INTERNET
The Votes and Proceedings for the House of Representatives are available at

Proof and Official Hansards for the House of Representatives,
the Senate and committee hearings are available at

For searching purposes use
http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au

SITTING DAYS—2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>8, 9, 10, 21, 22, 23, 24, 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 21, 22, 23, 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>10, 11, 12, 23, 24, 25, 26, 30, 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>1, 2, 14, 15, 16, 20, 21, 22, 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>4, 5, 6, 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>16, 17, 18, 22, 23, 24, 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>12, 13, 14, 15, 19, 20, 21, 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>11, 12, 13, 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 21, 22, 23, 24,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RADIO BROADCASTS
Broadcasts of proceedings of the Parliament can be heard on ABC NewsRadio in the capital cities on:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADELAIDE</td>
<td>972AM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRISBANE</td>
<td>936AM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CANBERRA</td>
<td>103.9FM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DARWIN</td>
<td>102.5FM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOBART</td>
<td>747AM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MELBOURNE</td>
<td>1026AM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PERTH</td>
<td>585AM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SYDNEY</td>
<td>630AM</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For information regarding frequencies in other locations please visit
http://www.abc.net.au/newsradio/listen/frequencies.htm
FORTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION—FOURTH PERIOD

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

House of Representatives Officeholders
Speaker—Mr Harry Alfred Jenkins MP
Deputy Speaker—Hon. Peter Neil Slipper MP
Second Deputy Speaker—Hon. Bruce Craig Scott MP
Members of the Speaker’s Panel—Ms Anna Elizabeth Burke MP, Hon. Dick Godfrey Harry Adams MP, Ms Sharon Leah Bird MP, Mrs Yvette Maree D’Ath MP, Mr Steven Georganas MP, Ms Kirsten Fiona Livermore MP, Mr John Paul Murphy MP, Mr Peter Sid Sidebottom MP, Mr Kelvin John Thomson MP, Ms Maria Vamvakinou MP

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

Party Leaders and Whips
Australian Labor Party
Leader—Hon. Julia Eileen Gillard MP
Deputy Leader—Hon. Wayne Maxwell Swan MP
Chief Government Whip—Hon. Joel Andrew Fitzgibbon MP
Government Whips—Ms Jill Griffiths Hall MP and Mr Christopher Patrick Hayes MP

Liberal Party of Australia
Leader—Hon. Anthony John Abbott MP
Deputy Leader—Hon. Julie Isabel Bishop MP
Chief Opposition Whip—Hon. Warren George Entsch MP
Opposition Whips—Mr Patrick Damien Secker MP and Ms Nola Bethwyn Marino MP

The Nationals
Leader—Hon. Warren Errol Truss MP
Chief Whip—Mr Mark Maclean Coulton MP
Whip—Mr Paul Christopher Neville MP

Printed by authority of the House of Representatives
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Party</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abbott, Hon. Anthony John</td>
<td>Warringah, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adams, Hon. Dick Godfrey Harry</td>
<td>Lyons, TAS</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albanese, Hon. Anthony Norman</td>
<td>Grayndler, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexander, John Gilbert</td>
<td>Bennelong, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrews, Hon. Kevin James</td>
<td>Menzies, VIC</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrews, Karen Lesley</td>
<td>McPherson, QLD</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baldwin, Hon. Robert Charles</td>
<td>Paterson, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bandt, Adam Paul</td>
<td>Melbourne, VIC</td>
<td>AG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Billson, Hon. Bruce Fredrick</td>
<td>Dunkley, VIC</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bird, Sharon Leah</td>
<td>Cunningham, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bishop, Hon. Bronwyn Kathleen</td>
<td>Mackellar, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bishop, Hon. Julie Isabel</td>
<td>Curtin, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bowen, Hon. Christopher Eyles</td>
<td>McMahon, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bradbury, Hon. David John</td>
<td>Lindsay, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Briggs, Jamie Edward</td>
<td>Mayo, SA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broadbent, Russell Evan</td>
<td>McMillan, VIC</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brodthmann, Gai Marie</td>
<td>Canberra, ACT</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buchholz, Scott Andrew</td>
<td>Wright, QLD</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burke, Anna Elizabeth</td>
<td>Chisholm, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burke, Hon. Anthony Stephen</td>
<td>Watson, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butler, Hon. Mark Christopher</td>
<td>Port Adelaide, SA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Byrne, Hon. Anthony Michael</td>
<td>Holt, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Champion, Nicholas David</td>
<td>Wakefield, SA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheeseeman, Darren Leicester</td>
<td>Corangamite, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chester, Darren</td>
<td>Gippsland, VIC</td>
<td>Nats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christensen, George Robert</td>
<td>Dawson, QLD</td>
<td>Nats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ciobo, Steven Michele</td>
<td>Moncrieff, QLD</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clare, Hon. Jason Dean</td>
<td>Blaxland, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cobb, Hon. John Kenneth</td>
<td>Calare, NSW</td>
<td>Nats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collins, Hon. Julie Maree</td>
<td>Franklin, TAS</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combet, Hon. Greg Ivan, AM</td>
<td>Charlton, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coulton, Mark Maclean</td>
<td>Parkes, NSW</td>
<td>Nats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crean, Hon. Simon Findlay</td>
<td>Hotham, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crook, Anthony John</td>
<td>O'Connor, WA</td>
<td>NWA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danby, Michael David</td>
<td>Melbourne Ports, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D'Ath, Yvette Maree</td>
<td>Petrie, QLD</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dreyfus, Hon. Mark Alfred, QC</td>
<td>Isaacs, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutton, Hon. Peter Craig</td>
<td>Dickson, QLD</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elliot, Hon. Maria Justine</td>
<td>Richmond, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellis, Hon. Katherine Margaret</td>
<td>Adelaide, SA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emerson, Hon. Craig Anthony</td>
<td>Rankin, QLD</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entsch, Warren George</td>
<td>Leichhardt, QLD</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ferguson, Hon. Laurie Donald Thomas</td>
<td>Werriwa, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ferguson, Hon. Martin John, AM</td>
<td>Batman, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitzgibbon, Hon. Joel Andrew</td>
<td>Hunter, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fletcher, Paul William</td>
<td>Bradfield, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forrest, John Alexander</td>
<td>Mallee, VIC</td>
<td>Nats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frydenberg, Joshua Anthony</td>
<td>Kooyong, VIC</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members</td>
<td>Division</td>
<td>Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gambaro, Hon. Teresa</td>
<td>Brisbane, QLD</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garrett, Hon. Peter Robert, AM</td>
<td>Kingsford Smith, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gash, Joanna</td>
<td>Gilmore, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georganas, Steve</td>
<td>Hindmarsh, SA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gibbons, Stephen William</td>
<td>Bendigo, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gillard, Hon. Julia Eileen</td>
<td>Lalor, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gray, Hon. Gary, AO</td>
<td>Brand, WA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grierson, Sharon Joy</td>
<td>Newcastle, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Griffin, Hon. Alan Peter</td>
<td>Bruce, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Griggs, Natasha Louise</td>
<td>Solomon, NT</td>
<td>CLP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haase, Barry Wayne</td>
<td>Durack, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hall, Jill</td>
<td>Shortland, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hartsuyker, Luke</td>
<td>Cowper, NSW</td>
<td>Nats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawke, Alexander George</td>
<td>Mitchell, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hayes, Christopher Patrick</td>
<td>Fowler, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hockey, Hon. Joseph Benedict</td>
<td>North Sydney, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunt, Hon. Gregory Andrew</td>
<td>Flinders, VIC</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husic, Edham Nurredin</td>
<td>Chifley, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irons, Stephen James</td>
<td>Swan, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenkins, Harry Alfred</td>
<td>Scullin, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jensen, Dennis Geoffrey</td>
<td>Tangney, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jones, Stephen Patrick</td>
<td>Throsby, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jones, Ewen Thomas</td>
<td>Herbert, QLD</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katter, Hon. Robert Carl</td>
<td>Kennedy, QLD</td>
<td>Ind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keenan, Michael Fayat</td>
<td>Stirling, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelly, Hon. Michael Joseph, AM</td>
<td>Eden-Monaro, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelly, Craig</td>
<td>Hughes, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King, Hon. Catherine Fiona</td>
<td>Ballarat, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laming, Andrew Charles</td>
<td>Bowman, QLD</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leigh, Andrew Keith</td>
<td>Fraser, ACT</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ley, Hon. Sussan Penelope</td>
<td>Farrer, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Livermore, Kirsten Fiona</td>
<td>Capricornia, QLD</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lyons, Geoffrey Raymond</td>
<td>Bass, TAS</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McClelland, Hon. Robert Bruce</td>
<td>Barton, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macfarlane, Hon. Ian Elgin</td>
<td>Groom, QLD</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macklin, Hon. Jennifer Louise</td>
<td>Jagajaga, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marino, Nola Bethwyn</td>
<td>Forrest, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Markus, Louise Elizabeth</td>
<td>Macquarie, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marles, Hon. Richard Donald</td>
<td>Corio, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matheson, Russell Glenn</td>
<td>Macarthur, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McCormack, Michael</td>
<td>Riverina, NSW</td>
<td>Nats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melham, Daryl</td>
<td>Banks, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mirabella, Sophie</td>
<td>Indi, VIC</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitchell, Robert George</td>
<td>McEwen, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morrison, Scott John</td>
<td>Cook, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moylan, Hon. Judith Eleanor</td>
<td>Pearce, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murphy, Hon. John Paul</td>
<td>Reid, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neumann, Shaye Kenneth</td>
<td>Blair, QLD</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members</td>
<td>Division</td>
<td>Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neville, Paul Christopher</td>
<td>Hinkler, QLD</td>
<td>Nats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oakeshott, Robert James Murray</td>
<td>Lyne, NSW</td>
<td>Ind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O' Connor, Hon. Brendan Patrick</td>
<td>Higgins, VIC</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O'Dowd, Kenneth Desmond</td>
<td>Roma, QLD</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O'Dwyer, Kelly Megan</td>
<td>Kingston, SA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O'Neill, Deborah Mary</td>
<td>Enfield, QLD</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owens, Julie Ann</td>
<td>Parramatta, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parkes, Melissa</td>
<td>Fremantle, WA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perrett, Graham Douglas</td>
<td>Moreton, QLD</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plibersek, Hon. Tanya Joan</td>
<td>Sydney, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prentice, Jane</td>
<td>Ryan, QLD</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pyne, Hon. Christopher Maurice</td>
<td>Sturt, SA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramsey, Rowan Eric</td>
<td>Grey, SA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randall, Don James</td>
<td>Canning, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ripoll, Bernard Fernand</td>
<td>Oxley, QLD</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rishworth, Amanda Louise</td>
<td>Kingston, SA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robb, Hon. Andrew John, AO</td>
<td>Goldstein, VIC</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert, Stuart Rowland</td>
<td>Fadden, QLD</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rowland, Michelle</td>
<td>Greenway, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ross, Hon. Nicola Louise</td>
<td>Gellibrand, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roy, Wyatt Beau</td>
<td>Longman, QLD</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rudd, Hon. Kevin Michael</td>
<td>Griffith, QLD</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruddock, Hon. Philip Maxwell</td>
<td>Berowra, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saffin, Janelle Anne</td>
<td>Page, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schultz, Albert John</td>
<td>Hum, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scott, Hon. Bruce Craig</td>
<td>Maranoa, QLD</td>
<td>Nats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secker, Patrick Damien</td>
<td>Barker, SA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shorten, Hon. William Richard</td>
<td>Maribyrnong, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sidebottom, Peter Sid</td>
<td>Braddon, TAS</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simpkins, Luke Xavier Linton</td>
<td>Cowan, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slipper, Hon. Peter Neil</td>
<td>Fisher, QLD</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smith, Hon. Anthony David Hawthorn</td>
<td>Casey, VIC</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smith, Hon. Stephen Francis</td>
<td>Perth, WA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smyth, Laura Mary</td>
<td>La Trobe, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snowdon, Hon. Warren Edward</td>
<td>Linglei, NT</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somlyay, Hon. Alexander Michael</td>
<td>Fairfax, QLD</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southcott, Andrew John</td>
<td>Boothby, SA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stone, Hon. Sharman Nancy</td>
<td>Murray, VIC</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swan, Hon. Wayne Maxwell</td>
<td>Lilley, QLD</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symon, Michael Stuart</td>
<td>Deakin, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tehan, Daniel Thomas</td>
<td>Wannon, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomson, Craig Robert</td>
<td>Dobell, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomson, Kelvin John</td>
<td>Wills, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truss, Hon. Warren Errol</td>
<td>Wide Bay, QLD</td>
<td>Nats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tudge, Alan Edward</td>
<td>Aston, VIC</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turnbull, Hon. Malcolm Bligh</td>
<td>Wentworth, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vannakinou, Maria</td>
<td>Calwell, VIC</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Van Manen, Albertus Johannes</td>
<td>Forde, QLD</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Members of the House of Representatives

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

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

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

Prime Minister: Hon. Julia Gillard MP
Deputy Prime Minister, Treasurer: Hon. Wayne Swan MP
Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government: Hon. Simon Crean MP
Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Jobs and Workplace Relations and Leader of the Government in the Senate: Senator Hon. Chris Evans
Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth: Hon. Peter Garrett AM, MP
Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy and Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate: Senator Hon. Stephen Conroy
Minister for Foreign Affairs: Hon. Kevin Rudd MP
Minister for Trade: Hon. Dr Craig Emerson MP
Minister for Defence and Deputy Leader of the House: Hon. Stephen Smith MP
Minister for Immigration and Citizenship: Hon. Chris Bowen MP
Minister for Infrastructure and Transport and Leader of the House: Hon. Anthony Albanese MP
Minister for Health and Ageing: Hon. Nicola Roxon MP
Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs: Hon. Jenny Macklin MP
Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities: Hon. Tony Burke MP
Minister for Finance and Deregulation: Senator Hon. Penny Wong
Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research: Senator Hon. Kim Carr
Attorney-General and Vice President of the Executive Council: Hon. Robert McClelland MP
Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and Manager of Government Business in the Senate: Senator Hon. Joe Ludwig
Minister for Resources and Energy and Minister for Tourism: Hon. Martin Ferguson AM, MP
Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency: Hon. Greg Combet AM, MP

[The above ministers constitute the cabinet]
Minister for the Arts | Hon. Simon Crean MP  
Minister for Social Inclusion | Hon. Tanya Plibersek MP  
Minister for Privacy and Freedom of Information | Hon. Brendan O'Connor MP  
Minister for Sport | Senator Hon. Mark Arbib  
Special Minister of State for the Public Service and Integrity | Hon. Gary Gray AO, MP  
Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation | Hon. Bill Shorten MP  
Minister for Employment Participation and Childcare | Hon. Kate Ellis MP  
Minister for Indigenous Employment and Economic Development | Senator Hon. Mark Arbib  
Minister for Veterans’ Affairs and Minister for Defence Science and Personnel | Hon. Warren Snowdon MP  
Minister for Defence Materiel | Hon. Jason Clare MP  
Minister for Indigenous Health | Hon. Warren Snowdon MP  
Minister for Mental Health and Ageing | Hon. Mark Butler MP  
Minister for the Status of Women | Hon. Kate Ellis MP  
Minister for Social Housing and Homelessness | Minister for Indigenous Employment and Economic Development  
Special Minister of State | Senator Hon. Mark Arbib  
Minister for Small Business | Hon. Gary Gray AO, MP  
Minister for Home Affairs and Minister for Justice | Senator Hon. Brendan O'Connor MP  
Minister for Human Services | Senator Hon. Tanya Plibersek MP  
Cabinet Secretary | Hon. Mark Dreyfus QC, MP  
Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister | Senator Hon. Kate Lundy  
Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer | Hon. David Bradbury MP  
Parliamentary Secretary for School Education and Workplace Relations | Senator Hon. Jacinta Collins  
Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on Digital Productivity | Senator Hon. Stephen Conroy  
Parliamentary Secretary for Trade | Hon. Justine Elliot MP  
Parliamentary Secretary for Pacific Island Affairs | Hon. Richard Marles MP  
Parliamentary Secretary for Defence | Senator Hon. David Feeney  
Parliamentary Secretary for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs | Senator Hon. Kate Lundy  
Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure and Transport and Parliamentary Secretary for Health and Ageing | Hon. Catherine King MP  
Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Carers | Senator Hon. Jan McLucas  
Parliamentary Secretary for Community Services | Hon. Julie Collins MP  
Parliamentary Secretary for Sustainability and Urban Water | Senator Hon. Don Farrell  
Minister Assisting on Deregulation and Public Sector Superannuation | Senator Hon. Nick Sherry  
Minister Assisting the Attorney-General on Queensland Floods Recovery | Senator Hon. Joe Ludwig  
Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry | Hon. Dr Mike Kelly AM, MP  
Minister Assisting the Minister for Tourism | Senator Hon. Nick Sherry  
Parliamentary Secretary for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency | Hon. Mark Dreyfus QC, MP
SHADOW MINISTRY

Leader of the Opposition
Hon. Tony Abbott MP

Deputy Leader of the Opposition and Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs and Shadow Minister for Trade
Hon. Julie Bishop MP

Leader of the Nationals and Shadow Minister for Infrastructure and Transport
Hon. Warren Truss MP

Leader of the Opposition in the Senate and Shadow Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations
Senator Hon. Eric Abetz

Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate and Shadow Attorney-General and Shadow Minister for the Arts
Senator Hon. George Brandis SC

Shadow Treasurer
Hon. Joe Hockey MP

Shadow Minister for Education, Apprenticeships and Training and Manager of Opposition Business in the House
Hon. Christopher Pyne MP

Shadow Minister for Indigenous Affairs and Deputy Leader of the Nationals
Senator Hon. Nigel Scullion

Shadow Minister for Regional Development, Local Government and Water and Leader of the Nationals in the Senate
Hon. Andrew Robb AO, MP

Shadow Minister for Finance, Deregulation and Debt Reduction and Chairman, Coalition Policy Development Committee
Hon. Ian Macfarlane MP

Shadow Minister for Energy and Resources
Senator Hon. David Johnston

Shadow Minister for Defence
Hon. Malcolm Turnbull MP

Shadow Minister for Health and Ageing
Hon. Peter Dutton MP

Shadow Minister for Families, Housing and Human Services
Hon. Kevin Andrews MP

Shadow Minister for Climate Action, Environment and Heritage
Hon. Greg Hunt MP

Shadow Minister for Productivity and Population and Shadow Minister for Immigration and Citizenship
Mr Scott Morrison MP

Shadow Minister for Innovation, Industry and Science
Mrs Sophie Mirabella MP

Shadow Minister for Agriculture and Food Security
Hon. John Cobb MP

Shadow Minister for Small Business, Competition Policy and Consumer Affairs
Hon. Bruce Billson MP

[The above constitute the shadow cabinet]
SHADOW MINISTRY—continued

Shadow Minister for Employment Participation
Hon. Sussan Ley MP

Shadow Minister for Justice, Customs and Border Protection
Mr Michael Keenan MP

Shadow Assistant Treasurer and Shadow Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation
Senator Mathias Cormann

Shadow Minister for Childcare and Early Childhood Learning
Hon. Sussan Ley MP

Shadow Minister for Universities and Research
Senator Hon. Brett Mason

Shadow Minister for Youth and Sport and Deputy Manager of Opposition Business in the House
Mr Luke Hartsuyker MP

Shadow Minister for Indigenous Development and Employment
Senator Marise Payne

Shadow Minister for Regional Development
Hon. Bob Baldwin MP

Shadow Special Minister of State
Hon. Bronwyn Bishop MP

Shadow Minister for COAG
Senator Marise Payne

Shadow Minister for Tourism
Hon. Bob Baldwin MP

Shadow Minister for Defence Science, Technology and Personnel
Mr Stuart Robert MP

Shadow Minister for Veterans’ Affairs and Shadow Minister Assisting the Leader of the Opposition on the Centenary of ANZAC
Senator Hon. Michael Ronaldson

Shadow Minister for Regional Communications
Mr Luke Hartsuyker MP

Shadow Minister for Ageing and Shadow Minister for Mental Health
Senator Concetta Fierravanti-Wells

Shadow Minister for Seniors
Hon. Bronwyn Bishop MP

Shadow Minister for Disabilities, Carers and the Voluntary Sector and Manager of Opposition Business in the Senate
Senator Mitch Fifield

Shadow Minister for Housing
Senator Marise Payne

Chairman, Scrutiny of Government Waste Committee
Mr Jamie Briggs MP

Shadow Cabinet Secretary
Hon. Philip Ruddock MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary Assisting the Leader of the Opposition
Senator Cory Bernardi

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance
Hon. Teresa Gambaro MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Roads and Regional Transport
Mr Darren Chester MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary to the Shadow Attorney-General
Senator Gary Humphries

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Tax Reform and Deputy Chairman, Coalition Policy Development Committee
Hon. Tony Smith MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Education
Senator Fiona Nash

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Northern and Remote Australia
Senator Hon. Ian Macdonald

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Local Government
Mr Don Randall MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for the Murray-Darling Basin
Senator Simon Birmingham

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Materiel
Senator Gary Humphries

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for the Defence Force and Defence Support
Senator Hon. Ian Macdonald
| Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Primary Healthcare | Dr Andrew Southcott MP |
| Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Health Services and Indigenous Health | Mr Andrew Laming MP |
| Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Supporting Families | Senator Cory Bernardi |
| Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for the Status of Women | Senator Michaelia Cash |
| Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Environment | Senator Simon Birmingham |
| Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Citizenship and Settlement | Hon. Teresa Gambaro MP |
| Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Immigration | Senator Michaelia Cash |
| Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Innovation, Industry, and Science | Senator Hon. Richard Colbeck |
| Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Fisheries and Forestry | Senator Hon. Richard Colbeck |
| Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Fair Competition | Senator Scott Ryan |
CONTENTS

TUESDAY, 16 AUGUST 2011

Chamber
MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS—
Economy ............................................................................................................. 8125

CONDOLENCES—
Holding, Hon. Allan Clyde—
   Reference to Main Committee ................................................................. 8134
Wake, Mrs Nancy Grace Augusta, AC, GM—
   Reference to Main Committee ................................................................ 8136
Olley, Ms Margaret Hannah, AC—
   Reference to Main Committee ................................................................ 8137
Chalmers, Mr Robin Donald—
   Reference to Main Committee ................................................................ 8138

STATEMENTS ON INDULGENCE—
Evans, Mr Cadel—
   Reference to Main Committee ................................................................ 8139

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE—
Emissions Trading Scheme ............................................................................ 8139
Economy ........................................................................................................... 8140
Carbon Pricing ................................................................................................. 8141
Economy ........................................................................................................... 8143
Budget .............................................................................................................. 8145
Coal Seam Gas ................................................................................................. 8146
Carbon Pricing ................................................................................................. 8147
Budget .............................................................................................................. 8149
Carbon Pricing ................................................................................................. 8149
Budget .............................................................................................................. 8150
National Health Reform Agreement ............................................................... 8151
Carbon Pricing ................................................................................................. 8152
Disability Services ............................................................................................ 8153
Member for Dobell ............................................................................................ 8154
Aged Care ......................................................................................................... 8154

STATEMENTS ON INDULGENCE—
Australian Financial Review ............................................................................ 8156

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS........................................................................... 8156

AUDITOR-GENERAL'S REPORTS—
Report No. 1 of 2011-12 .................................................................................. 8157

DOCUMENTS—
Presentation ...................................................................................................... 8157

COMMITTEES—
Australia's Immigration Detention Network Committee—
   Membership .................................................................................................. 8157

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE—
Gillard Government .......................................................................................... 8157
CONTENTS—continued

BILLSON—
Remuneration and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2011—
Product Stewardship Bill 2011—
Therapeutic Goods Amendment (2011 Measures No. 1) Bill 2011—
Customs Amendment (Serious Drugs Detection) Bill 2011—
Family Assistance and Other Legislation Amendment (Child Care and Other Measures) Bill 2011—
Intelligence Services Legislation Amendment Bill 2011—
Migration Amendment (Strengthening the Character Test and Other Provisions) Bill 2011—
Military Justice (Interim Measures) Amendment Bill 2011—
Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters Amendment (Registration of Foreign Proceeds of Crime Orders) Bill 2011—
National Consumer Credit Protection Amendment (Home Loans and Credit Cards) Bill 2011—
Customs Tariff Amendment (2012 Harmonized System Changes) Bill 2011—
Aged Care Amendment Bill 2011—
Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Amendment (MRCA Supplement) Bill 2011—
Child Support (Registration and Collection) Amendment Bill 2011—
Financial Framework Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 1) 2011—
Protection of the Sea (Prevention of Pollution from Ships) Amendment (Oil Transfers) Bill 2011—
Social Security and Other Legislation Amendment (Miscellaneous Measures) Bill 2011—
Assent........................................................................................................................................ 8174

COMMITTEES—
Membership.......................................................................................................................... 8174
Education and Employment Committee—
Report...................................................................................................................................... 8174
Agriculture, Resources, Fisheries and Forestry Committee—
Report...................................................................................................................................... 8176

BILLSON—
National Health Reform Amendment (National Health Performance Authority) Bill 2011—
Second Reading.................................................................................................................... 8177

ADJOURNMENT—
Murray-Darling Basin ........................................................................................................ 8240
Blair Electorate: Roads......................................................................................................... 8241
National Disability Insurance Scheme ................................................................................ 8243
Homelessness ....................................................................................................................... 8244
Ryan Electorate: Glenleighden School................................................................................ 8245
Industrial Relations ........................................................................................................... 8246
Disability Services .............................................................................................................. 8246
Wright Electorate ................................................................................................................ 8248
Television Sports Broadcasts .............................................................................................. 8249
Dawson Electorate: Diuron Fertilizer................................................................................... 8250
Greenway Electorate: Building the Education Revolution Program................................... 8251
CONTENTS—continued

Murray-Darling Basin ................................................................. 8253
Newcastle Electorate: Hexavalent Chromium Spill ........................................ 8254
NOTICES ..................................................................................... 8256

Questions In Writing
Ministers: Staff, Capital Works and Acquisitions—(Question No. 268) .......... 8258
F111 Aircraft—(Question No. 349) ..................................................... 8258
Superclinics—(Question No. 368) ...................................................... 8259
Superclinics—(Question No. 369) ...................................................... 8260
Superclinics—(Question No. 370) ...................................................... 8261
Salt Ash Air Weapons Range—(Question No. 378) .................................. 8261
Family Tax Benefit—(Question No. 379) ............................................ 8262
Broadband—(Question No. 380) ...................................................... 8263
Superclinics—(Question No. 381) ...................................................... 8263
Broadband—(Question No. 392) ...................................................... 8264
TS Pioneer: Air-Conditioning—(Question No. 396) ................................. 8265
Climate Commission Forum—(Question No. 397) .................................... 8266
Salt Ash Air Weapons Range—(Question No. 403) ................................. 8266
Army Cadet Ceremonial Uniforms—(Question No. 404) ......................... 8267
Border Management—(Question Nos. 409 and 410) ............................... 8267
Afghanistan: Tiger Helicopter—(Question No. 417) .................................. 8268
Asylum Seekers—(Question Nos 418 and 419) ..................................... 8268
RAAF Base Scherger: Irregular Maritime Arrivals—(Question No. 420) ...... 8268
Better Start for Children with Disability Program—(Question No. 426) ...... 8269
Asylum Seekers—(Question No. 428) ................................................ 8269
Asylum Seekers—(Question No. 429) ................................................ 8270
Bookstores—(Question No. 435) .................................................... 8270
Mackay Division of General Practice—(Question No. 436) ....................... 8271
Mackay Division of General Practice—(Question No. 437) ....................... 8272
Adult Migrant English Program—(Question No. 457) ............................... 8272
Tourism Australia: Expenditure—(Question No. 460) ............................... 8273
The SPEAKER (Mr Harry Jenkins) took the chair at 13:15, made an acknowledgement of country and read prayers.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Economy

Mr SWAN (Lilley—Deputy Prime Minister and Treasurer) (13:16): by leave—Honourable members are aware that the global economy has been through one of its most difficult periods in recent years, starting with the sub-prime crisis in the United States, the collapse of Lehman Brothers, the global financial crisis and the global recession. Despite all of the global turbulence, our economy and our people have shown themselves to be resilient—a resilience built on strong fundamentals, national unity, and a willingness to meet our challenges head on.

This resilience has seen us experience 20 years of continuous economic growth, and it saw us stare down the global financial crisis to emerge as virtually the only developed country to avoid recession. Our strong fundamentals and our enviable track record give us great confidence as we meet the challenges of the future and take advantage of the great opportunities that lie ahead for our nation.

Throughout this period of global uncertainty I have regularly updated members on global developments and their implication for Australia. And it is appropriate that I do so again today. On 6 July, just before the winter recess, I informed the House of worrying signs of a weakening in the pace of the global recovery. I also said that the challenges facing Greece and Europe more generally should not be underestimated and that a drawn-out resolution to the US debt ceiling debate could act as a severe shock to global financial markets.

Since then we have seen evidence that the US economy is weaker than previously thought. We have seen big swings in global share markets, a downgrade to the US government's triple-A rating by Standard and Poor's and a rapid rise in borrowing costs facing Spain and Italy. Confidence in both global economic prospects and in the capacity of political institutions in some parts of the world to resolve their problems has weakened in recent weeks. And as I emphasised when I addressed the House on 6 July, Europe and the US face major adjustment tasks to bring their debt levels down to more sustainable levels and to grow their economies into the future.

As these global events buffet global markets we should bear two things in mind. First, we should remember that 2011 is not 2008. Households are not as highly leveraged, our banks' balance sheets are stronger and the emerging economies of Asia are still doing quite well. And while global confidence and global markets have taken a battering in recent weeks, overall, global growth remains reasonably firm, supported by continuing strong growth in China and good growth elsewhere in our region.

The second point I want to make is this: Australia is better placed than just about any other nation to ride out the current global turbulence. We have solid economic growth, a strong labour market, an enviable fiscal position, well-regulated and well-capitalised financial institutions and a proven track record in dealing with global instability.

Our underlying strengths do not mean we are completely immune from international events, but they will help protect our economy and the jobs of our people. In saying that, I do not mean to down play the
extreme seriousness of the global situation. The unfortunate reality is that this global instability is going to be with us for some time.

**International developments**

As I have said many times, the recovery for the world economy from the global financial crisis was never going to be rapid or smooth. Despite the initial rebound in global demand since mid-2009, the need for both the public and private sectors in major advanced economies to strengthen their balance sheets remains.

In Europe, the positive market reaction to the new EU bailout package for Greece and reform of the EU's bailout facility announced on 21 July proved to be short lived. Sovereign debt concerns have infected Spanish and Italian sovereign debt markets. To counter the loss of confidence, Italy has now announced further austerity measures to fast-track its efforts to achieve budget balance. At the same time, Spain has announced further austerity measures and will also be seeking to introduce structural measures to support growth.

