver some of that protection. Thanks to the Greens, we managed to give this bill the improvements that it needed so that protections will now be available to a range of small businesses across this country.

There is much more that needs to be done because, as I said, the government often talk big on small business but then vote with big business. We have seen it with this bill, which they tried to get through until we called them on it in the Senate and the Greens managed to improve the bill. We saw it when they ran away from the effects test. You talk to many small businesses around this country and they will tell you about the significant power that the supermarkets have. The government have made some noises to people to say, ‘We might do something in that area,’ but then, when they get the opportunity to do it, they squib on it.

I hope that these amendments are accepted. I hope the government say, ‘We are prepared to work with those in the Senate,’ who do a bit more than just talk rhetorically about small business but know what it would mean to have some meaningful protections for small business. I hope that this is the beginning of the government saying, ‘Maybe there are a range of other protections that we can extend to small businesses as well. Maybe we need to take off the veil of always just supporting big business and actually support small business as well.’ This is a set of amendments that the Greens are very proud of and I urge the House in the strongest possible terms to agree to the Senate amendments.

Ms ROWLAND (Greenway) (17:50): In summing up, I note the comments from the member for Melbourne. Labor will be supporting these amendments—and, as I said, I give credit where it is due. I also give credit where it is due to the member for Hughes, who is at least in the chamber for the debate, although I disagree with him on matters such as the effect
on unemployment in this country—we have never seen higher levels of unemployment than we do today in Australia—and his arguments about the unfair contract terms in the Australian Consumer Law. Let's remember that these were provisions that Labor brought in. Labor brought in the definition of where contract terms become unfair. It is exactly as he was saying about a significant imbalance in parties' rights and obligations, where provisions were not reasonably necessary to protect the legitimate interests of the party who would be advantaged by that provision and where it would cause detriment, whether financial or not, to a party who applied or relied on these provisions. These were all Labor amendments that were brought in for the reason of protecting small businesses.

As I said, I will give credit to the member for Hughes. I went through his speech in this place from 17 August. I note that he talks about the threshold—firstly, the business can only have fewer than 20 persons by headcount, and the consideration that the contract has disclosed must not exceed $100,000, or $250,000 if it is more than one year in duration. He did make the point that these are debatable provisions, and he repeated some of the words he said just then. I also would concur with him on the relative ineffectiveness compared with the promise of the provisions in relation to unconscionable conduct in small business that arose out of the Bruce Baird review, which went on for some time. The provisions that were enacted then, under the Howard government, were touted as having the ability to solve many of the problems that this very bill is seeking to address now.

It is quite clear that those provisions either were not adequate or, as I have argued previously, have not had the opportunity to be litigated to a significant extent to determine whether they are effective in practice. So, I will give the member for Hughes credit where it is due. What I will not give credit for is some of the misinformation that has been coming out—and, again, the independent contractors have used words such as 'trickery'. In this quote from 11 September, in relation to this very issue, Independent Contractors Australia noted:

The Abbott government is engaging in the worst of political double-dealing against the interests of Australians—with their refusal to budge on the issue of the thresholds and the amendments. ICA said further, on 17 September, in terms of the contract protection threshold limits being increased to $300,000:

In fact, its (Senate) amendment to move the contract protection limit to $300,000 was based on a pragmatic assessment (by the Senate) of what the government might accept. We wanted no limit, so we didn’t get what we wanted, but the Senate outcome is a big improvement.

Amazingly, the government rejected this outright.

As I said, Labor supports these provisions. It is a bit rich for the small business minister to come in here and talk—and also put out a media release a week ago—about how this government had delivered for small business. They did have to come here, after voting against these provisions in the Senate. We are pleased that these amendments are coming back here and will be supported—it looks like they will be supported unanimously—because ultimately this is about addressing not only the asymmetry of information but also the power imbalance that inherently exists between big interests and small interests. We know that a majority of Australian small businesses are sole traders. They do not have any employees. These are people who rely on their own judgements, on their own assessments, and in many cases cannot afford the complex legal advice that is so readily available to big business. So, I
endorse the amendments that have come before us here, and Labor will, as I said, be voting in support.

Mr CRAIG KELLY (Hughes) (17:55): This is a very, very rare day, because I actually find myself in agreement with the member for Melbourne that the threshold should be increased. Who knows: the member for Melbourne and I might find a piece of artwork somewhere in Parliament House that we agree is something we both enjoy!

But to return to some of the points I raised before—that the genesis of the Treasury Legislation Amendment (Small Business and Unfair Contract Terms) Bill 2015 goes back to the Finding a balance inquiry back in 1997—I would like to read some of the notes of that report. It said:

Unfair conduct by big business towards small business is one such major concern. Indeed, it has been a matter of grave concern for many years. Not only has such conduct the potential to impact heavily on the economic health of the small business sector, and on the allocation of resources generally, it can also involve heavy social costs. Consequently, the Minister for Small Business, the Hon. Geoff Prosser MP, asked the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology to investigate and report on business conduct on 26 June 1996.

—almost 20 years ago—

After a detailed investigation the Committee has concluded that concerns about unfair business conduct towards small business are justified, and should be addressed urgently.

In fact, the very first recommendation of that inquiry—recommendation 1.1—back in 1997 was:

The Committee recommends that the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission be proactive in promoting compliance with the proposed new unfair conduct provisions of the Trade Practices Act 1974.

That was 18 years ago. Today, this coalition government delivers on that promise and has achieved that goal for small business—something that was 18 years in the making.

Robert Gottliebsen, the business commentator, has said of this provision:

It was probably the best employment generating measure that we have seen out of Canberra in a decade or so.

And he is correct, because it is small business that creates the new jobs in this economy. It always has and it always will. If we are going to encourage entrepreneurial activity in this country, we have to say that we are going to stand behind those small business people and not allow them to be exposed to the misuse of market power and the imposition of unfair contract terms by large companies. And that is what we are doing in this parliament today.

It has been refreshing to hear the new Labor small business shadow minister talk about her support for small business, although I am looking to see what the Labor Party proposes to do about section 46 of the Trade Practices Act. Will they further stand with the small business community? Will they work with the government and introduce provisions on anticompetitive price discrimination, to strengthen those provisions we have on predatory pricing, to give the ACCC the resources and encouragement to go after them? I would hope that the new shadow small business minister does so, but I do have a concern that this may not happen.
There was a book written a few years ago called The Latham Diaries, in which former Labor leader Mark Latham sets out why we could never expect the Labor Party to join hands with us and work on section 46. Here is a quote from The Latham Diaries:

Monday, 3 November (2003)

My submission to Shadow Ministry this morning on competition policy – to beef up the Trade Practices Act—
This is Mark Latham speaking about himself—
met with surprising resistance from Tanner—

Lindsay Tanner.
How’s this from the intellectual spearhead of the Labor left? He says we shouldn’t touch the supermarket duopoly between Coles and Woolworths because they have an agreement with the SDA, the Shoppies. This is the bloke who made his name in the 1980s by winning control of the Clerk’s Union of Victoria from the Groupers. Now he’s defending their sweetheart deal with the bosses.”

Latham goes on in his notes in his book:
… The SDA had an agreement with Coles and Woolworths to maintain unionised workplaces. Inside the ALP the Shoppies have lobbied to protect the market share of Coles and Woolworths against competition from independent grocers and retailers.

This is an extract from page 241 from The Latham Diaries. (Time expired)

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Irons): The question is that the amendments be agreed to.
Question agreed to.

Social Services Legislation Amendment (No Jab, No Pay) Bill 2015

Second Reading

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

Ms MACKLIN (Jagajaga) (18:00): I rise to support the Social Services Legislation Amendment (No Jab, No Pay) Bill 2015. This bill introduces a 2015 budget measure that will ensure children fully meet immunisation requirements before their families can access childcare benefit, childcare rebate or the family tax benefit part A supplement. The commencement date for this measure is 1 January 2016. This builds on important changes to family payments that were made by Labor in government that were designed to lift immunisation rates. We linked the family tax benefit end-of-year supplements to immunisations. Ahead of the 2013 election, Labor committed to further tighten immunisation requirements within the family payments system.

Let me say very clearly, Labor strongly believe in vaccinations. And we are pleased that the government is now taking this initiative. Labor are committed to strengthening immunisation rates so all Australian children have the best chance of growing up strong and healthy. Vaccines are arguably one of the most successful public health policies in human history. The mere fact that we can talk about terrible diseases like polio and smallpox as if they are some artefact of history is a testament to the success of vaccines.

According to the World Health Organization, immunisation averts an estimated 2.5 million child deaths a year. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimate that vaccinations will prevent more than 21 million hospitalisations and more than 730,000 deaths among
children born in the last 20 years in the United States alone. Of course, there are risks of side effects in some instances, but the science is very clear. The benefits far outweigh the risks. Vaccines work. It means less disease. It means healthier people in our communities. It means longer life expectancy for our citizens.

Higher rates of immunisations are vital for infant children who are too young to be vaccinated as well as for the elderly and sick who may be too frail to be vaccinated. High rates of immunisations are also vital to people for whom a vaccine may not produce a strong immune response. These vulnerable people in our community are generally protected from preventable diseases by what is called 'herd immunity'. This is where a large vaccinated population protect those who are weak or susceptible to disease. That is why it is so important that we maintain and encourage high rates of immunisation across the country. Just to give one example.

In December 2014, some 117 people caught measles in an outbreak that was traced back to Disney theme parks in Orange County in California. Fortunately, no-one died in the outbreak. But it could have been much worse. Measles is a dangerous and highly contagious disease. According to the World Health Organization in 1980, before widespread vaccination, measles caused an estimated 2.6 million deaths each year. In 2013, the number of deaths from measles had fallen to around 145,000. The evidence is compelling. Vaccines save lives. Falling immunisations rates increase the risk of outbreaks of preventable diseases and threaten the health of the most vulnerable members of our communities. Our responsibility as policymakers is to support policies that are designed to lift immunisation rates in the community.

There are some important exceptions to the No Jab, No Pay policy that I think are worth mentioning and that I hope allay concerns held by some members of the community. I know that many MPs and senators have been contacted by people in the community on this bill. Some people have raised legitimate questions around side effects and for those people I want to detail some of the exceptions that people may be interested in. Exceptions to the policy will apply for valid medical reasons, such as when a general practitioner has certified that vaccinating the child would be medically contra-indicated or that vaccination is unnecessary because the child has natural immunity from having contracted the disease in question.

Families with children participating in an approved vaccine study will be taken to meet the immunisation requirements for the duration of the study and similar rules will apply where a vaccine is temporarily unavailable. The requirements will also be met if a recognised immunisation provider certifies that the child has an equivalent level of immunisation through an overseas vaccination program.

Lastly, the secretary of the department will be able to determine that a child meets the immunisation requirements after considering any decision-making principles set out in a legislative instrument made by the minister. Importantly, immunisation requirements will also be extended to include children of all ages. At present, a child's vaccination status is only checked at ages one, two and five for the family tax benefit part A supplement, and up to age seven for the childcare payments.

Labor welcomes the commitment from religious leaders and organisations to support parents to ensure that children are vaccinated. Labor does think that parents should have the
final say in making health decisions about their child but, when it comes to immunisation, Labor believes there is a strong public interest in ensuring children are immunised.

We note that the percentage of children under seven years of age with a conscientious objection recorded on the Australian Childhood Immunisation Register rose from 0.23 per cent in December 1999 to 1.77 per cent in December 2014. Removing non-medical exemptions will make clear the importance of immunisation and protecting public health. I want to emphasise that the choice made by families not to immunise their children is not supported by public policy or medical research. We want to see these changes implemented in a way that increases immunisation rates among vulnerable children and we ask that the government work with the childcare sector to ensure that children are not inadvertently excluded from early education and care.

Labor recognises the important work that Medicare Locals were doing to increase immunisation rates in local communities and welcomes the support to ensure the new Primary Health Network will continue this work. We also know that in many cases missed vaccinations are due to oversight rather than a specific objection. The establishment of a national immunisation register of school based vaccinations will assist all parents to do the right thing by their children. We ask the government work with the childcare sector to ensure children, as I said, are not inadvertently excluded.

We would also like to see a greater emphasis on public awareness campaigns. As our collective memory of disease outbreaks recedes in this country, it is important we remind people of the vital link between immunisations and disease prevention. In particular, we would like to see public awareness campaigns targeted at communities that we know have lower rates of immunisation—so-called refusal clusters. Labor also supports moves to explore a national immunisation register to enable adults to keep their vaccinations up to date.

This policy has been proposed by the family of Riley Hughes, the Perth baby tragically killed by whooping cough in March this year at just 32 days old. Riley's parents, Greg and Catherine Hughes, have urged others to get their children vaccinated. Greg and Catherine have also raised more than $71,000 for the Princess Margaret Hospital Foundation, which is far more than the $32,000 they had hoped to raise. Funds raised will go towards fighting terrible childhood diseases, such as whooping cough. I want to acknowledge tonight Greg and Catherine's brave advocacy.

This bill is not aimed at punishing people or denying people choice. It is all about increasing immunisation rates, preventing disease and, above all, saving lives. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr WHITELEY (Braddon—Government Whip) (18:11): I am not used to the member for Jagajaga finishing up early, but I thank her for her contribution. I rise this afternoon to speak on the Social Services Legislation Amendment (No Jab, No Pay) Bill 2015. It is a bill which delivers on our undertaking in the budget to enact measures to ensure our nation's children receive necessary immunisation against disease. From 1 January 2016, this bill will ensure children fully meet immunisation requirements before their families can access the childcare benefit, the childcare rebate or the family tax benefit part A supplement. This government believes in rights, but it also believes in responsibilities. This government makes no apologies for enacting a policy that will deliver better outcomes for our children, especially when it comes to ensuring their health.
Australian childhood vaccination rates are over 90 per cent across the ages of one, two and five. This is an excellent rate of vaccination and is part of the reason the health of our children is so good compared to countries across the world. While vaccination rates in Australia have increased since the Childhood Immunisation Register was established back in 1996, vaccine objection rates for children under the age of seven have also steadily increased. There has been a marked increase with the rise of social media and the impact of unfounded claims around vaccination of children. It is estimated that there are 39,000 children under seven years of age—1.7 per cent—who are not vaccinated because their parents are vaccine objectors. It is simply not right that these children are put at risk due to misinformation in this space.

This government are very concerned at the rate of vaccine objection and the risk it poses to the broader community. In the budget earlier this year we made the commitment to take steps to rectify this situation and we are delivering on that commitment today in this bill. The coalition government are strengthening immunisation requirements for children. From 1 January 2016, 'conscientious objection' will be removed as an exemption category for childcare payments—both the childcare benefit and the childcare rebate—and the FTB part A end-of-year supplement. Immunisation requirements for payment of the FTB part A end-of-year supplement will be extended to include children over 12 months old. From next year, no vaccination objections will be accepted in order to receive the FTB part A end-of-year supplement and childcare subsidies.

Exceptions to the policy will apply only for valid medical reasons, such as when a general practitioner has certified that vaccinating a child would be medically contraindicated or that vaccination is unnecessary because a child has natural immunity from having contracted the disease in question. Families with children participating in an approved vaccine study will be taken to have met the immunisation requirements for the duration of the study, and similar rules will apply where a vaccine is temporarily unavailable. The requirements will also be met if a recognised immunisation provider certifies that the child has an equivalent level of immunisation through an overseas vaccination program.

The coalition government takes the health of our children seriously. There are 39,000 Australian children under the age of seven who are not vaccinated at this very moment, because their parents are vaccination objectors. That is twice the population of the city of Burnie in my electorate of Braddon. Twice the population are, at this moment, at risk of contracting a serious disease. This government does not accept this state of affairs and is taking steps to rectify this situation.

The No Jab, No Pay policy that this bill seeks to implement will secure the health of our nation's children. The choice made by families not to immunise their children is not supported by public policy or medical research. It is simply fanciful to suggest that vaccination of our youngest Australians harms them in the way that many say it does. Australian children receive some of the best medical care in the world, and this government treats the health of our children as a priority. This is a public health issue. The government has determined that parents still have the right to be vaccination objectors, but their decision will not be endorsed by the provision of taxpayer funds in the form of child care benefit, child care rebate or the family tax benefit part A end-of-year supplement.

This government makes no apologies for enacting incentives to immunise our children, and that is what it is doing in this bill. I am proud to be part of a government which has the
intestinal fortitude to take a hard stance against vaccination objectors who are risking the health and wellbeing of not only their own children but all children. I stand behind the No Jab, No Pay bill and I urge all members to stand with me. I would just like to reiterate that 39,000 Australian children are currently at risk of contracting disease due to vaccination objection. I think this is an absolute shame and I think this is something that this bill is long overdue to address.

Under the current system, eligibility for child care benefit and family tax benefit is linked to immunisation requirements, where children aged under seven must be fully immunised or have a valid exemption. To oppose the No Jab, No Pay policy is to endorse the position of the vaccination objectors, and that is something that the government are unwilling to do. The government will maintain exemptions, which, as I said earlier, include on medical grounds and for approved religions. Through this bill, the coalition government are delivering better health outcomes for our nation's children. We are taking a hard stance and we are strongly resisting the baseless proposition that vaccines are causing harm in our society. The government stand with our doctors and our medical professionals. We stand for a better future for all Australians, and that is why we stand for a No Jab, No Pay policy.

I think it is appropriate to acknowledge the small number of my constituents who made representation to my office in objection to this proposed bill. I say to those people that I respect that they have a different view in relation to this matter and I do respect that they have an entitlement not only to voice that view but to actually live it out, if that is their choice. But as I explained to each of them, the government, on behalf of all Australians, is also responsible for good public policy and good public health policy that, in this case, means that you can, if you are an objector, maintain your objection, but you will no longer be entitled to taxpayer benefits.

I will say though that, as a part of those discussions, one particular suggestion that came to me from a constituent is, I think, very worthy of consideration. It is that it would not be unhelpful for us, as a country, across all our state jurisdictions, to have a national register of children who have a radical reaction to immunisation and to have GPs’ or specialist paediatricians’ documentation attached to such a register. I do not think that is an unreasonable request for those that still see that this policy as something that they cannot support. They have made the case that there are examples—they would suggest many examples—of children negatively reacting to the immunisation programs of this country. I am not a medical expert, and I am certainly was not in a position to argue the toss one way or another with my constituents, but I did feel that it was a reasonable and sensible suggestion that we, as a country, through our health professionals, should be able to track such negative reactions to any of the immunisation programs.

Once again, I commend this bill to the House and I thank those opposite for the support that they are also providing.

**Mr THISTLETHWAITE** (Kingsford Smith) (18:20): I speak in support of the Social Services Legislation Amendment (No Jab, No Pay) Bill 2015, which introduces a 2015 budget measure that necessitates that children fully meet immunisation requirements before their families can access child care benefit, child care rebate or the family tax benefit part A supplement under the provisions of this new legislation. Labor support the public health purpose behind this bill. In government, we made changes to family payments to lift
immunisation rates, including linking the family tax benefit end-of-year supplement to immunisation. Before the 2013 election, we made the commitment to make further changes that would continue the push to increase immunisation rates across Australia, and we are pleased the coalition government has responded to that push with this bill.

I understand that there is some controversy and a small number of parents who do object to immunisation and choose not to immunise their children because of fears surrounding the potential for adverse reactions. The best science that we have access to asserts that vaccination is the safest and most effective way to protect children from harmful diseases. If there is medical evidence of a child's adverse reaction to vaccination, then this bill, importantly, provides the opportunity for some exemption to these provisions based on that medical evidence and a propensity for allergy to immunisations into the future.

It is important that, despite those objections, the Australian government is committed to ensuring that every Australian child grows up healthy, happy and strong. We believe that parents have an obligation to provide support to ensure that that aim is met. A child is probably at their most vulnerable in those early years. They completely rely on their parents for their health and wellbeing. Vaccination is proven to be the most effective way to reduce the possibility of a child contracting an infectious disease, including a deadly infectious disease. So, from a public health perspective, there is strong interest in ensuring that every child is immunised.

In June of this year, the office of the Chief Scientist to the Australian government released a report detailing the benefits of vaccination. The report detailed that severe side effects from vaccinations are quite rare. The data collected suggested that there is a one in 100,000 to one in one million per cent chance of a child experiencing any harmful side effects as a result of a vaccination.

Through immunisation and the elimination of carriers to spread diseases, it is even possible to completely eradicate some diseases. This is how smallpox was eradicated, and we are almost there with the eradication of polio worldwide. I was at a breakfast this morning hosted by a number of NGOs that work in this space. The name of the campaign that is being undertaken to completely eradicate polio throughout the world is One Last Push. But the threat remains in respect of other communicable diseases, most notably measles and whooping cough, which continue to be relatively common and highly contagious. There is still a threat of measles returning to Australia, as was recently seen in the United States, with 644 cases recorded in 2014, despite the disease being declared eliminated from the USA 15 years ago.

There is a far greater risk that a child may contract a serious disease as a result of nonvaccination than there is of a child experiencing side effects due to vaccinations. Indeed, the World Health Organization estimates that vaccines prevent two million to three million deaths every year. Those figures are indisputable and too hard for any government to ignore.

I am assured of the safety and effectiveness of any vaccine used in Australia, as all vaccinations undergo a series of rigorous testing procedures before they become available. Moreover, scientists continue to develop easier and more effective vaccines to be administered. I have also done some consultations with local doctors in my community, and every single one of them assures me of the safety of vaccination and, more importantly, that vaccination is the most effective, the cheapest and, from a public health perspective, the
easiest way to ensure that we are reducing and, hopefully, eliminating the potential of children picking up communicable diseases, so that we can avoid severe injury and illness into the future.

I was pleased recently to speak in this chamber regarding a bill which was introduced last week, the Australian Immunisation Register Bill 2015. With the increasing number of vaccines now recommended for adolescents and adults in Australia—such as influenza, whooping cough for pregnant mothers, shingles for older Australians and HPV for adolescents and young adults—the National Immunisation Register is an idea whose time has come also.

I wish to congratulate and thank all of those people who have been campaigning for improvements in the rates of immunisation throughout the country and, importantly, for government to take a more active role in encouraging greater immunisation amongst children throughout the country. I think particularly of those parents who have lost dear children to communicable diseases that could be avoided if there were greater rates of immunisation and there were not as much spread of particular diseases. I am thinking of course of Catherine and Greg Hughes, the parents of baby Riley Hughes, who died of whooping cough in March this year before he could be vaccinated. They have been very strong and powerful advocates for the cause of vaccination. To have the harrowing experience of the death of your child and then to be able to come out and campaign for a particular cause is admirable, and I take my hat off to Catherine and Greg and their families and others like them who have been great advocates for this cause. It is quite admirable.

Labor also recognises the important work that Medicare Locals across the nation were doing to increase immunisation rates, achieving a rise from 70 to 72 per cent from 2012 to 2013 for girls aged 15, and I welcome the support that Primary Health Networks are giving to this task into the future.

Labor is generally supportive of this bill, largely because of the importance of the task of increasing immunisation rates in Australia. We also urge the government to go one step further and include in the yet-to-be-released framework for the Primary Health Networks the goal to continue the push to increase immunisation rates across Australia. Immunisation has been proved effective. The medical science, the medical expert advice, is that this is the most effective and efficient way to reduce the spread of communicable diseases across the country. Quite simply, immunisation saves lives, and any program in which the government encourages more Australians to be immunised, and particularly more parents to immunise their children, deserves our support, and that is why I am supporting this bill.

Mrs GRIGGS (Solomon) (18:29): It is not very often the member for Kingsford Smith and I agree on things, but we do agree that immunisation saves lives, and any program that saves lives is important. When my son and his wife had a baby, 16 months ago, we were not allowed to spend a lot of time with our new granddaughter until we had had our whooping-cough vaccinations topped up.

There has been a lot of discussion about this particular legislation, this Social Services Legislation Amendment (No Jab, No Pay) Bill 2015, in my electorate. A minority of people are against it. I am pro-vaccination. The member for Kingsford Smith and I were involved in an immunisation program when we went to Laos. We saw the benefits of that; it was interesting how the country has embraced immunisation and is really seeing its benefits.
The purpose of this legislation is not to save money, it is to save lives and stop the spread of preventable communicable diseases. If this bill passes—and it looks like it may, because Labor are supporting it—it will make an amendment to the requirements for recipients of family tax benefit part A and the child care rebate. These changes will come into effect from 1 January 2016, meaning that family tax benefit part A and the child care rebate will not be paid to the families of any child who has not been fully immunised.

The purpose of this legislation is not to save money by restricting the payment of the family tax benefit and the child care benefit, it is to encourage parents to keep up the immunisations for their children. I sincerely hope the savings do not come to pass, because the much preferred outcome is for all those families who would otherwise be cut off from payments to get their children immunised.

This legislation will remove the 'conscientious objector' exemption to immunisation schedules and extend requirements to meet these schedules to all children under seven years of age on any day the benefit is claimed. In this place, when we discuss immunisation, it is very important that anyone taking part in or following the discussion remembers this parliament should be making decisions based, solely, on evidence—and, as far as the evidence goes, the public-health case for immunisations is an open-and-shut one.

Mass immunisation is, perhaps, the single most effective public-health policy that has ever been in place. To all those with concerns or objections, be they based on philosophical or religious ideals, I would respectfully remind them that this is a public-health debate. It is about preventing the spread of debilitating and sometimes fatal diseases, and we heard the member for Kingsford Smith give the example of a child dying from whooping cough.

When the stakes are this high, we should only be considering an evidence based approach. All the evidence—the hundreds of papers of peer reviewed science journal articles, the clinical trials and the decades of data—points to immunisation of children being incredibly beneficial. The number of children under seven years of age not immunised, because of a conscientious objection, was around 0.23 per cent of the population in December 1999. By 2014 it was more than 7½ times that number. Even with that exponential increase, the children of registered conscientious objectors are a minority—amounting to only about 20 per cent of the total number of children who are not up-to-date with vaccinations. If a child is not immunised and it is not a choice that can be supported by evidence, it is not a choice to be supported by taxpayers.

I had some people, from my electorate, approach me with concerns over what they called 'government mandated vaccinations'. There are two key points to raise to address this argument. The first is that no government is forcing anyone to have immunisations. This legislation proposes that for those parents who choose, for whatever reason, not to have immunisations they will not have that choice supported by government payments. The second is that the right of a child not to get a disease, like polio or whooping cough, is a far more important right than the freedom of someone to exercise a philosophical objection.

There will always be children who cannot—perhaps for medical reasons—be protected by vaccination. There will also be a minority of children who are vaccinated for whom the vaccination is not effective. For those children, every unvaccinated child they come into contact with is a risk. As the number of unvaccinated people in the society they live in increases, the risk of transmission of disease increases exponentially as the group's 'herd
immunity' is lost. The protection of these children from polio, diphtheria and whooping cough is a higher ideal than financially supporting an anti-immunisation choice.

The government's policy in this area is not all stick with no carrot. There is $161.8 million, over five years, for improvements to the National Immunisation Program's schedule of free vaccines. There is also $26.4 million to improve immunisation in adolescence—including incentives for health-care providers to identify children overdue for vaccines—public awareness campaigns and expansion of the HPV register to include all adolescents.

The legislation here today will reinforce the importance of immunisation, it will restrict access to conscientious objections and make family tax benefit part A and the child care rebate conditional on a child being up-to-date with their immunisations. As it stands, there are 39,000 Australian children under the age of seven who are not vaccinated because their parents object. There are many tens of thousands more who are not vaccinated for other reasons.

But the evidence is clear, and that is that vaccination is a safe and effective public health measure. Every child who is not vaccinated is at risk of preventable communicable diseases and is at risk of spreading preventable diseases to those who are too young to be vaccinated. I draw the House back to the example that was given by the member for Kingsford Smith of the child who was too young to be vaccinated against whooping cough and who died. That is one of the reasons why my son and his wife did not want us to see our granddaughter until we had our whooping cough vaccinations topped up.

This legislation will provide a significant incentive for parents of those children to get vaccinated and to keep that vaccination up-to-date. Where it is not possible for medical reasons to provide that vaccination, we will continue to offer an exemption clause. The government will not, however, continue to provide government payments to those parents who choose not to have their children protected.

As I mentioned earlier, this legislation is calculated to have a $508 million saving over forward estimates. Let me say it one more time: I hope that this legislation serves its purpose and that not one cent of the saving is made, because I want as many as parents out there as possible to ensure that their children are vaccinated. We need to make sure that we can keep our kids safe from these terrible diseases. No-one wants to see a child dying of whooping cough. Nothing can be more terrible than seeing that.

I commend the bill to the House.

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (18:40): I rise today to join with my colleagues and those opposite to speak on the Social Services Legislation Amendment (No Jab, No Pay) Bill 2015. That was a very powerful speech from the member for Solomon there. Obviously, she is a bit upset because she must know of someone who has lost their child to whooping cough. As she said, nothing could be more shocking, horrifying and terrible than watching your child die of whooping cough.

So I join with my colleagues right across the chamber to support this legislation. This legislation will ensure that children fully meet immunisation requirements before their families can access childcare benefits, the child care rebate or the family tax benefit A supplement. It builds on the work that Labor did in 2013 to further tighten immunisation requirements within the family payments scheme.
When we were in government we made important changes to family payments, to lift immunisation rates—including linking the family tax benefit end-of-year supplement to immunisation. This is what this is all about. This bill builds on those reforms. The Leader of the Opposition also wrote to the then Prime Minister in April of this year, offering bipartisan support to increase immunisation rates across Australia. We also announced our support for this measure shortly after it was announced in this year’s budget.

Labor is committed to strengthening immunisation rates so that all Australian children have the best chance to grow up strong and healthy. The importance of immunising our children cannot be underestimated. It is estimated that vaccinations currently save up to three million lives worldwide each year—three million lives worldwide each year! Immunisation is the safest and most effective way for parents to protect their children from disease, and one of the most important public health measures we have at our disposal. The Australian Medical Association, the National Centre for Immunisation Research & Surveillance and countless other experts all agree that immunisation is the safest and most effective way for parents to protect their children from disease.

Immunisation remains the safest and most effective way to stop the spread of many of the world’s most infectious diseases. When a person is vaccinated their body produces an immune response in the same way their body would after exposure to a disease, but without the person actually suffering the symptoms of the disease. When that person comes in contact with that disease in the future, their immune system will respond fast enough to prevent the person actually developing the disease.

When levels of immunisation in a community are sufficiently high, the risk of specific diseases can fall so low that even those who are too young or too sick to be given a vaccine will not be exposed to it. It is this communal, or ‘herd’ immunity that can save countless lives. Likewise, those who choose not to immunise their children are exposing other children to potentially fatal diseases—diseases that can be avoided through immunisation. This is what is quite often overlooked by these people.

I would just ask everyone in the chamber to cast their minds back to the 1960s and 1970s, before the major vaccination campaigns. Diseases like tetanus, diphtheria and whooping cough killed thousands of young children each year. Today, deaths from these diseases are extremely rare in Australia—although there is a worrying trend that whooping cough is now coming back again—and in the rest of the developed world. This is because of immunisation. We want to get to a situation where enough people in the community have been immunised so that infections can no longer spread from person to person and a disease can die out altogether.

We have seen this happen with smallpox, which was declared eradicated in 1980 after a concerted campaign of surveillance and vaccination led by the World Health Organisation. Or measles, which last year the World Health Organisation declared had been eliminated in Australia. These are extraordinary achievements! Extraordinary—eliminating these evil diseases that have killed so many people over many years. Or polio—the Global Polio Eradication Initiative has been successful in reducing polio cases, with only a few isolated cases remaining in the developing world.

Just on polio, I just want to touch on what was etched in my brain when I was a young girl. My mum, who is now in her 70s, went through the polio epidemic that was around in the
thirties, forties and fifties in Australia. She told us when we were little of stories of the baths in Melbourne being closed down, of theatres being closed down and you could not go to the movies because of the polio epidemic. Schools were closed down and when she went back to school once it had been reopened she found that a number of students were no longer there because they had been paralysed by polio. I know that my husband's uncle contracted polio around that era when he was a child and has lived with the crippling legacy that is polio ever since.

If the anti-jab campaigners met with the people who actually have to live with the consequences of no immunisation, who have to live with the consequences of contracting polio, particularly as a young child, they would see the challenges and the battles that they have to face. I remember reading books about young children having to be in bed for months and months as a result of the disease and the fact that they could not have a normal childhood. They could not run and play because they had been crippled by the disease. Their education was stunted in many ways and their opportunities were limited as a result. This is something that can be avoided through immunisation. As I said, since I was a child my mother told me those stories of the baths being closed down, of the school being closed down and of those children returning who were crippled, it has been etched in my brain that immunisation is absolutely vital to keep Australians safe, to keep our young people safe, to keep our older people safe and to keep the world safe. Those stories were incredibly powerful. Seeing Chris's uncle every time with that crippled, stunted leg as a result of the fact that he contracted the disease is horrifying.

As mum said, when she used to take us as babies to the little infant welfare centre and get us immunised, it used to be very distressing to her as a young mother. Babies cry because it hurts and sometimes they get a bit fevery afterwards. Despite the distress that it was causing to us as children and babies and to her as a new young mum, she knew that the benefit not just for ourselves but also for our community and our nation was significant. I did not hear my colleague the member for Kingsford Smith's story but I did hear the member for Solomon and it is incredibly concerning when you hear cases of children falling ill or in some cases dying due to diseases that could have been avoided if their parents had got them immunised.

For example, low domestic immunisation rates for measles in some parts of the United States saw the disease re-emerge last year, prompting officials to actually issue a warning. According to the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, there was a record 668 US measles cases from 27 states last year, mostly in unvaccinated travellers travelling to endemic regions or to areas experiencing a large ongoing measles outbreak. This was the largest number of cases since eradication was declared in 2000. We are seeing this resurgence as a result of people not being vaccinated. It was the largest outbreak to occur in unvaccinated Amish communities in Ohio and totalled more than 383 cases. There has been similarly a re-emergence of other preventable diseases like rubella, mumps, whooping cough and polio. It is so important that we immunise our kids and protect them against these preventable diseases. By immunising your child, you are protecting more than just their health; you are reducing the opportunity for that child to pass that disease onto another, especially to young babies who may not yet be fully immunised.

I was discussing this legislation with a dear friend of mine, who, unfortunately, is undergoing a battle with cervical cancer, and she recounted the story of her dear friend, Gay
Davidson, who was a well-known Canberra journalist here and her husband, Ken, who lost their daughter Kiri after she contracted measles. Kiri had not been immunised because, according to my dear friend, Gay was an anti-vaxxer; she opposed immunisation. Kiri died at the age of 13 from complications after getting the disease. After her daughter's death, Gay became a prominent public campaigner for immunisation against measles. She worked with successive Commonwealth health ministers in promoting what became the national Bicentennial Measles Campaign.

Any death of any child for any parent is just devastating and it took a significant toll on Gay. Her health suffered significantly. She continued to work for some time but her health suffered and she did die, I regard, prematurely as a result of the guilt, the knowledge and the trauma of losing their child, particularly when she had been such a strong, as I understand, anti-immunisation advocate and the fact that she in a way felt that it was her fault that that her daughter had died from a disease that could have been prevented through immunisation.

Measles does take its toll in so many ways and I think that Gay Davidson's experience and response highlights how devastating it can be for families to lose a child to a disease that could have been entirely prevented through immunisation. Imagine if you had a child or little baby who died as a result of someone not immunising their child. Imagine the trauma and the horror of living with that.

All I can say to those anti-vaxxers out there is: homeopathic preparations do not provide natural immunity; nor does being fit and healthy. Only conventional vaccinations produce a measurable immune response. So all I can say is: vaccinate your children.

Modern vaccines are extremely safe, and serious reactions to them are rare. In development, vaccines are rigorously tested on thousands of people in progressively larger clinical trials, and they are not included in the National Immunisation Program until they have been approved for use by the Therapeutic Goods Administration to ensure they meet strict safety guidelines and are evaluated to ensure that they are effective, comply with strict manufacturing and production standards and have a good safety record.

Once a vaccine is in use, its efficacy and safety are continually monitored by the TGA—so it is not just a set-and-forget environment; the TGA is continually monitoring these vaccines—and by vaccine sponsors through further clinical trials and detailed surveillance of disease and vaccine adverse events. They are constantly looking at the effectiveness of these vaccinations and they are doing that through these clinical trials and also the surveillance of the disease, as I said.

So I reiterate to those who are against immunisation: the vaccines for the 16 infectious diseases that are currently included on the National Immunisation Program are subjected to some of the most rigorous vaccine testing and registration processes in the world. They are safe.

Labor believes that the only exemption to the community expectation that children are immunised should be on medical grounds, and this legislation includes room for those exceptions, such as when a general practitioner has certified that vaccinating the child would be medically contraindicated, or that vaccination is unnecessary because the child has natural immunity from having contracted the disease in question.
In conclusion, I offer Labor's support to this legislation, which requires children to meet their immunisation requirements in order for their families to access family benefits. It is sensible legislation that will increase the immunisation rates of Australian children—something that will have an overwhelmingly positive impact on our society. Immunisation is the safest and most effective way for parents to protect their children from disease, and I encourage all parents to do the research, and I encourage all parents to immunise your kids.