The European Central Bank, a key player in addressing the crisis, has commenced purchasing Spanish and Italian sovereign bonds. But further decisive action is required. The EU is at a critical turning point in its history. The political courage and vision displayed by its founders is needed today, more than ever. In the United States the agreement to raise the debt ceiling and cut US government spending over the next 10 years averted an unprecedented and catastrophic default by the US government. But this is only the first step to fiscal sustainability. As the President noted, the Standard and Poor's downgrade of US government debt was driven by doubts over whether the US political system could act to address the problem.

In a perfect storm of bad news we also saw a few weeks ago that the United States' growth for the first half of the year had slowed to a crawl and that revisions to earlier data revealed the US recession to be much deeper, and the recovery much weaker, than previously thought. Two years into the recovery, the level of real GDP in the US has still not recovered its pre-crisis peak.

Unemployment remains above nine per cent and growth rates at present are simply not creating enough jobs to make any inroads into this awfully high level of unemployment. Of the more than seven million US jobs lost during the recession, just one million of those have returned. As well as its social cost, the significant pool of long-term unemployed in the US is destroying future growth potential in that economy.

I have been in touch with finance ministers in a number of countries in recent weeks, including the Secretary of the US Treasury, Timothy Geithner. They all recognise the importance of working together to provide stability in international financial markets and restoring confidence and growth.

This is a prime objective of the G20, and on 8 August my G20 counterparts and I released a statement affirming our commitment to work together to support financial stability and to foster stronger economic growth. This will be the focus of the G20 meetings coming up in the next few months, attended by the Prime Minister and I.

**Facing the world from a position of strength**

As I said, the global economic landscape is going to remain rocky for some time, but Australia faces the current turmoil from a position of genuine strength. Today I want to
outline four core strengths that put us well ahead of the pack.

The first of these is our fiscal strength. We have a strong balance sheet, with lower government debt than most other advanced economies, and a determination to get back to surplus in 2012-13, well ahead of our peers, and despite global challenges.

We have a triple-A credit rating, the best in the world, backed by our strong fiscal position, credible and consistent fiscal rules, a resilient economy and a stable financial system. Australia now stands as one of only 14 major countries in the world to hold that rating by Standard and Poor's.

The second reason is the strength of our banking system. Australia's banks are exceptionally well placed to deal with the volatility we are seeing in global financial markets. Their direct exposure to stressed European sovereigns and banks is very small.

Working with the government and the regulators, Australia's banks have done a lot of heavy lifting since 2008 to build up stronger funding, liquidity and capital buffers. The core capital levels of Australian banks are high by historical standards and they are sitting on larger reserves of liquid assets. They have significantly lengthened their funding profiles and built up their deposit bases. Our banks have confirmed they are very well advanced in meeting their funding requirements—and could go for a long period without needing to raise money offshore. I am in regular contact with our banks and our financial regulators, who clearly advise that our banks are strong, stable and well funded for the period ahead.

The third reason we are well placed is the continuing strength we are seeing in our region. For the first time in our history, we are located in the right part of the world at the right time, continuing to benefit as we are from the thriving economies of Asia. Around two-thirds of our goods and services are destined for Asian markets. Our exports to China and India, two of the world's fastest growing economies, are almost double those to the United States and Europe. While some of the goods we export to China go into their exports to the US and Europe, around 80 per cent are predominantly for China's own domestic use.

And as the region's economic transformation continues, we should not forget that the middle-class in the Asia-Pacific is expanding at an extraordinary pace—adding something like 110 million people a year to its ranks. This is creating a growing pool of internal demand and providing opportunities for exports to the region. China and Asia will never be immune from a deep slowdown in the US and Europe but, in the midst of global volatility, robust Chinese growth will remain underpinned by rapid industrialisation and urbanisation.

The fourth reason is our underlying economic strength. Because of the actions we took during the global financial crisis, we face this renewed global turmoil with low unemployment and more people in jobs. Every Australian should be proud of this fact.

It is easy to forget that we went into the global financial crisis with around the same unemployment rate as that in the United States. Our unemployment rate now stands at 5.1 per cent, while in the United States it is over nine per cent. And while we are seeing soft patches in some parts of the economy, there are good grounds to have confidence in our medium-term growth prospects.

We have an unprecedented investment pipeline that is continuing to build, with a staggering $430 billion planned in resource investment alone. These investments are a
vote of confidence in Australia and will provide a continuing solid bedrock of support for our economy in uncertain times. They are very long-term investments, driven by investment decisions over time horizons well beyond the current market turmoil, and so are unlikely to be knocked off course by recent events.

In fact, 40 per cent of our resource investment pipeline is already under construction or scheduled to commence. Projects like Gorgon, Gladstone LNG, Queensland Curtis LNG and Australia Pacific LNG are already making significant contributions to our resources investment. Together, these account for around $90 billion in capital expenditure over the coming years and will lead to a stream of exports.

But, with around 70 per cent of our economy driven by industries other than mining, the future is not without challenges. I know that some parts of our economy are doing it tough at the moment. This is particularly the case for businesses and people working in the trade exposed sectors of our economy that are facing sustained pressure from the high dollar, such as manufacturing and tourism, or in sectors which are still struggling to regain traction after the global financial crisis. The lingering effects of that crisis have meant that credit is a bit tighter and tougher to get, sentiment is more fragile and consumers are more cautious. At a time of low unemployment and good income growth, consumers are opting to rebuild their balance sheets after a long period of rising debt levels. While this has put pressure on our retailers, it does make Australian households more resilient in these uncertain times.

I do not want to sugar-coat the current situation. If the global economy were to weaken materially, that would obviously have an impact here. But our fundamentals are strong, and we have a government with a proven track record of dealing with global instability that is getting on with the job of rolling out a reform agenda to further strengthen our economy for the long term. This reform agenda cannot wait for the uncertainties in Europe and the US to play out.

Building skills and productivity, investing in technology, cutting our pollution and reforming the tax system—all of these plans—are just too important for our future economy to be put on the never-never, as suggested by those who underestimate our capacity as a country.

Conclusion

For the global economy it is clear that a key factor behind the current market turmoil is a loss of confidence. But in Australia we have good reason to maintain confidence in our future. We can be confident in our economic fundamentals, confident in our linkages to the strongest part of the world, confident in the resilience of our people and confident that we have a government who has passed the test before. And while many Australians are feeling uneasy about the economic outlook, we can take confidence from just how different our situation is here at home. We are not the United States; we are not Europe.

In uncertain times like these, it is more important than ever that we have a mature debate about our economy and where it is heading, rather than damaging rhetoric that risks undermining confidence further and sells our country's prospects short. The risk is that perceptions do not match the reality of our strong economic fundamentals. Too often the headlines or the debates fail to take into account the strengths I have discussed today.
That is the message I have heard loud and clear as I move around the country taking soundings from businesses and workers who are hungry for information and who deserve a mature discussion of the future of the global economy and how we best position Australia within it. For my part, I will continue to methodically assess international developments, plan for all eventualities, keep the reform wheels turning and update Australians and their parliament as necessary. I thank the House for the opportunity to do so today.

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House and Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) (13:32): I ask leave of the House to move a motion to enable the member for North Sydney to speak for 17 minutes.

Leave granted.

Mr ALBANESE: I thought that might be popular with the member for North Sydney. I move:

That so much of the standing and sessional orders be suspended as would prevent Mr Hockey speaking in reply to the ministerial statement for a period not exceeding 17 minutes.

Question agreed to.

Mr HOCKEY (North Sydney) (13:33): The Treasurer's statement today is an update on his view of the global economy. I have no doubt that parts of the global economy are facing volatile and challenging times, but there is a disturbing subtext to the Treasurer's words. In his statement the Treasurer is clearly preparing the ground to break his promise of delivering a budget surplus in 2012-13. In his budget speech in May, only three short months ago, the Treasurer said, 'We are on track for surplus in 2012-13, on time, as promised.' He even devoted a whole section of the speech to this promise to get the budget back in the black, with a core undertaking, and I quote: 'We will be back in the black by 2012-13, on time, as promised.'

The Treasurer has repeated that promise in this House on no fewer than 17 occasions and on at least 47 different occasions in the media. The government has led Australians to believe that good fiscal management in the form of a budget surplus is so crucial that it has had to introduce a surprise: a $1.8 billion flood tax to make up for an unexpected expense.

The Treasurer also gave guarantees that the carbon tax would be budget neutral. Of course, in the Treasurer's shared opinion piece with a number of other finance ministers—published today in the Financial Times—the opening words are: 'The world faces a crisis of confidence.' To have Australia's Treasurer utter those words does nothing to alleviate nervousness. A Treasurer who in recent days has effectively described a $4.2 billion hole in his carbon tax as 'broadly budget neutral' is hardly confidence-inspiring. And in relation to the much-vaunted budget surplus, only last week the Treasurer commented that this promise has now become an objective, and today that promise is a determination.

It is ironic that the Treasurer is today laying the ground to break his core fiscal promise. It is just one year since he himself solemnly promised Australians that there would be no carbon tax under Labor and described our allegations as 'hysterical'. The promise on the carbon tax was broken and the promise on the budget surplus will, I expect, be broken. This shows yet again that this is a government whose word cannot be trusted and whose solemn promises mean nothing. The best thing that can be said about the Treasurer's opinion piece and his statement in the House today is: thank goodness most people around the world do not know him; and those who do know him will not be listening.
Credibility and honesty build trust. Consumers will listen to the message only if they trust you at your word. I agree with the view that the recovery of the world economy from the North Atlantic financial crisis was never going to be smooth. I also agree that recent volatility has been linked to concerns about sovereign debt. A third point of agreement is that substantial fiscal austerity will be required to bolster financial stability and to foster stronger economic growth. Despite these points of agreement, I do not want anyone to think there has been a sudden outbreak of love. The fiscal difficulties in many developed nations should be a wake-up call that governments cannot continue to spend more money than they collect in tax revenue. Sooner or later the credit card bill will be called in, and I doubt the Treasurer has heeded this warning.

The Treasurer identified four core strengths of the Australian economy, and I want to focus on two of these. The first is the claim that our fiscal position is strong. The Australian situation is far from comfortable. This year the budget had a forecast deficit of $22.6 billion, the fourth consecutive year of deficit. It will be worse than that because of the $2.9 billion hole relating to the carbon tax. Let us be very clear: the budget deficit number was undermined at the government's own hands just 10 days into the financial year and a few weeks after the budget was delivered. This should not come as a surprise. Over the last four years of Labor the deficits have totalled $154 billion, which is the fastest accumulation of debt in Australia's history.

The government keeps blaming the financial crisis, but that argument is starting to wear thin after three years. On current projections Australia's net debt is likely to total over $110 billion, including the net spending from the carbon tax—well above the $96 billion the coalition inherited from the Hawke and Keating governments. Note that this excludes the $10 billion debt for the clean energy finance corporation, the Gillard bank, and the full $36 billion for the original $4 billion national broadband scheme. The Treasurer wants you to believe that this is not of concern, because it is lower than that of most other developed countries. But what he fails to mention is that Australia pays a higher rate of interest on its debt than most other developed nations.

At the end of July the yield on Australian government 10-year bonds was 5.02 per cent. This is compared with one per cent in Japan, 2.56 per cent in Germany, 2.82 per cent in the USA and 2.87 per cent in the United Kingdom. The interest on Australia's debt is significant. This year the net interest on the federal government debt will be $5.5 billion. It will rise over the next four years to $7.5 billion a year in 2014. This annual interest bill could build five major teaching hospitals every year. It could actually fund the national disability insurance scheme.

A further concern relates to Australia's very high reliance on offshore capital markets to fund the debt. As of March, 73 per cent of Australian federal government debt was held by nonresidents. The Australian government is not as well prepared for today's challenges as it was in 2008. Labor of course inherited a budget surplus of over $20 billion, which is now a deficit of over $20 billion. The coalition left net assets in the bank of around $45 billion, which, as I have noted, is now heading towards a net debt of around $110 billion.

The global community recognises the urgent need for budget belt tightening. But Labor have no track record of that. Labor have not run a budget surplus since 1989-90. Their commitment to a surplus in 2012-13 is waning and not strengthening. Today's statement by the Treasurer does not provide...
the comfort and confidence international investors and Australian households and businesses want and require.

The second point I want to address is the reference to our underlying economic strength. I remain very confident about Australia's medium-term economic prospects. We are in the right place at the right time, geographically located near Asia—the world's largest and fastest-growing economic region—and we are blessed with the resources and the rural output that they want. With the terms of trade at 140-year highs, it can be argued Australia has never been such a beneficiary at the moment as it should be now. Yet confidence is low, and activity in the non-mining sectors of the economy has lost momentum. The slowdown began about a year ago, well before the US downgrade and the recent volatility in global markets. Curiously, the slowdown dates back to about the time of the election and the formation of a minority Labor government. It is primarily a function of domestic factors rather than global influences. I will give some examples.

Consumer confidence has been falling steadily for a year. The Westpac-Melbourne Institute index of consumer sentiment in August is now at its lowest level since May 2009. Growth in retail sales began to slow in the middle of last year. Retail sales have been particularly soft in recent months, falling in three of the past four months. Employment growth also began to slow about a year ago, easing from trend monthly increases of around 0.3 per cent to just 0.03 per cent in July. The number of people unemployed rose by 18,000 in July to the highest level since November 2010. The unemployment rate has increased to 5.1 per cent—also the highest rate since November last year.

Turning to other data, demand for credit from households and businesses is very weak. Housing construction approvals are falling. Share prices are volatile and well below recent highs. And household prices are soft. Households are cocooning. The household savings rate is climbing to historic highs. The government want you to believe that it is someone else's fault. That is typical of Labor. They have tried blaming it all on global uncertainties. But that will not wash, because this data has been trending downwards for up to 12 months.

More recently, the government have said it is all the opposition's fault. They claim the coalition is talking down the economy through its attacks on the government's policies, such as, the economy-wide carbon tax which will increase the price of everything. The truth is that it is the government's actions, their own policies and their lack of a mandate that have destroyed consumer and business confidence.

Households are struggling under higher cost-of-living pressures. The headline consumer price index increased by 3.6 per cent over the year to June, the highest rate in 2½ years. The government claims it is all due to higher food prices, stemming from natural disasters. But a look at the underlying measures of inflation show that price pressures are widespread. On top of this, households have suffered two additional imposts. The first has been the added burden of the seven interest rate increases, as well as those increases beyond RBA cash rate movements. The second has been an ever-rising tax burden. The government has introduced or increased 19 taxes in four years. The flood levy commenced on 1 July this year and the mining and carbon taxes are yet to hit from 1 July next year. The impact of higher interest rates and higher taxes is not measured by the official inflation data. The cost of living for households and
businesses is increasing much faster than the CPI. The latest analytical cost-of-living indexes show that over the year to June for employees the cost of living rose 4.5 per cent, for pensioners it increased 4.4 per cent, for recipients of other government transfers it increased 4.6 per cent and for self-funded retirees it increased four per cent. All of these increases are well above the official headline inflation rate of 3.6 per cent, and even these higher figures do not include the effect on household budgets of higher taxes. The budgets of everyday Australians are groaning under the strain and the government is also eroding business confidence by making it more difficult for business to go about its legitimate affairs with consistent policy positions. In the last 18 months the government has had five positions on a carbon tax, four positions on a mining tax and at least four positions on live cattle exports.

What we are seeing in Australia is a significant loss of confidence. It is crucial the government does all it can to maintain investor and household confidence through credible and consistent economic management. The government's words must match its deeds. The government must immediately repeal the flood levy and cancel the introduction of the mining tax and the carbon tax. A recent comment from Warwick McKibbin, arguably Australia's most eminent economist, is worth noting:

Bad fiscal design always has an unexpected cost. Why is a flood tax being introduced just as the economy slows?

The government must cut wasteful spending and start to live within its means. The government must cease its demands on capital markets. If the current economic malaise continues, there will inevitably be pressure for the government to engage in further spending, and that means more government debt. It should be clear now from the global experience that debt is the problem. It is also crystal clear that more debt is not the answer. A recent IMF report on Australia made two important points that the Treasurer failed to refer to. The first is that the government should be running much larger surpluses from 2013. The IMF says that a tighter fiscal policy would help ease upward pressure on interest rates:

We recommend targeting a budget surplus of more than 1 percent of GDP, on average, for the period beyond 2013/14, while the mining boom continues to support growth.

Then it said:

... a further strengthening of the Commonwealth government balance sheet should continue to contain economy-wide debt-servicing costs.

The report's second point is a related point that surpluses should be larger in the upswings:

This would imply running surpluses during upswings to avoid overheating, and these surpluses should be larger than in past upswings.

The IMF is in agreement with the coalition's calls for Labor to be running much larger budget surpluses. In fact, we just want Labor to deliver a surplus—it's first surplus. It is about time, and we want Labor to keep its promise for a surplus. All we want is a promise that is kept, and to be saving much more of the additional revenues being collected during this the mining boom, which is meant to be the best terms of trade in 140 years.

I believe that Australia's destiny is prosperous. The medium-term outlook for Australia remains strong. We are much more closely linked to prospects in Asia and particularly China, even if China is facing some domestic challenges, rather than being totally exposed to the volatility of the Northern Hemisphere Western economies. There is no doubt that Australia can continue to benefit from the realignment of global
economic strength from the West to the East. This should be our decade and it should be our century. We can get through the current malaise in the global economy. We can get through the challenges, but it will require this government to recognise that it is its own policies of wasteful, debt fuelled spending, increased taxation and interference in the running of businesses that is unnerving Australians and causing our collective loss of confidence in this government.

CONDOLENCES

Holding, Hon. Allan Clyde

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (13:49): I move:

That the House record its deep regret at the death on 31 July 2011 of the Honourable Allan Clyde Holding, former Minister and Member of this House for the Division of Melbourne Ports from 1977 to 1998, and place on record its appreciation of his long and meritorious public service, and tender its profound sympathy to his family in their bereavement.

It was my sad and moving privilege to have just attended the memorial service for Clyde Holding in Melbourne. Appropriately for a passionate Victorian and supporter of the arts, it was held in the National Gallery of Victoria. With that ceremony and with these words of honour today we mark the end of a long and remarkable life. I think 'honour' is the right word because in this parliament we honour our own. We honour those who enter the heat of political battle, we honour the knocks and scars without complaining and we honour those who reach the end happy that they have simply had a chance to serve their community and their nation. It is the phenomenon that Sir Paul Hasluck called 'the chance of politics', and we honour Clyde Holding's journey through the chance of politics today.

The 36 years of Clyde Holding's career in public service were remarkable times. When Clyde joined the Victoria parliament in 1962 we were still a nation of pounds, shillings and pence, a nation of protectionism and the White Australia policy, a nation that still sent people to their execution. When he left this place in 1998 our nation had changed beyond recognition. The dreams of his generation for a more prosperous, fair and inclusive Australia had been abundantly fulfilled and he had played an honourable part in their fulfilment. Clyde Holding was an unlikely progressive. From a conventional, old Labor background, he embraced new ideas and new constituencies. He was a civil libertarian. He forged an unexpected friendship with Charlie Perkins, became a firm friend of the Jewish community, supported the arts and helped bring long-awaited support to non-government schools. So many of the things we now take for granted bear his mark: Indigenous ownership of Uluru, Kakadu National Park, the return of Indigenous remains from museums, ACT self-government. And, through it all, his was a personality that no-one who knew or observed him will ever forget. Gareth Evans observed that Clyde was equally at home sitting in cabinet, squatting in the red dust of the outback or mixing it in the rough-house politics of inner-city Melbourne. He was pugnacious, blunt, vernacular, and someone who did not let disappointment show—because there were disappointments.

He valiantly sustained the Labor cause against the invincible conservative populism of Bolte and Hamer. Few opposition leaders did it tougher than Clyde Holding. And of course here in Canberra his greatest hopes for national land rights legislation were not realised during his ministerial tenure. But, like many of our great policy developments, land rights did not happen in straightforward circumstances. In that instance, an obscure case wound its way slowly through the legal system until 1992 when the hopes of Clyde
Holding were triumphantly realised. There are members still in this House who will remember where they were that day, 21 December 1993, when the Native Title Bill passed into law on the floor of this chamber. Clyde Holding knew where he stood: on the right side of history. And that is where we will always remember him—a true friend of our Indigenous peoples, a true friend of every Australian who sought a better and fairer life.

Clyde Holding was a man who took the chance of politics, who copped the good with the bad, and who passed the only test we should ever set for ourselves in public life: to leave the nation a better place than he found it. On behalf of the Australian people, I pay tribute to the memory of Clyde Holding. I offer my respects to his widow, Judy, and to his children, Peter, Dan, Jenny and Isabella, and to his friends and colleagues in this parliament and beyond, I join in saying this final and grateful goodbye. May this honourable servant of the Australian people rest in peace.

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (13:55): I rise to support the fine words of the Prime Minister in tribute to and commemoration of the life of Clyde Holding. As well as serving for two decades as a member and minister in this House, he was of course the leader of the Victorian opposition from 1967 to 1977. These were, as some of us might remember, difficult times for the Australian Labor Party, particularly in Victoria. He was, we understand, a voice of reason and decency in a party which, at that time and in that place, was not always noted for these qualities. For instance, Bob Hawke, someone who many of us know and all of us like, said of Mr Holding that he faced not only the difficulty of the split arising from the emergence of the DLP but also the incubus of a way out left administration. Mr John Cain said of Mr Holding that he was one of the few politically competent and sensible people in the Victorian parliamentary party and had stood up to some of the thugs in the party. I think it is appropriate for people on this side of the chamber to salute courage and integrity on the other side of the chamber. He was obviously a man of distinction and achievement. Public life has lost a man of good character, and I join with the Prime Minister and convey to his family and friends the condolences of the Liberal Party and the National Party in this parliament.

The SPEAKER (13:56): I associate myself with the remarks of the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition. A 36-year association between two generations of Jenkinsses in the parliamentary sense, both state and federal, is something that I wish to note. With some of the remarks, perhaps, Jenkins senior may have been, as a rival, on the wrong side of arguments, in those early days in Victoria, but Clyde was somebody that we learnt to respect, and I have always said that if I had been picking a team to debate with, Clyde Holding would have been amongst the first that I would have picked to prosecute the case with me. I pass on my condolences to his family and friends. As a mark of respect I ask all present to signify their approval by rising in their places.

Honourable members having stood in their places—

The SPEAKER: I thank the House. Debate adjourned.

Reference to Main Committee

Mr ALBANESE: by leave—I move:

That the order of the day be referred to the Main Committee for debate.

Question agreed to.
Wake, Mrs Nancy Grace Augusta, AC, GM

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (13:59): I move:

That the House record its deep regret at the death on 7 August 2011, of Nancy Grace Augusta Wake AC GM, and place on record its appreciation of her long and meritorious public service.

Many Australians and free people around the world have joined in tribute to Nancy Wake in the days since her death in London on 7 August. It is fitting that this, the representative House of the Australian people does the same today.

Like so many great Australians Nancy Wake was born in New Zealand, but we claim her very truly. She lived overseas for long periods of her life but she was always one of us. Nancy grew up in Sydney, trained and worked as a nurse and then pursued her dreams of freedom and adventure as a journalist in Europe before the war. In later life she recalled that what she saw there in the 1930s led her to become committed to defeating the Nazi regime. At a time when many would not see the evils of fascism or the threat Hitler represented to the world, Nancy saw it straight. In her words:

I saw the disagreeable things that he was doing to people, first of all the Jews. I thought it was quite revolting.

At the outbreak of war Nancy Wake had love and money; a good life and everything to lose. Yet her courage called her to remain in France. She worked with the Resistance as a courier, a saboteur and a spy. Her enduring nickname, the White Mouse, reflected her remarkable ability to evade capture. She was three times awarded the Croix de Guerre and she entered France as a Legion of Honour. She was awarded the UK's George Medal, the US Medal of Freedom and became a Companion of the Order of Australia.

You do not get to be the Gestapo's most wanted person by being conventional, and Nancy Wake was no plaster saint. She lived a long and active life, she inspired movies and television series, she avoided politicians who wanted photos and she enjoyed plenty of gin and tonic. She never stopped telling it as she saw it and she was the author of many a memorable quote—the best of them thoroughly unparliamentary—although, if things had turned out differently in 1949, or 1951 or 1966 she would have been a Liberal member of parliament. I am not sure that either the member for Barton or the member for Kingsford Smith would have welcomed the competition, even when she was 98.

Above all, Nancy Wake was a tough, courageous lady: an Australian of exceptional courage and daring who saved the lives of hundreds of Allied personnel; an Australian whose wartime achievements helped bring the Nazi occupation of France to an end; an Australian whose extraordinary wartime efforts strained belief; an Australian who led Resistance fighters, who freed Allied prisoners, who escaped France over the Pyrenees, who returned by parachute months before D-Day, and who possessed a profound courage, the courage which she tested often and the courage which never failed her.

Nancy Wake was one of the bravest Australians who ever lived. For generations of our people to come, Nancy Wake will remain an abiding inspiration. For today, I simply offer my condolence and that of the House on the passing of this truly remarkable Australian.

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (14:03): I rise to join the Prime Minister in paying tribute to a truly remarkable person. Nancy Wake was Australia's most decorated servicewoman. She was a winner of the George Medal; she
was the rescuer of hundreds, if not thousands, of downed Allied airmen during World War II; she was the leader of a clandestine army in France, 7,000 strong, which contributed materially to the ultimate Allied victory. Nancy Wake was the ultimate antidote to any doubts that people might have about whether women can serve in combat.

She was brilliant, irascible and opinionated; why should she not have been a Liberal candidate for parliament with those qualities? She was too free a spirit for this House, but not to be an inspiration to many millions of Australians now and into the future.

The SPEAKER: As a mark of respect, I ask all present to signify their approval by rising in their places.

Honourable members having stood in their places—

Debate adjourned.

Reference to Main Committee

Mr ALBANESE: by leave—I move:

That order of the day be referred to the Main Committee for debate.

Question agreed to.

Olley, Ms Margaret Hannah, AC

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:05): On indulgence, I rise today too to honour another remarkable Australian, Margaret Olley, who died in Sydney, aged 88, during the winter recess of this parliament. She, of course, was a delightful artist and she was a great human being. She will be remembered for both of these things. She will also be remembered for being a generous donor and benefactor, especially to the Art Gallery of New South Wales, donating literally millions in paintings and in cash. She will be remembered as a mentor to young artists who she supported, and she will be remembered as someone who was always there to lobby politicians on behalf of the arts.

Her long life was captured in two Archibald Prize-winning paintings that book-ended her career. The first was by William Dobell in 1948. She was just 25 years old but looked even younger, dressed in an old wedding dress that had been used for a fancy dress ball. She looked like she had stepped out of a Victorian garden party. The contrast to that other portrait for the Archibald by Ben Quilty is exquisite, showing all of her 88 years of age proudly and unashamedly, a rugged and beautiful landscape of a face bearing contours of age and of wisdom. When sitting for Ben Quilty she made these very striking and poignant remarks:

I'm like an old tree dying and setting forth flowers as fast as it can, while it still can.

The last flower was one of her greatest, a sweeping portrait of Sydney Harbour, a stunning tribute to the city that she loved so much and a very sharp contrast to many of her other paintings of intimate interiors and still lifes.

I think we would want to remember her working and arguing, charming and cajoling right to the end. She will be missed by her friends and by the public who loved her as a living artist and representative of this country. Our thoughts in this place are especially with Malcolm and Lucy Turnbull who so often sat around Margaret's table in Paddington. Like so many others they have lost a dear and wonderful friend. Over 70 remarkable years of painting Margaret gave us everything she had. She poured out her talent, generosity and advice like a torrent to her final days. It was a full and complete life lived voraciously from start to finish. Our nation was privileged to share that life with her, to celebrate its achievements, and today we mourn her loss.
Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (14:08): On indulgence, I rise to support the eloquent words of the Prime Minister. Margaret Olley’s paintings brought out the character and the humanity of Australian domestic life. As the New York art critic Roger Kimball put it, 'She was the real thing in an age of posturing and ersatz'. She was a generous donor as well as a great painter. Thanks to Margaret Olley, the Art Gallery New South Wales now has an impressive collection of drawings by Degas, and paintings by John Russell and Lucian Freud. As Barry Humphries put it in his obituary for Margaret:

She did habitually what we all find difficult: doing good without being found out.

I should remind the House that amongst her many causes and concerns, Margaret was a founding member of a body dear to my heart, Australians for Constitutional Monarchy, which shows that she appreciated good governance as well as fine art. We mourn her passing and we celebrate her life.

Reference to Main Committee

Mr ALBANESE: by leave—I move:

That further statements by indulgence in relation to the death of Margaret Hannah Olley AC be permitted in the Main Committee.

Question agreed to.

Chalmers, Mr Robin Donald

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:10): On indulgence, during the winter parliamentary recess we lost a member of the press gallery, a remarkable man and a remarkable journalist, Rob Chalmers. When Rob Chalmers came to his first question time as a cadet reporter it was March 1951—that is pretty amazing to think about. Bob Menzies was within weeks of his second election victory that ended Ben Chifley's career. It was to become the year of Chifley's death; the year Menzies attempted to abolish the Communist Party. We were at war in Korea. We signed the ANZUS Treaty. We celebrated half a century of Federation. It was a vintage year for a young reporter to join a press gallery of giants. And Rob Chalmers became one of those giants.

He was a journo's journo: shrewd, independent, authoritative. He represented the best of press gallery journalism in this country. If he came to be considered old school that only served as a badge of honour. The 24-hour news cycle, like the spin of modern politics, had no appeal for Rob. If you had a good story locked away by midday on Friday then there was nothing to stop you from stepping out for the odd long lunch and a decent bottle of red to go with it. He was a raconteur in a town that tells many stories. He was also a romantic who ended up marrying his teenage sweetheart, Gloria, as his third wife.

Above all, Rob Chalmers was a true professional to the very end. In spite of the cancer that was to kill him, he worked in the gallery until he could do no more. Then he worked from home in those final days in the Queanbeyan nursing home, plugging away at the Inside Canberra newsletter that has been a part of federal politics since 1957. He also worked on his book Inside the Canberra Press Gallery: Life in the "Wedding Cake" of Parliament House, published in Rob's final days but which unconsciousness sadly prevented him from seeing. There will never be another career like Rob Chalmers'. Alan Ramsey put it in typical blunt fashion when he said last month:

… nobody, in any capacity—politician, bureaucrat or journalist—has equalled what Rob Chalmers somehow endured in the nation's parliament …

He went on to list some of them:

… fifty-eight Budget lock-ups, from the Country Party’s Artie Fadden in 1951 to Labor’s Wayne Swan in May this year, plus every federal treasurer in between; … twenty-eight federal
election campaigns … five changes of government—and 12 prime ministers. They do not make them like Rob Chalmers any more: the cadet who became a giant and who showed why journalism should always be regarded as an honourable profession. Vale, Rob. I do not think this place is going to be the same without him.

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (14:13): On indulgence, Rob Chalmers was not the father of the House, but he was certainly the father of the press gallery. And while the gallery does not run this country, it certainly has a vast influence on this House. If Philip Ruddock is a legend of parliament after 39 years of service, Rob Chalmers was an absolute phenomenon of political journalism after a full 60 years of service to his country in the press gallery. Rob Chalmers may not have loved every politician or everything every politician did, but he certainly loved politics and he loved journalism. Everyone who shares those passions should celebrate his life and mourn his passing. On behalf of the federal coalition, I send our sincere condolences to his family and friends.

Reference to Main Committee
Mr ALBANESE: by leave—I move:
That further statements by indulgence in relation to the death of Robin Donald (Rob) Chalmers be permitted in the Main Committee.

Question agreed to.

STATEMENTS ON INDULGENCE
Evans, Mr Cadel
Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:15): On a very different and very happy note, this parliament gathers today and has the opportunity to wish a fond congratulation to Cadel Evans for his sporting achievement over the winter recess. Cadel is a grand old Welsh name meaning ‘battle’, and battle he did—a tremendous battle showing great perseverance—to win the Tour de France. I had the opportunity to speak to Cadel after he had won but before the final ride into Paris. I actually interrupted him when he was having a long and well-deserved hot bath. I had the opportunity to speak to him—

Mr Bowen: It was on the phone, I imagine!

Ms GILLARD: Yes, it was on the phone. Thank you to the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship. For an abundance of caution, I will clarify it was on the phone, he being in France and me being in Australia. I had the opportunity then to congratulate him on behalf of the nation. He was delighted but also, to use football parlance, keeping a lid on it; because, whilst of course you cannot lose at that stage of the race, you do have to successfully ride into Paris. If anything happened on the way and you did not complete the journey then the honour would not be yours. So he was keeping a lid on his enthusiasm until he had completed that leg as well.

Since then, he has come back to a tremendous homecoming in Victoria. I had the opportunity to speak to Premier Ted Baillieu this morning. He told me what a terrific event it was for Cadel and for his family, for the people of Victoria and, of course, for the people of Australia, who are all sharing in and celebrating this triumph with him.

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (14:17): I am very happy to support the Prime Minister's words. The Tour de France is probably the world’s toughest endurance sporting event, and for the first time in history it has been won by an Australian. Cadel Evans has certainly cycled his way into our sporting history here in Australia. He cycled his way into the hearts
of millions of Australians and, of course, has also inspired hundreds of thousands of lesser cyclists to be as good as we can possibly be. So we all wish Cadel very well for the future. By gee, we revelled in his moment of magnificent triumph.

Reference to Main Committee

Mr ALBANESE: by leave—I move:

That further statements by indulgence in relation to Cadel Evans be permitted in the Main Committee.

Question agreed to.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Emissions Trading Scheme

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (14:18): My question is to the Prime Minister. I remind her that today is the anniversary of her notorious statement that 'there will be no carbon tax under the government I lead'. Does she believe that it is acceptable to say one thing to win votes but to do the exact opposite to stay in the Lodge? Will she now defer the carbon tax till after an election so that all Australians and not just the Greens can have their say on this bad tax?

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:19): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his very predictable question. Here we go again. The nation, of course, is facing turbulent economic times. It is the intention of the government to manage the economy now, to keep the economy strong and also to enact the reforms today that we need to have to ensure that the economy is strong for the future. In order to do that, we need to put a price on carbon to realise the clean energy future, the clean energy jobs and the innovation that this country should have.

Working here with the parliament that the people have voted for, during this parliamentary session we will present legislation to put a price on carbon: a fixed price for the first three years, moving to an emissions trading scheme. The impact of putting that price on carbon will be that we cut carbon pollution; that we see an increase in the use of clean energy; that we see all of the jobs and innovation which will come with that increased use of clean energy; and that we will cut taxes, increase pensions and increase family payments. We will ensure that we take the positive action necessary to seize that clean energy future for our nation.

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (14:20): My supplementary question is to the Prime Minister. If this is what the Prime Minister really thinks, why wasn't she honest about it before the last election? If the Prime Minister will not call an election, will she at least apologise for trying to win the last election on the basis of an ugly lie?

The SPEAKER: Past practice would have me asking the Leader of the Opposition to reconstruct the last part of his question. On the basis of those past practices, I ask the Leader of the Opposition to reframe the last part of the question.

Mr ABBOTT: Mr Speaker, to assist you and the House, I ask: will the Prime Minister now apologise for trying to win the last election on the basis of a falsehood?

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:22): At the last election campaign I spoke to the Australian people about needing to put a price on carbon. I spoke to them about an emissions trading scheme. I actually spoke to them about the same things that John Howard had spoken to the Australian people about in the 2007 election. Yes, of course I am well aware of what I said during the election campaign, and when I said the words that the Leader of the Opposition has referred to in this place and beyond I meant every word of it.
Then, following the election campaign, as Prime Minister, I faced up to an important choice for the Australian people. This is the parliament the Australian people voted for, and I had an opportunity in this parliament to ensure that we put a price on carbon, that we seized the clean energy future and we cut carbon pollution. When I made the decision to put that price on carbon—

Mr Abbott: Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order on relevance. I have asked her for an apology, and some statement of regret would surely be appropriate given the fact that millions of Australians voted on the basis of a statement which turned out to be untrue.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat. The Prime Minister has the call. She will respond directly to the question.

Ms GILLARD: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. So I made a decision, a determination, that the best thing for the nation's future was to put a price on carbon and to get through this parliament—indeed, this minority parliament—a reform that eluded this parliament during a period of majority government in the last term. I did that because I believe climate change is real. I have accepted the advice of the scientists; I have accepted the advice of the economists about the most efficient way of ensuring that we have a clean energy future.

So, yes, I take responsibility for having made that decision. I understand that that has caused disappointment amongst many and I accept that too. But you get elected to this position to make the tough decisions that are important for the nation's future. You do not get elected to this position to sit there and say no to everything. You do not get elected to this position so that you can say yes to everyone who presents to you, even if that means that you go around the nation—

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: Order! The Prime Minister has the call. She will be heard in silence, and it is on the basis that people can actually listen.

Ms GILLARD: As I was saying, you get elected to this position in order to take decisions, many of them very tough decisions—but they are decisions that need to be taken for the nation's future. You get elected to this position on the basis that you have got the preparedness to go and say things to people that they may not necessarily want to hear. You cannot, when you are elected to this position, just agree with someone on radio, then agree with someone walking down the street, agree with someone in a meeting and then agree with a journalist who rings you up for an interview and actually say different things to all of those people. What you have to do in this position is make the decisions necessary for the nation's future and have the determination to implement them and the courage to argue for them, and that is what I intend to do.

Economy

Ms ROWLAND (Greenway) (14:26): My question is to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister outline how the government is building a strong economy and why the nation has a bright future, despite recent international events?

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:26): I thank the member for her question. Australia has a bright future and the fundamentals of our economy are strong. In recent days, of course, Australians have watched a flood of concerning international news. Over the last few weeks, there has been plenty to watch on our TV screens and much of it has been very concerning. As people have watched it, they have been concerned about the political brinksmanship they have seen played out in Washington,
they have been concerned by the institutional weakness they have seen in a number of economies and they have been concerned by the fiscal issues they have seen playing out on the world stage.

But, as Australians have watched this flood of news internationally, our standpoint has been a very different one from people around the world watching this news. Whilst this news is concerning, it also paints in sharp relief the achievements of this country. Australians are rightly proud of our economic achievements, and that is a pride I share. When people from overseas look at Australia, it is often with a sense of great envy—great envy about our beaches; great envy about our climate. Today, people are looking at our nation with a sense of great envy about our economy. There are many nations around the world who would very, very quickly change all of their macroeconomic indicators to be the same as this country's.

We are better placed than any nation on earth to ride out the current global turbulence, and that is not because of any accident. It is because of the actions that this government took to keep our economy out of recession during the global financial crisis. It is because of the decades of reforms that have led to the resilience of our economy. It is because during the global financial crisis employers went that extra yard to keep people in jobs and unions cooperated with employers in order to keep people in work. It is because of that resilience that has been tested time and time again, a resilience that has always stood up to the challenges, that we can face the future with confidence.

We can face the future with confidence because we have solid economic growth, low unemployment and low debt. Those things are not simply words—they are real things impacting on Australians today. Low unemployment means 11.5 million Australians take home a pay cheque every week. It means our unemployment rate is 5.1 per cent. In the UK it is 7.7 per cent and the US is at 9.1. We have strong public finances, so people around the nation can get on with the concerns in their own lives and not need to have concerns about the nation's finances. Public debt is less than seven per cent of GDP in this country compared with 80 per cent of GDP in the UK and 86 per cent of GDP in the US, and we have a huge pipeline of investment—$430 billion—in the resources sector of the economy alone. Australians are rightly proud of the economy that we have built together. It has strong fundamentals and strong foundation stones and, because of that, even during this period of global turbulence, we can face the future with confidence.

Carbon Pricing

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (14:30): My question is again to the Prime Minister, and I refer her to big job losses at Qantas and OneSteel, Australian icons that will be severely affected by the carbon tax. Why is she making competitive pressures worse with a carbon price that applies to Australian companies but not to our competitors? Isn't this the worst possible time for a big new tax on everything?

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:31): Mr Speaker—

Dr Mike Kelly interjecting—

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: Order! The House will come to order. Order! The Prime Minister has the call. The Prime Minister will resume her place.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: As I have said to the parliamentary secretary before, I will consult the Deane's bus timetable, but it would
appear that on today's occasion he would have a busful from the other side to discuss matters with him. I think that now everybody might quieten down. The Prime Minister has the call.

Ms GILLARD: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. Can I say this to the Leader of the Opposition: of course this is question time and this is his opportunity to come in here and make criticisms of the government, and that is appropriate. What is not appropriate is to try and spin decisions that have been made by companies today about Australian jobs and pretend that they are somehow related to the government's plan to price carbon. To do so is completely disrespectful both to those companies and, more importantly, to the workers in those companies—

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: Order! The question has been asked.

Ms GILLARD: many of whom have got bad news today. Qantas has announced that there will be job losses of around 1,000. Qantas has made it abundantly clear that that is about conditions and competition in international aviation, and to associate that with a government policy is to show the ultimate disrespect to those Qantas workers who would be feeling anxious having heard this decision from Qantas today. What a dreadful thing to do when those people are under pressure—and equally in relation to OneSteel, where the Leader of the Opposition has already made such disgraceful false claims and has gone to places like Whyalla and said to those people that their town would be wiped off the map, only to be repudiated by the management of OneSteel, who have made it crystal clear in the public domain that the government, in working out its carbon pricing scheme, had heard and responded to their—

Mr Abbott: Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I asked the Prime Minister: why is she making Australia's competitive situation worse with an unnecessary carbon tax? The Prime Minister should address that question, not engage in the kinds of falsehoods that we are seeing.

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

Government members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: Order, those on my right! The Prime Minister is responding to the question. The interjections should cease, and she should ignore the interjections. The Prime Minister has the call.

Ms GILLARD: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. In relation to OneSteel and, of course, the Leader of the Opposition's false claims made on 27 April this year—'Whyalla will be wiped off the map'—and then the words of Geoff Plummer, the CEO of OneSteel—

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The House will come to order.

Ms GILLARD: who said, and I quote, 'We believe that on balance, the sectoral approach announced today by the Prime Minister for the steel industry, including the introduction of the—

Mr Pyne interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Sturt will resume his place.

Mr Pyne interjecting—

The SPEAKER: But we have had a point of order on relevance.

Mr Pyne interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The Prime Minister will resume her place.

Mr Pyne: Mr Speaker, on a point of order: I would ask you to require the Prime Minister to withdraw the imputation where
she has attached somebody else's remarks to the Leader of the Opposition. The remarks she is talking about were made by the AWU, not by the—

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Sturt will resume his place. The call for a point of order is not an opportunity for debate. I know the frustration because the standing orders allow debate in the answers, but I have asked that the Standing Committee on Procedure look at that. But there is no opportunity for the Manager of Opposition Business to come to the dispatch box to enter into debate. The Prime Minister has the call.

Ms GILLARD: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. I referred to comments by the Leader of the Opposition on 27 April in a doorstop. I am now referring to comments made by the CEO of OneSteel, Mr Geoff Plummer, on 10 July 2011, when he said:

We believe that on balance, the sectoral approach announced today by the Prime Minister for the steel industry, including the introduction of the Steel Transformation Plan—

is both appropriate and sensible. We are pleased that the Government has responded by adopting this approach.

So to the Leader of the Opposition I say this: our carbon pricing package is about seizing economic opportunities for the future. Our carbon pricing package will enable great Australian businesses to continue doing what they are doing. Indeed, we will see businesses grow, we will see economic growth and we will see 1.6 million new jobs. What the Leader of the Opposition most certainly should not do in this parliament is try and associate announcements today about job losses—very unfortunate announcements about job losses—with the government's policies and plans. To do so is an attempt to mislead Australians already in difficult circumstances because their employers have said that they will need to reduce jobs. We will take a different approach. We will work with those businesses. We will work with those employees. We will support them and not get them involved in a political debate, because that is such an inappropriate thing to do.

Economy

Ms SMYTH (La Trobe) (14:38): My question is to the Treasurer. Will the Treasurer please outline for the House the importance of responsible economic and fiscal management? How has this approach been received and what is the government's response?

Mr SWAN (Lilley—Deputy Prime Minister and Treasurer) (14:38): I thank the member for La Trobe for that very important question. As I indicated to the House earlier we are facing uncertainty and turbulence in global financial markets. I made the point earlier that there is a long and painful adjustment to take place both in Europe and in the United States and therefore we are not going to see for some time strong growth in either of those areas. All of that makes it much more important that we put in place very strict fiscal policy, predictable fiscal policy, in this country.

We have many things going for us in this environment, as the Prime Minister was saying before. We have lower debt than major advanced economies. One of the reasons our debt is lower is we put in place a responsible fiscal stimulus and therefore we avoided the capital destruction and the very high levels of unemployment that are now being experienced in many other countries around the world. But when we moved to put that stimulus in place we also put in place our fiscal rules and were determined to come back to surplus as soon as was responsibly possible. We have been applying those rules
from the time that we put that stimulus in place in February 2009.

The consequence of that is we did get a very big tick for our economic management from the IMF when they were here recently. They gave the economy a very big tick and said it had been very well run in very difficult circumstances and that we had handled the global recession in one of the most responsible ways of just about any other developed economy in the world. We realised when we put those strict fiscal rules in place that we would have to restrain spending growth and that we would have to put in place responsible savings and that is what we are doing. We are putting in place that fiscal policy. I will quote from the IMF report of only a week or two ago:

On fiscal policy, we commend the authorities for remaining committed to returning the Commonwealth budget to surplus by 2012/13 … This consolidation is faster than in many other advanced economies and is more ambitious than earlier envisaged …

This discipline, this commitment, stands in stark contrast to the position taken by those opposite. It was only one year ago when the Treasury and the department of finance found there was an $11 billion black hole in their election commitments.

Mr Pyne: Mr Speaker, on a point of order: the Treasurer was not asked about alternative policies and therefore he is now straying beyond the question he was asked. I would ask you to either draw him back to the question or sit him down.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Treasurer must directly relate his remarks—

Mr SWAN: Seventy billion dollars is a lot of money. I say this to the shadow Treasurer: with bungling like that you will not have the confidence of markets.

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: Order! A lesson that the House might learn is nobody can hear anything that is going on if you are all shouting at once. The Treasurer will directly relate his remarks to the question.

Mr SWAN: Mr Speaker, I was pointing out that the fiscal stance of those opposite is a risk to the economy.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Treasurer is overly debating the question.

Mr SWAN: A $70 billion savings ambition is the equivalent of all Medicare payments for four years.

Mr Pyne interjecting—

The SPEAKER: Order! The Manager of Opposition Business will resume his seat! He is one who shouts at me while, at the same time, I am trying to direct other people. It makes it very hard. I have just indicated that the Treasurer is overly debating the question. He will not do that.

Mr SWAN: The government is committed to returning the budget to surplus despite global difficulties. We are committed
to putting a price on carbon. We are committed to investing in skills and infrastructure and we are committed to a responsible fiscal policy, unlike those opposite who want to take $70 billion from the budget.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Treasurer will resume his place. The Treasurer has not got the call. The member for Deakin will resume his place unless he has some point of order he has found from the Manager of Opposition Business's play book, but I doubt whether that would happen. The member for North Sydney has the call.

Budget

Mr HOCKEY (North Sydney) (14:44): My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to the Treasurer's promise in the budget just three months ago: 'The government will return the budget to surplus in 2012-13.' I also refer the Prime Minister to the Treasurer's statement that this commitment has become an 'objective' or, today, a 'determination'; the finance minister's statement that it is now a 'plan'; the Assistant Treasurer's statement that it is now a 'guiding principle'; and the Prime Minister's own statement that it is now an 'expectation'. Is the Prime Minister's promise of a surplus in 2012-13 going the same way as her promise that 'there will be no carbon tax under a government I lead'?

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:45): In answer to the shadow Treasurer's question, yes, the budget in May had in the budget forecasts a surplus in 2012-13, exactly as we promised at the last election campaign. As the shadow Treasurer may have noticed—I hope he has noticed; it was certainly the subject of the Deputy Prime Minister's ministerial statement before question time—there has been turbulence in global markets.

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: Order! The Prime Minister will resume her place. The Prime Minister has the call and she will be heard in silence.

Ms GILLARD: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. As the Deputy Prime Minister detailed in his statement to the House before question time—

Mr Abbott interjecting—

Ms GILLARD: Yes, the Leader of the Opposition is right, I was not here to listen to it. I was at a funeral.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The Prime Minister will resume her seat. I would hope that over the winter recess members have had the same response that I have had to the general behaviour in this House. One of the overriding comments that I receive is the inability of members in general to show respect and civility to each other. I am quite happy to have robust debates about issues, but when we have slanging matches about things to do more with personalities I think it drags us all down. I would hope, whilst I do not like to hear any interjections, that interjections would go to the substance. The Prime Minister has the call.

Ms GILLARD: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. In answer to the shadow Treasurer's question, the Deputy Prime Minister earlier today outlined the turbulence that there has been in global markets and the fact we are not immune from that even though, of course, our economy has got such strong fundamentals. What the Deputy Prime Minister made clear to the House is of course that it does have an impact, and when we update the forecasts in the Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook then we will update the impacts coming from that global turbulence that we have seen on markets and its potentials for impacting on global growth. The Treasurer has also made the obvious and
common sense statement that impacts on global growth and potential impacts here make it more challenging for us to bring the budget back to surplus, but we are absolutely determined to do so and we expect to do so.

We are in a very different position coming to this task as compared with the opposition. We are in a different position because we have shown fiscal discipline throughout and we have adhered to a clear set of fiscal rules. That of course meant that when we went to the last election campaign we had all of our policies properly costed and we found offsetting savings for the new expenditures that we promised to the Australian people. The opposition did not take a similar approach and found itself in an $11 billion black hole. Now of course, since the election campaign, that $11 billion black hole has worsened to $70 billion. The shadow Treasurer has staked his reputation on the statement that he can find savings, cutbacks, to equal this $70 billion. He said very boldly—

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

Ms GILLARD: On the question of budget surpluses, he said very boldly that 'finding $50 billion, $60 billion or $70 billion is about identifying waste, identifying areas where you do not need to proceed with programs'.

Mr Hockey: Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order going to relevance. I am asking the Prime Minister to be accountable for her own promises, her own words.

The SPEAKER: The member for North Sydney will resume his place. As I have indicated, the Prime Minister under the standing orders is allowed to debate the question, but that debate must be directly relevant to the question.

Ms GILLARD: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. I was asked a question about the budget surplus and I have made the position of the government clear. I am simply asking for comparable clarity from the shadow Treasurer. If he is to find $70 billion in savings, then I ask him to list them. Seventy billion dollars is the equivalent of not paying pensions for two years. Seventy billion dollars is a lot of money. We await the shadow Treasurer's $70 billion list of cutbacks. I think Australians will be very interested to see it.

Coal Seam Gas

Mr KATTER (Kennedy) (14:52): My question is to the Prime Minister. Is the Prime Minister aware that the National Water Commission's review is quoted in today's Australian and is warning the government:

… the impact of coal-seam gas on water quality has become a pressing matter … there are also significant potential risks to water and our water management as a result of the scale of the development … there is a level of uncertainty … as a result of the less-than-perfect information …

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr KATTER: There is a fellow up here constantly interjecting and I would ask for the time to be taken off my time for the question. The gentleman is in the middle over there.

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Kennedy will resume his seat until the House comes to order. Now that the House is in order, I will call the member for Kennedy. I remind all that the member for Kennedy has a long memory and he will get his own back. He will be heard in silence.

Mr KATTER: I only have two names down so far, Mr Speaker. Is the Prime Minister aware that there is, outside the Murray-Darling, negligible surface water above the Great Artesian Basin? Kangaroos, emus, birds, half of Australia's cattle and
sheep, even tourism and elements of mining are therefore dependent upon this aquifer. In light of negligible employment and overwhelming foreign ownership, could the Prime Minister meet stakeholders and consider a moratorium on all drilling and intrusion into the GAB?

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:54): I thank the member for Kennedy for his question. In answer to the member for Kennedy's question, as he would be aware, constitutional responsibility for the regulation of these onshore resources rests with state governments. On the issue he raises, the Commonwealth government has been closely monitoring both the debate about coal seam gas and concerns about impacts on water.

The role of the Commonwealth government becomes enlivened when a project comes to the minister for the environment through the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act—that is, it is a project of a major scale and it has got some environmental significance and consequence. When those things have happened the minister for the environment has taken the best of scientific advice and has placed large numbers of conditions on projects, including conditions which go to the underlying water and to monitoring the water condition. To give you an example of that, the government imposed more than 300 detailed conditions each on the Santos and British Gas coal seam gas projects and 270 conditions on the APLNG proposal that I believe the member referred to. So, yes, when these matters do come before the Commonwealth there is a clear understanding that we do need to take the best of scientific advice. We get that expert advice from agencies like Geoscience Australia. We always ask for detailed water management plans and monitoring regimes to avoid or minimise impacts on groundwater and on surface water.

On broader debates about coal seam gas, I do understand the member is concerned. He is not on his own there; other members of the parliament have raised some concerns. In managing these sorts of questions, it is very important, I think, to recognise we have a constitutional position which gives a state government a particular role. We are talking about an industry worth billions of dollars to this country, with billions of dollars of investment in the pipeline. We are also talking about farmers, some of whom have profited from the identification of coal seam gas on their land and some of whom have had concerns about the question.

In order to deal with this issue—billions of dollars of investment, a constitutional position and some farmers with concerns—what you need to do is to be studied, methodical and careful. You have got to make sure that you understand the situation, that you act consistently and that you give the same message to all parties. It is certainly not appropriate to get on a radio station one day and say something which would void constitutional law and then ask for a serve of humble pie at a press conference on another day. That will not be the approach that we take. We will continue, under Commonwealth law, to work these issues through methodically with the best of scientific advice.

**Carbon Pricing**

Mr SYMON (Deakin) (14:58): My question is to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister outline the government's plans to undertake nation-building reform to deliver a clean energy future? What are the challenges to these plans and how will the government overcome them to deliver the right reforms for the nation?
Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:58): I thank the member for his question on pricing carbon. Since the parliament last sat, the government has announced a plan to put a price on carbon, to cut carbon pollution, to cut taxes, to increase pensions and to increase family payments. We will bring that plan, in the form of legislation, to this parliament during this parliamentary session and it will be through the parliament before the end of this year. That means that we will be able to put a price on carbon from 1 July next year.

During the winter recess I have had the great privilege of moving around Australia and talking to many Australians about our plans to put a price on carbon. I have talked to Australians in all sorts of circumstances, in community meetings, in shopping centres, at morning teas, at factories and at mines right around the country, and what I have found is, yes, there is a high degree of concern but people do want to know the facts about putting a price on carbon. They also want to understand what it will do to deliver a clean-energy future. As I have moved around the country talking to Australians in this wide variety of circumstances, I have been in a position to talk to them about the natural advantages our nation has for a clean energy future. We are a country with abundant sources of renewable and clean energy. We are a country with abundant sources of solar power, wind power, geothermal power and tide power, and I have had the opportunity around the country not only to talk to Australians about this clean energy future but to see also some innovative new projects that are already generating energy out of clean and renewable sources.

All up, consequently having had these discussions, I have seen with my own eyes the way that the new clean energy sources can create more jobs and higher skills, how they can create more investment in innovation, and how they can ensure that pollution goes down and not up. This is a reform that will attract investment to Australia and that is a great outcome for our country.

Of course, undertaking this reform was never going to be easy. But government is not about doing what is easy; it is about doing what is right for the nation's future. It is right for our future to create a clean energy future. Because we are a Labor government, as we have gone about this reform we have ensured that the assistance that will flow to households will particularly flow to those Australians who need it the most. People will see tax cuts, pension increases and increases in family payments, and Australians who need that assistance most will see more of that assistance.

What this does mean is that there is a major tax reform associated with this clean energy future. It will enable people to more directly see the benefits of the work they do and it will mean that a million Australians no longer need to fill in a tax return. This is good news for Australians making the journey from welfare to work. It is good news for Australians who are second-income earners and making a decision to return to the workforce.

So we are facing up to the big challenges of the future. Tackling climate change is a challenge that needs to be taken seriously. You need to be there explaining the facts to people, not making wild assertions. You need to be there telling people consistently what this means—the same message to people every day rather than saying different things to different audiences. I have enjoyed doing that during the parliamentary recess and I look forward to continuing it as we move to pricing carbon on 1 July.
Budget

Mr ROBB (Goldstein) (15:02): My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to a statement during the last election:

The Budget is coming back to surplus, no ifs no buts; it will happen.

Prime Minister, is this promise as believable as the promise that there will be 'no carbon tax under the government I lead'?

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (15:03): To the member's question, I have already in this question time answered a very similar question from the shadow Treasurer so I would refer the shadow finance minister to that answer. I would also ask the shadow finance minister when he believes he will be in a position to detail to the parliament the $70 billion of cutbacks that are necessary for the opposition to climb out of the black hole that it has got itself into.

Carbon Pricing

Ms GRIERSON (Newcastle) (15:03): My question is to the Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency. Will the minister please outline the government's plan to move to a clean energy future and the importance of doing so in the cheapest and most efficient way. What other options have been proposed and what is the government's response?

Mr COMBET (Charlton—Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency) (15:04): I thank my colleague the member for Newcastle for her question. As the Prime Minister averted to earlier, on 10 July the government announced its plan for a clean energy future, which includes of course the introduction of a carbon price into our economy. This is a major economic and environmental reform. The plan will cut pollution and drive investment in clean energy, and at the same time we will assist households and of course support jobs. More than half of the revenue from the carbon price mechanism will be used to assist households. The assistance for households will be delivered by tax cuts and increases in the pension, family tax benefits and other government payments. In fact nine out of 10 households will receive some assistance. The carbon price mechanism is a market mechanism which is important to ensure that cutting pollution is achieved at least cost to Australian households and businesses. When emissions trading starts in July 2015, businesses will be able to access credible international carbon markets to ensure that we achieve the emissions reductions at lowest cost.

All of that stands in stark contrast to the policy of those opposite, which is a 'subsidies for polluters' scheme. The opposition would take money from households and pay polluters. There would be no assistance for households to meet those costs. In a recent policy development the Leader of the Opposition indicated that their policy would impose the highest cost possible on households and businesses. In a classic piece of policy on the run—say one thing to someone and another to someone else—the Leader of the Opposition has ruled out access for business to international carbon markets. This has very important implications. The carbon price will need to be much higher and the economic costs will be much higher. On the basis of access to international carbon markets the opposition's policy had previously been costed at $720 per household. With this latest development, no access to international carbon markets, the cost will now be $1,300 per household. A cost of $1,300 per household—take it from households, pay it to polluters; subsidies for polluters! There will not be any assistance for households under the coalition scheme. All of this for the sake of some populist
drivel that we should not be trading with foreigners.

We have seen the Leader of the Opposition take his scientific advice on this issue from One Nation. Now he is taking his economic advice from them. He was at a rally today and Pauline Hanson was there. She has been in the gallery behind him again. She has probably gone off to write up a few notes for him. This positioning—one thing to one person—and these ridiculous, populist, antimarket economic propositions will cost the Australian people significantly. There is no better demonstration of the Leader of the Opposition’s preparedness to say anything and do anything—he says one thing to Alan Jones and another thing to miners and someone else. The Leader of the Opposition goes around spreading fear and alarm through deliberate misrepresentation. You cannot trust his word.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: Order!

Mr Robert: Get a grip, Combet.

The SPEAKER: The member for Fadden will leave the chamber for one hour under standing order 94(a).

The member for Fadden then left the chamber.

The SPEAKER: There was some interest in me giving the call to the member for Sturt.

Budget

Mr Pyne: The Manager of Opposition Business will resume his seat. Again I remind everybody, including the observers, the theatre critics, that a point of order is not a chance for a debate. If the point of order is on direct relevance, I remind the Prime Minister that she has to be directly relevant.

Ms Gillard: As I have indicated to the parliament already in question time today, we will adhere to our fiscal rules. As I have indicated to the parliament already today, we are determined to return the budget to surplus. As I have indicated to the parliament and the Treasurer has indicated to the parliament both in answer to questions and in the statement he made before question time today, the global economic turbulence we have seen is turbulence we are not immune from but our fundamental economic structures are strong. Consequently, it has...
made the journey to surplus more challenging, but we are determined to achieve a surplus.

The thing that would press on those on the other side who are interested in the question of surplus most is the $70 billion black hole they have and how they are going to fund it. Of course, in a portfolio like education—and I do know the expenditures in that portfolio well—

The SPEAKER: The Prime Minister will finalise her answer.

Ms GILLARD: to even make a dint on a problem like $70 billion you would need to be taking out all of the money in schools and all of the money in universities. The person who asked the question may like to direct his attention to that.

National Health Reform Agreement

Ms OWENS (Parramatta) (15:12): My question is to the Minister for Health and Ageing. How would the government's Health Reform Agreement deliver better outcomes for patients? What reaction has there been to this agreement? What is the government's response?