Ms GAMBARO (Brisbane) (18:54): It is an honour to be following the member for Canberra, and I thank her for her wonderful contribution, as I thank the member for Braddon, the member for Solomon and the member for Kingsford Smith. It is not often in this place that we can come together on legislation that is agreeable to both sides of the House, but the No Jab, No Pay measure reinforces the Australian government's position that immunisation is a very important public health measure for children, their families and their community. The coalition is absolutely committed to making sure that every child in every home has a safe environment and has a safe educational environment as well.

As the member for Brisbane, I have a huge number of schools that I represent in my electorate as well as many child care centres, preschools and kindies. This policy will bring clarity to the rules, and it highlights the very importance of immunisation and of protecting public health, especially for those who are the most vulnerable in our community, children.

The measure aims to further increase the immunisation rates in the Australian community, because we know that the more that people are immunised, the safer that everyone is going to be. From 1 January 2016, the No Jab, No Pay measure amends the immunisation requirements for the family assistance payments, including the Child Care Benefit, the Child Care Rebate and the Family Tax Benefit Part A end-of-year supplement.

Currently, immunisation requirements only apply to children up to the age of seven for the Child Care Benefit and Child Care Rebate, and at ages one, two and five for the Family Tax Benefit Part A end-of-year supplement. This is simply not enough to encourage higher rates of immunisation.

From 1 January 2016, in order for an individual to be entitled to the Child Care Rebate and Child Care Benefit payments, their child will need to meet immunisation requirements up to the age of 20. This is very much a common-sense approach that not only will make sure we do not witness the return of some of those debilitating diseases, but also will reduce the burden on our healthcare system by keeping kids out of hospital.

Immunisation stops the spread of many harrowing and life-threatening diseases like diphtheria. The release of the diphtheria toxin in the blood can cause nerve paralysis and heart failure. In the early 1900s, diphtheria caused more deaths in Australia than any other infectious disease. I was hearing about that when I visited a historical photographic exhibition at the Royal Brisbane Hospital recently to mark the Anzac Centenary. It is absolutely incredible when you think about this—that the increasing use of vaccines has led to diphtheria's virtual disappearance. No vaccinated person has died from diphtheria in Australia in the last 20 years, and we must ensure that that statistic remains unchanged.

Measles is another very highly infectious, acute viral disease which can cause serious complications, particularly in very young children. Complications of measles include middle-ear infections and laryngitis, as well as more serious infections such as pneumonia and
encephalitis, which can lead to brain damage and death. I know that today we have heard many stories of members having personal experiences. My personal experience was of a friend of the family who was not vaccinated when she was a child and who contracted measles. She had a lovely baby boy and unfortunately he suffered from deafness, and it was a terrible, terrible thing to go through. He is now contributing to society. But this could have been avoided if she had been able to have a vaccination and unfortunately she was unable to do that as a young child.

There is also meningococcal disease, one in 10 of the sufferers of which dies in Australia. Of those who survive, one in 30 has severe skin scarring or loss of limbs, and one in 30 has severe brain damage.

Finally, members have spoken today about whooping cough. It is an extremely contagious respiratory infection. The disease causes uncontrolled coughing and vomiting, which can last for several months and can be particularly dangerous for little babies under the age of 12 months. Patients have described the experience as if they were actually coughing up their lungs for months on end. It is clear, then, that we must act now to ensure that these diseases cannot spread any further.

In order for an individual to be entitled to the Family Tax Benefit Part A end-of-year supplement, their child will need to meet immunisation requirements from age one up to the end of the calendar year they turn 19. The changes do not impact fortnightly instalments of Family Tax Benefit Part A. The changes only impact the end-of-year supplement, which is currently $726.35 per year per child, as long as those conditions are met. Critically, this measure will remove vaccine objection, previously known as 'conscientious objection', as an exemption category. That measure is simply not good enough to protect the health of the broader community. Currently, if an individual makes a declaration that they have an objection based on personal, philosophical, religious or medical belief to being vaccinated, they meet the immunisation requirements.

According to the Australian Childhood Immunisation Register, more than 39,000 Australian children under the age of seven are not vaccinated because their parents object to vaccinations, which is an increase of more than 24,000 children over 10 years. This is a very dangerous trend that we must reverse. For every child who misses out on the chance to be vaccinated, the chance of infection increases. No child should be afraid to get the education they deserve simply because some parents decide to object to potentially life-saving vaccines.

This is a public health issue. The government has determined that, whilst parents have the right to decide not to vaccinate their children, if they are doing so as a vaccine objector their decision will mean that they will no longer be eligible for some government financial assistance. We have to take a tough stance for the good of public safety and the health of our youth. Children will meet the immunisation requirements if they are fully immunised, engaged in an approved catch-up schedule or have a valid exemption. We will allow for children who cannot be vaccinated for health reasons to be exempt so that they may not slip through the cracks financially.

Children with medical contraindications or natural immunity certified by a general practitioner will continue to meet immunisation requirements. Children are considered fully immunised when they have received the appropriate vaccines for their age cohort under the National Immunisation Program's early childhood schedule. A child will also meet
immunisation requirements if they are a participant in a vaccine study approved by a Human Research Ethics Committee registered with the National Health and Medical Research Council. Additionally, the secretary will be given new legislative powers to exempt a child from immunisation requirements in a very limited range of circumstances—for example, where a non-parent carer does not have the legal authority to vaccinate a child in their care. Where a child cannot be vaccinated as required and the Commonwealth Chief Medical Officer has declared that the relevant vaccines or all vaccines are temporarily unavailable, the child is considered to meet the immunisation requirements. This measure is compatible with human rights because it advances the protection of the right to physical health and, to the extent that it may also limit human rights, those limitations are reasonable, necessary and proportionate.

The bill for this measure is accompanied by a statement of compatibility with human rights, in accordance with the government's normal processes. In conjunction with these changes, the Minister of Health has introduced legislation to extend the Australian Childhood Immunisation Register to record immunisation information for children aged between seven and 20 years. This measure is expected to produce savings of roughly $508 million over four years.

This has been a very hotly discussed topic that is important to me and the community that I represent. Often the balance on this debate has been conflated and misconstrued. Hopefully this bill will bring clarity to people as well as piece of mind. Tough choices have to be made for the safety of the greater community. I support the bill.

**Ms PLIBERSEK** (Sydney—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (19:04): When I was first elected to the parliament, the Leader of the Labor Party was Kim Beazley. Kim is very well known to my friend sitting here, Gary Gray, and he is very well known to members of this parliament as an erudite man, a compassionate man and a great lover of American history, and for his great and good humour. But there is another thing about Kim Beazley: he had polio as a child. That is how recently this disease, which is now unknown in Australia and is on its way to being eliminated worldwide, stalked the Australian community. Our current Ambassador to the United States was one of its victims

Kim said that he never forgot the day he woke up, at just five years old, unable to move. He said:

I don't think contemporary Australians can comprehend the fear that ran through our community at the thought of polio.

That is what he said in an interview in 2004. I cannot imagine the fear that the little boy felt, but I can certainly imagine the fear of his mother. I think any parent can. I can imagine it, but neither I nor any parent in Australia today will ever need to feel it, because we have eradicated polio in Australia and will eradicate it within coming years around the world.

Polio was beaten in Australia by vaccination—in Australia, in North America, in Europe and soon in the rest of the world. We see resistant pockets in Pakistan and Afghanistan, but I am confident that the huge steps that those countries have made, even in the last year, will see us tackle this disease fully. Vaccination is one of the most effective and cheapest ways we have of keeping a community healthy. The examples of polio and smallpox before it show that, with proper eradication campaigns, we can eliminate many of these diseases and we can certainly save many lives. Vaccination is the reason that the number of measles deaths around
the world has declined from 2.6 million in 1980—which to us sounds like just yesterday, and it was mostly young children who died from measles—to under just over 145,000 in 2012.

If you put measles with diphtheria, rubella, polio, whooping cough and all of the rest of these diseases, between 2000 and 2013 vaccinations saved an estimated 15.6 million lives. Smallpox has been eradicated, as I have said. Polio cases have dropped from the hundreds of thousands in the late 1980s to a few dozen. Around the world, around three million lives a year are saved by vaccination. And for each of those lives saved, there are others who are spared lifelong disability from the complications of these diseases.

Labor has a very strong record on immunisation policy. Raising the rates of immunisation was a priority for me when I was the health minister. It was a priority for Nicola Roxon before me, and I know it is a priority for the current health minister and for our next health minister, Catherine King. In her capacity as shadow minister for health she spoke very movingly last week about meeting two sets of parents, Toni and David McCaffery, and Catherine and Greg Hughes, who had tragically lost their children to the easily preventable disease of whooping cough. Having worked as a director in the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care, Catherine really understands the policy issues around health and community health. More important that just this systemic understanding, I could tell from her conversations with these parents, who have lost so much and have given so much to the campaign in favour of immunisation—and have become such targets in some cases of horrible internet trolls—she was moved not just as a health administrator, but as a parent, and I am sure she will take up this case as health minister.

In 1993, our National Immunisation Strategy brought consistency to vaccine schedules and vaccine pricing. We introduced the Australian Childhood Immunisation Register (ACIR), announced in the 1995-96 Keating budget. We support the expansion of the ACIR to become the Australian Immunisation Register and the expansion of the National Human Papillomavirus Vaccination Program Register to the Australian School Vaccination Register, capturing a greater range of vaccinations.

While I was health minister we added several new vaccines to the schedule, including the combination measles, mumps, rubella and varicella vaccine—called the MMRV vaccine, a combined meningococcal C-Hib vaccine, and, of course, we also did Gardasil for boys. Just as we were the first nation internationally to do Gardasil for girls, we were the first to do Gardasil for boys, because boys are also vulnerable to HPV and to the cancers that can result.

We made important changes to family payments to lift immunisation rates, including linking the family tax benefit end-of-year supplement to immunisation. We worked with the states to raise vaccine awareness, and on successful strategies, like requiring a child's ACIR record for school enrolment, to identify children who had slipped through the immunisation net or had not yet fully met the immunisation milestones. This, accompanied by the very innovative work of our Medicare Locals, helped increase the coverage rate amongst five year olds from 83 per cent to 90 per cent during our time in office.

In fact, in just one year, from 2011-12 to 2012-13, the percentage of five year olds fully immunised rose in the Lower Murray region from 86.2 per cent to 93.9 per cent. In Broken Hill and the far west it rose from 89.1 per cent to 95.6 per cent, which is a stunning result. In Kempsey-Nambucca it rose from 84.6 per cent to 91.1 per cent. All three are marvellous results.
But we know that in some communities kids are still at risk. In the same year, 2012-13, 13 out of 61 Medicare Local catchments had less than 90 per cent of five year olds fully immunised. The lowest rate—and I am really quite ashamed to say this—was in Eastern Sydney, an area that is home for me, where it was 86.2 per cent. For last year, in my own state of New South Wales, the Northern New South Wales Local Health District, at the other end of my state, recorded only 87.4 per cent of children fully vaccinated.

Some children miss vaccination because their parents have forgotten, or do not know fully about the childhood illnesses their children should be immunised against, or they have lost track. There are a number of different reasons parents have missed out on the information communicated to them. Perhaps it is even in a language they do not understand. So it is important to invest in reminders, in education programs, in community awareness raising, and in making the point through reminders to individual parents and to our broader community about the benefits of vaccination.

But there are cases, of course, where parents deliberately refuse to vaccinate their children. They prefer to rely on the rumour-mill of the internet rather than take medical advice. I say to those parents: talk to your GP. As a parent, I took the advice of my doctor and all of my children are fully immunized. As a health minister, I took the advice of the medical professionals and I prioritised raising immunisation rates as one of the best and most effective health interventions we can make as a nation.

The number of children whose parents or guardians lodged what some people call a 'conscientious objection' to vaccination has risen from 0.23 per cent in 1999 to 1.77 per cent at the end of last year. I have said many times—and it disappoints me that I still see this language used sometimes—that the term 'conscientious objector' is completely inappropriate for people who refuse to vaccinate their children. They are not Quakers carrying stretchers under fire from the battlefield back to the trenches during World War I. These are people who are deliberately refusing to vaccinate their children, to protect their own children and our community against these illnesses.

I think it is important to note that no major religion has a prohibition on immunisation. This is a decision that parents are making based on dangerous misinformation from the internet. They are vaccine refusers. Vaccine refusers think they know better than doctors and scientists and, in doing so, they put the health of their own children at risk and they put at risk the health of other kids, of babies who are too young to be fully immunised, of older people whose natural immunity has broken down with age and of people who are sick with immunodeficient type illnesses and cannot be vaccinated. For the protection of our whole community, we need the majority of people to be vaccinated where they can be.

It is very important to say that we are supporting the No Jab, No Pay policy introduced in this legislation. We certainly said before the 2013 election that we would move further in this direction, and we are pleased to see our policy reflected in this bill. It ends the vaccine refuser exemption and it makes sure that only those with legitimate medical reasons to not vaccinate their children can access child care benefit, child care rebate or the family tax benefit part A supplement.

One of the most important things that we learn in managing our vast and vastly successful health system is that prevention is better than cure, and that certainly is the case when it comes to vaccines.
Ms MacTIERNAN (Perth) (19:16): The medical practitioners and medical scientists that I talk to about this bill and about vaccines are very clear that the two things that have really done the most to improve health in our community over the last couple of hundred years have been the availability of clean water and vaccination. So there is absolutely no doubt that there are very solid public health arguments behind the Social Services Legislation Amendment (No Jab, No Pay) Bill 2015.

Like many members, I have personal experience here. I remember the enthusiasm with which my mother dragged me down to get I think the Sabin polio vaccination when I was around three or four. It is one of my first and clearest memories. With her recollection, and having lived through the risk of my older brother and sisters contracting polio, it was such a frightening thing for my mother. As I think I mentioned when we were debating an allied piece of legislation last week, a great book, The Golden Age, by Joan London was released this year. It really captured the social impacts as well as the health impacts of the polio epidemic. Also in last week's debate, I related my very personal experience with my daughter who, at the age of three weeks, contracted whooping cough from an unvaccinated child. So I completely and utterly support the principle of vaccination.

But now I am going to make what I judge to be a career-limiting move, because I am going to step outside, a little, that box of orthodoxy that I followed right up until last week, when I was contacted by some people who, having seen my speech, suggested that I might want to look at some of the other science. I have done so. I do not want to depart from the standard script, because I do support vaccination and I do support an element of incentive to be placed into the system to ensure that we have proper coverage. I am not contesting in any way that what we have done with polio, with diphtheria, with whooping cough—even though it is becoming a little more complex—and with measles is anything other than judged to be a good thing.

I have sat in this place and listened to speeches about this being a black-and-white issue—that you have to be totally and utterly one way, otherwise you are an anti-vaxxer—and saying that the science is unequivocal. I have some quotes—and these are all from people who support vaccination. I just want us to start being a little less condemning of those people who have their concerns; let us in fact be a little bit more scientific. Let us not always, when contradictory evidence comes in, presume that we have to amend the hypothesis and have an auxiliary hypothesis that will help us patch up and bolster the principal hypothesis. From time to time, we have to be prepared to think that this data may have to be seriously considered and cause us to look at the paradigm.

I am going to quote people who are not crazy, unscientific trolls and anti-vaxxers. I do want to endorse comments by some of the previous speakers who have reprimanded in the severest terms those who have been trolling people like the Hughes family, who, quite rightly, support vaccination. Everyone should have the ability to do this without being vilified. I want to quote Natasha Crowcroft, the Chief of Infectious Diseases at Public Health Ontario, and her two colleagues from the University of Toronto in an article that appeared in The BMJ, formerly the British Medical Journal, earlier this year. I am going to quote this at length because I think it really sums up some of the issues that we need to face:

We are on a steep trajectory away from an era of inexpensive vaccines for diseases that are widespread in the absence of immunisation. Vaccines are increasingly being produced for diseases that are
devastating at an individual level but have less impact on population health. Moreover, the costs of developing and getting a vaccine to market are rising because of increasingly complex technologies and the public intolerance of adverse events. For these reasons new vaccines are likely to be less cost effective than older vaccines and are unlikely to be cost saving.

Technologies such as searching genetic codes for possible antigens and the development of new adjuvants to stimulate immune responses also bring considerable uncertainty about safety and effectiveness. It may take many years for adverse events caused by vaccines to be identified and confirmed, as was the case for the link between a pandemic H1N1 influenza vaccine (plus adjuvant) and narcolepsy.

These challenges come at a time when some sections of society are less likely to vaccinate themselves or their children. Those who hesitate to vaccinate are often highly educated, well resourced, and demand respect for their perspectives. How best to reassure the public is unclear. But all the components of decision making about vaccination programmes must be high quality and transparent and should stand up to external scrutiny to sustain the confidence of both the public and healthcare providers.

I think there is a very clear message here. To lump anyone who has an objection or a concern about a particular vaccine or a particular adjuvant into the anti-vaxxer box is, I think, a very deleterious thing for the confidence that we need to have within our system.

Professor Collignon, professor of microbiology at the Australian National University and director of infectious diseases at Canberra Hospital, is a great supporter of the principle of vaccination and one of those who is very clear that vaccination has absolutely turned around public health outcomes in our community. In talking about flu vaccines for children, he made a couple of statements. He said:

To stop two or three children going to intensive care we had to immunise 600,000 people … We need to be very careful before we recommend universal vaccination against influenza every year until we have better data. Otherwise we’re talking about faith-based medicine, instead of evidence-based medicine.

When Professor Collignon made these reflections after seeing healthy children post-vaccine coming into his hospital, he was very surprised at the amount of negativity that he received from other health professionals. But his fundamental point is that we need a better system than voluntary notification to the TGA, because whenever you do that you really underestimate how much of a problem there is. If the notification process is purely voluntary you get an under-notification. He said:

When I interviewed families who claimed to have experienced an adverse reaction there was a common thread—medical professionals were unwilling to countenance the possibility, even when the symptoms were extreme and immediate, and their cases were never referred to the TGA.

I think that one of the things we could take out of the anti-vaxxer argument is that we do need a better system of notification. My friend and colleague at the table, the member for Brand, would no doubt be aware of Professor Bryant Stokes, a very eminent medical bureaucrat and medical specialist in Perth. He was chief medical officer and head of the health department, but I understand that he has recently stood down. He was commissioned by the state government to report on what happened during that ill-fated Fluvax in 2009 when there were so many adverse reactions in Perth and across Australia in children who had the Fluvax that year. His report that was tabled in the state parliament focused on just how poor and chaotic the reporting processes were. There was a lack of any real systemised process of collecting that data.
If we want the public to have confidence in this system, we have to be prepared to set in place a rigorous reporting system. We cannot continue to say to people, 'You've made it all up' or 'You're wrong and it's something else.' We do want people to have confidence in the vaccination system. It is a great benefit for our public health system. But we have an obligation to make sure that we are being scientific and that we are not falling into the same trap that we are accusing the anti-vaxxers of. We need to ensure that we are not engaging in faith-based medicine rather than evidence-based medicine.