Ms ROXON (Gellibrand—Minister for Health and Ageing) (15:12): I thank the member for Parramatta for her question. It is not surprising that she is one member who would want to ask this question, because in her electorate of Parramatta the historic Health Reform Agreement, which has been struck with every state and territory around the country, is delivering 45 extra beds at Westmead Hospital—and 40 of those are already open, providing services to patients as we speak today.

This reform is going to deliver to many patients, not just through the provision of extra beds—1,300 extra subacute beds—but also through greater efficiency, greater transparency and accountability, more services for patients and less waiting. An extra $19.8 billion in funding is going to be provided. We have committed to sharing in the growth of hospital expenditure in equal partnership with the states and territories. In doing that we have assured that there will be accountability for where every dollar of public hospital funding is going. For the first time we will be paying hospitals actually for the services that they deliver. There will be national standards for emergency departments and for elective surgery—and the MyHospitals website will publicly report on performance—and more local governance of health services through the establishment of local hospital networks and Medicare Locals.

Reform like this is never easy in health. It is a credit to the Prime Minister, who has had the determination to get these big things done. I also want to congratulate all of the states and territories for finalising this agreement, including all the Liberal Premiers—those in Western Australia, New South Wales and Victoria.

Opposition members interjecting—

Ms ROXON: Unfortunately, as the interjections indicate, that is where the bipartisanship ends. When it comes to the Leader of the Opposition or the shadow minister for health, they have always said no to health reform.

They have as recently as yesterday said in the Financial Review that they will oppose legislation that will lock in this extra funding for hospitals. So it seems to me, when a question is being asked about where a $70 billion saving is coming from, that the health portfolio had better watch out. In fact the shadow minister for health has been put on the razor gang to look for savings and you would wonder why that would be. A $70 billion cut to hospital funding would close 40 per cent of hospitals right now—20,000 beds
would have to close. We know that the Leader of the Opposition has a history of cutting funding from hospitals and we do have to worry if he is really determined to find $70 billion worth of savings—where will that come from?

_Mr Pyne interjecting—_

_Ms ROXON:_ Our government is about doing the hard work, delivering reform, getting proper accountability in the system and making sure that patients can be treated in a better way, more quickly, with better quality and that electorates like Parramatta and elsewhere across the country get extra beds into their hospitals where they are needed. That is happening right now, today, as we speak.

_The SPEAKER:_ The member for Sturt is extending personal comments beyond what people from outside would expect. To be interjecting, ‘Who paid for the glasses?’ and things like that are the type of inanity that we can do without. I warn the member for Sturt.

_Carbon Pricing_

_Mr HOCKEY_ (North Sydney) (15:16): My question is to the Prime Minister. How is the carbon tax helping the federal budget to get back to surplus since it will cost the budget an additional $4.2 billion? Does the Prime Minister now subscribe to the view that, if you break one promise, you might as well break a few?

_Ms GILLARD_ (Lalor—Prime Minister) (15:17): When we announced our carbon pricing package we put before the Australian people all of the figures that go with it. We indicated at the time that we would make appropriate provisions at the time of MYEFO to make savings and of course we will do that. We made savings in the lead-up to the budget, we will continue to make savings and we will continue to adhere to our fiscal rules.

_Mr Dutton interjecting—_

_The SPEAKER:_ Order! The member for Dickson.

_Ms GILLARD:_ What I would say to the shadow Treasurer—something that he may want to consider about carbon pricing—is that, in my understanding of the current position of the opposition, they say somehow that they can decline the revenue source but still engage in the expenditure. When you determine to do that, that is what ends up giving you a $70 billion black hole.

_Mr Hockey:_ Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order going to relevance. The Prime Minister was asked about her policies—

_The SPEAKER:_ The member for North Sydney will resume his seat. Again, this is a question where the occupant of the chair might have assisted himself if he had ruled out the last part of the question because it opens the door wide as a debating point allowed in the question, as I have said before, and allows great more latitude in the response.

_Ms GILLARD:_ In answer to the shadow Treasurer's question, clearly the government accounts for its budget through the budget in May and through the Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook, and we will in the mid-year outlook provide a further accounting in relation to carbon pricing. The figures are there for people to see from the announcement we made shortly after parliament rose.

What I would also say to the shadow Treasurer is that, and perhaps he will want to do it on the same time frame, he may want to provide full accounting to the Australian people about how he will account for his plans on pricing carbon and particularly how he will fill the $70 billion black hole.

The shadow Treasurer raised the question of honesty. There are some things that the
opposition does not talk about. For example, I doubt that when the Leader of the Opposition addressed the rally today that he talked about his $1,300 slug on families. I doubt when he addressed the rally today he talked about the fact that, under the government's plan, more than four million households will be better off and he intends to take that money away. I would be interested to know whether the Leader of the Opposition, when he addressed the rally today, indicated to the people at the rally that his target to cut carbon pollution is the same as the government's at minus five per cent or did he, as he has been known to in the past, find this a convenient occasion to dump his target and not back it in? The shadow Treasurer talks about honesty and talks about being held to account. I believe that the opposition has an obligation in all circumstances to be honest about its $1,300 slug on families and I believe it has an obligation to account for the $70 billion black hole.

Disability Services

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (15:21): My question is to the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. Will the minister update the House on the government's initial response to the Productivity Commission report into disability care and support? What other responses have there been and how is the government addressing these?

Ms MACKLIN (Jagajaga—Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs) (15:21): I thank the member for Blair for his question and for his commitment to people with disabilities and their carers. It is very pleasing to be able to tell not only the member for Blair but the whole House about the progress that the government has already made. Last week the Prime Minister announced that our government has already started work on the extremely important task of transforming the disability support and care system in Australia. Something—

Mr Laming: Another revolution?
Ms MACKLIN: I beg your pardon?
Mr Laming: You heard me.
Ms MACKLIN: I did not actually.

The SPEAKER: The minister has the call. Those interjecting will cease interjecting. The minister will ignore the interjections. Order! The minister has the call.

Ms MACKLIN: It is very disappointing to hear, Mr Speaker, because the Productivity Commission's final report, which the Prime Minister released last week, into long-term care and support of people with a disability does show that the current system of disability is broken. That is why the government asked the Productivity Commission to do this major inquiry: it is because we do understand that, for people with disability and their carers, the current system is broken—and we intend to fix it. We intend to fix it and we intend to start right now.

We understand just how important it is and that is why as a government so far we have taken a number of very important actions, doubling the amount of money that we are providing to the states and territories for disability care and support to make sure that the services that are being provided at the moment are improved. We have done that since we have been in government because of the terrible state of care and support for people with disabilities and their carers.

We also understand how important it is not only to increase the funding for disability services but to really build a new system, an insurance system, because we need a new
approach to disability care and support. We have started that work already. As the Prime Minister announced last week, she is taking a recommendation to the Council of Australian Governments this Friday.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: Order!

Mr Billson: Jenny, your people wanted an apology—

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Dunkley will withdraw that remark.

Mr Billson: I withdraw.

The SPEAKER: If what I am about to say falls on one member's shoulders, let it be, but, when people appear on TV shows and take issue with people who constantly interject, I find it amazing that the same behaviour is seen as suitable in this place. I know that there is a bit of give and take from both sides, but it does amaze me that these trivialities cut across important discussions—and, if this is not an important discussion, I do not know what is.

Ms MACKLIN: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. As I was indicating, the Prime Minister this Friday is taking a recommendation to the Council of Australian Governments to establish a new select council on disability reform. I thank her very much for her leadership on this very, very important issue to millions of Australians who have been waiting decades for these changes.

The government has also committed an additional $10 million to get on with the very important technical work that is needed to make sure that we get, as we have termed it, the NDIS—the National Disability Insurance Scheme—ready, to make sure that we have the common assessment tools and the quality assurance work and to make sure we have the workforce ready so that we can start to build a national disability insurance scheme.

We understand how important this is. The Productivity Commission has recommended that by 2014 we be ready to launch the scheme. We want to make sure that, with the states and territories, we are ready by doing this technical work with the disability sector and the carers, who are doing an extraordinary job right now. I thank the Prime Minister for her—(Time expired)

Member for Dobell

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP (Mackellar) (15:26): My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to her statement that she retains complete confidence in the member for Dobell but that she had not undertaken a thorough investigation into the allegations surrounding that member. Has she now conducted an investigation of her own into the allegations surrounding the member for Dobell and is she satisfied that her confidence in the member for Dobell is warranted?

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (15:27): I thank the member for the question. It gives me the opportunity to say I have complete confidence in the member for Dobell. I think he is doing a fine job representing the people of his constituency in this place and raising their concerns in this parliament, as is appropriate for a local member. I look forward to him continuing to do that job for a very long, long, long time to come.

Aged Care

Mr MITCHELL (McEwen) (15:27): My question is to the Minister for Mental Health and Ageing. What is the government doing to support positive and healthy ageing for our older Australians? How is the government consulting the community about its initiatives and what has been the response?

Mr BUTLER (Port Adelaide—Minister for Mental Health and Ageing) (15:28): I
thank the member for McEwen for his question—

Mr Hockey interjecting—

The SPEAKER: Order! The minister might pause. I will simply say that this is an example of somebody seeking the call, and I gave it to that person who sought the call. I thank the member for North Sydney for his assistance.

Mr BUTLER: I thank the member for his question because one of the truest tests of a decent society is how it treats its seniors—those citizens who for many years worked hard, paid their taxes and raised their families and who, in their older age, require a bit of care and support in return from the community that they helped to build.

This government has a proud record and an ambitious agenda around ageing. It is this government that delivered record increases to the age pension and that has a plan to extend that great Labor reform of universal superannuation from nine to 12 per cent. We are talking to seniors about ways to lift opportunities for mature age workforce participation, and the government's work bonus will allow older Australians to keep more of their wage and more of their pension when they take up those opportunities. Over the winter recess, as the House has heard, the last details of health reform were finalised by the Prime Minister and her COAG partners. This is a reform that delivers more doctors, more beds, shorter waiting times and an e-health record to older Australians.

On top of all that the Prime Minister has committed the government to beginning reform of the aged care sector in this term of parliament. To that end the Prime Minister released last week the final report of the Productivity Commission inquiry, a comprehensive report with 58 far-reaching recommendations. No-one in the sector thinks that reform in this area will be quick or easy, but they all think that it is essential. I have already begun meeting with sector stakeholders, providers, consumer groups, aged care unions and clinicians to work through those recommendations methodically. This week I will attend the first of a series of forums across the nation to talk directly with older Australians about their views on aged care.

I notice that I have been criticised by the opposition for talking directly with older Australians, but I make no apology whatsoever for taking time to have those important conversations. On this side of the House we know that talking directly to people who use the system will add different perspectives to those presented by stakeholders who have no difficulty coming to Canberra and having their views heard.

The Prime Minister has been clear that this process should involve an open conversation and that the government will be guided broadly by four guiding principles. Firstly, that every older Australian has the right to be able to access care and support that is appropriate to their needs when they need it. Secondly, that older Australians deserve greater choice and control over their care arrangements than the system currently provides them. Thirdly, that funding arrangements for aged care need to be fair and they need to be sustainable, both for older Australians themselves and also for the broader community. Fourthly, that older Australians and the community rightly expect quality care, and this rests in significant part on our ability to continue to attract and to retain dedicated and qualified staff.

I very much look forward to hearing the views of older Australians through this important process.

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

The SPEAKER: Please proceed.

Mr SCHULTZ: On 10 August this year in the upper house of the New South Wales parliament a question was put by the Hon. Mick Veitch MLC to the Minister for Roads and Ports, the Hon. Duncan Gay. The question involved my contribution to the issue of wind farms.

During the latter part of the reply from the Hon. Duncan Gay he said:

I have to acknowledge that life has dealt Alby a tough hand. For him some days are really difficult and one of the toughest for him was the day that I, as chairman of the National Party, rejected his application to become a member of the National Party. He has had a lot of trouble getting over that, and some of his statements should be taken bearing in mind that rejection.

Those of this House who know me well know that that is an outrageous lie, and it is misleading the New South Wales parliament. I totally reject it because hell has not yet frozen over.

Mr MURPHY (Reid) (15:35): Mr Speaker, I seek to make a personal explanation.

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

Mr MURPHY: I do, Mr Speaker.

The SPEAKER: Please proceed.

Mr MURPHY: Mr Speaker, on page 1 of today's Australian newspaper is a report on the ALP caucus's discussion yesterday on media ownership that states, inter alia, that my support for a public inquiry into the media was 'taken to advocate Labor support for Senator Brown's proposal'. News Limited, the ALP caucus, my constituents and the wider community have for many years been aware of my longstanding public campaign against the concentration of media ownership in Australia. I repudiate any
suggestion by News Limited that I need Senator Bob Brown or the Greens to motivate me on this very important issue.

AUDITOR-GENERAL’S REPORTS

Report No. 1 of 2011-12

The SPEAKER: I present the Auditor-General’s performance audit report No. 1 of 2011-12 entitled The Australian Defence Force’s mechanisms for learning from operational activities.

Ordered that the report be made a parliamentary paper.

DOCUMENTS

Presentation

Mr ALBANESE: Documents are presented as listed in the schedule circulated to honourable members. Details of the documents will be recorded in the Votes and Proceedings and I move:

That the House take note of the following documents:

Australian Customs and Border Protection Service—Report for 2009-10—Correction.

Australian Human Rights Commission—Reports—

No. 44—Mr Toro-Martinez v Commonwealth of Australia (Department of Immigration and Citizenship).

No. 45—Mr Al Jenabi v Commonwealth of Australia (Department of Immigration and Citizenship), incorporating an erratum.


Ministerial statement—Live animal exports—Senator Ludwig, Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, 7 July 2011.


Productivity Commission—Reports—

No. 53—Caring for older Australians, 28 June 2011—

Volume 1, incorporating an erratum.

Volume 2, incorporating an erratum.

No. 54—Disability care and support, 31 July 2011—

Volume 1.

Volume 2.

Debate adjourned.

COMMITTEES

Australia’s Immigration Detention Network Committee

Membership

The SPEAKER: I have received advice from the Chief Opposition Whip nominating members to be participating members of the Joint Select Committee on Australia’s Immigration Detention Network.

Mr ALBANESE: by leave—I move:

That Mr Briggs, Mrs Griggs, and Mr Entsch be appointed participating members of the Joint Select Committee on Australia’s Immigration Detention Network.

Question agreed to.

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Gillard Government

The SPEAKER: I have received a letter from the Leader of the Opposition proposing that a definite matter of public importance be submitted to the House for discussion, namely:

The adverse effects on the nation of the Australian people’s lack of confidence in the Government.

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

More than the number of members required by the standing orders having risen in their places—
Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (15:39): We have heard in parliament today many statements from ministers opposite about the international difficulties facing the Australian economy. In fact, in defending the government's imminent abandonment of the previous cast-iron commitment to achieving a surplus in 2012-13, they have spoken abundantly of the dire economic circumstances in which our country is now placed. Indeed, there are many economic difficulties facing our country right now. We have the worst retail confidence figures in decades. In fact, we have a retail strike in the shops of our country. We have large companies now announcing a series of significant job cuts. We have unemployment starting to rise. We have the international share market in turmoil. We have some European countries really struggling with their sovereign debt. We have the euro, the world's largest currency, under great pressure.

In the face of all of these difficulties, and in the face of a very fragile international and domestic situation, what is the response of this government? The response of this government is to persist with yet another big new tax. The reason we have this government persisting with a carbon tax that will knock our economy for six in the face of all of these difficulties is that its response to every difficulty is a great big new tax. The mining industry is making big profits, so we have a mining tax. There is too much carbon dioxide in the atmosphere: let us have a carbon tax. There were floods in Queensland: let us have a flood tax. Young people are drinking too much: let us have an alcopops tax. This is a government which responds to every single problem in the community with more regulation and more tax.

The Australian people, I regret to say, are losing confidence in our economic prospects because they have lost confidence in this government. They are absolutely entitled to have lost confidence in this government because, by any reasonable measure, this is the most incompetent government in living memory. It is the most incompetent government bar none. Some people have said that this government is the most incompetent government since Gough Whitlam's, but that is very unfair to Gough Whitlam, who did not lack ideals and never sold the soul of the Labor Party to Senator Bob Brown and the Greens. Wherever we look, there is a web of incompetence and untrustworthiness from this government. This is a government that could not be put pink batts into people's roofs without houses burning down. This is a government which could not build school halls without rip-off after rip-off. This is a government which could not preserve the live cattle trade in the face of a TV program.

With all of the problems of infrastructure in our country—the clogged roads, the queues and queues of ships out the front of ports, the railroads that have not been extended in some cases in 100 years—what is this government going to do? Spend $50 billion it does not have putting fibre to people's homes whether they need it, want it or can afford it—and the $50 billion it will spend is just to connect to the fibre, not to use it. This is the most incompetent, the most extravagant government in living memory, and now this government wants to be trusted with the most complex and most difficult tax change in Australian history. This is a government of truly monumental waste and ineptitude.

There was a lot of talk today, a lot of bluster from this government, in parliament about the surplus which, to any acute listener, clearly is never, ever going to be delivered. The promise to deliver a surplus is going to turn out to be just as reliable, just as
trustworthy as the notorious promise, 'There will be no carbon tax under the government I lead.' Let us look at what this government has done when it comes to being prudent, frugal and trustworthy with the Australian people's money. It inherited a $20 billion surplus in 2007-08 and boasted it would deliver a $22 billion surplus in the following fiscal year. What did it actually give us? A $27 billion deficit. But they are never satisfied with mere mediocrity; this government wants to achieve records of incompetence and wastefulness. In 2009-10, not satisfied with a $27 billion deficit, they delivered us a $55 billion deficit. Just to ensure that the $55 billion deficit in 2009-10 was not a fluke and they were absolutely committed to waste, incompetence and extravagance, they gave us a $49 billion deficit in the current financial year. For an encore, it is going to be a $23 billion deficit in 2011-12. Then, finally, with a miracle to rival the loaves and the fishes, after achieving $150 billion plus in accumulated deficits, they say, 'And we're going to have a $3.5 billion surplus.' At that rate they will have to do it for 50 years just to repay the extravagance and incompetence of the first four years of the current administration. If we cannot trust this government with money, we should never trust them with a new tax.

We should never trust this government with a new tax. Particularly, we should not trust this government with a new tax that is specifically designed to change the way every single Australian lives and every single Australian works, making it deliberately more expensive to turn on our fridges, TVs, air conditioners and heaters, making it deliberately more expensive to buy goods that have to be transported by truck around our country. Even on the government's own figures there is an immediate 10 per cent rise in electricity prices under this tax. There is an immediate nine per cent rise in gas prices under this new tax. We know, because we know that governments put the best possible presentation on these things, that groceries are going up and up and up and that power will go up and up and up in addition to the government's current estimates. There is an estimate from the Food and Grocery Council of a five per cent increase in grocery prices. The automotive industry says there will be a $400-plus increase in the price of Australian automobiles. Is it any wonder that iconic Australian businesses are now restructuring and moving offshore, because this government, at an extremely difficult time in international economic circumstances—at a very fragile time in the economic life of this country—has only one instinct: to go ahead with a bad and unnecessary new tax?

This carbon tax, on top of the mining tax and the treatment of Telstra, is just going to add to the perceptions of sovereign risk that are now damaging brand Australia right around the world. This is just going to add to the job difficulties that this country is likely to face thanks to the policies of this government. Under the carbon tax there have been estimates of 10,000 lost jobs in the coal industry, 23,000 lost jobs in the mining industry more generally, 45,000 lost jobs in energy-intensive industries generally and 126,000 lost jobs right around our economy, mostly in regional Australia—and for what?

This is all supposed to reduce our carbon dioxide emissions. But if you go to the document that the Prime Minister released on carbon Sunday, you will see that the carbon tax is not going to cut our emissions; it is actually going to increase them. Here in black and white we see that our current emissions are 578 million tonnes in the current year. In 2020, thanks to what will by then be a $29-a-tonne carbon tax, they go up to 620 million tonnes. What an absurd policy. A policy that is supposed to cut our
emissions actually increases them. The only way we actually get our abatement target in 2020 is by buying nearly 100 million tonnes of carbon credits from abroad at the cost of $3½ billion. That is $3½ billion shoved out of the pockets of Australian consumers via Australian businesses into the pockets of international carbon traders—and aren’t they an honest and reliable crew? Safe as Solomon Brothers, the international carbon trading fraternity—

**An opposition member:** Lehman Brothers.

**Mr ABBOTT:** Lehman Brothers. Solomon Brothers are a good firm! But it is $3½ billion into the pockets of the international carbon traders just to achieve the abatement target of 2020.

But it gets worse. This government is going to give us, on its own figures, a carbon tax not of $23 a tonne, not $29 a tonne but of $131 a tonne by 2050. You know what our emissions are going to be? Our emissions are going to be 545 million tonnes. So we are going to go through all this turmoil, all this upheaval, all these job losses and all this pressure on the cost to Australian families for years and years—four decades of pain—for what? Our carbon emissions go, on the government’s own figures, from 578 million tonnes to 545 million tonnes. It is going to achieve its 80 per cent emissions reduction target by spending—would you believe it?—$57 billion buying more than 400 million tonnes of emissions abatement from the carbon traders overseas. This is a lunatic policy. If I had not seen it in black-and-white in the government’s own documents, I would not have believed it. I say, through this parliament, to the Australian people: look at the government’s own figures. I am not making this up: a $131 a tonne carbon tax. It hardly makes a single difference to our environment but, by God, Mr Speaker, it is going to make a difference to our country. It is going to hurt jobs, hurt investments and hurt the struggling families of Australia.

Members opposite seem to be very interested in what may or may not have been said to Alan Jones. I have got what was said to Alan Jones this morning on the radio by former Labor senator John Black, who was asked about what Labor members of this parliament are doing. He said:

Sweating a great deal and looking for alternative employment.

Mr Albanese interjecting—

**Mr ABBOTT:** So I say to the member for Grayndler: you can crack hardy all you like, but not even your seat is safe, mate. That is why this Prime Minister’s job is not safe. A very clear message is going out from the Australian people to this government: there can be no tax collection without an election. If this government had any honesty, any decency, that is what we would have: an election now. *(Time expired)*

**Mr ALBANESE** (Grayndler—Leader of the House and Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) *(15:54):* I was optimistic—perhaps naive but optimistic—that over the break somehow the Leader of the Opposition would discover some semblance of leadership. But, once again, we have seen today why he is the most negative opposition leader in Australia’s history: all opposition and no leader. He is so determined to continue to run on the absurd line that what we need is an election because he does not think he will make it until 2013 as the opposition leader.

The opposition are running a two-pronged strategy here. On the one hand they say, ‘Oh, we need an election,’ and that the crossbenchers should give them one. On the other hand they abuse the crossbenchers, they go to their seats, they denigrate them,
they attack them and they seek to humiliate them. And then they wonder why this government is completely secure and why this government has not lost a single piece of legislation before this House—164 pieces of legislation have been carried and not a single amendment has been carried without the support of the government. It is not surprising, because those people who sit on the crossbenches, those people who view things objectively, know a rank opportunist when they see one.

We have seen it evidenced in the last week. There he was, returned from overseas, and he went on the Alan Jones program. It was not so much Alan Jones interviewing the Leader of the Opposition about what his views were; it was more the Leader of the Opposition going on the Alan Jones program to tell him how terrific he thinks Alan is. Alan put an idea to the Leader of the Opposition and, of course, he agreed with him. He determined that he was on the side of the farmers of New South Wales against the miners of Western Australia. The only problem was that he forgot that he was on his way to Western Australia. So when he got to Western Australia he did a press conference. There, of course, he decided that he was then for the miners and against the farmers—typical Tony Abbott: the inconsistency, the rank opportunism and no platform too low. He is the only living Liberal leader who does not support putting a price on carbon.

Of course, that has not always been the case. The Leader of the Opposition has had a very strong view about carbon over the years, a very strong view indeed on climate change. At one stage he was a non-believer. In October 2009, at a public meeting in Beaufort, he said:

The … argument is absolute crap.

Then he was a sceptic on the Four Corners program on 16 August 2010, saying:

I certainly think that there is a credible scientific counterpoint but, in the end, I'm not going to win an argument over the science, I'll leave that to the scientists.

Then he was a believer. On 3 March 2011 he said:

I think climate change is real.

On 8 March 2011, he went even further. He had always been a believer! He said:

I've always thought that climate change was real.

That was what he had to say then. But then of course, six days later, he was back to being a sceptic. In a public forum in Perth he said:

I don't think we can say that the science is settled here.

The only thing that is consistent is that the Leader of the Opposition says whatever he thinks people want to hear. That is what he does: he travels around the country telling people what he thinks they want to hear.

The problem is that today in modern politics there are things called recordings, there are things like DVDs and there are things like the internet. We know that he does not understand the internet; we know that from the 7.30 Report interview that he gave during the election campaign. He does not understand this new technology thing, but I say to the Leader of the Opposition that he should understand it and he should understand that he needs to be held to account. We saw again on the weekend another Mark Riley moment: another moment where he was asked questions and he just stared at the interviewer menacingly, trying to intimidate them into backing off. We saw that occur.

The fact is that the Leader of the Opposition has failed to wreck the parliament. The parliament is functioning effectively. So now he is trying to wreck the economy, without a care or concern for those
who may lose their jobs or businesses—no concern whatsoever. Today again we have seen an announcement by Qantas that is indeed very unfortunate about the shedding of jobs. Senator Eric Abetz has put out a statement blaming Labor's carbon tax for that issue. He has not spoken to Alan Joyce of Qantas. He has not looked at the facts. If you look at the facts, they are these. One is that the measures that Qantas has announced are about what is going on with the globalisation in aviation; it has made that very clear. It is also the case that the carbon price does not apply to international air traffic. The fact is, of course, that the opposition do not worry about those details and facts; they just put out their scare campaign regardless of what the reality is—regardless of the fact that Qantas is saying that the areas of the company that are under pressure are those international routes. The domestic part of the business is, indeed, extremely profitable and doing well. That is why the cutbacks Qantas has announced are about reducing some of its international business. But this opposition is so opportunistic that there is no opportunity it will not try to seize.

The Leader of the Opposition, of course, has to answer some questions about how he is going to fill his incredible $70 billion black hole. I note that the shadow Treasurer last week on television was saying: 'Oh, $50 billion, $60 billion or $70 billion? We can just find that.' It was an extraordinary statement. Seventy billion dollars is the equivalent of twice the current six-year federal infrastructure program, stopping the age pension for two years, stopping Medicare payments for four years, stopping assistance to people with disabilities for three years or stopping family tax benefit payments for three years. It would require savings equivalent to doubling the GST for a year. But that is the position that the opposition have brought themselves into.

Why have they brought themselves into that? First, they want to unwind the mining company tax, because of course, although those big mining companies say that they can afford to pay the tax, the opposition are determined to make them not pay the tax. They want ordinary Australian taxpayers to pick up that difference. Of course, there is $27 billion from unwinding the price on carbon, because the opposition are determined that, rather than taxing the big polluters and providing assistance and support to Australian families, to businesses and to clean energy, they will tax ordinary Australians so they can provide subsidies to the big polluters. It is an absolutely extraordinary position.

But nothing is too great in terms of being prepared to talk down the economy. We saw it again in question time today. We saw it in the response of the shadow Treasurer to the Treasurer's ministerial statement. The shadow finance minister—who is no threat, I must say, to the shadow Treasurer; I say that to you in your defence, Shadow Treasurer—said this this morning at the doors: 'No wonder we've got a deficit vulnerable to world meltdown in terms of finances.' He was speaking about world meltdown. The Australian economy is about to melt down according to the shadow finance minister. It is absolutely extraordinary. The fact is that those people opposite are determined to talk the Australian economy down in spite of the fact that we are in the strongest position of any advanced economy in the world. We are in a position where we have strong public finances and strong employment—a 5.1 per cent figure, the envy of the industrialised world. We are in a strong position, with a plan to deal with our infrastructure and skills deficits going forward. We have an investment pipeline of over $400 billion. Yet those opposite say all these industries are just
going to collapse. It is absolutely extraordinary.

The $70 billion figure is really just the starting point, because that does not take into account the fact that they have run around the country and made all sorts of promises without having any money attached. There is the Midland Highway in Tasmania. Last Thursday in Hobart I met with all the mayors up and down the highway and with the Tasmanian Minister for Infrastructure. The opposition have said they will duplicate the entire Midland Highway. They have said they will provide $400 million for it. That will not even pay for the land acquisition, before you start to spend one cent on concrete or any other activity. Four hundred million dollars will not pay for the land acquisition. The opposition have said they will duplicate the highway from Geelong through to Adelaide—again, without any money whatsoever. The Leader of the National Party runs around the country making promises almost on a daily basis. He is a bit like the Leader of the Opposition; he has not discovered the internet. He does not know that we are keeping that record of all of these commitments and there will be dollars attached to them, and at the end of the day they will have to come clean about whether the commitments will be delivered and whether they are real or not. In a speech recently the Leader of the Opposition said he would build new motorways and rail lines in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Perth. These things just roll off the tongue without any money being attached to them, and that is before you get to the $70 billion debacle which is there.

The fact of the matter is that this Leader of the Opposition simply cannot be trusted, and he has said that himself. In terms of transport, which he raises, the fact is that in 2007 the opposition went to an election with a comprehensive plan to have the world's most comprehensive emissions trading scheme, and they wanted all transport fuels in. I saw them out there today at the rally on the box talking about heavy vehicles. The fact is that the coalition stated in the document they produced for the 2007 election, with cabinet ministers including the current Leader of the Opposition and the then Leader of the National Party, who went to that election as the Deputy Prime Minister, that the coalition:

… recognises the importance of reducing greenhouse gas emissions from transport, which currently comprise around 14 per cent of Australia’s total emissions. By bringing transport fuels into the Australian emissions-trading system, consumers will be given greater incentive to improve the energy efficiency of their transport choices.

They wanted emissions trading to apply to the passenger vehicle, to every vehicle right across the transport sector, something that we have said that we will not do in the position that we have put forward.

The fact is that the Leader of the Opposition will make any claim no matter how untruthful, offer any promise no matter how outlandish, discard any principle no matter how dearly held, vilify any person no matter how well meaning and nonpartisan their motives and betray any loyalty no matter how longstanding. And didn't Peter Reith find that out? The Leader of the Opposition got Peter Reith to run for national president of the Liberal Party and then voted for Alan Stockdale, who won by one vote. That is the integrity of the Leader of the Opposition, who is leading a party of talk-back, not a party of government. The party is irresponsible in the way that it has engaged in the economic debate, including the one that has taken place today. The Leader of the Opposition is a walking vuvuzela with just one noise coming out of his mouth—no, no, no, no. He is incapable of putting forward a
positive alternative, and that is why this government is determined to not be distracted by the negativity of the opposition leader. This government is determined to pursue the important reform agenda that it has put forward, including pricing carbon, the national health reform agenda and the MORT, during this sitting of parliament. These important reforms will stand Australia in good stead and further back up the good economic management of this government.

(Time expired)

Mr HOCKEY (North Sydney) (16:09): What an interesting aside that was from the Leader of the House in this matter of public importance, given that the Prime Minister was not prepared to defend herself and her personal integrity, nor was the Treasurer prepared to defend his personal integrity. I have been doing a little bit of research on this the anniversary of the Prime Minister's commitment to the Australian people that there would be no carbon tax under the government she leads. Having a drift through Hansard from 2005, a newer, slightly younger Julia Gillard—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper): The Prime Minister.

Mr HOCKEY: at that time said:

… the Labor Party is the party of truth telling. When we go out into the electorate and make promises, do you know what we would do in government: we would keep them. When we say them, we mean them.

I thought, 'Hang on! Is this the same member that is now the Prime Minister, that went to the last election promising to have no carbon tax under the government she leads?’ I thought, 'The delusion continues,’ because on 20 March 2009 our now Prime Minister said:

I think when you go to an election and you give a promise to the Australian people, you should do everything in your power to honour that promise. We are determined to do that. We gave our word to the Australian people in the election and this is a Government that prides itself on delivering election promises. We want Australians to be able to say well, they’ve said this and they did this …

These are the Prime Minister's own words. This is why the Prime Minister's integrity is in tatters. This is why there is no trust between the Australian people and their Prime Minister. This is why the Australian people have switched off. They have switched off on the Prime Minister, the leader of the nation, because they no longer trust the person in the job.

Trust is a two-way street. Politicians go to the election and they ask the Australian people to trust them with the responsibility of properly running the country and to honour their promises. The flip side is that the politicians have to trust the Australian people, so much so that words are bullets in this game. As has been said before, there are three things in life that can never be recovered: the spoken word, the spent arrow and the lost opportunity. And on this day of all days—the first anniversary of when the Prime Minister spoke the words, 'There will be no carbon tax under a government I lead’—she cannot recover those words. They are spoken forever. And the bullets and arrows that follow are spent forever.

The fact is that there will be no further opportunities for this Prime Minister. There will be no further opportunities for this government because it is a government that has fundamentally undermined the trust of the Australian people in its judgment, its integrity, its honesty, its consistency and its credibility. This is a government that is inconsistent. That is why consumer confidence is down. That is why people are not going out and borrowing money and taking risks. They are afraid that if they take risks in their daily lives the government will come along and either regulate it or tax it, because that is what Labor does. Labor regulates and taxes. Labor wants to control
The coalition believes in an Australia where people take personal responsibility for their actions. We believe in a nation where people control their destiny; the government does not—the government facilitates their destiny. That is what we believe in. That is what drives us. The government is clinging onto fictional numbers out of a report in the media, fictional numbers about a so-called black hole. Let me tell you this: we make no apology for going after government waste. We make no apology for having smaller government under the coalition. We will not tax Australians as much as Labor and we will not spend as much as Australia has to spend under Labor. Under the Labor Party it is big tax, big spend. We will not have a $26 billion carbon tax and we will not spend $30.2 billion on the other side of the equation. Somehow this mob think in government that Australians are better off when you take $26 billion of a carbon tax off them and give them back $16 billion in compensation. You know what? You only offer compensation if you cause injury. You only offer compensation if people are hurt. Even Ross Garnaut—Saint Ross himself: the person the Labor Party believe is truly the oracle on this matter—has said every single Australian household is going to end up paying this tax. You can tax business, but business is going to pass it through. And, of course, they do not even know how many businesses. Old Swannie comes in here—we love Swannie—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for North Sydney will refer to the Treasurer by his title.

Mr HOCKEY: I am sorry; we love the Treasurer. We want him to keep his job. The Australian people have such confidence in the Treasurer that a recent survey, which named 10 people and asked who was best placed to lead the Labor Party, did not even ask whether the Deputy Prime Minister was. Not even the pollster thought that was credible. They had the Leader of the Greens and they had someone from the Liberal Party before they asked whether the Treasurer should be leading the Labor Party. That is what he is reduced to—and this is a man running the Australian economy. He writes an article in the Financial Times saying there is a 'crisis of confidence in the world'. You know what? I do not get any more confident about the world when Wayne Swan is out there. I do not feel more confident about Australia when the Treasurer gets up and says we are in good shape. This is the man that said the carbon tax would be 'roughly budget neutral'. Budget neutral? It is a $4.2 billion hole in the budget.

They said they would deliver a surplus in this budget, and this was only a few weeks ago. I was sitting over here with my colleagues listening intently to the Treasurer and I refreshed my memory of the budget. In the budget he said this:

We'll be back in the black by 2012-13, on time, as promised.

The alternative—meandering back to surplus—would compound the pressures in our economy and push up the cost of living for pensioners and working people.

We will reach surplus despite company tax is not recovering like our economy.

And he also said:

Our spending restraint means real growth in spending averages 1 per cent …

So he said 'things are tough, but we're going to get the budget back to surplus because that takes the pressure off pensioners and working people'. Well, today the Prime Minister conceded that the budget is not going to get back to surplus in 2012-13, which means the Prime Minister has
conceded that Labor, under her, is now going to make life harder for pensioners and working people. This is her own Treasurer; this is the guy that stood up in this place and delivered a budget and now he is saying, 'I'm sorry, we're going to have to dump that promise.' Today of all days is the day: 'We had dumped a promise on the carbon tax and now we dump a promise on a surplus.' All of the indicators have been going for months: before he even stood in this place he was recognising that consumer confidence is down, building approvals are down, credit growth is down—all of those things. It was happening months ago, and yet he stood in this place a few weeks ago and said emphatically, 'We will deliver a surplus in 2012-13, I promise.'

Like his Prime Minister, the Treasurer has broken a promise. If he wonders why the Australian people are not listening to him as Treasurer, if he wonders why people are cocooning, saving money, walking away from taking a risk and walking away from discretionary spending, he should look no further than this simple fact: the Labor Party cannot be trusted. The Prime Minister cannot be trusted. The Treasurer cannot be trusted. They are deceiving the Australian people, and the Australian people will punish them at the next election.

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (16:19): We heard the shadow Treasurer pushing piffle and dribbling drivel. What he has not said is a fact. All he has talked about is belief and exposition of his position. Let us give a few facts. Expenditure: under this government, one per cent growth; under the Howard coalition government, 3.7 per cent. Average unemployment: under the Howard coalition government, 6.4 per cent; under us, 5.1. Let us talk about tax on the Australian public. Under this government, if you are on $50,000 a year you have got an extra $1,750 in your pay packet per annum and if you are on $100,000 you have got another $1,900 in your pay packet. That is what we have done. We have also had a historic increase in pensions. If you are a pensioner in this country you have got $128 extra per fortnight and $117 extra if you are a couple. That is what we have done since we have been in power.

The coalition have never supported markets and their position with respect to climate change is one of Soviet centralism, not supporting markets, not supporting the most economically efficient and environmentally effective way to tackle climate change. That is what the Productivity Commission has to say. We get mindless negativity from those opposite, saying one thing to the farmers and saying another thing to the miners. On the east coast you are the farmers' friend; on the west coast you are the miners' mate. You say one thing to Alan Jones; you say one thing to the press gallery here. That is what the Leader of the Opposition does. He will say anything and to do anything. He is like St Paul of Tarsus—he will do anything and say anything in order to win some. That is what his view is in order to gather votes. He is not interested in the households of Australian families; he is interested in the household of the Lodge. That is what the Leader of the Opposition is like.

I see the member for Herbert here. The Leader of the Opposition went on holiday when he was going to go across the country doing forums. They were LNP community forums in Queensland, not real forums; they were simply party political meetings. He did not have anyone in those meetings. And guess what? The Leader of the Opposition did not go to flood affected and cyclone Yasi affected Queensland. He could have come to Blair and enjoyed himself there. He could have gone to Herbert and enjoyed himself in Townsville. He did not go there. He traipsed
off overseas. He does not understand the geography, the electoral demography or the flood geography of Queensland. He shows such little regard for the people of Queensland that on 8 February this year, in a speech on the condolence motion, he could not list the flood affected electorates in Queensland. He did not mention Moreton, he did not mention Oxley and he did not mention Blair. In fact, he thought it flooded in Redcliffe and he mentioned Petrie as a place that flooded. That just shows how much he understands.

The Leader of the Opposition does not understand anything about Queensland. He opposed the flood tax. We saw the shadow Treasurer here today and elsewhere saying he would oppose it. The people of Queensland know—and the LNP members across there should hang their heads in shame—that they could not find the $1.8 billion to be raised by the flood tax, a one-off flood tax which is less than a cappuccino a week if you are on about $50,000 a year, and they did not have the wisdom or wit to support what we are doing for the recovery of South-East Queensland and North Queensland. They knew that we had been affected by the floods. They knew it would cost $6.8 billion, but they would not support the recovery of Queensland. They would not support the community infrastructure, the roads and the bridges. The LNP members in this House should be ashamed of themselves. They should have gone to the party room and they should have spoken up on behalf of their constituents and Queensland; they did not.

We know that the Leader of the Opposition does not understand Queensland. On 19 July he was in South-East Queensland. He was in Gatton in the state electorate of Lockyer and in the federal electorate of Wright and he thought he was in Ipswich—he thought he was in Blair. He actually started saying he was in Ipswich. I want to thank the member for Wright—my neighbour and my mate—because he corrected on national TV the Leader of the Opposition because he could not work out where he was in Queensland. That is how much he respects Queensland and how much he wants to stand up for Queenslanders—opposing the reconstruction of Queensland. There is $478 million for local road infrastructure in the Lockyer Valley in the seat of Wright and in Ipswich in the seat of Blair, but guess what? The coalition have opposed it all. They have opposed the funding for the reconstruction of Queensland. That is the situation. The coalition are opposing the Green Army jobs, the job skills and development officers in the Lockyer Valley, in Ipswich and in the Somerset region and all the reconstruction necessary for recovery.

But guess what? We have the coalition here today being proud of the fact they are going to sack public servants and get rid of government departments. They are proud of the fact they are going to cut back $70 billion. They could not find $1 billion. They said they would find it to help with Queensland's recovery. It took them weeks. I see the member for Curtin is here, having fought a rearguard action against the One Nation supporters opposite in the party room when they tried to strip away the funding for foreign aid, taking the idea right out of the playbook of One Nation. That is what the coalition did when they tried to find the money. They could not find $1 billion to help the recovery of Queensland. Where are they going to find $70 billion?

We know they have an $11-billion black hole. That is what the Treasury said after the last election. We would not have known about it but for the Independents insisting on discovering it. They would not have discovered it until they were forced to do it.
Now they have a $70 billion black hole. What are they going to do? What projects, what flood recovery in Queensland, are they going to stop? They are going to stop the Ipswich motorway construction. We know they want to stop the Ipswich motorway construction. That is the policy they took to the last election. There are 10,000 jobs at risk in Ipswich in South-East Queensland because of you guys.

We know they do not support community infrastructure. We know they are going to get rid of the regional infrastructure funding. They are opposed to the $4.3 billion for regional universities and regional infrastructure in South-East Queensland and Central Queensland. The member for Flynn is here. Did he stand up for this thing? No, he did not. He wants to get rid of the funding for regional Queensland. Places like Gladstone will suffer because of him. The member for Ryan will not support the BER projects here but went to the BER project at the Pullenvale State School last week in her own electorate. They say one thing down here and say one thing back in Queensland.

The LNP members opposite should be ashamed. They are the ones that are not instilling confidence in the people of Queensland and the people of Australia. We know that the LNP members are like that. They are really proud down here, but back home they will say something very different. Guess what? We know they are inconsistent. It reeks of hypocrisy. We know they are hopeless, hapless and helpless. We know that when it comes to economics. We know that because inflation was higher, interest rates were higher, unemployment was higher and government expenditure was higher under the previous coalition government. They say one thing to the market and they do another.

Did they have the wit or wisdom to ever bring in trade practices legislation in this country? The Whitlam government did that. Did they have the wit and wisdom to reform competition and consumer laws in this country? No. Did they float the dollar? No. Did they bring in superannuation? No. Did they internationalise the economy? No, they did not, because they are always on the side of big liquor, big tobacco and big business and never on the side of the small business sector. Did they ever bring in a national business name registry? No. It is going to save $1.6 billion to Australian business. What about the business hotline? What about the mybusiness website? This government is doing all of that. We are supporting small business in flood affected areas like South-East Queensland, in North Queensland and in Central Queensland that have been so affected.

The coalition is the one not instilling confidence in the Australian public, because what it is doing is damaging the economy. Coalition members are talking it down all the time. They are also damaging the civility of Queensland and Australian life. Some of the things they say and do they should be ashamed of. The rallies they support, what they do and the way they refer to the Prime Minister are disrespectful. I do not care if they disagree with her politics. I do not care for the sexism and the misogyny we see at times from those opposite when we make statements. That is unfortunate.

Ms Julie Bishop: Mr Deputy Speaker, on a point of order—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper): The member's time has almost expired but he referred, as I understand, to the opposition as a group and he did not refer to any individual member. I call the member for Blair.

Mr NEUMANN: That is exactly right. At the rallies we see placards and we see members of the opposition standing in front
of placards that are disrespectful of the office of the Prime Minister. (Time expired)

Ms JULIE BISHOP (Curtin—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (16:29): The debate today is about the adverse effect on the nation of the Australian people's lack of confidence in the government. Before we turn to the Australian people's lack of confidence in the government, for starters let us have a look at what Labor insiders are saying about this government. On radio 2GB this morning, Alan Jones interviewed two guests: two Labor insiders. During the course of the interview he raised a whole raft of issues that the government was currently bungling: the carbon pricing scheme, the East Timor solution, and the Malaysian asylum seeker issue. He said:

I mean, the issues are everywhere. How is the backbench reacting to all of that?

He put the question to one Graham Richardson: a former Hawke minister; godfather of the New South Wales Right of the Labor Party; the most recognisable faceless man of the Labor Party, reportedly involved in the political assassination of Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and the installation of Prime Minister Julia Gillard. This is what he had to say, and he has obviously been talking to a lot of Labor backbenchers. He said:

Well, a lot of them just simply delude themselves into believing that next May when the money starts going into people’s pockets a couple of months in advance of the tax that suddenly there’ll be this massive change of heart and they’ll be saved, they’ll be delivered. I wouldn’t have thought that’s going to happen myself. So I think that’s just delusional, but that’s a lot of them are doing. Some of the others are... already looking at what they’re going to be doing next because they know they won’t be in parliament. And some of the others—

and this is Graham Richardson—

are just sitting there scratching their heads and saying 'what will we do?’ I think there’s a great number in there saying ‘how did we get into this strife and how do we get out of it?’ and they haven’t got answers.

This is what a former Hawke minister is saying of Labor members of parliament. If that is what Labor members of parliament are saying about their own government, if that is what they believe are the problems of this government, why on earth would the Australian people have any confidence at all in this government?

The Australian people have no confidence in the Labor Party leadership, and why should they? Again, Alan Jones to Graham Richardson:

Is she up to it?

He asked Graham Richardson, former Labor minister, whether she—meaning the Prime Minister—was up to it. Richardson said:

No. I don’t think anyone really believes it at the moment. She’d have to have a magnificent year to come; this was to be the year of delivery. Well so far the delivery has been pretty poor.

And then, finally, the radio show host put two questions:

... (a) will she lead the Labor Party into the next election and (b) what will happen to the Labor Party at the next election?

Alan Jones's other guest, John Black, a former Labor senator from Queensland, said in answer to the question (a):

Well, I don’t believe that she will and there’s a slim chance for the Labor Party if they changed to the right leader and acted quickly.

Then the last word of course was to Graham Richardson who said:

She’ll lead Labor, it’s far more likely, and I believe Labor will be slaughtered.

That is the view of the insiders of the Labor Party—that they will be slaughtered at the next election. As Mark Latham, the former Labor leader, said of this Prime Minister:
She's the next one for the knife.

So why would the Australian people have any confidence in the leadership of this party? Why would they have any confidence in this government when their own people, people on their own side, believe that it is an incompetent, hopeless government?

Let us turn to the Australian people. Business and consumer confidence is fragile in this country. People do not believe the government spin. They do not believe that this government has any fiscal management skills at all and they certainly do not believe it has the ability to get Australia through the coming months and years, particularly because of the global turmoil. This comes from the Westpac-Melbourne Institute Index of Consumer Sentiment:

Consumer sentiment fell by 3½% in August, coming after a fall of 8.3% in July.

And as the chief economist of Westpac said:

... this latest fall is sending a significant message... the index is at its lowest level since May 2009.

He indicated that the index was falling even before the current turmoil in the markets in the US and in European zone. He said:

... this financial turmoil has added another dimension of risk to consumers over and above those issues associated with interest rates, house prices, carbon tax and, potentially, jobs.

The Australian people are concerned because they know that Australia is not in the same shape that it was when we entered into the global financial crisis in 2008. They know that the Rudd government had inherited the best fiscal position of virtually any comparable economy. There was zero government debt—no government debt—and a surplus over $22 billion. There were tens of billions of dollars of savings in a Future Fund, a Higher Education Endowment Fund, and a Health and Medical Research Fund. This government inherited enormous capacity to respond to that global financial downturn.

In the aftermath of the downturn they announced a $10.4 billion stimulus, and we supported that. They were able to do that because they had inherited a $20 billion surplus. But when the government then announced in 2009 a $42 billion stimulus, we knew that that was too large, poorly targeted, and was going into too deep a descent into debt, and we offered an alternative and affordable package. But, no, Labor went ahead and now the stories of the waste and the mismanagement from that $42 billion stimulus package are legendary—the pink batts, the $900 cheque giveaways, the overpriced school halls.

Since 2008 the Treasurer has delivered successive budget deficits. They have been so large that on occasions he has been too embarrassed to even say the amount of those deficits. The cumulative deficits under this Treasurer, under this government, come to $150 billion. In order to fund those deficits they are borrowing and going into debt, and the debt is now $107 billion and increasing. It has gone from zero when they came into government to $107 billion, and it is going up. How do we know it is going up? Because we have a debt ceiling in this country. There is a limit to the amount that the federal government can borrow. It was $75 billion, but in the last budget they came in in the dead of the night and put legislation in this House to raise the debt ceiling to $250 billion. That is where their debt is heading.

The incompetence is not just confined to the waste and mismanagement; it is also in relation to their promises. The Gillard government promised that the budget would be back in surplus in 2012-13. They have promised it—they guaranteed it—but now they have downgraded that promise. Now it is going to be: wouldn’t it be nice to be able
to get the budget into surplus in 2012-13? The fact is that this Labor government will never deliver a surplus; therefore, we will not have a buffer for the next global financial downturn and it will put pressure on interest rates.

The incompetence is not confined to matters purely fiscal. Australians are well aware of the waste and mismanagement, the debt, the deficit, the reckless spending and the borrowing. Add to that incompetence the border protection debacle, the East Timor solution that never was and the Malaysian swap deal. The Prime Minister claimed the Malaysian swap deal to be one of her achievements the other day. Not one asylum seeker has been sent to Malaysia under it, it is mired in the High Court because of a legal challenge and the boats keep arriving, yet the Prime Minister says that that is an achievement.

There is the spending, borrowing and taxing. There was a flood tax because they could not even find $1.8 billion in reserves to rebuild Queensland after the floods. The mining tax will put a burden on the most productive sector of our economy. Then there is the carbon tax, which no other country on earth is introducing. When the President of the World Bank says that we are entering a new and dangerous phase and when he says this turmoil could be with us for some years to come, this is the worst time for a government to be introducing a job-destroying carbon tax.

The Prime Minister said before the last election, 'There will be no carbon tax under a government I lead.' She has broken faith with the Australian people. She should do the honest thing and take this matter back to the Australian people in an election because this government has no mandate to introduce the tax. The Australian people have no confidence in this government to manage this economy through a global downturn. This government must go.

Mr STEPHEN JONES (Throsby) (16:39): There was a time when the role of the opposition was to present itself as an alternative government. That time is in the long distant past. We have not seen that under the current Leader of the Opposition and those who follow him. They revel in the Leader of the Opposition as the champion of doom and gloom. We saw at the end of the last parliamentary session the Leader of the Opposition declare war on science and scientists. He declared war on economics and economists. We see at the beginning of this parliamentary session the Leader of the Opposition and his deputy leader declare war on good news, because that is what this matter of public importance is today. They continually come into this place day after day talking down the country, talking down the economy and talking down the good news. In fact, they have not found a good news story that they would not be willing to go out there and bag. Far from being a group of people who like to present themselves to the Australian people as an alternative government, they come here as the champions of doom and gloom and engage in a relentless campaign of mindless negativity. They have nothing to offer.

Is it any wonder that the Australian people are not buying it? They know there are some things to be worried about in this current Australian political debate. One thing they could start with is the $70 billion black hole that the shadow cabinet is considering at the moment. How on earth are they going to fund the outlandish and outrageous series of promises and cuts they are proposing and do anything to bring the budget back into surplus? They know they cannot do it. They know there is a huge $70 billion black hole in their economic plan.
We already know that their economic plan starts with slashing 12,000 jobs from the Australian public sector. If they are elected to the treasury bench the first act by this group of people who claim to be concerned about job losses will be to slash 12,000 jobs from the Australian economy. We know there will be more to come. We just heard the Deputy Leader of the Opposition express her concern about border protection. She might like to answer this question: how many of those 12,000 jobs are going to come from the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service? We have heard a lot of talk and concern from members, particularly from those who represent rural seats and are members of the National Party, about biosecurity, particularly in relation to fire blight and the importation of apples, which I know is an issue that is very dear to your heart, Mr Deputy Speaker. Members opposite might ask themselves: how many of those 12,000 jobs are going to come from our biosecurity agencies and the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry?

It is very easy to talk about 12,000 jobs, but when you have to identify those people and the programs and agencies they are going to come from it is a little more difficult. The Department of Defence, Centrelink, the court workers, the immigration workers and the people working tirelessly at this time of year to ensure that taxpayers get their tax returns paid on time are amongst the 12,000 as well.

We know that you will not find $70 billion just by slashing public servants. You would have to close down more than an entire department to do it. We know that, if they are going to meet the $70 billion black hole in their budget, they are going to have to do a bit more. Here are some other questions they might have to answer in this place and ask their constituents. What are they going to do to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme? How much are they going to pull out of the PBS? How many drugs will not get listed? They currently come to this place and say they are backing those consumer advocacy groups. They say, 'We will get your drugs listed if you just vote for us.' How much of those drugs and much needed services will not make it to the scheme? How much is going to be pulled from the PBS? If you are going to save big money, these are the places you have to go to, and those opposite know it.

What are they going to be doing about Medicare payments? What are they going to do about health and hospital funding? Are they going to slash the record increases that we have seen under this government to health and hospital funding? It is very easy to get out there as the shadow treasurer and the Leader of the Opposition do and say, 'It's pretty easy for us to find savings.' The hard yards are to go line by line through the budget and find the savings. That is what this government have been doing. We have seen the greatest fiscal consolidation over the last 12 months and we will continue to see the greatest fiscal consolidation in our budget than has been seen in any country anywhere around the world and those opposite know it.

There are many things to be concerned about. Another thing that members of the public will be concerned about is when they look under the bonnet of the opposition's climate change policy. We have learnt today that this climate change policy is, in fact, a subsidy to polluters policy, because what they are proposing to do is to go household by household and say, 'You must pay for our policy which won't work.' In the last session of parliament we knew that the cost was $720 per household. Since the knee-jerk policy reaction of the Leader of the Opposition—this is policy brought to you by
One Nation and talkback radio—we know that the blow-out in their climate change policy now brings the bill to $1,300 per household. What we are seeing from those opposite is all slogan and no content.

There are serious issues that we might consider in a matter of public importance debate. After the events of the last month you might think that those opposite might bring in here a matter for debate around the downgrading of the US credit rating over the last fortnight. You might think that we might have a debate in this place about the implications in this country of the riots that we have recently seen in London. They are serious issues worthy of debate. You might think that the upheavals in the Middle East, particularly in countries like Syria and Libya, are matters worthy of debate. You might think the European financial crisis is something that we might have a debate about in a matter of public importance. Instead what we see from the champions of doom and gloom is that they come in here day after day trawling for disappointment—they have never met a good news story that they would not like to bag—trying to drag down confidence in the Australian economy and in our Australian institutions.

The opposition are far from recognising that in this country we are actually in one of the best positions of any country in our region and any country around the world. These are not our words. These are the words of the Reserve Bank Governor, because he has said on more than one occasion that when he travels the world, as he does regularly, and talks to other central bankers, he has not yet met a central banker whose place he would like to trade with.

Let us have a look at the ultimate test of the world's measure of the Australian economy, and that is the Australian dollar. That is where the institutions of the world get to put their money where their mouths are and make an assessment about the strength of the Australian economy compared to every other country around the world. We will not have the doom and gloom scenario proffered by those opposite. They ignore the fact that we have the lowest unemployment rate in decades and one of the lowest unemployment rates in the OECD. They ignore the fact that we are filling the huge black hole that they left behind in infrastructure investments. We have record spending in rail, ports and roads. They ignore the fact that business is actually backing the strength of the Australian economy and we have the capacity to really boom over the coming years with a record pipeline of investment—$400 billion. They bag the NBN; they bag health and hospital reform.

They seem to overlook the fact that we have delivered tax cuts for three years in a row, which means that the average wage earner on $68,000 a year is now paying $1,000 less in tax than when the opposition were sitting on this side of the House. They overlook that and that there are more tax cuts to come. We have a plan to spread the benefits of the mining boom through the minerals resource rent tax. Their plan is to whack households $1,300 per annum and give the money to the big polluters, hand back the money to the big miners and then run round the country and sack public servants and others. (Time expired)

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott): Order! The discussion is now concluded.

**BILLS**

Remuneration and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2011
Product Stewardship Bill 2011
Therapeutic Goods Amendment (2011 Measures No. 1) Bill 2011
Customs Amendment (Serious Drugs Detection) Bill 2011
Family Assistance and Other Legislation Amendment (Child Care and Other Measures) Bill 2011
Intelligence Services Legislation Amendment Bill 2011
Migration Amendment (Strengthening the Character Test and Other Provisions) Bill 2011
Military Justice (Interim Measures) Amendment Bill 2011
Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters Amendment (Registration of Foreign Proceeds of Crime Orders) Bill 2011
National Consumer Credit Protection Amendment (Home Loans and Credit Cards) Bill 2011
Customs Tariff Amendment (2012 Harmonized System Changes) Bill 2011
Aged Care Amendment Bill 2011
Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Amendment (MRCA Supplement) Bill 2011
Child Support (Registration and Collection) Amendment Bill 2011
Financial Framework Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 1) 2011
Protection of the Sea (Prevention of Pollution from Ships) Amendment (Oil Transfers) Bill 2011
Social Security and Other Legislation Amendment (Miscellaneous Measures) Bill 2011

Assent
Messages from the Governor-General reported informing the House of assent to the bills.

COMMITTEES
Membership
The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott): I have received three messages from the Senate informing the House of the appointment of senators to certain joint committees. As the list of appointments is a lengthy one, I do not propose to read the list to the House. Details will be recorded in the Votes and Proceedings.

Education and Employment Committee Report
Ms RISHWORTH (Kingston) (16:50): On behalf of the Standing Committee on Education and Employment, I seek leave to make a statement on the Schools Assistance Amendment Bill 2011 in discharge of the committee’s requirement to provide an advisory report on the bill and to present a copy of my statement.

Leave granted.

Ms RISHWORTH: The committee has considered the content of this statement and unanimously endorses it. On 23 June 2011 the Schools Assistance Amendment Bill was referred to the standing committee for inquiry and report. The bill proposes a mechanical change to the Schools Assistance Act to align the act with more flexible arrangements for the implementation of the national curriculum. This greater flexibility was agreed in December 2010 by the Australian Governments’ Standing Council for School Education and Early Childhood, formerly known as the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs. Without the amendment, forward funding for non-
government schools is uncertain. In the interests of due process and to ensure full consideration of the bill the committee called for submissions. We received six submissions, all of which supported the bill. Notwithstanding the unanimous support for the bill from stakeholders, the Independent Schools Council of Australia noted:

... it is proposed that regulations to prescribe the curriculum implementation timelines be authorised by the Standing Council.

The independent schools pointed out:
The non-government school sector does not have specific representation on the Standing Council or on its advisory officials’ committee …

And thus sought assurances that non-government schools will be adequately and appropriately consulted regarding the implementation time frames prior to the development of these regulations.

In a similar vein, the National Catholic Education Commission noted:

... neither national nongovernment school peak body has any representation on MCEEECDYA—

the national council—

the body that governs the work of ACARA and thus the work on the Australian Curriculum. NCEC therefore calls on Australia’s Ministers of Education assembled at MCEEECDYA to be always mindful of their responsibilities as Ministers of Education for all students in their jurisdiction, rather than act simply as heads of major state department school systems, when making decisions about the Australian Curriculum.

The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations stated:
The Australian Government recognises and respects the role of the non-government sector as equal and active partners in the process to develop the Australian Curriculum … Through its representation on the ACARA Board and its participation in consultation processes, the non-government sector will continue to play a critical role in the development of the Australian Curriculum.

The committee supports and encourages ongoing consultation and engagement with the non-government sector in relation to all processes related to the development and implementation of the national curriculum.

After consideration of the evidence, the committee has agreed not to further inquire into this bill and recommends that the House pass the bill. As part of this report, the committee has authorised me to comment on the procedure by which this and other bills are referred to general purpose standing committees. The committee supports the bill referral powers of the Selection Committee, which was one of the reforms foreshadowed in the agreement for a better parliament, and it supports the referral of bills as an effective mechanism for increasing transparency and public consultation. This is the third occasion that a bill has been referred to us for inquiry in this parliament. However, it was unclear to the committee why this specific proposal was referred for inquiry considering it had been unanimously supported by stakeholders. The referral of an uncontroversial bill can significantly interrupt the work program of a standing committee for little or no gain. Worse still, an unnecessary referral may unsettle stakeholders, who could form a view that the referred bill may not be proceeded with or may be delayed because of the referral. This sentiment was given voice during this current inquiry by the Australian Parents Council, which stated:

Further delay in the passing of the Schools Assistance Amendment (Financial Assistance) Bill 2011 can only increase the current feelings of uncertainty.

The education and employment committee concurs with the Procedure Committee’s recent recommendation that reasons be provided for referral. The committee and I
am sure that those stakeholders who made submissions would have found an explanation as to why the current proposal was referred most useful.

Mr RAMSEY (Grey) (16:56): by leave—I rise as Deputy Chair of the Standing Committee on Education and Employment. I support the chair's remarks and thank her for them. They were a true and accurate representation of the committee's deliberations. As she stated, submissions were provided by six organisations that plainly stated the legislation must be passed with as little delay as possible and that there were no alternatives because, in fact, the independent schools' funding would be threatened by their inability to introduce the national curriculum in time.