Allan Cunningham, a retired paediatrician from the USA, said in an article in the *British Medical Journal*:

Vaccines are among the greatest medical advances of modern times, but public health officials have become intoxicated by success and have lost their sense of perspective. A case can be made for mandating vaccination against measles, which used to infect 3-4 million US children a year, but it is over-reach to mandate vaccination against hepatitis B, which was reported to infect only 300 children aged 1-9 years annually in the US.

One of the concerns that has been raised is what is happening with the adjuvants—those things that are added to the vaccine to enhance the immune response. I asked our library to find me the latest research on the impact of these adjuvants. I do not want to reflect negatively on the person, but the piece of research they found had been conducted by a researcher from Flinders University in Adelaide, who also just happened to be a director of a biotech firm producing adjuvants and vaccines. That certainly does not mean that he should be precluded from contributing to the academic and scientific debate but I think this is an endemic problem that we have in the pharmaceutical industry—there is not enough independence in the system; there are not enough people researching and providing this information who are free from the taint of preferment and funding by the pharmaceutical industry.

As I say, we need to get the science right here. Those who are advocating for vaccinations, like me, believe in science—but believing in science does not mean that you do not allow any contrary evidence to come within your field of operation and that you demean and belittle those people who are raising those concerns. I really do urge members to research some of these people who are raising an alarm about exactly what we are doing and whether or not employing all of these I think now 16 vaccinations—including for hepatitis B, rotavirus and the human papilloma virus—is really in the best interests of everyone and can be justified in terms of a mandated public health outcome.

Ms HALL (Shortland—Opposition Whip) (19:31): The contribution by the member for Perth was an interesting one. I am a strong supporter of science and science-based evidence for any sort of medical procedure. I also put on the record that I do question the fact that many drug companies fund research in Australia. Unfortunately, government does not fund research to a level that would enable research to be undertaken independently. When it comes to immunisation, for every one paper that condemns vaccination there are 10 or 100 or maybe even 1,000 that support it. Some research asserted that immunisation led to autism, although I did not come into this place ready to talk about the scientific research in that area.

The Social Services Legislation Amendment (No Jab, No Pay) Bill in no way makes it mandatory for parents to immunise their children. This legislation makes it essential that parents immunise their children if they want to receive family tax benefit. I have thought about this very seriously. When my daughter was having her children immunised she
researched the issue and talked to many people. As I said in a speech last week, I have a niece who has done leading research in the area of autism and she has worked with many people. We asked her what she thought about the connection between autism and immunisation, and she said to us that the risk from not immunising is much, much greater than the risk from immunising.

Vaccination has been one of the most effective interventions to prevent disease worldwide. I had a grandfather who had polio, and now polio has been eradicated in Australia. It has almost been eradicated worldwide, except for countries like Pakistan and a couple of other places. It is a preventable disease—if you are immunised against polio you do not get it. You do not have the epidemic that existed when my grandfather contracted polio; you do not have the epidemic that raged here in Australia postwar, in the late forties and fifties, when so many people had their lives changed. We do not have epidemics that see survivors of polio coming into this parliament with the late effects of that disease. Polio sufferers survived and led normal lives; in some cases they may have had a level of disability but as they aged the effects of the polio might have become much greater. It is estimated that immunisation prevents approximately 2.5 million deaths a year. How can we argue against immunisation? This legislation, as I have already said, does not prevent parents from choosing not to immunise their children, but I would encourage them to immunise their children. It not only gives their children protection but also gives protection to the whole community. It is a major public health issue and immunisation is a practice that we as a nation should be embracing.

Labor members who have spoken in this debate have made it quite clear that we will be supporting this legislation. It was part of the 2015 budget measures and it is one of a number of measures being put in place to ensure that children are fully immunised. It will commence from the beginning of next year, 1 January 2016.

However, included in this legislation is a clause that says that, where there are valid medical reasons for not vaccinating a child—where a general practitioner has certified that vaccinating a child would be medically contraindicated or it is unnecessary because the child has a natural immunity, having already contracted the disease in question—such children will be exempt. Australia has one of the best immunisation records in the world. Nationwide, around 92 per cent of children are immunised, and we should do anything we can to encourage an increase in that number. Other children who will be exempt are those in approved vaccine studies or for whom the vaccination is temporarily unavailable. I think that is a common-sense approach. A family should not be penalised because the vaccine is unavailable, but that would be on very rare occasions.

Immunisation requirements will also be extended to include children of all ages. Once again, that is very important. Just because you are an older child, it does not mean that you do not need to ensure that your vaccinations are up to date and that your immunity to such diseases is still in place. Last year, I think it was, there was an outbreak of measles within the community; even in Canberra, there were cases of measles. Measles, whilst it may have been considered a common childhood illness when I was younger, can lead to a very significant level of disability or even death. Now that children are immunised against measles, they no longer face this potentially disabling and life-threatening illness.

In the lead-up to the 2013 election, Labor supported tightening up requirements around immunisation. As such, we were very supportive of these measures when the government
announced them in the budget. There is one point that worries me, though, and that is that the budget projects that this will lead to savings of $508.3 million. I see this as a good public health initiative. It is not a budget savings measure; it is a measure that should be put in place to ensure that children are immunised. I think that there should be a backup as well, to make sure that it is not just a cost-saving measure and that it really is a sound public health initiative. Those are the grounds on which I support it—as a sound public health initiative, not a cost-saving measure.

Professor Brian Owler from the AMA said he was concerned that such large savings were expected from these measures:

… it indicates that a number of people aren’t going to vaccinate their children. What we should be saying is we need to make sure that we do get all those children vaccinated and we should be aiming to actually continue to spend the same amount on those sorts of Family Tax Benefits.

So, along with No Jab, No Pay, there should be initiatives put in place that will educate and encourage people to have their children vaccinated, and make them aware that their children may be due for immunisation but they may not have followed through.

Quite often, it is the people whose lives may be little more chaotic, who have a lot of things on their plate, who may not have access to a GP or to medical services at the same level as most Australians, who will fall through the cracks. They may not even pick up on the fact that they are not being paid their family tax benefit. I put on the table that I am very concerned about that group of people. So I think that, rather than looking at this from a cost-saving perspective, we should be looking at it from the perspective of using No Jab, No Pay as an incentive to parents to ensure their children are immunised, while at the same time making those parents aware of the fact that the reason they are not receiving their family tax benefit is that their child did not have the jab.

We on this side agree and, I think, every member of the House would agree that parents should have the final say on this. We live in a free society, and whether or not to immunise a child is a decision that ultimately rests with the parents—but there have to be incentives in place to encourage parents to ensure that their children are properly immunised. Also, we need to make sure that the registers are up to date. We need to make sure that the information going to parents is adequate. We need to make sure that those parents who may have missed their child's immunisation because of some sort of oversight are made aware of the facts which I referred to a moment ago. We need and do support a national immunisation register to enable adults to keep up to date with their vaccinations. I do not know how many members of this House keep track of their vaccinations, but as a group we probably do so more than others. Many Australians believe that once they have been through their childhood immunisation that is where it ends; it is not the case. There needs to be more information and more education around immunisation.

The case for vaccinations, the case for immunisation, is very strong. There are a small number of people for whom it is contraindicated, and this legislation covers that. There needs to be ongoing scientific research. I do not think any member of this House would approach the issue of immunisation and health with a closed mind. We are here to ensure the common good of all Australians. We are here to ensure good health outcomes. If research shows that one form of immunisation should be abandoned then we should seriously look at it.
I support this legislation. My only concern is that the $508.3 million worth of savings should be put towards education and ensuring that parents do not miss immunising their children simply because of an oversight.

Mr ZAPPIA (Makin) (19:46): The Social Services Legislation Amendment (No Jab, No Pay) Bill 2015 adds to previous reforms which have linked immunisation to the family tax benefit end-of-year supplement payments. This legislation takes that measure even further and ties immunisation to child-care benefits, child-care rebates and the family tax benefit part A supplement, which I referred to a moment ago. I understand that the changes will commence on 1 January 2016.

Before I get into my general comments about the legislation and for the benefit of anyone listening, I want to say, as other speakers have made clear, there are exemptions to this legislation where it ties receiving government assistance to having children immunised to what we call Australian standards. The exemptions tying immunisation to those payments—whether they are child-care benefits, child care rebates or family tax benefits—are based on the child or the family having a valid medical reason for why the child should be exempt from being vaccinated. That valid medical reason might be that it will have ill effects on the child or it is contraindicated by the doctor. Clearly, it has to be a decision made by the family doctor. There is also an exemption if the child has a natural immunity to the particular disease. The child might have contracted the disease at an earlier stage in life and developed a natural immunity to it. Alternatively, if the child has come from overseas and has had an equivalent vaccination in an overseas country then, again, that child would be exempt from the measures in this legislation. I also note that there is a temporary exemption for a child who might be part of a medical study of some sort—it has to be an approved study—or if the vaccination is temporarily unavailable. Those exemptions are also only temporary.

I also note, as the previous speaker, the member for Shortland, did a moment ago, that in future the vaccination requirements will apply to children of all ages, whereas currently my understanding is that a vaccination status is only checked at ages one, two or five years with respect to its application to the family tax benefit part A supplement, which I referred to at the beginning of my comments, and up to age seven for children receiving child-care payments. I believe that applying the age extension right through does have some merit. If you are going to apply policy then I am not quite sure why it would be limited to those age groups in the first place.

Australia has a long and strong record of publicly funding immunisation programs. Indeed, almost for as long as I can remember there have been government funded immunisation programs available. In my own state of South Australia, in addition to the family doctor being able to provide the immunisation required, there were also what we referred to as mothers and babies centres where a nurse would come along and similarly provide the service. Local councils also provided immunisation services in many parts of South Australia. Indeed, there was a debate between local government and the federal government some years ago about the amount of money that was being reimbursed to the local councils for providing that very service. However, it was generally accepted that immunisation was part and parcel of Australian life. Just about all families immunised their children and very few people ever questioned it. In more recent years, I understand that Medicare Locals assumed much of the responsibility for ensuring that immunisation programs were carried out throughout the
community. Since the closure of Medicare Locals, I understand that responsibility has been passed on to the Primary Health Networks.

The value of immunisation has and will continue to raise questions and lead to differences of opinion in the community. I suspect that has become the case more so in recent years than it was in years gone by. I have been contacted by several people in my electorate about this legislation. These people oppose the legislation and they wanted to speak to me about it. I have met with some of them. I have also read all of the material that has been sent to me on it. I make it clear that I do not dismiss the concerns that those people have raised with me. Similarly, I do not dismiss the concerns, which I consider to be very often valid, with respect to the health effects that occur from a whole range of prescription drugs and agricultural chemicals that are used throughout our country. I accept that all drugs and chemicals will have adverse consequences and that there will be individual examples which provide living proof of the risks and the consequences.

I suspect that, for a whole range of reasons—more people in the world, more drugs being used, perhaps more pollution everywhere, and changes in our diet and air quality—there are all sorts of ailments and illnesses that are occurring and that are perhaps compounded by some of the chemicals and drugs that are already on the market. Indeed, I have a constituent who has become a tireless campaigner against drug companies not disclosing all of the information that they have about drugs before releasing them and putting them onto the market. I believe that her campaign has a lot of merit, particularly given that she has been permanently affected by a drug that was prescribed to her several years ago. She will most likely never entirely overcome the effects of that drug. Her claim is that the manufacturers of that drug were aware of the particular side effect that she suffered but yet did not make that information available to the public at the time. I suspect that with all drugs trials there is information that is not necessarily released at the time it should be. So, again, I do not dispute what people are saying to me about the risks when it comes to any form of medication. This is in respect of real people that I talk to and affects their lives in ways that are clearly apparent to me. I, therefore, do not deny or dispute what it is that they are saying.

I am sure that other MPs have had similar representations made to them about this legislation. Again, it is a matter that, quite rightly, ought to be debated in this place. Can I say to those people that make the representations to me: it seems to me that the real argument and the real debate should be taking place within the medical industry and that the real convincing needs to take place within that sector and the pharmaceutical sector, because that is where the real experts are, that is where all the testing is done, and that is where the people with the most experience do their work each and every day.

Governments also have a responsibility to make decisions for the greater good of society. In fact, I struggle to identify any legislation—be it medical or otherwise—that serves everyone's needs and does not create an unfair or unnecessary burden on some people somewhere in the community. I am equally conscious of the rights of children to participate in all forms of community activities and community events—such as kindergartens, schools, sports activities, childcare centres or wherever—in the knowledge that they will feel absolutely safe and be at no risk of being infected by someone else that participates in the same activity. It is noteworthy that the parties who are most affected by this legislation—that is, the children—do not get a say in it. There might be good reason for that, but the reality is...
that they do not get a say in it. They rely on the good judgement of their parents and of governments to do the right thing by them. They, too, have a right to grow and live healthily and be able to fully participate in society. We, as parliamentarians, have a responsibility to ensure that we protect them in the best way that we can. I am sure that governments—with respect to this kind of legislation—rely on the advice provided by the medical fraternity when it comes to what is in the best interest of a child's health. I am sure that—in respect of the immunisation programs that we have conducted in this country for decades, as well as those that are being conducted around the world—that is the underlying premise on which that immunisation is carried out.

This morning I attended a briefing on the global fight against polio. I notice that the member for Shortland and the member for Sydney both referred to polio. The briefing, in my view, brings context to this very legislation. If I can just quote some of the statistics that were provided to us this morning: in 1988, when the global polio eradication initiative commenced, some 350,000 people a year were affected by polio; by 2013, the number of cases had reduced to 416; by 2015, it had reduced to 359; and to the end of September of this year, there were just 44 cases, and only in two countries. There were only two countries this year where polio was detected. I commend all of the people who were involved in the global polio initiative, because quite frankly to see its effects on a young person really is disheartening, I also take this opportunity to commend Rotary International for the work that they have done for years and years as part of the polio eradication program and for the support that they have provided to that program.

Along with polio, other diseases or illnesses like smallpox, yellow fever, measles, diphtheria, mumps, rubella, tetanus and so on have also been either entirely eradicated or nearly eradicated. Certainly, the world has changed markedly from the years when those diseases were feared by community members around the world. I have no doubt that that is because of the vaccination programs and the vaccines that have been developed over those years. Yes, there might be other factors—and better education also helps in eliminating many diseases, as does having better water and food supplies—but I have no doubt that vaccination was at the heart of eliminating or reducing those diseases around the world.

My understanding is that presently over 90 per cent of all Australian children are immunised in accordance with Australian government recommendations and that only about two per cent of the parents do not comply, because of concerns that they have about immunisation or, perhaps, because of their religious beliefs.

The remaining four or five per cent of parents—and, again, I noticed that the member for Shortland touched on this point, and I commend her for doing so—do not have their children fully immunised because, primarily, they do not have access to immunisation programs. I can think of many reasons why that could be the case, and so I accept that that is a reality. It would, therefore, seem that, if we want to make an even greater difference to the health of our children, the focus should be on that four or five per cent rather than on the two per cent and that the emphasis of our efforts and government efforts should be on trying to overcome the barriers that are stopping that four or five per cent I refer to from having their children immunised. Nevertheless, even with the two per cent, I go back to the comments that I made earlier: in my view, every child has the right to be protected in the way that the government
thinks it is providing the best possible protection and, quite frankly, in the way the parents think they are providing the best possible protection for their children.

This legislation imposes a financial penalty on parents who choose not to have their children vaccinated. That is the bottom line to it. Parents can of course still choose not to have their children vaccinated and wear the penalty. That is a choice the parents can still make. It might be an unfair choice, but it is still a choice they can make. Time will tell whether this legislation will have the desired outcomes or not. I will certainly watch with interest what happens in the years ahead.

Mr PORTER (Pearce—Minister for Social Services) (20:01): The Social Services Legislation Amendment (No Jab, No Pay) Bill 2015 will ensure children fully meet immunisation requirements before their families can access childcare benefit, childcare rebate or the family tax benefit part A supplement. I would like to take the opportunity to thank all of the members for their contributions, particularly the member for Jagajaga and the member for Solomon, and in a moment I might also touch on the contribution of the member for Makin. All members have touched on some of the very important issues that arise in the context of this bill and have also, I think, offered some very good statistical and historical information about why this bill is important to the parliament and to the nation.

It was interesting, Member for Makin, hearing you speak about the polio epidemics that occurred in Australia. I must say, it is a matter of great personal pleasure to be able to provide this summing up speech at the second reading point in this debate. I grew up with an older cousin, my eldest cousin, and he was one of the last handful of children in Australia who contracted polio. He was a lovely boy, is a fine man and has had an extremely successful career, but it is a life made very much more difficult than it would otherwise have been. The two vaccinations, the injected and oral vaccinations, are the Salk vaccination, which I think came to Australia in 1956, and the Sabin vaccination, which came to Australia in 1966. My cousin would have been one of the very last in the cohort around the time of the Sabin oral vaccination who was unlucky enough to contract polio. I think that the generation of Australians, of which I am very much at the tail end, who lived through those episodes bring to their experience a very different mindset to a modern generation who have not experienced what it must have been like. The reason why Jonas Salk's wonderful contribution to medicine that he pioneered at the University of Pittsburgh was so welcome in Australia and why that man was, frankly, such a hero to many Australians is that, between 1946 and 1955, there were several catastrophic polio epidemics in Australia which caused 1,000 deaths. In the context of Australia between 1946 and 1955, that was an enormous number of people to die, in a particularly unpleasant way, from a disease which we later found was completely preventable. Of course, not merely did those deaths occur in that decade but the disease itself left thousands of survivors handicapped, in many cases very seriously, including many who became ventilator dependent for the rest of their lives.

So, having grown up with a cousin who suffered at the very tail end of that time, the notion that we have a range of people in Australia who have formed the view on vaccinations that they have is a very strange thing, I think. The extent that this legislation can offer some ongoing educative component, both historically and by raising the issue in the minds and consciousness of the Australian people, is a very important aspect of what we are doing this evening.
Immunisation is, of course, an important health measure for children and their families. That it is the safest and most effective way of providing protection against disease has been verified statistically and historically for many decades now. From 1 January 2016, the government will extend current immunisation requirements to include all children of all ages. At present, a child's immunisation status is only checked at ages one, two and five for the family tax benefit part A supplement, and up to age seven for childcare payments. Parents of course have the right to decide to not vaccinate their children. However, the government considers that, if they are making such a decision as a vaccine objector, this decision can no longer be supported with government financial assistance provided through the effort of the taxpayer. Much has been said in very valuable and decent contributions this evening. Perhaps those contributions can be fairly summarised by noting that it is the view of the House that the choice made by some families not to vaccinate their children is their own choice, but it can no longer be supported, indirectly or directly, or tacitly, by public policy decisions of this House. Public policy, medical research and all other best available information does not support a decision to fail to vaccinate children, and that action, if it is taken by parents in question, can no longer be supported by taxpayers in the form of family assistance and childcare payments.

Critical for the government is that ending vaccine objections through this bill will have an ongoing positive effect for the nation's health and that of, particularly, the nation's children. This means that families who do object to vaccination will no longer be able to access the relevant family assistance payments. As has been noted, there are appropriate exceptions to the policy, which have been carefully designed. They will apply as exceptions for valid medical reasons such as when a general practitioner certifies that a child has a medical contraindication or vaccination is not required as the child has a natural immunity to any particular disease in question. Families with children participating in an approved vaccine study will be taken to meet the immunisation requirements for the duration of the study. Similar rules will apply where a vaccine is temporarily unavailable. The requirements will also be met if a recognised immunisation provider certifies that the child has an equivalent level of immunisation through an overseas vaccination program.

Finally, the secretary of the department will be able to determine that a child meets the immunisation requirements, in very limited circumstances, after considering decision making principles set out in a legislative instrument made by the minister. Such decisions of the secretary will be made on a case-by-case basis, and they are strictly to address unusual situations—for example, where a grandparent or non-parent carer does not have the requisite legal authority to require or compel the vaccination of a child or effect the vaccination of a child in their care. In those circumstances, it cannot be used to give effect to exemptions on the ground of vaccine objection. The example we are giving is a circumstance in which a parent who has the legal authority to prevent vaccination does so but the child is nevertheless in the care of another person.

This policy, as it has been presented and articulated in the bill before the parliament tonight, will tighten up the rules and reinforce the importance of vaccination in protecting public health, especially for children, and perhaps it will do something to bring to the forefront of the Australian consciousness issues that in the 1940s, 1950s and, very sadly, still in the 1960s left physical scars across the nation that were eventually cured by widespread use of relevant vaccinations. I commend the bill to the House.
The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Henderson): The question is that this bill be now read a second time.
Question agreed to.
Bill read a second time.

Third Reading

Mr PORTER (Pearce—Minister for Social Services) (20:08): 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 (More Generous Means Testing for Youth Payments) Bill 2015

Second Reading

Debate resumed on the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Ms MACKLIN (Jagajaga) (20:09): I am pleased to speak on the Social Services Amendment (More Generous Means Testing for Youth Payments) Bill 2015 and to offer Labor’s support for this bill. I have to say, it is a very rare day that we see this government seeking to make income support payments more generous or to provide extra support to ordinary Australians. Indeed, in the two years of this Abbott-Turnbull government, this may well be the first time a bill has come before the House that seeks to make life easier for Australian families. Such is the legacy of this government.

So, before I go into the details of the bill, I want to spend just a moment or two reflecting on the legacy of this government and the impact they would want to have on pensioners, families and young people in our community. It is a legacy of cuts to income support the likes of which this country has never seen before—unfortunately a legacy that in some cases is likely to continue, because, despite what could only be described as a brutal change in leadership, there does not seem to have been much of a change in direction. And I guess you could ask, why would we expect there to be? The new Prime Minister has been just as much of a player in the decisions of the government as when Mr Abbott was the Prime Minister. The new Prime Minister was at the cabinet table when the 2014 budget was drawn up. He would have supported, around that cabinet table—in fact, he said so publicly—all the cuts in the 2014 budget, including the cuts to indexation of the pension, cuts that we now know would have seen every single one of Australia’s four million pensioners left with $80 less pension a week over the next 10 years. The new Prime Minister also supported and voted in this place for the second round of pension cuts in this year’s budget—cuts that will leave 330,000 pensioners worse off in 2017.

Dr Stone: Madam Deputy Speaker, a point of order on relevance: I ask that you draw the member’s attention to the topic that is currently under debate, which is the Social Services Legislation Amendment (More Generous Means Testing for Youth Payments) Bill 2015.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Henderson): There is no point of order.

Dr Stone: Well, I argue that the member is not visiting this bill at all but rather the budget.
The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I ask the member for Murray to resume her seat. There is no point of order. But, before I give the call to the member for Jagajaga, I will just say that you would expect some ranging, but I do remind the member to stay within the subject matter of the bill. Thank you.

Ms MACKLIN: As I indicated at the start of my remarks, the Labor opposition will be supporting this more generous indexation of youth payments. But what is important to families is of course to know the whole context of what this government is doing to family budgets. I was just talking about the impact of the government's cuts on pensioners. Some single pensioners will lose $8,000 a year as a result of the government's pension cuts, and some couples will lose up to $14,000 a year.

We also know that there are very significant cuts in the 2014 budget to family tax benefits. Today we have seen some signs that the government is considering retreating from these very unfair cuts, at least in part, and I think we can expect to see the detail of that. The government has insisted for the past two years that Australian families should just accept these cuts to family tax benefits, should accept that families should, apparently, pay the price of fiscal repair. But Labor does not see it that way. We have argued long and hard for the past 18 months that the cuts from this government have unfairly targeted low- and middle-income earners. It now seems that families will be protected from some of these cuts and Labor are very, very pleased to have fought the hard fight for those families. We will continue to fight this Liberal government's cuts to paid parental leave—another cut to families, cuts that 80,000 new parents each and every year will feel. These cuts are just as savage today as they were when they were introduced.

As this legislation specifically focuses on young people, I will draw the parliament's attention to two attempted cuts to young job seekers. This Prime Minister sat around the cabinet table as every single Liberal-National Party member in this parliament agreed to what I consider to be the toughest cuts of all, the cruellest cuts of all, which would have left young people under the age of 30 with absolutely nothing to live on for six months. I am pleased to say that that got defeated with Labor's hard campaigning. But we are now seeing the next iteration of this cruel cut. Now, young people will face a one-month wait for any income support, and that is for young job seekers under the age of 25.

If this new Prime Minister gets his way, young people on income support will be left with nothing to live on for a month, and we should not forget that. Even as we consider this bill, we have to remember that there is another group of young people who are going to be harshly impacted by this government's cruel measures.

Another very harsh measure for young people on income support between the ages of 22 and 24 would see a cut to their income support of around $46 a week. That is around $2,400 a year. We saw just a few weeks ago that this government has reintroduced this bill that would see these cuts implemented. That was one of the first acts of the new Prime Minister—to reintroduce the same unfair cuts to young Australians as Mr Abbott had attempted to do. These measures have already been defeated in the Senate and, of course, Labor will do everything in its power to try to defeat them again. It does seem that the new Prime Minister is still going to pursue these very, very harsh measures.

You would have to wonder what liberalism actually means in the face of these very harsh cuts. I do not think any of us here today should pretend that we have a government that have
the interests of our young people at heart. These cuts that are currently before this parliament are very harsh indeed and the government have relentlessly pursued them. They have tried to demonise young people, calling them the leaners of Australian society. The argument from the government was that all of this was to be done to improve the budget. In fact, the government have achieved the remarkable, simultaneously cutting into the incomes of pensioners, families and young people while, at the same time, doubling the deficit. Unemployment is up, growth has slowed and, at the same time, they have this legacy of cuts—all supposedly geared to improving the state of the economy, all of that demonstrably false. None of us should ever forget any of that. All of this pain would have been on pensioners, families and young people yet, at the same time, amazingly, the government have doubled the deficit.

Tonight like every single night, we should never forget this government's attitude to the most needy members of our society and we should also, at the same time, never forget that these cuts have failed to achieve the stated objective of budget repair. The sum total of this government's record on social policy is to demonise the vulnerable for absolutely no gain. This is why the bill before the chamber tonight is a surprise.

There are four main components to the bill. The first, commencing from 1 January next year, will see a removal of the family assets test and the family actual means test from the youth allowance parental means test arrangements. Removal of the family assets test will see around 4,100 additional dependent youth allowance claimants qualify for the first time, accessing average annual payments of $7,000 a year. Removing the family actual means test will see around 1,200 more people receiving youth allowance for the first time, as well as increasing payments for around 4,860 existing students by approximately $2,000 a year.

The bill also aligns the parental income test exemptions for youth allowance with existing arrangements for family tax benefit part A; removes the maintenance income from the youth allowance parental income test assessment; and applies a separate maintenance income test for the treatment of child support like that currently applying to family tax benefit part A. Also, where a family has a dependent child who receives an individual youth payment that is parentally income-tested and younger siblings who qualify for family tax benefit, the family pool for the youth parental income test will include all FTB children. They are all positive measures.

According to the minister's second-reading speech, including all FTB children in the family pool for the youth parental income test will allow around 13,700 families with dependent children in both the family tax benefit A and youth streams to become eligible for an average increase in payment of around $1,100 a year. Around 5,800 families who currently miss out on payments due to the combined high-taper rates will also become eligible for an average payment of around $1,300 per year. According to that same material, the changes will reduce the regulatory burden on around 30,000 families subject to the family actual means test and around 200,000 families subjected to the family assets test.

For these reasons, Labor will support the bill.

Mr Wilson (O'Connor) (20:22): I rise today in support of the Social Services Legislation Amendment (More Generous Means Testing for Youth Payments) Bill 2015. I welcome the support from the member for Jagajaga and the Labor Party for this bill. It does
go part way to rectifying the damage done to youth allowance by the Rudd government in 2010.

I first want to thank the Hon. Scott Morrison, the former Minister for Social Services, for introducing this amendment bill after listening to the pleas from regional backbenchers such as myself and my colleague the member for Murray and also from Senator Bridget McKenzie, Chair of the Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee, when we appealed for more equitable access to higher education opportunities for the youth of regional, rural and remote Australia.

I thank Senator McKenzie and her panel of representatives from the education and social services departments who recently conducted over 14 regional education forums across the country, including one in Albany in my electorate of O'Connor. These forums were an opportunity to hear firsthand the experience of families and students when trying to access higher education in regional, rural and remote Australia. The information collected at these forums will be collated into a final report to be presented to the new ministers, my dear friend the Hon. Christian Porter, the new Minister for Social Services, and Senator the Hon. Simon Birmingham, the Minister for Education and Training, for their consideration in November to help shape further changes to accessibility for youth payments going forward.

In Albany, over 65 people attended our forum, including parents and grandparents, university, high school and gap year students, educational professionals and others concerned by the barriers country kids are experiencing in obtaining tertiary education. I commend the attendees for sharing their personal and often heart-rending stories and I acknowledge their well-considered recommendations on how the federal government can address the obstacles they have encountered. Together we heard of the emotional as well as financial cost for regional students having to leave home and the security of family, friends and mentors to set up a life in the city, taking full responsibility for the daily necessities of feeding, clothing and transporting themselves as well as securing a job while maintaining their studies. Many are ineligible for any form of government financial assistance.

Youth allowance is the main benefit these students seek to access to allow them to live guilt-free of the financial burden incurred by their parents, many of whom are supporting other siblings at school and university. I myself was once such student. I was the youngest of six children. My mother was a widow working as a nursing sister to support my four older sisters as they pursued their university studies. My brother, Allan, and I remained at home, working on the farm after graduation from high school. I worked for two years to attain independent status for youth allowance and was able to move away to the Muresk campus of Curtin University and pursue my agribusiness degree. I am eternally grateful for the support that allowed me the opportunity to be the person I am today.

Now, some 30 years later, I see country kids just like me struggling with a system that is complicated to negotiate and, for some, impossible to gain any benefit through. Attendees at the recent higher education forum described the onerous application process for youth allowance, with one highly educated parent clocking up 80 hours helping their child fill out the necessary documentation.

Those from farms spoke of issues regarding the family asset test, where, even with the substantial discount applied, they still exceeded the threshold for youth allowance eligibility. In addition, farmers made the point that in this current economic climate you cannot just
liquidate a farm asset overnight and, even if it were possible to do so, you would simultaneously lose your main income source. With respect to the family actual means test, I have met constituents who found the whole process so onerous they simply gave up.

This amendment to remove the family assets test and family actual means test from the parental income test will base the assessment of a young person's eligibility for youth allowance on a much fairer measure of their family income than the current system. I believe removing the family assets test will see around 4,100 additional dependent students qualify for the first time, accessing payments of more than $7,000 a year. The passage of this bill will significantly reduce the regulatory burden on around 200,000 families subject to the family assets test. Removing the family actual means test will see an additional 1,200 students receive youth allowance for the first time, and some 4,800 existing students will see their payments rise by approximately $2,000 a year. The passage of this bill will reduce the regulatory burden on around 30,000 families subject to the family actual means test. I therefore heartily welcome the plan to scrap the family assets test and family actual means test from the youth allowance eligibility and calculation criteria. I foresee this leading to tremendous improvements in access to youth allowance payments for the farming families of O'Connor.

This brings me to another issue raised at the forum by those with large families and multiple children studying. These parents find their children are ineligible for youth allowance due to them exceeding the parental income thresholds, yet they say there is inadequate consideration of the immense financial burden of supporting each of these children's individual education and accommodation needs. Many parents at our forum described paying living expenses of $17,000 to $25,000 per year per child attending university and only marginally less for children boarding for secondary school. One parent at the forum had put four children through higher education and another had spent $250,000 on higher education over the past 10 years.

It is for this reason that I welcome the amendments to change the youth allowance parental income testing arrangements to include all family tax benefit children in the family pool. Currently only children over 16 years of age are included in this test. These changes to the family pool for the youth parental income test will allow around 13,700 families with dependent children in both the family tax benefit part A and the youth systems to become eligible for an average increase in payment of around $1,100 per annum. Around 5,800 families who currently miss out on payments due to the combined high taper rates will become eligible for payments of around $1,300 per year. The changes in this amendment bill will soften the reductions in the dependent child's youth allowance payment as the family's income increases. I look forward to the changes this bill will introduce as a first step in a process that requires a major revamp. These changes to the current legislation will facilitate fairer access to dependent youth allowance for rural, regional and remote students.

But how many of these kids are truly dependent? Most cannot remain living at home to complete their studies. In Western Australia, unlike in the eastern states, we do not have regional universities. In some large regional centres, such as Albany, we are blessed to have satellite campuses of metropolitan universities such as the University of Western Australia. In Kalgoorlie we have the Western Australian School of Mines campus of Curtin University. Albany's Great Southern Institute of Technology hopes to soon offer degree programs in
nursing and other in-demand qualifications through university partnerships so local students can be educated in situ and, hopefully, graduate to contribute to our much needed regional professional workforce. The City of Albany is actively trying to grow Albany as a tertiary education destination, and I strongly endorse the efforts of Mayor Dennis Wellington and his deputy, Greg Stocks.

Most of all, I acknowledge the quality of our country students. They are distinguished by excellent academic achievement, qualifying for university places only to be hampered in their aspirations for their desired courses by the tyranny of distance and the inherent financial barriers to obtaining self-sufficiency. Secondary school principals who attended the think tank I convened after the regional higher education forum confirmed up to 80 per cent of their graduates in 2014 qualified for university entrance, yet some 97 per cent of those would take a gap year, driven largely by financial considerations. It is important to note at this point that deferral from university only holds a place for 12 months, yet students have to take 12 to 24 months to qualify for youth allowance under various different criteria. Those who take time out are often lost to the temptations of a regular disposable income and peer group pressure. One principal stated over 33 per cent of their students taking a gap year would not proceed to university.

Although there are concerted attempts to offer educational opportunities in the regions so students have the opportunity to study in situ with the support of their friends, family and greater community, the undeniable fact is that most of our country kids have no choice but to move to the city for all of their studies. These kids leave home, often relocating many hundreds of kilometres, to set themselves up in halls of residence or rental digs where they have to largely fend for themselves. Although they have access to various support networks, there is nothing like the comfort of coming home to a warm hug or a home-cooked meal. I applaud the young people of my electorate who successfully make this transition to university life and work hard at their studies whilst also holding down jobs to support themselves.

At this juncture, I digress to congratulate three innovative Albany siblings, twins Caitlin and Damien and big brother Joshua Boccamazzo, all of whom are living away from home to complete degrees in Perth. Together they have drawn on their collective experience to create a website for country students, called City & Beyond, which aims to help country students like themselves in the transition to city and university life. Their website details the pitfalls and perils associated with accessing rental accommodation, negotiating the job market and applying for scholarships and benefits like youth allowance. I met with the Boccamazzo twins recently and was gobsmacked to hear that despite their identical education and employment histories they had both failed eligibility for youth allowance on different criteria. I think this anomaly is symptomatic of the broken vehicle this vital benefit had become under the previous government, and I challenge Minister Porter to fix this trusty old wreck one piece at a time.

For my electorate, the biggest constituent issue is actually eligibility for youth allowance under the independence criteria. For general independence eligibility, any student anywhere in Australia must prove they have supported themselves by working full-time for 18 months in a two-year period. This is not an easy feat in regional and rural areas where jobs may be seasonal, inconsistent or non-existent. I have met many students who have failed to meet these criteria due to situations beyond their control, such as illness, the seasonal nature of
farm labour force requirements and competition from younger, cheaper labour during school holidays. A failure to meet these eligibility requirements often means abandoning their plans to study. For the special regional and remote criteria, a country student can be assessed as independent if they have received at least 75 per cent of wage level A of the National Training Wage Schedule in an 18-month period or have worked part-time for at least 15 hours a week for at least two years.

In addition, their parents must also have earned less than $150,000 in the most recent tax year. I have encountered countless constituents whose children have worked hard for the requisite period to prove their independence only to find they fail eligibility under the parental income criterion. Many parents cited the parental threshold of $150,000 as inadequately low when taking into account double-income families and those supporting other truly dependent children. I have also heard of cases where changes in parental circumstances have resulted in previously eligible kids losing their benefits part-way through their degrees and having to drop out. I therefore hope there is scope for reviewing youth allowance independence criteria in the near future.

All in all, I anticipate Ministers Porter and Birmingham will take the information gleaned from these Australia-wide regional higher education forums, together with the thoughtfully penned individual submissions of parents and students, teachers and mentors—all reflecting on the barriers to accessing higher education for country kids—and consider their constructive suggestions moving forward. It is my sincere hope that together they can shape a great youth allowance of the future, one that is equitable for all students—remote, rural, regional and metropolitan—and is based on their individual needs, so that we can nurture and encourage our youth to pursue a higher education.

I thank the former Minister for Social Services, the Hon. Scott Morrison, for the well-constructed amendment bill before us for debate today. It fulfils a budget promise to provide more generous and consistent support for families with dependent students who qualify for certain youth income support payments. I thank the government for their commitment of over $262 million over the forward estimates to bring extra support to some 30,000 families. In particular, I reiterate that this bill will benefit the many families in my electorate of O'Connor who have children wishing to pursue studies beyond year 12. These children are our future community leaders. They deserve access to the same education as their metropolitan cousins so they can become the best they can possibly be, irrespective of their postcode. I commend the bill to the House.