The Schools Assistance Amendment Bill 2011 allows for more flexible implementation of the national curriculum, which is, of course, code for the fact that the national curriculum time lines were unachievable. As the 2008 act made the implementation of the national curriculum a prerequisite for continued funding, it is essential that the time lines be changed. This amendment will allow for the implementation of the national curriculum when all parties are ready. When this bill is debated in the House, I am sure that much more will be made of the lack of preparedness when the government passed the original bill in 2008. It is essential the national curriculum be got right before it is introduced. A rushed or hurried introduction will lead to a poorer result, and a severance of funding for independent schools would be a disaster.

As I move around the electorate talking to teachers at various schools and to parents, there is a view that many of the educational institutions are not ready to introduce the national curriculum yet, particularly in South Australia in the senior years of education—including, I must say, in the government schooling system.

The coalition members of the committee concurred with the government members that it is essential that the legislation is passed. However, we reserve our right to continue to put the national curriculum under the microscope through the parliamentary process.

The chair mentioned the National Catholic Education Commission and raised the fact that it has no representation on the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs. That is the norm—it is, of course, a ministerial council—but perhaps the fact that that council was not listening to the independent school system was one reason the legislation was deficient when it was passed in 2008. I urge that body to take due note of what the independent school system is telling it, because the private sector is one of the very important planks in delivering a broad education to Australia. Its contribution should not be underestimated and should be taken into account at all times when the government plays around with the system.

Agriculture, Resources, Fisheries and Forestry Committee

Report

Mr ADAMS (Lyons) (16:59): On behalf of the Standing Committee on Agriculture, Resources, Fisheries and Forestry I present the committee's report entitled Advisory report on the Excise Tariff Amendment (Condensate) Bill 2011 and the Excise Legislation Amendment (Condensate) Bill 2011, together with the minutes of proceedings.

Ordered that the report be made a parliamentary paper.
Mr ADAMS: by leave—I just want to say that it would be in the interest of the committees to receive a small brief from the selection committee providing some context as to why a reference of a bill was made to a committee. I think the legislation is much better when it goes through a committee. We find that, and there are more bills coming to us. It is a great idea—a great concept—and we should encourage it, but the selection committee should consider why an inquiry is appropriate and give a reason for that within a small brief. That is a consideration that I have put in the forward of this report.

BILLS

National Health Reform Amendment (National Health Performance Authority) Bill 2011

Second Reading

Debate resumed on the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

to which the following amendment was moved:

That all words after "That" be omitted with a view to substituting the following words: "the House declines to give the bill a second reading until provisions establishing the Independent Hospital Pricing Authority, including its functions and responsibilities, are presented to the House for its consideration."

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (17:01): I speak in support of the National Health Reform Amendment (National Health Performance Authority) Bill 2011. The Minister for Health and Ageing in her speech of 3 March this year said a couple of words which I think are worth repeating because they sum up the challenges that we are facing in this country. She said:

In many ways we are lucky that Australia has one of the most impressive public health systems in the world—our doctors and nurses are world class, our public system provides free hospital care for all and it delivers outcomes such as low infant mortality and long life expectancy.

But we’re faced with a health system that is fragmented, costly, underresourced, unsustainable, overly focused on acute care and with constant pressure to deliver for more patients with more complex needs.

In those few words I think that the minister summed up the challenges that we face in delivering good health services in what she later in her speech called ‘the equality of provision’ of services across the country.

This particular piece of legislation is important. It establishes the National Health Performance Authority, and it has been a mystery to me why the coalition has constantly campaigned against this particular measure. They have come up with every kind of excuse possible and criticised the proposal. We have had ridiculous comments from those opposite on this topic on many occasions. But this particular authority is part of a COAG process. It is there to monitor and report on the performance of the local health and hospital networks, the public and private hospitals, the Medicare Locals which we have established and other healthcare service holders as well.

So, it is a critical operation and a critical authority in terms of the overall power of the health service to make sure that in the regional and rural areas, as well as in the urban areas of this country, we get equality of provision of health service. We challenge those challenges which the minister talked about in her second reading speech on 3 March this year.

Additionally, the bill provides for the authority; it talks about the membership, the committees, the staffing, the planning and reporting obligations of the authority and disclosure of information by the commission and also by the performance authority.
The functions of the authority can be found in the legislation. The main function, of course, is to monitor and report on the performance of the health and hospital networks and the other organisations and services that I outlined. The Commonwealth will be responsible for appointing the chairperson, and the deputy chair will be appointed in agreement with the states and territories. As I said, it is part of the COAG process.

In my area we have seen some significant changes with regard to health and hospital services, and with the Medicare Locals we have seen some significant changes as well. Indeed, I had the opportunity to speak to the district manager in relation to these changes and to talk about this bill. So it is germane for me to talk about it here today.

I spoke with Pam Lane, who is the District Chief Executive Officer for the West Moreton Health Service District, about these types of reforms and the bill that is here before the House. We have had some changes in our area, and we have seen the Darling Downs Health Service District split from the West Moreton Health Service District. In my area this means that the West Moreton district will include Boonah, Esk, Gatton, Ipswich, Laidley and The Park—the Centre for Mental Health Treatment, Research and Education—as well. Pam looks forward to the challenges there, and I have spoken with doctors and allied health professionals about the health and hospital networks. The authority will oversee all of those.

As well, there are some changes with regard to the Medicare Locals. Fortunately, we have been part of the first 19 that have been appointed throughout the country and ours will be known as the West Moreton-Oxley Medicare Local. It functions from Oxley Creek in south-west Brisbane across to Ipswich, up the Brisbane Valley into the old Boonah shire, taking in Kalbar and Boonah, and out towards Toowoomba through the Lockyer Valley. It hubs around Ipswich, and I look forward to working with Vicki Poxon CEO, with doctors and with a number of allied health professionals in the area. I have already had a number of meetings with the Medicare Local in Brisbane and also in Ipswich to see how they are going to progress this issue.

There are a number of challenges in the provision of health services, and I think that the authority which we are talking about here today with this legislation will have the overarching opportunity to make sure those health and hospital networks and the Medicare Locals carry on and perform as we have entrusted them to do. I know that in the Brisbane Valley in my area there is a need for more primary health care services. I know the Lockyer Valley and the Brisbane Valley are growing quite rapidly, and Ipswich as well, so those regional and rural areas are in dire need of more allied health professionals as well as doctor's surgeries and the kind of equality of health service provision that is necessary. This legislation is really important and that is why I have never been able to quite understand why the coalition have been opposed to this. They have come up with arguments that this is some great overarching bureaucracy, but we think it is important. I cannot understand why members opposite who represent rural and regional seats, like me, have opposed this. I think this is an opportunity for health and hospital networks and Medicare Locals to make sure that the provision of health services in those areas is being carried out effectively and equally. I think that the coalition are really missing an opportunity here, as they have on many occasions. We know they have missed many opportunities. We know the opposition oppose this
particular network, the authority and Medicare Locals. We know they oppose, for example, the GP superclinics, which this authority will oversee. The Ipswich GP Super Clinic in my electorate was so helpful to the evacuation centres at the Ipswich Showgrounds and Riverview. Without the GP superclinic, which the coalition propose to close down and not support, the people of Ipswich would have suffered from a lack of health provision.

The coalition can say we are not spending the money wisely and well, but this is a particularly important thing for my electorate. The policy to cut the GP superclinics, to rip out a billion dollars, as the coalition did when the Leader of the Opposition was Minister for Health and Ageing, is the sort of stuff we can expect from those opposite when they have to find $70 billion. We know that the authority that is the subject of this legislation will have an important supervisory and monitoring role in relation to e-health, which those opposite oppose, and the after hours GP online service, which the coalition proposes to get rid of. Those opposite oppose GP superclinics, e-health and the after hours GP hotline, so I really wonder how those opposite from regional and rural seats have the temerity to come in here and talk about health services.

This legislation is important because the performance authority is a key element of our health and hospital agenda. We are negotiating this with the states and territories, Labor and Liberal governments alike. As I said, it will monitor and report on all those organisations—public and private hospitals, Medicare Locals and other healthcare service providers. We have reached an agreement with the states. This authority is part of that agreement, and I suggest to those opposite they should talk with Ted Baillieu, Colin Barnett and Barry O'Farrell because they are in on this. They are supporting what we are doing in health reform. It does not matter which government is in power, they have signed up and supported it. We came to a historic agreement on 13 February this year when one or more of those state governments was held by the Liberal Party. We showed our commitment to the healthcare needs of all Australians and we have worked to get a better deal for patients across the country.

The agreement we came to, what we have carried out and what the Prime Minister has recently announced gives $19.8 billion in extra funding for public hospitals. It will be monitored by the authority that is the subject of this bill. There will be more beds, more local control, more transparency and more accountability. We have made a commitment to pay 50 per cent of the growth in hospital costs. We are going to do that in two stages, from 45 per cent eventually to 50 per cent. This is particularly important for regional and rural areas. I know from discussions such as those I had with Pam Lane how important the extra funding for subacute care is.

I know that we are putting about $8 million into the Ipswich General Hospital redevelopment. It is part of a commitment of over $120 million by the Bligh Labor government in Queensland. According to Pam Lane, that will be good for the Ipswich area up until about 2018 when I look forward to further discussions about the future of Ipswich General Hospital and whether it eventually gets relocated to the showgrounds. This is a question for the state government. We have put money into reducing elective surgery lists in Ipswich as well as emergency care departments. I have welcomed the Minister for Health and Ageing when she has come to Ipswich and looked at what we have done. We have made
a major commitment to health in my seat as a result of these health reforms.

The tragedy of all of this is that we had virtually a decade of invisibility when it came to health and hospital funding in my area. I talk to the local doctors and nurses. It is not surprising that people in regional and rural areas are up in arms about the lack of doctors. When Michael Wooldridge was the health minister they took pride in the fact that they were capping GP training places. We will have trained 6,000 more doctors by 2020, including doubling the number of GP training places to about 1,200 a year by 2014. Those opposite pose, parade and posture about standing up for regional and rural areas. In regional and rural areas, increasing the number of doctors trained is so important because many of them end up going to those regional and rural areas and country towns—like Lowood, Kilcoy and Fernvale in my electorate. This is crucial because they are crying out for more doctors in regional and rural areas. That is why I mentioned the equality of health service provision, which is so important. People in the Brisbane Valley and the rural parts of Ipswich know how important it is.

They also know how important elective surgery is. They also know how important it is to have an authority which monitors it, to see how it goes. We have put in more than 70,000 elective surgery procedures which have been delivered in the last two years. We know that the coalition had in excess of 88,000 people on waiting lists in the last year of their tenure of the Treasury bench. We have backed up our commitment with money and we intend to do so again. We have doubled funding for health. We think our proposal with respect to the authority is important because we want to make sure there is proper funding for public hospitals. We want to reduce the waste. We know that the bureaucracy needs to be attended to. We need shorter waiting times, and that is why it is important that we have a target of 90 per cent of patients in emergency departments being treated within four hours. We think it is important that we provide more than 1,300 additional subacute beds. In a recent meeting with Pam Lane, she made the point that she appreciates our additional commitment to subacute beds. We think this is important.

We think these reforms are extremely necessary in all of these areas. We are committed to doing better. We think we can make a system that is more sustainable, transparent, efficient and well resourced. We are putting real money on the table. I am interested in what those opposite want to say about this, because they will cut GP superclinics, e-health and the GP after-hours care. We know that they kept people on waiting lists. We know they ripped $1 billion out of the health system when the Leader of the Opposition was the health minister. We know they have no significant commitment to rural cancer infrastructure despite the rural patients having up to three times the waiting times of people who live in the city. We know that. That is why we put in the 22 regional cancer centres that we are undertaking.

I am very interested in what they have to say, and I look forward to the member for Dickson being on their razor gang, trying to come up with savings for the $70 billion black hole they have. I look forward to what they have to say on this stuff, because they will criticise us but we will see whether they will put any real money on the table. They oppose the architecture that we have with this legislation. We know they have opposed the infusion of money into the system. We will see what they have to say. They say they are listening. We know there is a lot of vacuous white noise from those opposite with respect to health and hospital reform. They have not really listened to healthcare...
professionals. They do not really focus on local care. They do not focus on localism. We have massively increased the pool of funding and we have instigated some unprecedented transparency in this regard. The opposition has simply been an opposition for opposition's sake.

This legislation is a better deal for the country. It is a better deal for my community. I support the legislation.

Mr EWEN JONES (Herbert) (17:16): I rise to speak on the National Health Reform Amendment (National Health Performance Authority) Bill 2011. I take up the point of the member for Blair on regional and rural areas and training doctors. As a matter of fact, it was the Howard government that instituted and incorporated the James Cook University School of Medicine and Dentistry, the James Cook University school of allied health and the James Cook University School of Veterinary and Biomedical Sciences. All those things came through under the Howard government. I welcome those things. They were our commitment to the regions.

I also welcome the noise they make on all sorts of issues when it comes to health. The GP superclinics, I think, are a wonderful thing. In 2007, we were promised 16. Townsville was promised one; you can see it diagonally across the intersection from where my office is. It is still vacant. We were promised another one in the 2010 election. That has been walked away from. There is a building being gutted somewhere in Townsville that someone knows something about, but as yet the delivery system would see them deliver the last of the 52 GP superclinics, at their current rate of installation, in approximately 2197—which would be magnificent reform for this government!

I would also like to mention the Australian Institute of Tropical Medicine. We saw you walk away and not commit to that institute's installation at James Cook University. You would rather see the study of tropical medicine go to somewhere in Sydney or Melbourne. You do not worry about the first Australians. You do not worry about the Torres Strait. You do not worry about the cases of Japanese encephalitis and drug-resistant tuberculosis currently in the Thursday Island hospital. The member for Blair has now walked away.

This bill seeks to establish the National Health Performance Authority. This is the second step in the government's plan, and it changes a few names and places. It will also amend a few words and a few acts. That is about all this bill will actually do. These all relate to the National Health Performance Authority. This body is there to report on the performance of the local hospital networks in public and private hospitals, primary healthcare organisations and other bodies. These bodies look after the running of senior management at each of these workplaces. These senior managers look after the middle managers in the health facilities. These middle managers look after the supervisors who look after the individuals or small teams of people who will provide feedback on how this process is going.

What about the healthcare providers? They are the people who are actually out there looking after the patients and their health needs. But that is not a core responsibility of this department. No, for such a vital cog in this machine—for this new level of bureaucracy—what performance indicators would you think were in place? What key performance indicators should be there? What measures are in place to ensure that this $109 million is spent wisely? That would be none. It is $109 million, and there are no KPIs to ensure
that they are not wasting money. This is $109 million that could go towards front-line services and actually provide something tangible for the tax dollars we are collecting. What we need is an agency which will ensure they are keeping the back office spend as low as possible and support the front office.

I have a friend who works on the front line in health at a major hospital. She spends an entire day per week on the computer with no patient contact. This is to allow her to complete all the forms required so that the back office can ensure that she is using the time wisely and not killing any patients. She has put a tag on those electronic files which will tell her when they are being accessed by others. This is so she knows that what she has done is being read. To date, not one of her files has been accessed by management for review in over 18 months. Extrapolate that across the front line of health and then stand there and tell me that what we need is another level of reporting. Better still, tell the doctors, nurses and healthcare professionals actually doing the work that they need another level of red tape in their lives. This, I am afraid, is typical of this government: grow the public service at the expense of delivering actual service.

Measures like these lead me to ask whether the minister or anyone in her department has actually spoken to a healthcare worker—someone on the front line. Have they explained to them why this new level of officialdom is needed. If so, what was the response from the nurse who has just finished a double shift? What was the response from the hospital orderly who, in Queensland, still cannot get his pay right? Have they explained to hospital health workers how this new level of red tape will help them achieve more on the floor?

This new authority does not even have the authority to obtain anything more than the states and private providers want to give them. So, for $109 million, what we have is an organisation which will be able to state categorically that the report from Queensland Health that is in front of them is in fact the report from Queensland Health. This government will be pretty happy with that. For one thing, it actually does something. That is better than most of the regulations they have imposed on Australia. This government will no doubt be hailing this as a new level of efficiency not seen since they won the 2007 election—and on that we will agree. This waffling and deflating government, this incompetent minister and department, have never seen a raft of regulations or a ball of red tape they did not like.

I know that there have been representations from various bodies, such as the Australian Private Hospitals Association, Catholic Health Australia, the AMA, the Consumer Health Forum and the Australian Council on Healthcare Standards, among others. But each organisation has stated that, while supporting the establishment of this body, there should be some consultation before the regulation and that it should have KPIs to ensure that it is working and we can all see that it is working. They warn that care must be taken; otherwise, waste will be the order of the day. Gee, where else have we heard that? In everything. All of these things have been said. What will this government hear? They only hear what they want to hear. This government do not actually listen. They stand there and put up their hands and say, 'I've made up my mind; don't confuse me with the facts.' All of this from a government which promised one new regulation in, one old one out, when they came to power in 2007. They are currently sitting at 220 new regulations in for every one out. Like so
much of what this government have done it is prefixed with, 'Anything is good enough.'

If they had wanted to show some initiative, they could have got behind the coalition's PET scanner proposal for Townsville. The PET scanner is a major diagnostic tool. There is no need for it to be housed inside a hospital. We had two plans for a PET scanner. One was recently proposed by then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and it was to be installed at Townsville General Hospital some time towards the end of 2014. We now have a plan where the Townsville hospital will have it put in some time before the end of 2012. We took to the election last year a plan for Queensland X-Ray, in a private-public partnership, to install a scanner off-site from the Townsville General Hospital. The cost for the government's plan, for the machine only and for the floor space, is $9 million. The cost to the taxpayer of the Queensland X-Ray one would have been $2.5 million. Even the Queensland Health people will tell you that they will be capable of doing three scans per day at the Townsville General Hospital. At Queensland X-Ray they can do between 15 and 17 if necessary. No-one would have to fly to Brisbane whilst they are having radiation, whilst they are having chemo, to have another PET scan, because they could have it done in Townsville. It could have been up and running in January this year.

Queensland X-Ray, to their credit, have gone ahead and done it anyway. They have put it in without a cent from the government, and this government are still vacillating. They still will not recognise that they have ever even seen a proposal for a PET scanner for Townsville. What we need to do now is make sure that they have Medicare accreditation so they can bulk bill all from North Queensland.

Mr Lyons: Will they bulk bill?

Mr EWEN JONES: I thank you for what? You have done nothing. You have done nothing but stand in front of us. You have a health minister who has refused to even accept that there is a proposal on the floor. This government could have had a PET scanner up and running in January this year. You say, 'Is that a thank you?' What about the people who have had to fly from Townsville, from North Queensland, to Brisbane to get their PET scans done? You should hang your head in shame. You were in the hospital game. You know what sick people are like. That you can sit there and be flippant about that sort of thing just beggars belief.

Dr Emerson: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I think a little bit of civility and adherence to the standing orders would be warranted—that is, that he should not be addressing members across the chamber with the term 'you'.

Ms Gambaro: Mr Deputy Speaker, on the point of order: it is a two-way street. The member opposite could stop interjecting as well.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott): I thank the member for Brisbane and the Minister for Trade for their advice. I remind the member for Herbert that he should not respond to interjections from across the chamber. That equally applies to members on the other side of the House. I also remind the member for Herbert that he should refer his comments through the chair and not to members as 'you', which is a reflection on the chair and, in this case, the speaker.

Mr EWEN JONES: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I will behave myself from now on.

Fortunately for the people of Townsville, Queensland X-Ray chose to go it alone, announcing last week that they would deliver
Townsville its only PET scanner, without help from this government and long before this government were prepared to do anything. It is a sad day when the government cannot be trusted to provide vital, lifesaving medical equipment and that private enterprise is forced to pick up the slack alone and carry the bill. If this government could not see the economic sense in Queensland X-Ray's proposal then no wonder they think that $109 million is good value for a new level of bureaucracy, which has no power to require any more information from the bodies it is supposed to be watching than the information they are willing to supply. It beggars belief. On behalf of all the taxpayers in Australia, I urge the minister to consult, listen and act on the advice of people actually doing something in this industry. Do not just sit there and take up space.

Mr LYONS (Bass) (17:28): I rise in the House today to add my comments on the National Health Reform Amendment (National Health Performance Authority) Bill 2011. This piece of legislation is very important. As the minister said in the second reading speech on this bill, it will form the backbone of a modern, integrated, high-performing health system. It is as a result of the government's historic agreement with all states and territories to undertake fundamental reform of our health and hospital systems. The Gillard Labor government is committed to improving Australia's healthcare system so that all Australians can access high-quality services that meet their needs and the needs of their family. This legislation will create a National Health Performance Authority, a new watchdog for Australia's health system. It will tie in with our Medicare Locals and local health networks to ensure we deliver positive outcomes for Australians. The Commonwealth government is building on the national health reforms through changes to primary health care which will see key improvements, with a particular focus on specific needs of local communities. The performance authority will work to open up the performance of the health and hospital system to new levels of national transparency and accountability. It will allow for the identification of high-performing parts of the health system so those successes can be transferred to other areas. It will identify areas of the health system that require improvement so that action can be taken, and improve the health choices of Australians making key decisions about their own healthcare needs.

The reform of Australia's health system is one of the most important public policy challenges of this generation. It is much needed. In many ways Australia has one of the most impressive public health systems in the world. Our doctors and nurses are world class. Our public system provides accessible hospital care for all and it delivers outcomes such as low infant mortality and long life expectancy. Australia's life expectancy increased substantially over the last 20 years. It is now one of the highest in the world behind Japan and Switzerland, with 84 years for females and 79 for males. However, from working in hospitals for many years in Tasmania, including the Beaconsfield District Hospital and the Launceston General Hospital, I understand the issues that are facing our health system. We are faced with a health system that is costly, under-resourced and under pressure to deliver for patients with complex needs. We have an ageing population and also an increasing burden of chronic illness and obesity, as well as skills shortages.

The Labor government has delivered on our election commitment to end the blame game and end the cost shifting and blame shifting that have plagued our health system
for decades. The Gillard Labor government inherited a health system in crisis from the Liberal-National coalition. The current opposition leader has a lot to answer for when it comes to this very important area. In 2003 the current Leader of the Opposition cut $108 million from public hospitals. In 2004 the member for Warringah cut $172 million from health and then in 2005 he cut $264 million—and it does not stop there. In 2006 he cut a further $372 million, and more again in 2007, his final year as Minister for Health and Ageing. That is more than $1 billion cut from hospitals by the Liberals in just five years. Despite the huge shortage of GPs in Australia, as health minister in the Howard government the current Leader of the Opposition capped federal funding of GP training places and left the nation short of 6,000 nurses. No wonder they are now on the other side of this chamber!

We cannot trust the Liberals on health. In 2006 the current opposition leader, the member for Warringah, indicated that he wanted to manage health by queues—and I quote from the Australian Financial Review of 1 June 2006:

Cost and queues is what ensures that services aren't overused … So [hospital] waiting lists and gap payments are a necessary part of the system …

The Leader of the Opposition has admitted that, if he becomes Prime Minister, he will make further cuts to health, carbon pricing, education, the environment, business, consultation, infrastructure, broadband and other services. This shows a lack of vision and is not in the best interests of this country. But it does show that the opposition are consistent. That is what we have come to expect from those opposite.

We, the Gillard Labor government, have a solid plan to fix the health system in Australia. We are implementing the biggest health reforms since Medicare—which I think has been the best thing for health in my lifetime—to ensure our hospitals are properly funded and to improve our local GP services and make them accessible to all Australians. The Australian health system has evolved and expanded greatly since the nation was formed at Federation in 1901, as the needs and expectations of the Australian people have changed. Despite the extent of this evolution in health service provision and medical knowledge and technology, there have been only a few occasions on which major changes have been made to the whole system. The Whitlam Labor government Medibank system was the major change in my lifetime. A key component of our health reforms is ensuring that communities have the health and aged care services that they need through more locally responsive planning and management. I should say that I worked in the courts when Medicare came in, and two-thirds of all our summonses were medically related. We had hospitals suing patients who were half dead and were never going to come out of hospital. It was a terrible system, and the Whitlam Labor government brought in Medibank, which was the saviour of our systems at that time.

The government's national health reform will deliver new services designed specifically to meet the real needs of communities through a model that enables a strong engagement with local health services and local communities. In regional Australia this will be achieved by Medicare Locals and local hospital networks. They will be made up of local community members and will work for their communities locally. Health, like most things, is best managed at the lowest possible level, where people have full information.

The National Health Performance Authority is an important part of our plan to improve health services in Australia. The National Health Performance Authority will
exist to improve quality, increase transparency and drive value for money in the health system. This is badly needed. It will drive transparency in the health system by improving Australians' access to vital health information. Australians will have more access to information on their local hospitals, health services, primary health care and community health services. It will be a model that will benefit all Australians. This will be a powerful independent watchdog body that, by using the power of accurate information, will push our hospitals to deliver better services and push our primary healthcare sector to develop and improve.

In reaching agreement with the Australian states and territories on 13 February 2011, the Australian Labor government showed its commitment to meet the healthcare needs of Australians and to work with the states and territories to deliver a better deal for patients. The agreement includes $19.8 billion in extra funding for public hospitals that will deliver more beds, more local control and more transparency. It also means less bureaucracy and less waste. These national health reform measures are critical for creating a health system that delivers the services Australians deserve and expect. The Gillard Labor government is improving quality, safety, performance and accountability in our health system.

The Australian Labor government has a vision for social inclusion to ensure every Australian has the opportunity and support they need to fully participate in the nation's economic and community life. Ill health and disability can reduce a person's capacity to work and participate in education or social activities through both physical and mental health conditions as well as time spent receiving health care or caring for others, and all of these can exacerbate the financial strain of households.

Every family in Australia depends on our health system. That is why we must get it right for the future. Everyone, no matter where they live, deserves access to first-class health care. That is why we have ended the blame game through a national agreement to boost hospital funding, increase local control and expand primary and aged-care services Australia-wide. It means more money, more beds and less waste in public hospitals. Hospitals become more accountable and doctors and the community get more say. Plus there is extra support for GPs and aged-care providers.

Labor is the only party that cares about public hospitals and better health care. We are fixing a decade of waste and neglect left to us by the Liberal Party and we are delivering the hospitals and community care that Australians deserve. Patients are already seeing the results of the Gillard Labor government's investments in health with extra beds being delivered, an after-hours GP helpline established and new doctor training places beginning this year.

I look forward to locally responsive health services through the establishment of Local Hospital Networks and public hospitals using activity based funding, which will fund hospitals for the service they provide—not a bucket, which has been the tradition. This will drive efficiency, reduce waste and deliver greater transparency.

This bill is an important part of our healthcare agenda. I am proud to be part of a government that is addressing the problems in our health sector and preparing Australia for the future. This is a vital piece of legislation and I urge those on the opposite benches to join with us and all the state and territory leaders that support our Australian health reform.

Ms GAMBARO (Brisbane) (17:40): I rise to speak on the National Health Reform
Amendment (National Health Performance Authority) Bill 2011. It establishes a new statutory authority, the National Health Performance Authority, and is designed to monitor and report on the performance of hospital networks, public and private hospitals, primary healthcare organisations and other bodies that provide healthcare services.

On the surface, this seems to be another Labor attempt at creating much more big bureaucracy and even more big government, and it is very typical that Labor's version of health reform is more bureaucracy. It is about a bigger waste of money by duplicating more government departments that overlap already with existing agencies and it does not provide for what is needed at the grassroots level. It does not provide for more doctors. It does not provide for more nurses. All it does is create more boards, more secretariats and more and more bureaucracy.

A wide range of stakeholders have expressed extreme concern. There is a list of stakeholders who have expressed concern, but I will just deal with a couple of them today. The AMA has called for a deferral. The RACGP has concerns. A number of bodies have expressed concerns, particularly on what the performance indicators are going to be. How will the authorities monitor and report on those performance indicators?

The bill has very scant detail on how all of this is going to work in a real setting. It has very scant detail on how the three national government agencies—the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care, the National Health Performance Authority, the Hospital Pricing Authority—will be able to work together to deliver improvements in the Australian healthcare system. The bill does not give the NHPA enforcement powers. It will be unable to compel any state or territory government to act to provide performance data. What is the point of that? Additionally, it cannot compel individual providers to make changes that will result in much better performance.

There is a whole level of confusion out there in the healthcare sector. I regularly meet with doctors and other health professionals who do not understand what these new Medicare Locals are going to do. No details are being provided. What will they do? What will be the interaction between stakeholders and the community? There is a whole level of confusion, and what this bill does is bring in another layer of confusion and another layer of bureaucracy.

The AMA has very grave concerns about the bill. The AMA has concerns about what data will have to be collected and how it will have to be supplied. We on this side are all concerned that this legislation does not provide for appropriate interaction between the authority and the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care, the commission or the proposed independent Hospital Pricing Authority. There will be important synergies between these organisations that should be reflected in this legislation. For example, it is reasonable to expect that performance indicators formulated by the authority will be contingent upon the indicators relating to healthcare safety and quality matters that the commission formulates. The functions of the authority include the monitoring and the preparing of reports on matters relating to the performance of private hospitals and other bodies or organisations that provide healthcare services. The explanatory memorandum states that these measures will have no regulatory impact on individuals and businesses. Who believes that? We do not believe that that is a true statement of what is going to happen out there. The collection and the provision of data to the authority by very
small hospitals, of which I have many in my electorate of Brisbane, and organisations that provide healthcare services, such as medical practices, will potentially have a significant impact on them, especially if it requires the development of new systems. And there will have to be new systems implemented to gather all of this data. As if private medical practices do not have enough bureaucracy already; they will be required to collect and report the data. The full regulatory cost impacts for these entities should be properly assessed. We have to be certain that the activity of the data collection and the reporting by the healthcare providers is not onerous and does not detract resources away from the primary health care that they provide day in, day out to thousands of my constituents in the electorate of Brisbane.

It may also be appropriate for the government to provide financial assistance to these entities for the additional cost of collecting and reporting against these performance indicators, because there will be a whole new level of procedures and bureaucracies that will have to be put in place in these medical practices and small private hospitals. Further, there is no certainty yet on the type of information to be collected. The legislation makes no provision for the type and the scope of the data to be collected—a very important aspect, seeing that information is the key of this particular bill. What cost is going to be involved in collecting the additional information that private practitioners and hospitals have to collect? As I mentioned, smaller private hospitals and medical practices will struggle to collect and provide data as opposed to getting on with their core business, which is primary health care.

Managers of local hospital networks or hospitals must be provided reports indicating 'poor performance', but there is no indication of what constitutes 'poor performance' and what devices will be used to compel these organisations to provide data or to take those very steps to correct this poor performance. The coalition oppose the establishment of this new bureaucracy and we stated that in the 2010 election. We propose to redirect the $109 million in the case of the NHPA to frontline services to make sure there is real action on hospitals, real action on funding nursing and a real plan for better mental health policies. These were well received by the people of Brisbane when we released these policies in the lead-up to the election. The people of Brisbane need more health services. What they do not need is more bureaucracy. They need more doctors, more nurses and more health professionals, not more agencies that collect data at the expense of very good primary health care.

The lack of clarity in the role that the authority has and the extensions of the levels of non-core improvements make it very difficult to see what is good about this bill. There are a number of local, state and national performance monitoring schemes already operating in the sector. Are you going to bring in another layer of bureaucracy? I have spoken to nurses. I have nurses in my family who spend their day, day in, day out, filling out paperwork and they feel severely impeded in their ability to care for their patients. Nurses are telling me the same thing. What they want is more resources. They want more staff to provide better care. They do not need to have good clinical staff taken away from the bedside, which is what we all expect, to undertake yet more onerous data collection.

Another cause of concern is the ineptitude that we already see in our state from the Bligh government running the health system in Queensland. The Bligh government will close down the Royal Children's Hospital and there has been absolutely no consultation. Again, they are taking away
Key, important services for one of the fastest growing areas—the inner city of Brisbane and the inner north. There are still ongoing battles that constituents come to me with day in, day out, including the nurses’ payroll issues, which still have not been solved. Still many of my constituents come to talk to me and ask for my assistance in just getting some simple payroll issues rectified. And here we have more bureaucracy coming into health when in Queensland we cannot even get our payroll issues right. So imagine what putting another layer of bureaucracy is going to do to an already dysfunctional health system in Queensland. Elective surgery waiting lists continue to grow in my state and continue to grow in the electorate of Brisbane. To add further red tape to the system would only result in further problems in Queensland. This bill has many, many flaws. The government really needs to go back to the drawing board on this one.

Mr MITCHELL (McEwen) (17:49): I rise to support the government’s National Health Reform Amendment (National Health Performance Authority) Bill 2011. One of the Gillard government’s top priorities is health. We continue to invest in and fund healthcare services so Australians have the best health care no matter where they choose to live. As members of this place are aware, McEwen is a very diverse electorate, and I am fortunate enough to represent rural areas, farmlands, new growth suburbs, small towns and highly populated suburbs. McEwen is an example of how, no matter where you choose to live, the Gillard Labor government is investing in healthcare services for all. When you travel across my electorate you see the ongoing investments in health care and health services by this Labor government. Unlike the Liberal Party, we do not discriminate by postcode; we believe that all Australians have a right to affordable and accessible health care.

I am delighted to speak on this bill, which will go to strengthen and build on this government investment in health. The passage of this bill will establish a national performance authority under the Financial Management and Accountability Act 1997. The performance authority will be a statutory body which will come under the National Health and Hospitals Network agreement. The performance authority's function will be to monitor and report on the performance of local hospital networks, public and private hospitals, Medicare Locals and other healthcare service providers. The authority will deliver clear and transparent performance reporting against a new performance and accountability framework to provide Australians, for the first time, with information about the performance of their health and hospital services in a way that is both nationally consistent and relevant. Not only is the authority a key to the government’s health reform agenda but it will ensure the production of clear and transparent reporting of every local hospital network and the hospitals within it through routine and regular hospital performance reports. This builds on our establishment of the MyHospitals website, which compares the performance of emergency departments and elective surgery in public hospitals around Australia for the first time. The Gillard government is investing $16.4 billion in the health system and imposing tough national standards to make sure that money goes where it should and in turn delivers the funding that our hospitals need.

The new health reform deal, which the performance authority will go towards strengthening, will deliver a better deal—a long-term solution and a deal that will last, not just a short-term fix—for Australian patients. The Gillard government is continuing to invest in our health services to ensure that all families, no matter where they
choose to live, are able to access the services they require.

Recently I was pleased to announce as part of our 2011-12 federal budget that Kilmore and District Hospital will receive $10 million. Never before has the hospital received money of that magnitude from the federal government, but our government is committed to making sure that all people get access to good quality healthcare services. This funding will go to the redevelopment of the theatre suite and the day procedures and recovery unit; the expansion and enhancement of the acute inpatient facility to provide expanded acute care services and increase the number of acute care beds from 30 to 60; and the construction of a new outpatient facility to deliver comprehensive, integrated primary health care. This is fantastic news for my community.

The Baillieu Liberal government made an election commitment to also provide $2 million to Kilmore hospital. But, unfortunately, in the state budget this commitment was not funded. It was not delivered on either, despite the state government saying that in their first budget they would deliver on all election commitments—except, apparently, for their commitments on health. I will continue to put pressure on the Baillieu government to ensure that they keep their promise to the people of McEwen.

In this government's responsible budget, which will get us back in the black by 2012-13, we have seen a great investment in health. This is particularly the case in my community, and for that I would like to thank the Prime Minister, the Treasurer, the Minister for Health and Ageing and everyone that has been involved in understanding the importance of health care and its funding in my community. Locally, this builds on the government's $3.5 million commitment to building GP super clinics in Wallan and a GP super clinic in South Morang.

Those opposite opposed these measures, but who is surprised by that? The Leader of the Opposition ripped more than $1 billion out of hospitals in just five years. In 2003, he cut $108 million. In 2004, he cut $172 million. In 2005, he cut $264 million. In 2006, he cut a further $372 million. In 2007, his final year as health minister, he cut more. In 2007, the Leader of the Opposition was more focused on his own re-election than on getting health policy right. In July 2007, he would not start negotiations on the coming Australian healthcare agreements because he prioritised his own re-election over the health of Australians. On Lateline on 24 July 2007, the now Leader of the Opposition said, 'The important task at the present time is to get re-elected and that is where my energies are focused.'

Things have not changed; he is still the same. Without any real plans of his own, the Leader of the Opposition continues to oppose everything in the hope that one day he will become Prime Minister. He says he has a plan to get us back into surplus, but he will not say how he will do it. In fact, this week we learned that there is a $70 billion black hole in his costings, which would be a further burden for this nation to bear. He has nothing to say, but he likes telling people anyway. On all the big calls, such as the historic health reform deal that he opposed, the Leader of the Opposition gets it wrong. When it comes to mental health, the government is delivering a $2.2 billion comprehensive package focusing on early intervention and coordinated care—the largest ever package in mental health. The Liberal party would fund mental health by cutting essential services such as GP super clinics, e-health and the after-hours GP hotline.
Federal Labor has increased hospital funding by 50 percent. There are 1,300 new sub-acute beds and support for 2,500 new aged-care beds. On the other hand, when the Liberal Party were in office, they ripped $1 billion—which is equivalent to 1,025 beds—out of hospitals. The Gillard government is training 6,000 new doctors by 2020. This includes a doubling of the number of GP training places to 1,200 a year by 2014. But the Liberal Party wanted to put a cap on GP training places, and, at the end of the Howard government's 12 years of nothing, six in 10 Australians lived in an area with doctor shortages. That is an absolute disgrace. Under this government, more than 70,000 surgery procedures have been delivered in the last two years, slashing hospital waiting lists. Under the previous Liberal government, there were 88,630 Australians who had to wait longer than clinically recommended for elective surgery.

Federal Labor is delivering 22 regional cancer centres and 44 McGrath Foundation specialist breast cancer nurses.

Compare that to what happened when the previous Liberal government were in power. There was no significant investment in rural cancer infrastructure, despite rural patients being up to three times more likely to die than their city counterparts within five years of their diagnosis. I think it is important that we look at the history—if you want to look where they are going, just look at where they have come from. Those opposite talk about the great old days of the Howard government, but it was not great if you needed health care; in fact, it was absolutely appalling. It appears that in Victoria the apple does not fall far from the tree and that they will continue down that path.

Australia's healthcare system is one of the best-performing systems in the world, and we are very fortunate to have well-trained doctors, nurses and medical staff. Patients are already seeing results from the Gillard government's investment in health. Extra beds have been delivered and new doctor training places are opening up this year. From 1 July, patients will begin to see the training of the 6,000 further doctors, the delivery of 1,300 more sub-acute beds and strict deadlines for emergency departments and elective surgery waiting times. Patients will get more information, and there will be tough national standards such as a four-hour emergency waiting time. However, we believe that we must continue to support and invest in our healthcare system to make sure that it remains the best in the world. We need to reform the system in order to meet the demands of an ageing population and increasing rates of chronic disease and to take advantage of improvements in medical and other technologies.

The National Health Reform Amendment (National Health Performance Authority) Bill will go to strengthening the National Health and Hospitals Network agreement and building on this government's health reform agenda. There are endless reasons as to why we must improve our healthcare system, and this bill is one of the many measures we are taking to ensure patients get the best care when they need it.

This week we find the opening of the Northern Hospital, the one that the former Kennett government were threatening not to fund. I am sure, Deputy Speaker Vamvakinou, you would know the PANCH hospital well—a 500-bed hospital closed by a Liberal government. Then they opened the new one, the Northern Hospital, and they brought out 180 beds and said, 'Wow! Look at us. We have just opened an extra 180 beds in the northern suburbs.' I am sure even if they counted their numbers they would figure out that is still a shortfall. It is a shortfall that we have to continue to keep working on and delivering on.
Unfortunately, again, a Liberal government are now refusing to upgrade the emergency ward in the Northern Hospital to upgrade the training places and facilities. It is an area that has thousands upon thousands of more people moving into it and they want to cut back on hospital health care and services for the people of the northern suburbs of Melbourne. It is an absolute shame, but what it shows is the consistency of Liberal governments in cutting health care. They do not care about it. They are not interested in it—they never have been. The leopards over on that side will never change their spots.

I am very proud to support this government’s National Health Reform Amendment (National Health Performance Authority) Bill because it continues to deliver on this government’s commitment to bring better health care to people, no matter where they live.

Mr TEHAN (Wannon) (18:01): I rise to speak on the National Health Reform Amendment (National Health Performance Authority) Bill 2011. I would love to be standing here tonight saying that what we have is real reform for the Australian health system but, sadly, we do not. I have some personal experience with this because my mother, the late Marie Tehan, introduced serious health reform in the state of Victoria between 1992 and 1996. That period was incredibly challenging for the then government because the Cain-Kirner government had left the state of Victoria with a $33 billion debt. The interest on that debt was equal to that of delivering a large state government department. So when the Kennett government came in they were faced with getting the budget back in order—sadly, an all too familiar story—but also with really having to drive reform through.

My mother, the late Marie Tehan, had four principles by which she went about achieving reform in the state of Victoria. She wanted to put people first rather than institutions or systems. She wanted to ensure a fair distribution of limited resources to obtain value for taxpayers' funds and to provide a better health status and outcome for all Victorians. There were two major ways that she set about doing this. The first was to introduce casemix funding, which has been rolled out not only by other states in the Commonwealth but also overseas. Also, she introduced health networks. The bottom line was that an extra 30,000 patients were treated by Victorian acute hospitals in the first 12 months. On the category 1 waiting list that is for people who are waiting for heart surgery and life-saving surgery, 30,000 more patients were treated. That is what real reform is about.

After Neil Blewett stated in this parliament that those reforms were ‘the most imaginative set of reforms to deal with the hospital system in this country in the last half a dozen years’, an Age editorial in February 1994, with the headline ‘Healthy praise’, said: Dr Neal Blewett, the former federal Labor health minister who retired on Thursday, used his retirement speech in the House of Representatives to praise the Victorian government’s health changes and to congratulate its health minister, Mrs Tehan, for introducing casemix funding in public hospitals.

The editorial went on to say:

In calling her changes ‘the most imaginative set of reforms to deal with the hospital system in this country in the last half a dozen years’, Dr Blewett not only speaks the truth, but gives a generous and genuine endorsement his former colleagues could do well to acknowledge.

I think that is true. It is sad that what we have before us here has not taken up the gauntlet and put real reform at the heart of our national health system.
Sadly, instead, what we are seeing once again is the creation of another great big bureaucracy. This is not putting the resources where they need to go. The resources need to go where there will deliver outcomes for patients, not where they will deliver outcomes for bureaucrats. These reforms, sadly, are not going to do this. I do not know why we need to always head down this path where we seem to think that having more people in charge overseeing the system will lead to better results. What we need to see is more doctors, more nurses and greater throughput of patients through our hospitals. What we need to see is better results from that throughput, better management and better health outcomes. This is what should be at the heart of this reform process, but it is not.

Some might see this as just partisan statements on behalf of our side, the coalition, but it is not. When you look at what some serious medical groups have said on this issue you will see that it highlights that we are not alone in saying that these reforms really lack the necessity of delivering a better health system in this country. The AMA, for instance, have called for the legislation to be deferred. They want an assessment of the impact of the legislation. They want to know the detail of what data will have to be collected and supplied. They dispute the government claims that the NPA will not have a regulatory impact on businesses or individuals and they fear that smaller private hospitals and medical practices will not be able to cope with as yet undefined data collection. They want open and transparent processes and accountability to parliament. These are serious issues, yet this government is not taking them into consideration.

The Consumer Health Forum says that there is a need for the legislation to outline at least a minimum scope for areas of performance to be assessed. It wants more details on the functions of the NPA and greater safeguards for patients. These comments and criticisms come from major stakeholders and should be taken seriously by the government.

The Australian Private Hospitals Association fears yet another layer of compliance burden, requiring multiple reports to multiple government agencies. Surely a simple reporting system would be at the heart of reform rather than another process leading to multiple reporting requirements. The Australian Private Hospitals Association wants parliamentary scrutiny of the data hospitals will be required to provide.

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners warn that the provisions of this bill 'hold long-term threats to harm the current high standard of medical services, and consequently health services, delivered to the community'—very worrying—and that these provisions could drive health management to be focused on performance and cost cutting more than patient care. They had concerns about virtually every aspect of the bill. They warned of significant overlap between this new bureaucracy and the existing Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care. So, not only are we getting extra bureaucracy, we are once again getting extra regulation. Real reform would cut the number of bureaucrats needed to administer the system. Real reform would cut the regulatory burden on our hospitals, both public and private. We do not see that with this bill.

The Australian Institute for Primary Care and Ageing warned about functional overlap between the two bodies. The Council of Procedural Specialists could see 'no justification or compelling case' as to why the NPA was needed. There is still a lot more...
explaining for the government to do on this bill. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, an independent body, already collects reliable, regular and relevant information and statistics on hospitals and health care. We are still waiting to see some key definitions in the regulations on this bill, including how outcomes are going to be measured, probably the most difficult aspect of introducing any reform in the health system.

This is another area where the federal government, the Gillard government, seems to have a tin ear. The Gillard government has ignored the outcomes of COAG and produced a bill that has ridden roughshod over the states and territories. The minister has completely failed to recognise that the states and territories actually own and manage public hospitals. Why not introduce a system where you pick the best reforms that have occurred in each state and then encourage the other states to implement those? If they have been shown to deliver results in one state, surely other states would take them up and implement them. Wouldn't that be better than this system of producing a large bureaucracy in Canberra and telling the rest of the country how it should be done? Fortunately, in the recent negotiations the states have reasserted their dominant role in running public hospitals and local hospital networks. But we have to ensure now that the funding does not place a large burden on these state run hospitals and make sure that they can access the money to deliver the health outcomes that we so desperately need in this country.

There is no doubt that real reform is still needed in our national health system, but once again we have to be very careful about how we go about achieving it. We have to ensure that in the ultimate outcome patients and taxpayers are the winners. As I highlighted earlier, we are dealing with limited resources. We cannot continue to raise our debt ceiling on and on and upwards and upwards. We have reached $110 billion in the space of a bit over three years. If we continue to raise that debt ceiling then the limited resources that we can put to our health networks will diminish, not increase. That is an important thing that we must realise.

We also have to ensure that we put people first. I have been a bureaucrat, and I have a lot of respect for the people who work hard in our Public Service. But we have to understand that the role of the bureaucracy is not to grow; the role of the bureaucracy is to deliver results on the ground. Sadly, it would seem that what we are seeing once again is growth here in Canberra rather than funding to the local hospital networks and to driving the reform process through the hospital networks to deliver for patients.

I wish I was here saying that Dr Neal Blewett’s advice to his Labor colleagues had been taken on board, that they had looked at what real reform had occurred already in our existing state networks and that they had used that as the basis to drive real reform nationally. Sadly, that has not been the case. I think once again we are going to see a continuation of the blame game, which we were promised was going to end under this Gillard government and, before it, the Rudd government. Hopefully, this is not another broken promise, but we do seem to be heading down that path where the blame game has not ended but will become a reality once again.

I wish that I could stand up here today and say that this has been a bill which will drive another major reform through our health networks. Sadly, I do not think that is the case, and we are going to have to wait for the coalition government to get in and then drive real reform into our national health system.
This will not end the blame game. It will lead, sadly, to waiting lists growing rather than receding, and that will then lead to a lot of blame being apportioned from the Commonwealth towards the states, with the states being left with no alternative but to look at the federal government and say, 'It is your reforms which have led to this.'

I hope dearly that this is not the case for patients right across Australia, but given the way this government has rolled out and implemented its policies in the last four years one has to be very sceptical about how the government goes about implementing anything. Sadly, I think these health reforms are going to be like everything else that this government has touched and not end in a good result. (Time expired)

**Ms O’NEILL** (Robertson) (18:16): I rise to speak in support of the National Health Reform Amendment (National Health Performance Authority) Bill 2011. This bill is another fundamental step in Labor’s reforms to the manner in which health services are provided throughout the Commonwealth. I have to take umbrage at the honourable member of Wannon who was just speaking about the rollout of amazing resources across this country under Labor leadership over the last four years. Since I was last in this place I opened $23 million worth of fantastic new facilities under the Building the Education Revolution program in my seat, and the way that has transformed learning and hope in learning communities on the Central Coast is absolutely phenomenal. The recognition in our community of that capacity to lead, to innovate and to invest in things that matter to Australians is absolutely palpable.

But health is an issue, and we as a government understand that and we will get on with delivering what it is that Australia needs—and it certainly needs what this bill is referring to. This bill is another fundamental step that represents the reforms that the Labor Party is committed to delivering throughout our Commonwealth. It is a victory of cooperation between the Commonwealth and the states and it indicates a commitment to effecting real and needed reform for our health system.

I speak to this bill this evening because the provision of health services on the Central Coast has long been a burning issue for my constituents. Throughout my time as the member for Robertson I aim to work with local agencies to improve the manner in which health services are provided on the Central Coast. This was overwhelmingly the most common issue that constituents raised with me during last year’s election campaign. I believe that the provision of a GP superclinic on the Central Coast will do much to help alleviate the unmet demand for health services and integrated health care that wraps around the patient, rather than giving the patients the run-around.

The provision of a GP superclinic in my electorate was an issue on which I campaigned strongly and I am very much looking forward to its delivery. The project is on target, with negotiations with the preferred tenderer now completed, and Reliance GP Super Clinic Pty Ltd has been appointed as the service provider of the GP superclinic. This in itself is an important step in providing people of the Central Coast with greater access to medical care. Reliance will be establishing a new GP superclinic and building on that record of working with local hospitals, local GPs and community organisations. It is also planning to develop an outreach clinic on the Bouddi Peninsula, which currently has no medical services at all, subject to the availability of commercially available zone land. This southern Central Coast GP superclinic intends to provide integrated,
multidisciplinary, team based, patient centred health care under one roof and it will certainly take pressure off other GP services around the area. It indicates at my local level the incredible investment that the Gillard government is making in GP superclinics across the country—$528 million committed to build 64 GP superclinics. We obviously have a great commitment to improving the health outcomes and health experiences of those Australians out there who rely on their government to take seriously the need for reform and rebuilding as their needs change.

Despite this great GP superclinic in my electorate, I want to speak on this bill because, in addition to that, there are quite a number of other health services that can certainly be further improved. We need to continue the complete and systematic reorganisation of our health services and set out transparently how they are being supplied throughout the Commonwealth. I believe that this legislation, the National Health Reform Amendment (National Health Performance Authority) Bill 2011, once enacted, will achieve these goals.

The primary reason the Central Coast as a region has had difficulty in meeting demand for health services is that there has been a distinct lack of decision-making power at the local level. This has also been a facilitator for a lack of transparency over the practical challenge of public funding, and it has often been a problem where money has been caught between federal and state governments. This is not the fault of those who work in healthcare management on the Central Coast—in fact, members of the electorate are always telling me how amazing their experiences have been in terms of the care that they receive—but the problems that exist have not been assisted by the fact that the Central Coast did not have its own local healthcare authority. In fact, we were attached to northern Sydney, which has a completely different demographic and a completely different geographical structure to us. I certainly believe that the establishment of the local hospital networks will improve the provision of health care on the Central Coast and in other regions where, similarly, the wrap-around will fit the community, instead of somebody's idea of a community watched from afar. I am also supported in this belief by having met many medical professionals and healthcare workers with whom I have discussed these matters. The reason I believe it will work is that local hospital networks will certainly have a far greater understanding of the healthcare needs of their particular local area—and, in my case, the needs of the people on the Central Coast. Furthermore, because the local hospital networks represent management at a local level, they will be under more direct accountability than any alternative involving a more centralised governance model. This will increase response capacity and it will also increase transparency and accountability to the local community who require the services.

An example of why the Central Coast, including my electorate of Robertson, needs its own local authority is the demographic characteristics of the region. Recently the Australian Bureau of Statistics declared the Central Coast a category 4 region for the collection of data, which is just below the state level, and, for the first time, when the census came through just a week or so ago, they gathered data about the Central Coast as a region. We know, based on the best available evidence at this point in time, that we have a very high proportion of constituents who are of retirement age. At the last census, the percentage of people at or above retirement was almost 19 per cent of our population, compared with a national average of about 13 per cent.
As a result, the Central Coast will be affected more severely by what some people might call the 'pension bomb'—in other words, the process by which the baby boomer generation will transition into retirement. In fact, there is a really important point that needs to be made about the 100 years of excellent health policy and education that has actually led to the arrival of two generations of aged citizens living at the same time. Having worked hard, many of them have decided to come and settle on the beautiful Central Coast and enjoy their retirement years surrounded by our beautiful beaches, bushland and waterways. It is a tribute to the work of those who helped to set up the care and public education to achieve that outcome.

It means, though, that we need to find ways to rise to the challenge that is present in different ways in different communities. The health care of ageing Australians is a challenge that exemplifies exactly why the way we organise the provision of health care needs to be reformed and to be locally responsive. Different local areas can have vastly different healthcare needs, and centralised management will often not address this.

I commend the government and the health minister in their efforts to reform the manner in which health care is funded. As has been explained many times in this place, the Commonwealth will provide half of the funding for meeting the growth in hospital costs. As has been set out in the Intergenerational report and elsewhere, the issues associated with the ageing population are the primary reason that hospital and healthcare costs have continued to grow.

I speak on this bill because I agree that accountability is fundamental in ensuring that the increased demand for health services is properly met through the Commonwealth—and I am most concerned about that in my electorate of Robertson. This bill, through the establishment of the National Health Performance Authority, the NHPA, provides for exactly this kind of accountability. Whilst I understand concerns raised in this debate that the NHPA is possibly an establishment of another layer of bureaucracy, we do need to understand that there has never been a system of ongoing and comprehensive review of how health services are provided. Audit, we understand, is essential for accountability, and the results are essential to drive review and enable ongoing improvement in any institution. The NHPA will provide that. I believe such a system will have immense benefits for how health services are critiqued, funded and developed on the Central Coast.

I also support this bill because it enables the government to be proactive when managing demand for health services. This is provided for under the legislation through the ability of the authority to produce hospital performance reports and health community reports. As a member of parliament, it will be immensely useful to have access to this type of reporting, which will provide comprehensive analysis of the healthcare needs of my electorate. The reporting will enable the government and the proposed local hospital networks to be much more proactive in dealing with issues related to provision of healthcare services. And that can only be a good thing.

The establishment of the Health Performance Authority will enable comprehensive transparency with regard to the operation of both local hospital networks and Medicare Locals. This reporting will enable Australians to have access to comprehensive information as to how both local hospital networks and Medicare Locals are allocating resources. Furthermore, the Health Performance Authority will provide
Australians with information as to whether their money is being effectively and efficiently spent by the local hospital networks and Medical Locals. This transparency and accountability will help ensure the continued improvement of health services through the Commonwealth.

This new, groundbreaking legislation up for debate today really concerns the critical issues of transparency and accountability, and it will provide real and practical benefits to the local constituents in my area and right across the country. It does this in addition to devolving the management of hospitals and health services to the local community.

Whilst I speak of the benefits that this legislation will have in my electorate, I emphasise the fact that it will identify those areas right across the country where greater health funding is needed. It is right that Australians should have a fair share and a fair response to improve the outcomes for all of us, not just some of us. Furthermore, the information that the public will have regarding the healthcare system will be clear and objective. It will not be subject to political opinion and bias, and Australians will have an alternative to the information supplied by the media regarding their healthcare system. For a democracy, access to that information unmediated is a very powerful thing. I speak on this bill because I believe that it is a right for Australians to have access to information regarding the state of their healthcare system.

It is time that in the national interest those opposite support this bill and therefore support reform in our healthcare system. It is time that the national interest is thoroughly considered by all those here in the parliament. This legislation breaks new ground in providing Australians with transparency and accountability with regard to how our money is spent on health. The process by which this reform was negotiated with the states was long and difficult, as any negotiation is. But this government and our health minister have never lacked courage and continued to negotiate very constructively with the states with regard to the provision of health services. Despite the pessimism and carping negativity of those opposite and a few setbacks along the way, the government and COAG have pushed through and succeeded in providing real and practical hospital and healthcare reform in the interests of the nation.

Since being elected as the member for Robertson it has always seemed to me that those opposite cannot bear such good news. Any setback, any difficult negotiation and any compromise is heralded by those opposite as evidence of the impending collapse of the country—on a daily basis, no less. But such alarmist nonsense reveals that they have neither the nerve nor the drive nor the endeavour for reform. That is why critical reforms such as this bill have been left to the Labor Party. The Labor Party is the party that values hope for our future, the party that has the courage and the conviction to work through the challenges and arrive at the delivery of good news and practical action for the nation. And I do rather believe that the proposals contained in this bill before parliament are very good news—good news for the state of our national healthcare system, good news for our hospitals and for Medicare, good news for the people of the Central Coast and good news for the Commonwealth of Australia. I look forward to this significant improvement in how our healthcare services are provided and I commend the bill to the House.

Mr LAMING (Bowman) (18:31): In joining the debate on the bill for the Health Performance Authority I certainly want to retain the very optimistic view that we have in Australia of a top-three-performing health
system. It performs as such for very good reason: we have great people. Never let us forget that health systems perform because of the people in them, not the systems around them. It is important to get both right, but the absolutely necessary and sufficient element in that is the people. The great concern, then, is the zest and the zeal that was very much expounded by the previous speaker. This Labor zeal to reform is a privilege that is earned, not an automatic right of government. This government needs to remember that every one of its revolutions, as each revolution arrives, it is less funded than the previous one. So as these progressively less well funded revolutions occur, that zeal to reform and tip upside down and change and poke, with the desperate hope that it will be better, reminds me of that famous quote: I came, I saw, I was a little confused, I revolutionised—and not very much changed.

The great concern of people on the ground is that bureaucracy, certainly in health, has become this thousand-layer cake upon which ANHPA is effectively the icing—yet another layer in an attempt to keep measuring and monitoring health providers. I think everyone in this chamber would agree that we are trying to do exactly the opposite in health: we are trying to free up and deliberate the great ideas on the ground without compromising, obviously, the very important fiscal requirements of running a health system and containing the cost curve that every Western economy is battling with. We do not have that focus in this legislation. When we look for performance, let us read the detail and see if the word 'performance' is even defined. It is not. In this legislation is poor performance even defined? It is not. So the very notion of a health performance authority or agency is based on this hope, as you are running around with that hammer, that just to build one more bureaucracy could make the difference that the health system is yearning for. That hope is probably utterly futile because what we have are highly performing, competitive states operating in a very tight economic circumstances, and we know that in many cases with public services in states around this country the faster they work the quicker they go broke. Nothing will change with this legislation.

We have tonight in the great city of Gladstone, Queensland, a top-10 city in my state, no surgical coverage for 60,000 people. If there is an incident or a disaster on the Bruce Highway or if there is some need for urgent surgery, Queensland Health will instruct emergency officials in the hospital there to stabilise the patient and then throw them in an ambulance to Rockhampton. There is nothing in this legislation that changes that. Without appearing carping or negative, the great fear I have is that when Australians look at the health system they wonder: can I access a GP for my child when they need one? Can I go to hospital and hope to be seen in a reasonable time in an emergency? Can I get that operation without being continually shuffled from a waiting list to a waiting list to a waiting list? And I suspect if you are a senior you worry about bed block and the ability to be able to shift from being an inpatient to return to your aged-care facility and know that there are provisions available for that.

Those are the four prisms through which we need to examine any reform, because that is what Australians demand of us as law makers. They are not interested that we have been able to convene an authority and who the person is who will lead it or what the reporting arrangements are. They do not know that the AIHW collects data, that the Safety and Quality Council on Health Care collects data, that the COAG Reform Council is collecting data and that the ABS is doing the Australian Health Survey. And
now what do we have for you, courtesy of the Labor Party? We have got ANHPA to collect more data. That is right. Do any of these bodies collect data together? Do any of these agencies say, 'I'm sorry, that was incomplete?' Do any of these agencies actually look at each other's data, pull it together and make sure it is reporting off the same platform? Of course not. We have just added in another data collector.

Do not look at me, please, as the guy who does not love health data, but it is not the sufficient element to get a functional health system. We are all collecting the data. The problem is it is not being processed; it is not being collected on a level platform; it is not being compared equally between jurisdictions. Will ANHPA do that? Alas, no. That is not their brief. Their brief can be most closely compared to the CGRIS, the coordinator-general that FaHCSIA have created in their own office to oversee Indigenous services in remote areas. This individual, who works extraordinarily hard visiting communities and writing large reports about how the data is incomplete and how things should be happening but they are not, is utterly powerless. The CGRIS is funded to write these reports upon which nothing is done. This individual could not even employ his own staff. He is meant to be independent of government and writing independent advice, but FaHCSIA employed all his staff. So the same problem that we see in FaHCSIA, the inability to report independently, will simply exist in Health, where there are effectively data collection agencies and rewards for doing the right thing in hospitals. But what will happen when we take money away from hospitals not doing things so well? The patients suffer. I come back to this element of performance. How do you screw down efficiency in a hospital without affecting quality? How do you make a doctor work faster without him jettisoning teaching? There is nothing contained in this legislation to ensure that occurs. When we employ public doctors in public hospitals, some of them are slower because they teach. How is this going to be measured under some of these reporting arrangements?