Ms CHESTERS (Bendigo) (20:35): This bill is not opposed by Labor, but I did want to put on the record the experience of regional students when it comes to this government. As the previous contributors to the debate on this side of the House have said, we do not oppose this bill. We do support it because we do believe we need to support students when they are at university. But this government's track record of support for students is shocking, and through this debate I do want to highlight some of the examples of how shocking it is when it comes to supporting regional university students and regional families.

It is interesting that the previous contributor to the debate brought up the regional forums that they have been holding. When they were talking about this issue, I hope that they had more people attending the regional forum organised by the government in the member's electorate than attended the regional forum that they held at the La Trobe University at
Bendigo. Not one student turned up. I should take that back. Not one student who was not involved in the Labor Party turned up to their forum. The student who did turn up was a member of the Labor Party, and he turned up to challenge the government about why they were introducing $100,000 degrees.

So, even when it comes to talking about a bill that should be positive, that should be about saying to families in regional areas, 'We're actually going to help more students come to university,' this government fails to get out and articulate and engage people. If it did, it would learn very quickly how upset regional students are about this government's plan for higher education, its proposal to introduce $100,000 degrees. The deregulation of university degrees has gone down like a lead balloon. It is not popular in the regions because it will be a barrier to so many people in regional Australia being able to attend university.

What the regions also do not like about what this government is doing to universities is the massive funding cuts that it introduced in its first budget, including for La Trobe University and the campus in my electorate. It was $40 million that this government cut. That meant that students, to obtain the same qualifications, have the same experience, would either have to pay more for their course materials or they would have less time at university. As a result of this government's cuts to higher education, university students at La Trobe—whom this government claims to support in this bill before us—have less time with their tutors, less time with their lecturers, less time on campus. The bill before us, whilst it will help a few, will not help the majority of university students. It is a piece of window-dressing by this government to distract people by saying, 'We'll help some of you,' and meanwhile trashing the rest of them when it comes to higher education.

This bill makes changes to the means-testing for youth payments. It will mean extra support for young people living in families with higher levels of assets, by removing certain means-testing provisions, including the family assets test, for youth allowance. So, as other people have mentioned, it does help regional families, particularly, whether they work in small businesses, whether they be farmers or whether they be, as we say, asset rich but cash poor. It does help some families in that way to support their young people when they go to university. It means that more young people living in families with higher assets will now have access to youth allowance.

Of course Labor wants to see extra support for young people from youth allowance, because we understand how expensive life has become for students—and not just students. Life in general has become expensive. I was looking just today at reports released by Domain.com.au and Realestate.com.au on average rents and how rents have increased in places like Melbourne, Sydney and even regional centres like Bendigo. Rents are going up by a ridiculous percentage, so any support from youth allowance will help keep young people at university. Of course Labor wants to see the support come for young people, but we need to acknowledge that it is only a small number of young people who will receive support. This is not the silver bullet to ensure that young people stay at university.

In relation to this bill, we want to point out the hypocrisy at the heart of the government's agenda. Whilst it supports some people going to university, these are the same families that it is going after with changes to other areas, whether it be the family tax benefit or the Medicare system. This government takes with one hand and gives with the other. This is a simple move
that does not really help many, and it tries to disguise what is actually going on in many of our regional communities when it comes to the cost of study and the cost of living.

Just last week the government voted to put through legislation which would see young people left with nothing to live on for a month. To young people who finish university, they are saying, 'Too bad; we're not going to help you.' If you don't get a job within the first two days of your graduation, you are not going to get help. If you have been made redundant, if you have lost your job, you are not going to get help for the first four weeks. But this is after their proposal to leave young people without any support for six months.

The government are so selective about which young people they will help. This bill is a demonstration that they are being selective in the young people that they will help. If you are a young farming kid who wants to go to university: 'Sure, we'll lend a hand, change the means-testing and help you.' But, if you are a young farming kid who wants to start working and moves to a city like Bendigo and starts seeking help: 'We're not going to help you; we're going to keep you on nothing to live on for six months'—and these days they are saying that it is nothing to live on for four weeks. If you are a young person going to TAFE, the same applies. If you are a young person who finishes university and struggles to get that job interview, struggles to get that first job opportunity—because there is a lack of entry-level jobs today—then: 'We're not going to help you.'

This is another attempt by this government at window-dressing—to pretend to constituents in the bush, in the regions: 'We really do care about you.' Quite frankly, the regions are not buying it. They do not believe that this bill is enough to support and encourage more young people to go to university. As I have said, one of the major barriers to going to university is upheaval that the government have introduced to the higher education sector. Will there be $100,000 degrees? Will there be fee deregulation? Will we actually see the cost of education go so high that a number of people in the regions say, 'I just can't afford it; I'm not going to try?'

I thought it was important just to mention a few local examples—people I spoke to about what their experience of getting some youth allowance has been. These are students from La Trobe University who did not attend the forum that was put on by the government but who spoke to me, when I was at the campus, about their experience when it came to youth allowance. Jack Cullen, who is an outdoor education student, gets some youth allowance, and these are his comments on what it is like to study at the moment: 'It costs me about $110 for food, not including rent, which is huge'—about $280 a week. 'I only get $170 in youth allowance, so I have to budget everything to make sure I get through.' He attends any event on campus that involves food—that sounds like a few staffers we have here, in this place! Any event there is food, he will pop along. That is one less meal he has to pay for.

Youth allowance simply does not stretch as far today as it did when people in this place went to university. Jessica Hill, an event management and business student, gets no youth allowance. She said, 'University life is definitely not like breezing through. If your parents don't support you and you don't work, you won't be able to stay at university; no way.' Jemma, an education student, gets no youth allowance: 'You really have to think hard about where you shop. One of the firsts things you learn at uni is to survive on a budget, eat less and definitely not buy big-brand stuff.' These are people we want to excel in their studies. They currently live in poverty.
These are people who—because of other things this government has failed to tackle—are struggling. Rents are going up because we have not tackled housing affordability. Despite the government's rhetoric about lowering energy bills, they are higher today than they have ever been under any Labor government. If the government pretend they are not, they have their heads in the sand. Energy bills are up. Water bills are up. These are some of the cost pressures on students today—not just on university students but on everybody in our community.

Jack is studying arts. He gets some youth allowance. He said, 'It's not enough to cover expenses. I live at home, at the moment. If I moved out, I wouldn't be able to afford rent or food not to mention bills and text books. The price of food has gone up. It's very hard if you want to eat a balanced diet, which is what I need to do in order to be a healthy human being.' It means the idea of students eating two-minute noodles is a cold, hard reality. I know that some people like to joke about their days as a student when they tried to survive on two-minute noodles. But is it something we should be aiming for, for our young people?

Tim is an arts student too and gets some youth allowance. He has moved to live on campus, at the university, in my electorate. He said, 'I've already had tonsillitis three times this year because of the stress and have no sleep from having to manage working in fast food while getting study done.' He works at McDonald's and studies full time. There are lots of pressures in trying to keep up full-time work and full-time study. He continued: 'Youth allowance helps but it definitely isn't enough. When you get to the checkout at the supermarket there is always a tense moment waiting to see if the transaction is approved. It's like living on a tightrope.'

What this government fails to realise is that students are already doing it tough. The measures in this bill will help some access youth allowance, but they do not go to tackling the broader issues we have facing higher education. It is an attempt by this government to pretend they are helping students. It is only some students they are helping. That is why Labor supports this bill before the House—any support for young people in this space should be given.

The government is kidding itself if it thinks this is a silver bullet that will help all students. For all the speakers on this list—and I note there is a long list of speakers compared to the other debates today—they were not speaking about the fact they want to see them have less in their superannuation. They were not speaking on other bills that would have helped young people. Very few of them spoke about the fact they are going to introduce changes to Newstart, which would see them on no income.

This government and its backbenchers are selective about what they will stand up and speak about in this House. They are in hiding from the truth. They are not standing up and saying, 'Whilst we will give some the opportunity to youth allowance, we have cut funding to universities. We will introduce up-front fees. We will regulate universities that see, in some places, a quadrupling of fees, which will become a barrier. We are doing very little to tackle the cost-of-living pressures. Once these people leave university, we will do very little to help them enter meaningful employment.' This government has no jobs plan for young people. For all their rhetoric, they do very little to help them after they get their education. A clear example of their failure to help people with graduate entry-level jobs is the lack of graduate jobs this government offered to university students finishing last year and this year.

If this government were serious about supporting young people and those who want a higher education, they would do more than what is in this bill. They would stop cutting...
funding to university; in fact, they would restore it. They would make sure our university campuses were strong and the centre of the university's focus. They would also drop their ridiculous package of $100,000 degrees, which are a real barrier for university students. And they would more than just 'help' some students who do not have access to youth allowance—they would do more. They would ensure they had decent university support services on campus so that students' experiences I shared with you today are in the past and not the future.

Mr PASIN (Barker) (20:51): I rise to speak on the Social Services Legislation Amendment (More Generous Means Testing for Youth Payments) Bill 2015. I commend to you the contribution made prior to the member for Bendigo's contribution—that is, the one by the member for O'Connor. It was both considered and positive.

With respect, I think I had better run out and get some Prozac after listening to the member for Bendigo, because that was one of the most depressing presentations I have heard. If anyone wants to know why, perhaps, the fortunes of this government have turned for the good, it is because we are focusing on hope and not despair. Maybe the member for Bendigo could reflect on that while she returns to her room and considers what she does just before we adjourn.

This bill will implement the government's 2015 budget measures to provide more consistent and more targeted support for families with dependent young people who qualify for certain youth income support payments. In doing so, it honours the original policy intent of youth allowance. I am especially supportive of this bill, as it offers better support for rural, regional and remote families in transitioning their children from school to further study.

A significant proportion of the families in my electorate are engaged in agriculture, forestry or the fishing sector. Some 20,000 of my constituents are employed directly in these sectors, and whilst there are significant employment opportunities for young people within Barker, and whilst Barker now proudly provides tertiary opportunities to constituents through UniSA in Mount Gambier and the Flinders University Rural Clinical School in Renmark and Mount Gambier, a significant number of young people wishing to pursue further study are often challenged by the costs associated with moving to undertake that study.

I have reflected on this challenge previously in this chamber. Many of the constituents I have spoken to who are facing this cost challenge also face significant and arbitrary regulatory provisions which exclude their children from receiving assistance. In the coalition we understand the requirements of Australia's rural, regional and remote families.

During the debate on our university reforms, those opposite were fixated on absurd claims regarding $100,000 degrees. I remind those opposite that for many people out there, especially rural families, getting to university is the real challenge—perhaps that is something that the member for Bendigo can reflect on as well. That is because the Higher Education Loan Program meets the tertiary costs associated with tuition but does not meet the costs associated with living away from home. That is why we proposed reforms to the tertiary sector which would meet this shortfall. But, sadly, those opposite and those on the crossbench in the other place rejected those considered reforms.

That is why we have taken these steps to enable those families to send their children to tertiary education. I am proud to say that this bill will have a positive impact on rural, remote and regional families. The measures taken in this bill are a direct response to the government's
understanding of these challenges and those challenges faced by these constituents. This bill recognises the need for a simpler, fairer youth income support system. This government has consistently removed unnecessary regulation, and this is true of the social security sector also.

In this bill we are squarely focused on better targeting youth income support. This government is delivering a more efficient use of taxpayer funds across the social services sector. We have taken steps to deliver stronger compliance frameworks and we have taken steps to curb unnecessary costs in the area of administration of social services. The myGov one-stop shop is an example of this simplification. And yet whilst it too often falls to coalition governments to tighten loose spending by Labor governments, this bill is an opportunity for the government to deliver our resources more effectively and in a more thoughtful and targeted way.

This government does not engage in generosity for generosity's sake. Government should approach each spending commitment with 20/20 vision, focused on policy integrity. This bill is not a ploy to gain some hollow popularity. It is a bill which delivers better outcomes by recalibrating youth income support, with a focus, as I have said, on the original policy intent.

While those opposite remove accountability mechanisms and weaken job seeker compliance frameworks, we have tightened our requirements. Having done so, we have the capacity to deliver more support where it is needed in a way that will provide a significant return on investment to the Commonwealth. This government understands that there is a finite pool of government revenue. We understand that each and every measure must be accurately costed and ultimately paid for by the taxpayer. We take our obligation to the taxpayer seriously, and understand that Australians provide tax revenue to us on trust, to expend in a cautious and effective manner.

Whilst this bill involves a cost to the taxpayer, I believe deeply that it is an investment that will yield handsome dividends into the future. In many cases, the measures in this bill will enable families who would otherwise not be able to send their children to further education to pursue that transformative opportunity. Could there be a better example of a hand up?

Importantly, this is delivered not through manipulating the means test but through bringing that means test back to reality. The coalition believes that we should take a broader focus on families when it comes to assessing youth income support. We are focusing on families who need assistance, particularly those in rural, regional and remote areas who face the higher costs of supporting their children to pursue post-secondary study because of the need to move away from home.

This bill simplifies the rules by more closely aligning parental means test assessments for youth payments with family tax benefit part A. Family tax benefit A is subject only to an income test based on adjusted taxable income, and has no family asset test or family actual means test. Many farming families, as you know well, Madam Deputy Speaker Landy, are asset rich but income poor. With drought now taking hold in much of my electorate, I fear that this may become increasingly the case. It is absolutely critical that we give our young rural, regional and remote Australians the widest scope of opportunities possible. This bill maximises that spectrum of opportunity.

The current arrangement is simply inadequate in this space. It highlights a misperception of agriculture and agribusiness within our social services legislation. Around 1,200 families
from rural, remote and regional areas will be eligible for an increase in payment from the removal of the family actual means test, and they are also expected to benefit from the removal of the family asset test.

The changes also mean that farming families will not have farm assets included when assessing eligibility for the youth allowance.

Debate interrupted.

**ADJOURNMENT**

The SPEAKER (21:00): It being 9pm, I propose the question:

That the House do now adjourn.

Marfan Syndrome

Medical Research Future Fund

Mr MITCHELL (McEwen—Second Deputy Speaker) (21:00): Tonight I rise to acknowledge the work of the Marfan Association of Victoria in increasing awareness of Marfan syndrome and the work it does in advocating for Australians living with this rare disorder. Marfan syndrome is a rare genetic disorder that affects connective tissue. Marfan affects an estimated one in 5,000 people and half of those people would not know they have it. At least 90 per cent of Marfan cases have potentially life-threatening cardiac involvement in varying degrees.

The Marfan Association of Victoria was established in 1997 and is made up of volunteers who have all been directly affected by Marfan syndrome. I first came into contact with the association after the death of my brother Jason. People likely Sally, Kate, Roslyn, Justin and every other member I have conversed with at the Marfan Association have made understanding why and dealing with loss so much easier. This organisation obviously has a special place in my heart, and I congratulate the Marfan Association of Victoria on its most recent and successful panel session at the AGM held in Chadstone last Sunday.

The panel session on surgery allowed members the opportunity to understand the pre, during and post recovery experience shared by other members of the organisation. This is where the all-important role of organisations like the Marfan Association of Victoria come to the fore. These organisations are strong advocates for everyone affected by rare genetic diseases, illnesses and disorders. They work tirelessly to advance research for treatments to save lives and enhance the quality of life for people affected by these disorders. They provide supportive communities for everyone—from the person affected directly by a disorder to the families and carers who also experience the health journey. When breakthroughs and advances are made, it is these organisations that spread the latest news and most accurate information and that educate everyone from patients and their families to medical professionals and the general public.

The importance of medical research into rare, genetic diseases cannot be understated. Parliament passed a bill creating the Medical Research Future Fund in August this year. The idea of having a future fund for medical research is fantastic. It has the potential to strengthen Australia's position as a global leader in medical research. Unfortunately, the version of the future fund the Liberal government rushed through failed to include a number of the recommendations from the McKeon Strategic Review of Health and Medical Research—a
missed opportunity. It could have been because the landmark review was commissioned by Labor, but you would hate to think that politics got in the way of providing Australians with the benefits of advanced medical research. As I said before, it really was a missed opportunity.

The future fund is expected to provide financial support for medical research and innovation. Given the future fund was a signature policy announcement of the Liberal government before the last budget, and was rushed through by securing the support of the Greens, you would think that the work to establish a transparent and robust structure to support the future fund would have been ready to go as soon as the bill was passed. But the future fund has not yet provided funds to any medical research or projects. What is the hold up? The Australian Medical Research Advisory Board, one of the key governance structures of the future fund, has not been established and there is no real indication of when the advisory board will be in place. The Department of Health's last update on this was in August and referred to an announcement being made 'shortly'. So the answer to stakeholders on when the future fund will be up and running is: how long is a piece of string?

There is also confusion, and I use the term loosely, about how money will be disbursed from the future fund. The bill provides that the minister may delegate their responsibility for funding to institutions. But in the absence of a formal instrument of delegation or an agreed arm's length distribution process, it leaves the issue open to suggestion that 'pet projects' could be funded. This could be avoided by strengthening the role of the existing National Health and Medical Research Council. The NHMRC is a fantastic organisation with an international reputation. It has been instrumental in guiding Australia's medical research agenda and ensuring high-quality outcomes for more than 80 years. The NHMRC is an organisation that advocates like the Marfan association would trust when it came to disbursement of funds for medical research.

Labor commissioned the McKeon review, which provided a 10-year road map showing how health and medical research can be supported. The future fund arrangement in no way reflects that vision. On behalf of organisations like the Marfan association I call on the Minister for Health to actually do something, help Australians by making medical research a priority and to get the future fund working.

**Forde Electorate: Seniors Expo**

*Mr VAN MANEN (Forde) (21:05):* It is always a pleasure to rise in this place and speak about some of the wonderful people in our electorates who contribute so much towards making our communities what they are today. In that vein, I would like to speak about the seniors in the electorate of Forde and the lifeblood that they are to our many community organisations. Many of them spend time as volunteers or are carers to family members and non-family members in the wider community. The fact is seniors make an enormous and valuable contribution to Australian society.

In my electorate of Forde, I often like to take the time to catch up with many of our seniors for a chat, to listen to their concerns and anecdotes but, more importantly, absorb their wisdom and, in many instances, enjoy their friendship. This year's Forde Seniors Expo had one of our best ever turnouts to date, with more than 500 seniors from around the electorate attending on the day. It was a fantastic opportunity to catch up with many of our local seniors face to face and discuss the issues most important to them. It also provided our seniors with a
one-stop-shop for many of the local services, businesses and organisations that are available to them.

The Forde Seniors Expo is getting bigger and better every year, and I would like to thank all our sponsors and exhibitors for taking part as well as Canterbury College for hosting the event.

Special thanks to my electorate neighbour, the member for Fadden, the honourable Stuart Robert, for coming along to the Forde Seniors Expo as our guest speaker. He was warmly welcomed by our seniors in his role as Minister for Veterans’ Affairs, Minister for Human Services and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Centenary of Anzac.

I also appreciated the minister taking some time to visit my electorate and meet with some of our local residents involved in various community organisations. We took the opportunity to first visit Canterbury College, where the school had used the funding from the Anzac Centenary grant to create a memorial garden. A great big thank you to Principal Donna Anderson for showing us around this fantastic addition to the school which I am sure will be used for commemoration services for many years to come. Next we visited Beenleigh RSL and caught up with the RSL executives and met a number of local veterans. It was a great opportunity to chat about the possible club upgrade for the RSL and enjoy a light lunch, and also to speak with the veterans about some of their concerns about issues that veterans are facing.

Our final stop was to the cenotaph at Charlies Crossing at Upper Coomera where the Rotary Club of Coomera Valley had used the Anzac Centenary grant to restore the monument. Stonemason Verner Nielson has done a tremendous job completing the restoration work, and I would like to thank him for his insights during our visit. Thank you also to all the members of the Rotary Club of Coomera Valley for this fantastic project, and I would like to especially mention Rob Stanford who supplied and installed the flagpoles around the cenotaph.

Over the past couple of weeks I have also had the opportunity to visit many of our over-50s communities in the electorate. I would like to thank Bob Phillips and all the seniors at Palm Lake Resort at Upper Coomera for sharing a great afternoon tea together. I enjoyed catching up and getting to know many of you.

It was a pleasure to come along to a morning tea at Jeta Gardens at Bethania and to be able to present the community with a new Australian flag. I thank Peter Hennessey and all the residents for their kind hospitality.

The friendly welcomes continued when I attended the morning tea at Palm Lake Resort, Waterford. I appreciated the opportunity to visit your community and get to know the issues affecting you. I look forward to dropping in again soon.

Finally, the Friday night fish and chips night at Regal Waters, Bethania, was a great evening of fun and conversation. Thank you to the residents for inviting me to your social evening and giving me the opportunity to chat and listen.

I appreciate greatly the hard work and contributions our seniors make to the electorate of Forde. They always welcome me into their communities with a friendly ear and plenty of advice.
Holloway, Ms Ruby

Ms McGOWAN (Indi) (21:10): Tonight I would like to speak about the cultural economy of Indi and of the work of Ruby Holloway, who has worked as an intern in my office for the past six months under the Australian National Internships Program. Ruby is a local from Wangaratta in north-east Victoria. She is currently in her second year studying Law/Arts at ANU. She says she has been interested in the arts all her life, and acknowledges the support of her parents, Robert and Sylvia, who, she says, 'let my interest in the arts flourish from childhood and never stopped supporting me.'

The Australian National Internships Program provided an excellent vehicle for Ruby to further her knowledge, and an opportunity to perform applied policy work to complement her academic studies. The ANIP is an excellent program, and I am grateful to both the ANU and the Presiding Officers for their support. During their internships, students complete a research project which is assessed by academic staff, and the students gain academic credit for their internships which counts towards their degrees.

Ruby's report is titled The cultural economy and Indi, and the report analyses why a strong cultural economy is important in Australia, and the impact that funding and funding cuts have on the ability to strengthen the cultural economy. The report makes recommendations that will help boost the arts, particularly in my electorate of Indi.

I will let Ruby's words tell the story of the cultural economy. 'A cultural economy is the impact to a region through the arts—not only the visual arts, but music, writing, architecture, theatre, filmmaking and many other creative activities.' The impact is split into two arms. Firstly, there is the traditional economic impact. This is quantifiable in monetary terms, and the revenue created by cultural practices is often overlooked. Secondly, there is the impact that having a strong cultural economy has on the lifestyles of people who live in the regions. This is especially important for Indi as a rural and regional electorate where people often feel like they are missing out on arts events by not living in Melbourne or Sydney.

The electorate of Indi has a rich arts culture that covers a wide range of mediums and interests, and this plays a massive role in the lifestyle enjoyed by my constituents. There is rarely a weekend in Indi where there is not an exhibition, gallery opening, music festival or other showcase happening somewhere in the electorate.

Ruby's report is in four chapters. The first outlines what a cultural economy entails, what it means to talk about boosting it, and the impact this has on the community, as well as looking at sources of funding for the arts in Indi, and the saddening trend of continuous cuts to the arts.

Chapter 2 is a case study into the internationally recognised Wangaratta Jazz and Blues Festival that is held over the last weekend of October. This festival highlights musicians who are local, interstate and international, in a variety of concerts that are both free and ticketed. It is worth in excess of $1.6 million annually to the local economy, and, Mr Speaker, could I point out that this is on in Wangaratta the weekend after next. It will be lovely to see you and any other of my colleagues on your way through! The jazz festival is on 30 October in Wangaratta—a great time.

Chapter 3 of Ruby's report focuses on the HotHouse Theatre in Wodonga, which started out as the Murray River Performing Group in 1979 and is the root of the renowned Flying
Fruit Fly Circus. This regional theatre company brings high quality performances to Albury Wodonga, allowing local people to enjoy the country lifestyle without missing out on the cultural events of the capital cities.

The final chapter of Ruby's report is the conclusion with recommendations, some of which I would like to share with the House tonight. She stresses the importance of local recognition for cultural and arts practices, particularly support for arts in communities, and building networks of artists; she also stresses the importance of better funding support for the arts, the creation of a database so that we know who is who and what is on, the creation of an Indi arts award, collaboration with media for promotion, and the use of social media to maintain connections between groups and allow the wider population to know what is happening in Indi. So we have instituted #Indiarts.

In closing, congratulations to Ruby. You have done a terrific job. To Paul Squires and the boys at the jazz festival, thank you for your help. To Tahni Froudist and the board of HotHouse also, thank you.

This is an excellent report. Well done to all concerned. I look forward to working with Ruby and other artists to advance the cultural economy of Indi.

Domestic and Family Violence

Mr VARVARIS (Barton) (21:15): I rise to speak tonight on a topic that has affected one too many Australians. It is a topic that many members on this side of the House and those opposite have spoken about: domestic and family violence. Being October, this month marks National Domestic Violence Awareness Month. It is important that this topic is discussed and issues are continuously addressed because the statistics are simply horrifying. One woman is murdered every week and another is hospitalised every three hours. One in three Australian women will experience violence in their lifetime. Since January this year, 63 women have been killed as a result of domestic violence, leaving behind children and shattered families.

The media is only reporting what they know and, indeed, what has been reported to police. It is a terrible feeling to think that there are many more women and families suffering in silence. Yet silence is the condition in which domestic violence and abuse thrives. Being aware of the issue and taking a stand is the best method to resolve this. Historically, talking about domestic or family violence was a social taboo. It just was not the done thing. It was not too long ago that the issue was considered a private matter and something to sort out at home. But it did not really get sorted out and, increasingly, some methods of sorting it out at home only involved further violence and, alarmingly, death.

The issue of family and domestic violence is not simple. It is a complex issue that occurs across all cultures, ages and socioeconomic groups. It is true that violence is not always inflicted on a woman by a man, but the majority of those who experience abuse and violence are indeed women. It is difficult to measure the true extent of this nationwide problem when many incidents of family, domestic and sexual violence go unreported. I recognise that both the coalition and Labor are committed in combatting this scourge together and this is the right thing to do. We recognise that an alignment of funding and resources must work in unison to stamp out this terrible crime. As the Prime Minister has said, in order to address this issue, we must 'elevate the issue to our national consciousness and make it clear that domestic, family and sexual violence is unacceptable in any circumstances'. The $100 million Women's Safety
Package announced by the coalition government is a necessary step in the right direction. Funding is needed for essential access to frontline services, including shelters, case managers and financial assistance, for those escaping from violent homes. Counselling and legal services are also part of a holistic approach to help victims move on.

Moving on and moving forward from the emotional and physical trauma inflicted upon women and children is something that I believe needs further addressing. Being able to move forward is the one thing that many women talk about in a bid to get on with their lives. It is for this reason that the Moving Forward organisation in Barton is such a critical piece of community infrastructure that I am very proud of. The managing director of this amazing domestic violence service has informed me at length of the critical work they do in helping victims get their lives back together. Jan Christie has more than a decade of experience in this field, having previously worked in many parts of Sydney. She can attest to the fact that this heinous crime does not discriminate against culture and demographics. I was simply astounded in learning about the multifaceted aspects of this highly complex issue, because it goes beyond just violence itself. As Jan has stressed, the physical assaults experienced by the victim are only a form of domestic violence. Too often, long-term emotional abuse has greater paralytic effect on the individual and the child than physical attack. In fact, long-term mental trauma is much harder to recover from, making it difficult for victims to escape from their perpetrators.

This is where Moving Forward steps in to provide a specialist case management service for women and children who are experiencing, escaping or have left domestic and family violence. The specialist team of employees and volunteers not only provide a bed for the night but help victims find long-term accommodation and employment to escape abuse. It also offers therapeutic and educational workshops for women centred on practical support and client-centred planning. It is important that women can rebuild their sense of identity and purpose in moving forward with their lives, because, without any sense of empowerment to leave and move forward, they remain trapped in that environment. It is also crucial that we as a nation address the cause of domestic violence and family abuse. The statistics I mentioned previously are as startling as they are revealing that this crime is an indictment of some male attitudes towards women.

Australians have had enough and I have had enough. Quite frankly, the level of family and domestic violence in Australia in 2015 is alarmingly high and completely unacceptable. All Australians have a role to play in changing the attitudes that create and sustain this endemic culture of violence in our communities. If we all work together, we can resolve this.

Parthenon Marbles

Mr THISTLETHWAITE (Kingsford Smith) (21:20): The removal of the Parthenon sculptures is one of humanity's greatest cultural and artistic travesties. The Parthenon, commenced in 444 BC at the height of the Athenian empire, was one of the world's most important architectural, engineering and artistic feats. The temple, whose remnants still remain today, was adorned with the most significant hand carved relief metopes narrating the story of Athens. It is an artistic and cultural masterpiece. It 1801, the seventh Earl of Elgin, Thomas Bruce, effectively bribed local Ottoman authorities in Athens to remove the Parthenon sculptures and shipped them to England for his private collection. Effectively, the Parthenon sculptures were stolen. In 1816, under financial pressure to settle a debt, the Earl of
Elgin sold the artefacts to the British government, and they remain in the British Museum in London.

The modern state of Greece has on many occasions sought to have the sculptures returned, but the British government continues to refuse that request. Even successive opinion polls in Britain support the return of the sculptures. Greece has offered concessions on numerous occasions for their return. The Greeks have offered to provide a permanent, ongoing display to the British Museum on loan. In 2013, the Greek government sought the assistance of UNESCO and UNESCO offered to mediate the dispute between the British and Greek governments. Once again, the British government refused. Because of this British recalcitrance there has been a growing international campaign for the return of the sculptures. In Australia, and internationally, many high-profile supporters are campaigning for their return. Supporters in the political sphere in Australia include former Prime Ministers Gough Whitlam, Malcolm Fraser and John Howard. Internationally, Nelson Mandela and Bill and Hillary Clinton have all advocated for the return of the sculptures.

Last week the Parliamentary Friendship Group for the Parthenon was created. It is a body that will serve to enhance Greek and Australian relations and help raise awareness of the historical and cultural importance of the Parthenon and, importantly, campaign for the return of the Parthenon sculptures. I was pleased to see David Hill, my friend and a resident of Kingsford Smith, speak at that event. David has been a vigorous campaigner over many years for the return of these important Grecian artefacts.

The importance of the sculptures to Greece as a nation and to the people of Hellenic descent throughout the world, including Greek-Australians, cannot be overstated. I am proud to be part of the campaign to return the Parthenon sculptures to Greece. I am proud to lend my voice to the international and Australian campaigns. And I am proud that this parliament, in a bipartisan manner, has recognised the importance of these cultural artefacts and sought to establish a parliamentary friendship group for the return of these important artistic and cultural artefacts to their rightful home in Greece.

**Bonner Electorate: SpecialCare Central Recognition Awards**

Mr VASTA (Bonner) (21:23): Tonight I rise to speak on the SpecialCare Central Recognition Awards, which were recently held in Bonner. In particular I would like to talk about two outstanding individuals from my electorate who have gone above and beyond to help people with special needs.

This year marked the 7th year of the SpecialCare Central Recognition Awards. These are a fantastic set of awards for a fantastic set of local individuals and businesses. The awards shine a light on those in our community who are making a real difference for disabled people. They are held as part of the Disability Awareness Expo, which itself helps raise the profile of our disabled community.

I have been so privileged to be a part of the Disability Awareness Expo and the recognition awards over the years. It was unfortunate this year that I had to be in Canberra during the same week this wonderful event was held. However, I must thank my good friend Yvonne Campbell from SpecialCare Central for allowing me to sponsor a new award this year. The Local Hero Award was created to recognise people in the community for the positive contribution they have made to the lives of individuals with special needs. I was pleased to
hear that two noteworthy individuals received the 2015 inaugural award and I would like to
take a moment to single out their remarkable achievements. Thomas Spencer is a young man
with a disability, who has overcome many obstacles in his life to achieve his goals. He has
worked hard to help and inspire others with special needs to realise their potential. He was
extremely deserving of the Local Hero Award for all that he has accomplished from such a
passionate and selfless perspective.

The second recipient of the Local Hero Award has dedicated many years to helping
students, with special needs. Lyndall Hayes has led the Step-Up to Employment program at
Darling Point Special School, since it began in 2013. In the years beforehand she coordinated
the vocational education programs at Darling Point Special School. The Step-Up program
helps disabled students get work-ready and fosters their independence. Lyndall and her team
help each Step-Up student progress in their senior education while helping them work
towards achieving their hopes and aspirations. Students learn important life skills and benefit
from work experience opportunities with local businesses. Many graduates have gone on to
paid and volunteer work. Thanks to Lyndall's dedication, Step-Up has been a great success,
setting up students for a bright future. Thank you to Thomas and Lyndall for your amazing
work. Congratulations also to the people and businesses who were nominated for a Special
Care Recognition Award this year.

I want to thank SpecialCare Central for everything you have done for the disabled
community. I look forward to attending the awards at next year's Disability Awareness Expo.

**StartupWeek Sydney**

**Mr HUSIC** (Chifley) (21:27): In the limited time I have Mr Speaker I wanted to speak on
something you and I both have an interest in, which is seeing the emergence of a strong
innovative spirit within this country, and seeing enterprises be able to play their part in
changing the way the economy works and the community works, as well. As part of that it
was a real honour last night to be able to attend the launch of the inaugural StartupWeek
Sydney, which was kicked off at Stone & Chalk, a fintech hub that has been set up in the
AMP building in Sydney with the support, commendably, of the New South Wales
government. This week will feature a whole series of events—hack-a-thons and policy
discussions—and will also provide enterprises with the ability to connect with each other, to
network, and be able to find out what makes other enterprises tick, what pitfalls they have
eexperienced and how they can overcome them.

It is really good that StartupWeek Sydney, which has been driven in large part by Michelle
Williams, with the support of Alex Scandurra of Stone & Chalk, was able to be set up. I think
it is vital that we find ways to put a spotlight on the great work that start-ups are doing in this
country. It is good that both sides of politics are focused on this as a policy area, because,
frankly, the work these enterprises are doing in liberalising the economy and in changing the
way in which business models operate in this country is really important.

It is a challenge to government, in terms of thinking of new ways in which to make
regulation work in this day and age. That will be the subject of one of the events I have the
pleasure of being involved in. I understand that the member for Banks, David Coleman, is
going to be involved in another event. It is good that we are engaging early on in this space,
though, from their perspective, a lot of start-ups in this country would have liked both sides of
politics to engage a lot sooner. But the fact of the matter is that we are engaged and we are listening.

Being able to have opportunities like StartupWeek Sydney, and the other events that are happening in other parts of the country, are a welcome development. I would like to commend them for putting it together. They have also put a great app together, which you can download from iTunes or from Google Play for your Android system. I commend them for this. If people would like to see it, it has been put together by a very good bunch of people there. I congratulate them and I wish them all the best for this important week.

The SPEAKER: It being almost 9:30 pm, the debate is interrupted.

House adjourned at 21:29

NOTICES

The following notices were given:

Ms Ley: to present a Bill for an Act to amend the law in relation to Medicare benefit, and for related purposes.

Mr Porter: to present a Bill for an Act to amend the law relating to family assistance and social security, and for related purposes.

Dr Stone: to move:

That this House:

(1) acknowledges:
(a) and applauds the efforts of Australian primary producers as they work to protect and rehabilitate the natural environment, often in conditions of extreme hardship;
(b) that Australian farmers have replanted the landscape via Landcare and the 20 Million Trees Programme;
(c) the personal commitment of Australian farmers to replanting the landscape; and
(d) that Victorian Farmers have won the fight against high saline water tables caused by tree clearing for mining and urban development in the 1800s;

(2) applauds the:
(a) environmental codes of conduct and farmers’ voluntary compliance as applied to food growers by our local food manufacturers and retailers; and
(b) clean green image developed by Australia’s food producers which adds great value to our food exports and domestic markets; and

(3) calls on the Government to designate a National Day of Australian Farming that celebrates their great achievements and their contributions to the nation.

Ms Hall: to move:

That this House:

(1) notes that:
(a) November is Lung Health Awareness Month;
(b) 17 November 2015 is International Lung Cancer Awareness Day; and
(c) 18 November 2015 is World Chronic Obstructive Disease Day;
(2) also notes that:
   (a) lung diseases such as asthma, lung cancer and influenza contribute to more than 10 per cent of the overall health burden in Australia; and
   (b) three out of five Australian adults studied by the Lung Foundation Australia reported symptoms that put them at risk of contracting lung disease;
(3) recognises the personal and financial impact that lung disease has on patients; and
(4) acknowledges the effectiveness of pulmonary rehabilitation for treating chronic lung diseases.

Mr Watts: to move:
That this House:
(1) acknowledges that White Ribbon:
   (a) is a male led campaign to end male violence against women;
   (b) is now active in over 60 countries around the world; and
   (c) ambassadors around Australia are working to engage men and encourage them to take a leadership role in ending violence against women;
(2) notes that:
   (a) in 2015 in Australia, approximately two women are murdered each week by a partner or former partner;
   (b) 17 per cent of Australian women have experienced violence by a current or former partner in their lifetime;
   (c) men’s violence against women is a symptom of gender inequality in our society; and
   (d) social policy initiatives and law reform addressing gender inequality are central to reducing attitudes that support violence against women;
(3) recognises that:
   (a) 25 November is White Ribbon Day; and
   (b) the white ribbon is the symbol of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women; and
(4) supports White Ribbon and other organisations to eliminate violence against women.

Mr Christensen: to move:
That this House:
(1) congratulates the Government on its support of development in north and central Queensland with its White Paper on Developing Northern Australia;
(2) acknowledges the contribution of the Government to:
   (a) water infrastructure in north Australia through its $500 million National Water Infrastructure Development Fund; and
   (b) key infrastructure in north Australia through its $5 billion Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility;
(3) congratulates the Government on its support of water projects throughout northern Australia including Nullinga Dam and the development of the Ord River Irrigation Scheme;
(4) calls on the Government to support the construction of the Urannah Dam;
(5) notes that the:
   (a) damming of Urannah Creek in the Whitsunday region would open up 30,000 hectares of new agricultural land;
(b) new agricultural land will have the potential to triple the current cane production industry in the region and double the size of other agricultural production; and
(c) Urannah Dam will develop water sources and power supplies to service the growing mining and agricultural industries in the Whitsunday region;
(6) further notes that the:
(a) development of the project has the potential to double the current agriculture workforce in the region;
(b) dam has the capacity to generate $323 million over 25 years; and
(c) development of industry in the region will help to repopulate the Collinsville community; and
(7) calls for the support of federal, state and local governments in providing supportive policy in order to aid the progress of the Urannah Dam especially in allowing private investment in the project.

Ms MacTiernan: to move:

That this House:
(1) expresses concern at the culture of secrecy prevalent in the Government and the serious undermining of the core principles enshrined in the freedom of information legislation;
(2) notes the Government has:
(a) defunded the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner (OAIC) despite failing to pass its legislation to abolish the office; and
(b) failed to advance Australia’s application for the Open Government Partnership (OGP); and
(3) calls on the Government to abandon its attack on the OAIC and provide it with proper funding, and recommit to joining the OGP.
QUESTION IN WRITING

Administrative Appeals Tribunal
(Question No. 847)

Ms MacTiernan asked the Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development, in writing, on 11 August 2015:

In respect of the Administrative Appeals Tribunal matter between myself and the Secretary of the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development (Perth Registry 2015/0388), (a) what was the cost to the department of engaging lawyers to represent itself, (b) was the matter discussed with the former Assistant Minister at any time, and (c) was any advice given by the former Assistant Minister as to the way the case was to be conducted.

Mr Truss: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

a) $14,000
b) No
c) No

Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development: Staff Contracts
(Question No. 851)

Mr Conroy asked the Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development, 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 Truss: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

(a)

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(b) (i) $129,571.
(ii) Nil.
(iii) Nil.
(iv) Nil.

Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development: Office Space
(Question No. 905)

Mr Conroy asked the Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development, in writing, on 17 August 2015:
In respect of office space leased or owned by the Minister's department(s), (a) where are these offices located, (b) how much space (in square metres) is each office, (c) how much of this space is currently unused, and of this, what is the cost of (i) rent per month, (ii) utilities, including electricity and/or gas, telephone and internet, (iii) office furniture and/or hired equipment, including artwork and plants, and (iv) any other associated services.

Mr Truss: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

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<td>24 Beaumont St</td>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>NEWCASTLE</td>
<td>303</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>$101,682</td>
<td>$48,424</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>179A Anson St</td>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>ORANGE</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>$86,000</td>
<td>$49,724</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75 Wharf St</td>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>TWEED HEADS</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>$21,320</td>
<td>$20,278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL (NSW)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$606,901</td>
<td>$359,161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Lonsdale St</td>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>MELBOURNE</td>
<td>847</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>$473,009</td>
<td>$72,540</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Airport (Tullamarine)</td>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>MELBOURNE</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>$43,257</td>
<td>$35,078</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Airport (Moorabbin)</td>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>MELBOURNE</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>$8,000</td>
<td>$0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52 Mitchell St</td>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>BENDIGO</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>$38,378</td>
<td>$26,178</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOTAL (VIC)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$562,644</td>
<td>$133,796</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>179 Turbot St</td>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>BRISBANE (Lvl 4)</td>
<td>850</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>$682,853</td>
<td>$160,861</td>
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<td>179 Turbot St</td>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>BRISBANE (Lvl 6)</td>
<td>525</td>
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<td>$57,774</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Airport (Da Vinci)</td>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>TOWNSVILLE</td>
<td>303</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>$139,914</td>
<td>$57,774</td>
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<tr>
<td>155 Hugh St</td>
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<td>239</td>
<td>33%</td>
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<td>TOTAL (QLD)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>$1,225,325</td>
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<tr>
<td>37 St Georges Terrace</td>
<td>WA</td>
<td>PERTH (Lvl 10)</td>
<td>451</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>$492,847</td>
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<td>WA</td>
<td>PERTH (Lvl 15)</td>
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<td>$0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 Francis St</td>
<td>WA</td>
<td>PERTH</td>
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<td>100%</td>
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<td>$0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Airport (HKEW)</td>
<td>WA</td>
<td>PERTH</td>
<td>610</td>
<td>100%</td>
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<td>TOTAL (WA)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>$1,412,832</td>
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<tr>
<td>55 Currie St</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>ADELAIDE</td>
<td>1,288</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>$671,300</td>
<td>$93,226</td>
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<td>TOTAL (SA)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>$671,300</td>
<td>$93,226</td>
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<tr>
<td>22 Elizabeth St</td>
<td>TAS</td>
<td>HOBART</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>$43,068</td>
<td>$4,936</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL (TAS)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$43,068</td>
<td>$4,936</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 Mitchell St</td>
<td>NT</td>
<td>DARWIN</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>$122,399</td>
<td>$14,003</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOTAL (NT)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$122,399</td>
<td>$14,003</td>
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</table>

Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development: Consultants

(Question No. 941)

Mr Conroy asked the Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development, 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 Truss: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:
A list of the Department's consultancies and contracts valued at $10,000 or more can be found on the AusTender website.

Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development: Media Monitoring
(Question No. 959)

Mr Conroy asked the Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development, in writing, on 17 August 2015:
What sum was spent by the Minister's department(s) on media monitoring and associated services in 2014-15.

Mr Truss: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:
The total cost of media monitoring services, including press clippings and electronic media transcripts provided to the Department for 2014-2015 was $711,446 (GST inclusive).

Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development: Market Research
(Question No. 977)

Mr Conroy asked the Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development, in writing, on 17 August 2015:
What sum was spent by the Minister's department(s) on market research and associated services in 2014-15, and what policy areas did this inform.

Mr Truss: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:
$516,255—Programme design.

Department of Employment: Market Research
(Question No. 979)

Mr Conroy asked the Minister representing the Minister for Employment in writing, on 17 August 2015:
What sum was spent by the Minister's department(s) on market research and associated services in 2014–15, and what policy areas did this inform

Mr Pyne: The Minister for Employment has authorised the following answer to the honourable member's question, as provided by her predecessor:
It is longstanding practice that advertising campaigns with expenditure in excess of $250,000 are required to conduct research as part of the development and evaluation of the campaign as per the Australian Government Guidelines on Information and Advertising Campaigns by non-corporate Commonwealth entities.

The sum spent by my department on Market Research and associated services in 2014–15 was $758,462.00 (GST exclusive).

The policy areas this informed were:
- Employment Services 2015/jobactive
- Mature age employment/restart wage subsidy
- Post Programme Monitoring survey
- Youth employment planning project.

According to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Annual Report 2012–13, $1.0 million was spent on market research in 2012–13 under the former government.
Department of Employment: Advertising
(Question No. 997)

Mr Conroy: asked the Minister representing the Minister for Employment, in writing, on 17 August 2015:

What sum was spent by the Minister's department(s) on advertising and associated services in 2014–15, and what policy areas did this relate to

Mr Pyne: The Minister for Employment has authorised the following answer to the honourable member's question, as provided by her predecessor:

The total amount spent by the department on advertising and associated services for the jobactive campaign in 2014–15 was $730,209 (GST exclusive). The Policy area this related to was Employment Services 2015/jobactive.

The total amount spent by the department on advertising and associated services for the mature age employment/Restart wage subsidy campaign in 2014–15 was $1,719,606 (GST exclusive). The policy area this related to was Mature age employment/Restart wage subsidy.

The former Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations spent a total of $1.9 million on advertising in 2012–13 under the former government.

*Campaigns with expenditure in excess of $250,000 are required to conduct research as part of the development and evaluation of a campaign as per the Australian Government Guidelines on Information and Advertising Campaigns by non-corporate Commonwealth entities.

Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development: Legal Services and Credit Cards
(Question No. 1031)

Mr Conroy asked the Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development, in writing, on 17 August 2015:

What sum did the Minister's department spend in 2014-15 on (a) legal services, and (b) credit cards.

Mr Truss: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

The department spent $10,644,996 on legal services and $7,787,829 on credit cards (GST inclusive) in 2014-15.

Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development: Mobile Phones and Tablets
(Question No. 1049)

Mr Conroy asked the Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development, in writing, on 17 August 2015:

1) What sum did the Minister's department spend in 2014-15 on the purchase and/or lease of (a) mobile phones, and (b) tablet devices for (i) Ministerial staff, and (ii) departmental staff.

2) What sum was spent on telecommunications contracts associated with these devices by (i) Ministerial staff; and (ii) departmental staff.

Mr Truss: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

1) (a) $99,735

   (i) $14,357
Mr Conroy asked the Minister representing the Minister for Employment, in writing, on 17 August 2015:

(1) What sum did the Minister's department spend in 2014–15 on the purchase and/or lease of (a) mobile phones, and (b) tablet devices for (i) Ministerial staff and (ii) departmental staff. (2) What sum was spent on telecommunication contracts associated with these devices by (i) Ministerial staff, and (ii) departmental staff.

Mr Pyne: The Minister for Employment has authorised the following answer to the honourable member's question, as provided by her predecessor:

Mobile devices are issued to Ministerial staff in accordance with the Department of Employment's IT Services and Ministerial Entitlements Guidelines. This policy has been in place since the establishment of the department and complies with relevant Department of Finance guidelines.

Mobile devices are issued to departmental staff in accordance with the department's Mobile Telephony Policy, which has been in place since the establishment of the department.

(1) In 2014–15, the Minister's department spent the following on purchasing and/or leasing:
   (a) (i) mobile phones for Ministerial staff - $2,244.09
      (ii) mobile phones for departmental staff - $3,269
   (b) (i) tablet devices for Ministerial staff - $883
      (ii) tablet devices for departmental staff - $8,958.80

(2) In 2014–15, the Department of Employment spent the following on telecommunication contracts associated with these devices by:
   (i) Ministerial staff - $34,892.40
   (ii) Departmental staff - $151,542.41

Mr Conroy asked the Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development, in writing, on 17 August 2015:

What sum did the Minister's department spend in 2014-15 on (a) office refurbishment, and when and where did this occur, and (b) the purchase and/or lease of office furniture.

Mr Truss: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

(a)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Where (Location)</th>
<th>When (Completion date)</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Melbourne Airport</td>
<td>19 December 2014</td>
<td>$160,321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norfolk Island</td>
<td>7 June 2015</td>
<td>$226,013</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mr Conroy asked the Minister representing the Minister for Employment, in writing, on 17 August 2015:

What sum did the Minister's department spend in 2014–15 on (a) office refurbishment, and when and where did this occur, and (b) the purchase and/or lease of office furniture.

Mr Pyne: The Minister for Employment has authorised the following answer to the honourable member's question, as provided by her predecessor:

During the 2014–2015 financial year the Department of Employment spent a total $6,532,000 from its capital budget on office refurbishments and purchase of furniture, primarily for the purpose of establishing new national offices following the separation of the former Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, as follows:

- 10 Mort Street, 12 Mort Street and 14 Mort Street CANBERRA. The expenditure of $5,900,000 spanned the period October 2014 to June 2015. This expenditure was against a total of 25,000 square meters, occupying 1545 staff with a leasing term of 10 Years.
- 215 Adelaide Street BRISBANE. The expenditure of $32,000 spanned the period November 2014 to December 2014. This expenditure was for minor office works within 5,100 square meters with a lease ending in September 2016.
- Purchase of loose furniture – $600,000, which was allocated to the 10/12/14 Mort Street properties listed above.

Mr Conroy asked the Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development, in writing, on 17 August 2015:

In respect of departmental staff (a) how many redundancies were made in 2014-15, and (b) what is the total cost of payments associated with these redundancies.

Mr Truss: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:
(a) 25
(b) $2,935,490

Mr Conroy asked the Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development, in writing, on 17 August 2015:

(1) In 2014-15, what sum was spent on (a) domestic travel, and (b) international travel, for departmental staff.
(2) Of this, (a) on what dates, and to what locations, did the Minister travel, (b) how many departmental staff accompanied the Minister on this travel, and (c) for what purpose was the travel

**Mr Truss:** The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

(1) (a) Domestic travel spend $3,923,259
(b) International travel spend $2,719,411

(2) (a) Leipzig (Germany) from 25 to 30 May 2015
(b) One
(c) International Transport Forum

**Department of Education and Training: Ministerial Conferences**

(Question No. 1412)

**Mr Conroy** asked the Minister representing the Minister for Education and Training, in writing, on 17 August 2015:

Did the Minister host any conferences in 2014-15; if so (a) on what date(s) did each conference occur, and at what location(s), (b) what total sum was spent on each conference, and of this, what sum was spent on (i) meals and accommodation, and what are the details, (ii) travel, and what are the details, and (iii) social events, and what are the details, (iv) travel, and what are the details, and (c) what outcomes were achieved at each conference.

**Mr Hartsuyker:** The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

The Minister did not host any conferences in 2014-15.

**Fair Work Ombudsman's Pay and Conditions Tool**

(Question No. 1501)

**Mr Conroy** asked the Minister representing the Minister for Employment, in writing, on 7 September 2015:

In respect of the Fair Work Ombudsman's Pay and Conditions Tool (PACT),

(a) what is the cost of all activities associated with the app, including
   (i) research and development,
   (ii) advertising, and
   (iii) ongoing maintenance,
(b) how many times
   (i) was the app downloaded during testing, and
   (ii) has the app been downloaded post launch,
(c) does the Minister's department provide any other tools of this nature; if so, can usage data be provided, specifically how many times each tool has been accessed since launched, and
(d) is the Minister's department aware of other tools of this nature provided by other Government departments and/or agencies; if so, how do these tools differ from the PACT.

**Mr Pyne:** The Minister for Employment has authorised the following answer to the honourable member's question, as provided by her predecessor:

This tool provides quick, easy and accurate advice to employees and employers about pay and conditions. Previous tools established under the former government were plagued with errors and inaccuracies and not accessible on mobile devices. The tool incorporates more than 337,000 different pay rates into plain English.
(a) The costs of implementing the Pay and Conditions Tool (PACT) are:
   (i) Research and development: $4,494,953
   (ii) Advertising: $43,495
   (iii) Ongoing maintenance: $347,929 over a 12 month period.
(b) The PACT has received 1,602,563 visits from its release on the Fair Work Ombudsman's website on 22 May 2015 to 7 October 2015.
(c) The PACT is the only current tool of this nature provided by the portfolio.
(d) No.

International Network on Innovative Apprenticeship Conference
(Question No. 1537)

Mr Conroy asked the Minister representing the minister of Education and Training, in writing, on 15 September 2015:

In respect of the International Network on Innovative Apprenticeship Conference held 1 to 2 September 2015, (a) how many (i) delegates, (ii) Ministerial staff, and (iii) departmental staff, were in attendance, (b) did the then (i) Minister, (ii) Assistant Minister, and/or (iii) Parliamentary Secretary, attend, (c) what was the total cost of the conference, including (i) venue hire, (ii) venue preparation and decoration, (iii) meals, (iv) accommodation, (v) travel, and (vi) other allowances, and (d) what was the itinerary.

Mr Hartsuyker: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

The International Network on Innovative Apprenticeship Conference was organised by Federation University. This included responsibility for all planning, logistics, event management and the conference budget.

In respect of the International Network on Innovative Apprenticeship (INAP) Conference held 1 to 2 September 2015:

(a) how many (i) delegates, (ii) Ministerial staff, and (iii) departmental staff, were in attendance:
   (i) Conference organisers have advised that over 100 delegates from 12 countries attended the conference;
   (ii) Two ministerial staff attended the Assistant Minister's keynote address and side meetings with the Assistant Minister and INAP board members and key conference delegates;
   (iii) Six departmental staff attended the conference assisting with co-ordination and presentations.
(b) did the then (i) Minister, (ii) Assistant Minister, and/or (iii) Parliamentary Secretary, attend:
   Yes, the then Assistant Minister for Education and Training, Senator the Hon. Simon Birmingham, delivered the opening keynote address at the conference. Following his address, the Assistant Minister met with INAP board members and key conference delegates including leading international apprenticeship experts.
(c) what was the total cost of the conference, including (i) venue hire, (ii) venue preparation and decoration, (iii) meals, (iv) accommodation, (v) travel, and (vi) other allowances:
   The Department of Education and Training did not organise the conference and therefore does not know the total cost of the conference.
   The Department provided $15,000 sponsorship for the conference. This was an investment in a conference of international significance which showcased Australia's apprenticeships system to delegates from all over the world. Representatives from 12 countries attended, shared leading practice approaches, learned of the latest research and collaborated on ways to build stronger apprenticeship
systems. Connections made with leading researchers and apprenticeship specialists will provide the Department with the opportunity to build bilateral and multilateral relationships to support policy development at the local level.

A panel of WorldSkills and Australian Apprenticeships Ambassadors also hosted a panel session titled 'Beyond the classroom: Promoting apprenticeships as viable career pathways to industry and society'.

(d) what was the itinerary:

The conference was held on 1 and 2 September 2015. Copies of the conference programme can be obtained from the House of Representatives Table Office

Department of Employment: What's Next website
(Question No. 1538)

Mr Conroy asked the Minister representing the Minister for Employment, in writing, on 15 September 2015:

In respect of the "What's Next?" website, (a) what is the total cost of all activities associated with the product, including (i) research and development, (ii) advertising, and (iii) ongoing maintenance, (b) how many times has the website been accessed, and (c) from which countries are users located.

Mr Pyne: The Minister for Employment has provided the following answer to the honourable member's question:

(a) Total costs associated with the website are approximately $16,300.

(i) Research and development of the website was conducted by departmental staff. Development of a good news video to be used as content for the website had an approximate cost of $2,500.

(ii) Approximately $13,800 was spent on advertising materials.

(iii) Costs associated with the ongoing maintenance of the website will be absorbed into departmental costs as all work is performed by departmental staff.

(b) As at 18 September 2015, in the two weeks since the What's Next website was launched, it has been accessed approximately 1,800 times.

(c) Users who access the website were from Australia, India, United States, Singapore, Philippines, Germany, Japan, Papua New Guinea, Brazil, Belarus, Switzerland, France, Greece, Hong Kong, South Korea, New Zealand, Russia and Zambia.