I go no further than outpatients where this weekend just gone Queensland Health dictated to the second largest hospital in the state that only two outpatient visits will be allowed before that patient has to be returned to their GP for another piece of paper, another referral. Then they can go back and see another two outpatient specialists before they are returned again to their local doctor—hitting up Medicare and sitting in the queue, which is the social cost of travelling to a GP. That is not integrated care. That is a direct result of the federal goal to set benchmarks around how often patients can be seen in outpatients, to encourage throughput in outpatients and, obviously, to create room—which we support—for new outpatients.

Queensland Health responded as any provider would: it capped the visits to outpatients. So a 50-year-old woman diagnosed with diabetes, late stage, low levels of literacy who has been brought into the hospital and referred to that particular hospital can see the diabetic doctor and can be referred across to the dietician. But, after that, down come the shutters. She must go straight down to her GP, wait in the waiting room and get another referral before she can come back and see the podiatrist or the cardiologist, let alone go back to the diabetic doctor again to report on what has happened. This is how we know that providers will respond in an exquisitely rationed environment where you do not have the incentives running the right way.
This legislation will not free up the consultants and the staff to do innovative and imaginative things because those immediately above them in the bureaucracy will be so panicked about having to report data that they will not allow the freedom. We do not reward clinicians for great innovation. There is nothing in this legislation that will allow that to happen.

I speak on behalf of patients who are looking for an interstate operation. Mr Deputy Speaker, from a smaller state like Tasmania, you will know that not every one of our eight jurisdictions, while they do an extraordinary job, can do every operation. We are a health system one-twentieth the size of the United States. Australia's health system, a great health system as it is, cannot expect to provide in every one of our eight jurisdictions every operation known to the health system. At some point there has to be consolidation, not just for breakthrough operations but for operations that are not done as frequently anymore like clipping a large aneurysm in the brain. Most of them are done with an internal platinum coil, but some of them are still so large that we have to do open brain surgery. There are so few of them done that in many jurisdictions there is barely one a year. Do we have to keep funding a doctor and keep that doctor trained to do one operation or is it more sensible to send that person across to a larger state?

What happens? Up come the walls of bureaucracy. Does anything in this bill fix the problem for the lady with vascular disease of the brain who needs an operation on the Circle of Willis and waits weeks and weeks while hospital systems shuffle responsibility between each other and the respective states refuse to free up operating time? This is not addressed at all by a performance agency as described in this legislation at all. It will remain.

I want to tempt, for the optimism of the other side, an almost euphoric optimism that by creating this new body all things can be fixed in the health system. It is actually much harder than that. The right to reform a health system is a privilege that is earned. It is not an automatic shift to a new revolution because we need another press release. I said about our previous Prime Minister that he would revolutionise everything else and I said, 'I promise you he has not fixed the health system, but this ex-prime minister has one more revolution up his sleeve and that is the revolution of the health system,' and sure enough it came along and it came along just a couple of weeks after the opposition leader announced, so insightfully, hospital boards for the struggling health systems of New South Wales and Queensland. What were they? They were effectively administrative and reporting boards to oversee the work of bureaucrats in each one of our hospitals. They provided information to the public and they also took information directly to bureaucrats and obtained answers. Whether you like the idea of hospital boards or not, it was only weeks later that we were sold by this administration the notion of equally local boards that happened to cover regions as large as nine major hospitals.

To hear the previous speaker saying that decisions sometimes are better made locally is one of the great understatements from this current government, because there is nothing local about the Medicare Locals. The word 'Medicare' is only in there at the insistence of the staffers of the previous Prime Minister. So we are left with this curious term Medicare Locals that actually is an amalgamation of a number of divisions.

The previous speaker really loves local health decision making. What was wrong with basing it on divisions? What was wrong with working with our existing structures? They were completely adequate for that role.
Instead, we are left with Medicare Locals that—wait for it—do not conform to local hospital boundaries. Here are our hospital boundaries and the Medicare Locals run across like this so patients are in one hospital boundary and a different Medicare Local. It should have been quite easy to fix. And would it not have been that hard also to align those boundaries with ambulance boundaries so that the ambulance takes you to the hospital where you live and where they work? It was not hard to do that either.

It was not hard to align some of those boundaries with local boundaries of interest like local government areas, because they run the emergency responses in most states I have been to. But what happens is they do not do it very often, they often do not have the capacity and then they find themselves with a conflict of interest because the large hospital is located in a different local government area to those where the people are affected. The Queensland floods were such a great example. Toowoomba was mostly focused on Toowoomba needs. All the other local government jurisdictions had neither the capacity to respond to the floods nor the ambulance services to go out and reach the Australians that needed them most. Another simple solution has been completely passed up.

I have spoken about the surgeons. I have spoken about the patients that rely on services. I have talked about how outpatients effectively will not change and how, if it does, we could compromise teaching. I have talked about waiting for a waiting list by being on a waiting list for the waiting list and by being constantly passed over. The only way off a state government waiting list in many cases, regrettably, is to get sicker until you need it urgently, give up waiting and take out private health cover or, for many tragically, to pass away. That is not the health system that we signed up for. We as a nation signed up for a responsive system that rewarded innovation. It is easy to say but will not be fixed with this notion of a performance authority.

The one glimmer of optimism—and I have been asked for optimism from the other side so I will give it to them—is that there are great people on the ground who will decipher the health minister's press release. It is one page. They try to work out what she is going on about and what this means for their job? The one thing about reform is that, when you threaten everyone with their jobs in reform, the first thing they focus on is keeping their job, and most of the health professionals right now are seriously wondering, "Where will my program be when Medicare Locals evolves?"

What is the relationship with state community health, when in many major cases and jurisdictions they have refused to merge until 2015 or later? When people are frightened like that you do not get the innovation you need. You get perverse reactions and people often operating to work out a way to save their jobs. We do not have any undertaking yet on whether there will be a state based role for divisions and it seems almost inconceivable that this large number of Medicare Locals can operate completely independently and find the capacity they need to do training and operate as political bodies as well as funding bodies and then also to be reporting directly to Canberra. To do so without some form of state collaboration means that Medicare Locals cannot talk to state governments. That has been wiped out.

There are a number of concerns I have about this legislation that have not been addressed. Australians will look back on us and judge us harshly. They will look at the health system five years from now and they will judge the administration today for the
decision they made. I remind them, without giving gratuitous advice, that they will look at waiting lists. They will look at the availability of a hospital doctor. They will not appreciate seeing public hospitals secretly bulk-billing patients, undercutting GPs, suspending continuity of care and, most importantly, undermining deputised medical services, the very after-hours care that ensures that people who get sick at night have their medical records transferred back to GPs. That is all wiped out as well. This is a government that does not understand after-hours care or how to deliver it. And it can all be solved with a hotline. They will learn that it is not that simple. Health care is extraordinarily complex. You tamper with it with great care and caution and you make sure that you have the best minds on your side when you do it.

Ms HALL (Shortland—Government Whip) (18:46): It is no surprise that I follow a member of the opposition who, once again, has made his contribution to this debate by attacking the legislation and opposing it. He talks about how a patient asks how they will access a GP when they need it. He made a commitment to rationalise health services and he talks about Medicare Locals, and when he does that it shows that he has very little understanding of what a Medicare Local is and very little understanding about how it will operate. He also has no historic knowledge of what has brought us to the point we are at today.

The first step that brought us to where we are today came about in November 2006—or before that, when the Health and Ageing Committee tabled a report, the *Blame game*. The inquiry took place over the period from when the Howard government was elected in 2004 and it was conducted because the then Leader of the Opposition, the then health minister, thought that our health system needed reform.

The first recommendation of the *Blame game* was that the Australian state and territory governments develop and adopt a national health agenda—exactly what both the Rudd and Gillard governments have done. The national health agenda was to identify policies and funding principles to initiate and rationalise the roles and responsibility of government including their funding responsibilities. They were to improve long-term sustainability of the whole of the health system, support the best and most appropriate clinical care, support affordable access to best practice, rectify the structural and locative inefficiencies in the whole health system, give a clear articulation of the standard of service that the community could expect, redress inequities in the service quality and access, and provide a reporting framework on the performance of health services, providers and government. That is recommendation 1. The National Health Reform Amendment (National Health Performance Authority) Bill 2011 we have before us today does exactly what the last dot point says. It provides a reporting framework on the performance of health service providers and government.

I will just take us back to that Howard government of 2004 when the Leader of the Opposition believed that we should have health reform. He could see that there were inequities within the health system. He saw that the blame game existed where state and federal governments tended to shift the blame if something went wrong instead of taking responsibility. The whole package looks to deal with that, and this particular piece of legislation looks at the reporting framework.

I will also add for the benefit of the House, that this piece of legislation was referred to the Committee on Health and Ageing. We conducted a hearing into the legislation and we supported the legislation.
We supported the establishment of a national health performance audit authority and we could see that this was about: making sure that we had national transparency and accountability; the identification of high-performing parts of the health system; the identification of those parts of the health system that needed to undergo some improvement; and improving the health choices of Australians in making decisions about their own healthcare needs. When this particular piece of legislation was referred to the committee—and it is part of the whole tranche of legislation that is being considered in relation to health reform—we decided that the legislation was good legislation. But we also recommended an improvement in the legislation, that an additional requirement be incorporated into clause 60(1)(b) of the bill to require that an annual report on the performance of local hospital networks, public hospitals, private hospitals, primary healthcare organisations and other organisations that provide healthcare services be compiled by the performance authority and presented to the Minister for Health and Ageing for presentation to the parliament. That was included in the recommendations of the committee. That was the only change that was made. That was made to improve the transparency and accountability and to bring together this health reform agenda.

The member for Bowman was not at all supportive of Medicare Locals in the region I come from, which is the Hunter and the Central Coast. The Hunter has its Medicare local appointed. It is GP access. The Hunter Division of GPs, who have extensive knowledge of the needs of the area, have been involved in providing after-hours service for a very long period of time and truly understand the needs of that area. The Medicare local has not been appointed yet on the Central Coast. It is important to note that, prior to the Medicare Local areas being identified, the Central Coast was part of northern Sydney. The North Shore of Sydney and the Central Coast were lumped together. You cannot tell me or any member of parliament from the Central Coast that those areas have the same needs. They are very diverse areas. The people who live in those areas know that what they need is different to what the people living on the North Shore of Sydney need. They know they do not have the same access to services as the people living on the North Shore of Sydney. This legislation delivers local solutions to local areas. This legislation looks at the transparency and the accountability that is expected from the government.

I cannot talk on this legislation without congratulating the Prime Minister on the agreement that was reached on 8 October. The Gillard government has delivered national health reform with an agreement now in place between every state in this country—something that was never achieved by the now opposition when the Leader of the Opposition was the Minister for Health and Ageing. Rather than division we have a positive outcome. We have something to move forward on. People are working together. We have reforms in place that guarantee more money, more beds, less wait and less waste. They also deliver better GP, primary and aged-care services—something that the previous Howard government could not do. Most importantly, it will end the blame game and the cost-shifting that marked the Howard government years. Why do I say that is the most important thing? Because that blame game and cost-shifting saw thousands of Australians go without their health needs being met. This is about delivering to Australians who had been marginalised by the Howard government during its time in power.
The reforms will, as I have already mentioned, deliver more money. There will be an extra $19.8 billion for public hospitals, covering 2.9 million more emergency cases. My daughter-in-law works as an accident and emergency nurse. I know how busy she gets. I know the constraints that are put upon them. This extra money will mean they will be able to deliver services to those patients who visit the accident and emergency department. It will cut the time that they have to wait in accident and emergency. The staff working in accident and emergency will have the support to do the things that they know need to be done. There will be two million more in-patient services, like major surgery, and 19 million more outpatient services, like minor operations and physiotherapy. People have had to wait not for weeks or even months sometimes but years to obtain those services in the public system.

As I have said, this is about delivering services to Australians in their community when they need it, in a timely fashion. It will mean more doctors. There will be 5,500 more GPs and 680 specialists trained—something the previous government failed to do. Instead of addressing the chronic shortage of doctors, specialists, allied health service providers and nurses, they exacerbated the shortages. There will be more local decisions. That is the Medicare Locals. The decisions will be made by the clinicians, the hospital staff and the community who know the needs of the community they live in.

These reforms also deliver less waste. Hospitals will be funded for what they actually deliver. There will be shorter waiting times in emergency departments and for elective surgery. Instead of people going on a waiting list and having to wait years—and I mean 'years'—to have surgery, it will happen a lot quicker. The reforms will also deliver better GP, primary and aged care. There will be more after-hours services, new GP training places, new GP superclinics and direct Commonwealth responsibility in most states for basic community care for the over-65s.

I want to commend one program that saw four GP practices within the Shortland electorate receive money. Under the health infrastructure program Jewells Medical Centre received $500,000. The facilities they are building there are fantastic. Not only will they be able to have more doctors working out of there, provide training for doctors and work very closely with Valley to Coast but they will also have room there for allied health professionals, like dieticians and psychologists. Even occupational therapists will be able to come in and work out those rooms providing, once again, local services to local communities where there is a need identified. The Labor Party is the only party that really cares about hospitals and ensuring that people can get services when they need them. We care about making sure that services are not determined on your ability to pay or where you live but on your needs. We are about fixing the blame game—something that the previous government did not do—and we are delivering the hospitals and community care to Australians when they need it.

As I mentioned earlier this particular piece of legislation was looked at in great detail by the Standing Committee on Health and Ageing. The bill stipulates that the performance authority also has the role of formulating performance indicators, collecting, analysing and interpreting performance information, and promoting, supporting, encouraging, conducting and evaluating research. This is vital information. We can have all the extra services, we can have Medicare Locals operating and we can stop the blame game, but if we do not have
in place the proper accountability, the proper reporting requirements, then we cannot guarantee that our health system will operate as effectively and efficiently as it should. This is good legislation. It is about the Gillard government stopping the blame game and delivering health services to all Australians.

Dr SOUTHCOTT (Boothby) (19:01): It must be hard being a Labor government member and talking about the government's health plans, because you really have to keep up. Every year the government has a new health plan. I think we are onto the Rudd-Gillard government's health policy mark 4 or 5. Before Kevin Rudd was elected Prime Minister he was going to fix the public hospitals by mid-2009 and he was going to step in and take them over if the states did not come up to the plate. Last year, while Kevin Rudd was still Prime Minister, he described his reforms as the most historic changes since Medicare. Those reforms did not proceed. Only just last month Prime Minister Gillard described these reforms as the most fundamental changes since Medicare.

It is really hard to have anything complimentary to say about this government's approach to health because after almost four years in government they have no runs on the board. There are no improvements to the health system or to health services that they can point to. Their legacy will be statutory authorities and more bureaucracy but no improvements in health services.

The National Health Reform Amendment (National Health Performance Authority) Bill 2011 is yet another example. It is another bill which proposes to establish another statutory authority. It does it by amending the National Health and Hospitals Network Act 2010, legislation only passed by the House at the end of March. This bill, amongst other things, aims to create the National Health Performance Authority. We already know that there will be future amendments to establish the independent hospital pricing authority. The current bill is the second step in the government's plan to reform the healthcare system. It changes the title of the act to the National Health Reform Act 2011 to reflect the changes made to the government's historic health reforms under the new Prime Minister Gillard.

I move to the functions of the authority itself. The purpose of the National Health Performance Authority will be to monitor and report on the performance of local hospital networks, public and private hospitals, primary healthcare organisations and other bodies that provide healthcare services. There is a lack of clarity about the role and function of the authority. It has an extremely wide-ranging purpose statement. This is the problem across everything that the government has done on health.

When the previous Labor government introduced Medicare, that had a clarity of purpose. When the previous Howard government introduced the private health insurance rebate, that had a clarity of purpose which everyone understood. It was simple. No-one can follow the twists and turns, backflips and changes that have occurred in health under this government. On the specific performance authority the Bills Digest compiled by the Parliamentary Library states:

This lack of detail combined with the lack of power attributed to the Authority raises questions about the extent to which the Authority can achieve its objectives as set out in the Bill … or as articulated by Government.

This legislation raises more questions than it answers. There are absolutely no details about the performance indicators that the authority will monitor. We have a
government authority that does not know what it is meant to be reporting on. They are meant to decide that themselves.

If the government were serious about this authority, the legislation would outline a minimum scope for the areas of performance to be assessed by them. It is also unclear how many primary healthcare providers will be monitored directly by the NHPA or what the scope of the monitoring will be. It is unclear whether general practice will be monitored. This is an area where clarity is needed, and has been requested by the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners.

We do not know how often the NHPA is going to report, how detailed those reports are going to be, or what they are going to contain. But, worst of all, it seems the authority will be limp when it comes to the power to compel organisations to provide information to the authority. The authority will be relying on the goodwill of healthcare organisations to provide the data they need. Indeed, the Bills Digest again states that the legislation:

... does not give the Authority any enforcement powers; it cannot compel state and territory governments, private and non-government organisations to provide performance data and it cannot compel individual providers to make changes that will lead to better performance.

On the reform agenda more broadly we in the opposition have repeatedly called for the government to provide all the provisions to establish their full reform agenda to this parliament at the one time. They should provide the legislative provisions to establish all their new government bodies at one time so that this House and those affected by the changes—the stakeholders and the community at large—can see just how all these bodies are going to interact before these measures are considered by the parliament. Instead, we have been drip-fed bill after bill and amendment after amendment and have been forced to put their health reform agenda together like a puzzle, working out where each piece is meant to fit.

These constant changes and amendments are just another example that the health minister is struggling to get this right. This is further demonstrated by the fact that the minister ignored the outcomes of COAG and produced a bill that walked all over the states and territories anyway. The content of their bill was contrary to, and overrode, the outcomes of the heads of agreement signed at the COAG meeting in February 2011. The states and territories actually own and manage the public hospital system. The states and territories are responsible for the planning of their state-wide health services, and the minister needs to remember that. This is compounded by the fact that the authority will have no power to compel the state and territories or their hospitals to provide information. The minister is now having to make substantial amendments to correct this attempt to walk over the states. The states won the battle and the minister has had to retreat. What we see today in the news is more back-downs and more retreating from their ‘historic’ health reforms—and I do not think this will be the last word on that.

There have been so many backflips by this government. The capitation payment for diabetes for general practice was not well thought through and was opposed by every health group, and the government backflipped on that. The lack of after-hours cover between the wind-down of the divisions of general practice and the tier 1, 2 and 3 payments for after-hours care and the establishment of Medicare Local were, again, not well thought through and the government had to back down on them. The social work and OT access to Medicare for people with mental health issues were, again,
not well thought through and the government had to back down on them.

Every time an announcement in health is made, it is 'historic' and is 'delivering on the government's health reform agenda', but I fear that, like every other historic announcement, this will be a case of over-promising and under-delivering. As I speak to GPs, specialists, allied health providers and people who work both in primary care and in the hospital system, no-one believes that this government has a capacity to improve the running of health services. No-one believes that adding extra layers of bureaucracy and having more managers and more bureaucrats will improve health for patients or improve their journeys through the health system. The government have a long list of health announcements where they have over-promised and under-delivered. They promised 64 GP superclinics; there are currently 13 operational. This is a $650.4 million program. They announced Medicare Local, a $416 million program, which is already off to a false start with the revelation that, despite opening on 1 July, the organisations will take up to 12 months to become operational.

But the worst part of this reform is that this is just another great, big, new bureaucracy. At the time the original historic announcement was made—Kevin Rudd's announcement that this was the most significant change in health since Medicare—then Prime Minister Rudd and health minister Roxon promised that their reforms to the healthcare system would not lead to further bureaucracy. I can safely stand here today and tell the parliament that they have failed in this promise. The National Health Performance Authority is another layer of compliance and another reporting burden for healthcare organisations. The creation of this new authority to report on the performance of healthcare organisations will mean extra time that these healthcare organisations will have to spend filling out paperwork, writing extra reports and sending through data when they should be in the consulting rooms treating patients.

The government have been very successful at creating reports, reviews and working groups and adding layer upon layer of bureaucracy to everything they touch. The Department of Health and Ageing is no different. We see lots of new acronyms coming out of the department of health, each adding its own layer of paperwork. We have the introduction of the NHPA, the LHNs and the MLs, while being very vague about what they are meant to do. Even these organisations that have been established already do not know what they are meant to do. We have the National Health Performance Authority looking at and reporting on the success of Medicare Locals and we have the Medicare Locals looking at and reporting on the success of primary health care including the GP superclinics. Around and around we go and, where the paperwork stops, nobody knows. This is just another layer in the thousand-layer cake of the measuring and monitoring of our health providers. The only thing that we know for sure—the only thing we are absolutely guaranteed of—is that there will be more red tape, more paperwork and more wasted time under the proposal currently before the House. What we need is less talk, fewer discussion papers and reviews, less paperwork, less bureaucracy and more doctors, more nurses and more allied health practitioners on the front line, delivering those services that our communities really need.

There is a wide belief that the provisions of this bill will severely risk the current high standard of medical services delivered throughout the community. There have been
calls from the peak medical body, the Australian Medical Association, for the legislation to be deferred. There were many common themes throughout the submissions to the House and Senate committees around a lack of clarity about the legislation and the authority, ambiguity over what the authority will actually do, a lack of goals and objectives for the authority, duplication of work with pre-existing agencies and, most importantly, concern from stakeholders over the extra administrative burden that this agency will create. In its current form, this bill should not be before this House. That is clearly highlighted by the number of amendments that the government have had to move to fix their own legislation. The opposition will be moving for the deferral of this legislation until such time as the government have presented all legislation which deals with so-called health reform.

Mr GEORGANAS (Hindmarsh) (19:14): I rise in support of the National Health Reform Amendment (National Health Performance Authority) Bill 2011. I do so because we know that this bill is about the availability of information to the public, and we know that the availability of information is paramount. I think that within a democratic society the provision of information and the availability of information is absolutely critical. I am sure that most of us in this House would recognise this as an obvious fact.

The bill before us today contributes to the information that will be made publicly available to the Australian public on matters concerning our health system and our hospitals. Specifically, this bill will create a performance authority which will be charged with monitoring and reporting on the performance of our local hospital networks, public and private hospitals, Medicare Locals and other healthcare service providers that service the people of Australia.

While informed public knowledge is important within a democracy, information is also rather important when we evaluate things. It is really important to the evaluation of services that are provided and, of course, the funding that goes into those services. And so for the very first time in our nation’s history we will have a health system that is expected to meet new national standards of service provision. It will be expected to meet new targets in fields of practice such as elective surgery and emergency department waiting and turnaround times.

This is a great thing; this is something that this Labor government is delivering to the Australian public. It is delivering something to the Australian public that has always been far too hot a political potato for governments to deliver in the past. Setting benchmarks and publicly exposing where the health system is can only be a good thing. Looking and analysing whether we are meeting the standards and whether we are having successes or failures in meeting those benchmarks is very important.

As I said, this is a very open and transparent way of measuring our health system, our successes and performance. It is an extremely important and open process, which will benefit all involved. I, for one, am proud of this government’s work; especially what this government is doing in this exact area. It is being more transparent and more open for all to see.

I am coming at this new emerging reality from the perspective of the people who rely on these health services: the people around Australia. In decades past we used to hear of elderly residents who were waiting for years and years, perhaps for a hip replacement; hobbling around home, minimising their trips to the shops whence groceries could not be carried away without great pain. People had to live with their pain for far too long. In
a First World country such as Australia, with a first-rate health system like ours, this really stood out as a failure by all governments in the past to invest in people's good health, mobility and independence. By monitoring the system and knowing our performance rates we can see where relevant needs are.

We have probably all experienced the frustration of having to wait eight hours in an emergency department to see a doctor, especially for something that is not particularly critical. How many days of people's lives have been wasted waiting around emergency departments? How many labour hours are lost due to the emergency departments not being capable of seeing and treating people in a timely manner?

This government is setting service delivery targets that we can already see in hospital statistics through the MyHospitals website, which started in December last year. For example, the MyHospitals website gives information on the number of days people have had to wait for a given procedure or other service at any given hospital and the national average for that particular procedure. It gives those waiting times for the previous two financial years, so you can go back two financial years and see what the waiting times were in particular hospitals for particular procedures.

For example, in Adelaide's western suburbs we have the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. When you log onto the MyHospitals website you can easily find the table which shows the Queen Elizabeth Hospital waiting time for a full knee replacement for the last two years. In 2009 the Queen Elizabeth Hospital replaced knees after patients waited for 91 days as compared to a national average wait of 147 days. In 2009-10 QEH patients had to wait 140 days as compared to 180 days on average around Australia.

What is wrong with members of the public being able to access that information, and being able to see exactly how long they will have to wait for a particular procedure? Those figures I just gave you compare with the Royal Adelaide Hospital, where for the same service one would have to have waited 211 days and 191 days respectively. It is all very interesting and is of particular interest, as I said, to anyone contemplating full knee replacement surgery. The purpose of all this data accumulation, management and communication is, of course, to drive improvements in service delivery. This is part of the overall reform of our health and hospital system that this government has courageously undertaken, driving improved services that will be more cost effective and sustainable in the future.

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health and Ageing, which I have the honour of chairing, met to discuss this bill, and I tabled the committee's report during the last few weeks of the last parliamentary session. The committee recommended that the House of Representatives pass the National Health Reform Amendment (National Health Performance Authority) Bill 2011 with a further amendment which I believe will be moved later on in this House, that the performance authority presents a compilation of its performance monitoring activities to the parliament annually in addition to its publication on the authority's website.

These are very, very important initiatives by the government. Under this policy the performance authority will work to open up the performance of the health and hospital system to new levels of national transparency and accountability. It will allow for the identification of high-performing parts of the health system so those successes can be transferred to other areas. It will identify areas of the health system that
require improvement so that action can be taken and it will improve the healthcare choices of Australians making key decisions about their own healthcare needs—all good things.

Opening up the performance can only be good. Allowing the identification of high-performing parts of the health system so you can mirror them in other areas can only be a good thing. Identifying areas of the health system that require improvement so we can improve things is also a good thing.

This is a very, very good bill that should be supported by all—unfortunately I see that it will not be. It will better meet the health requirements of Australians in the future. This is one of the first steps in the government's major national health reform, which is critical to delivering to Australians a health system that will deliver the services that they deserve.

Mr WYATT (Hasluck) (19:23): I rise to speak against the National Health Reform Amendment (National Health Performance Authority) Bill 2011. I do so on the basis that I am part of the Standing Committee on Health and Ageing, which looked at this. After reflecting on the legislation, revisiting the Council of Australian Governments website and casting my mind back to three significant bodies that exist at the national level and that work in concert with state and territory jurisdictions, I came to the view that we are duplicating an area which, if it were tweaked within the three bodies that currently exist, would be a much more effective use of taxpayers' money.

The proposed bill will amend the National Health and Hospitals Network Act, which established the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care as an independent statutory committee. I listened to the member for Hindmarsh's comments, which in a number of areas were important. But I think there are elements within the health arena that we have to seriously consider when we establish bodies to take on the national role of collecting data, reporting and monitoring. We have to consider how that information is used. Often the complexity of health is not considered in its fullest context because each state and territory implements its services differently. Their priorities are based on state and territory needs. The other element that we can never capture in data is the human element, which is absolutely critical in the role of the health workforce in improving health outcomes.

This bill will establish the authority which will monitor and report on the performance of the local hospital networks, which are still evolving; public and private hospitals; primary healthcare organisations and other bodies that provide healthcare services. What I found fascinating is that when you go to the COAG website you find a list of those agreements that have been developed under the Council of Australian Governments with the involvement of health ministers from each of jurisdictions. We have the National Health Reform Agreement, the National Partnership Agreement on Improving Public Hospital Services, the expert panel report, the National Healthcare Agreement, the Intergovernmental Agreement on Federal Financial Relations and a brief summary of the Commonwealth investments in public hospitals.

If you look at these NPAs, or national partnership agreements, you will see the structure of them. They talk about the focus of the work and the outcomes to be achieved. They also identify the reporting elements within each of the agreements. Within states and territories—through the COAG process and the reform under the Rudd government, and through the Australian Health Ministers Conference and the Australian Health
Ministers Advisory Council made up of the directors-general—there is broad agreement on what the measures should be. There was rigorous debate through the Australian Health Ministers Advisory Council on the types of data that needed to be collected and how it was to be used, and what reforms would take place and how the data would underpin that. But the emphasis was on the states and territories. When you read through these—and I invite any member who has spoken today not to restrict themselves to the proposed bill alone—you can look at those other elements that have been negotiated over a period of time in reaching directional-setting objectives for the reform of the healthcare system and the delivery of services, policies and programs.

Another point I want to make is that the data that is collected is produced in reports. There are something like 28 reports from a number of minimal data collections. These data collections are reports that are released biannually or within an arranged time period when they are investigated, the data is collected and a report is done. I know for Aboriginal health a jurisdiction can pay additional money to the relevant agency—I will come that agency shortly—to get a particular state slant on the data. So they can receive a WA-emphasised report, or a report based on that jurisdiction.

I find it fascinating that we have so many datasets, collections and reports and yet we are not using those. In a sense, they have a historical basis. Why do we need to establish another authority to collect data when that authority does not tell me what is going to do with it? We talk about reform, but when I consider the burden of collecting data I realise that you are taking people away from frontline services. You are taking them away from delivery of health care that is needed at the various levels within each of the state and territory jurisdictions, including the primary healthcare providers. It is a cumbersome process. If we want a healthcare system that works, do not tie people in frontline services to collecting data that feeds a beast that has been established in Canberra. To me this is a centrist approach and what we will see again is a grab for the control of the health agenda. To me the Australian parliament sits at the heart of Australian federalism. The Australian parliament continuously positions itself as a dominant player in the national political deliberations but does not have exclusive responsibility. We have state and territory governments who are the front-end providers. Professor Brian Galligan, in a paper from the Politics and Public Administration Group on 26 June 2011, titled Parliament's development of federalism, states:

The National Government was given defined powers—either exclusive or concurrent—whereas the States retained the residual. Where there is overlap, Commonwealth laws prevail to the extent of any inconsistency.

It is my view that this bill will provide the Commonwealth with authority over the state and territory governments and this will be extended by practice through the implementation of public sector erosion of the responsibility of the states and territories. When you work in that sector you protect the area in which you work. If you have a leadership role then you certainly identify those very key things that you want to achieve within this framework. To me it is control by stealth.

By adopting a written constitution we confined notions of parliamentary sovereignty by the terms of the Constitution itself. Support for a federal rather than a unitary constitution was unanimous amongst the delegates in the 1891, 1897 and 1898 conventions because the states wanted to protect their responsibility for the provision of front-line services. Health is a key area
where states and territories consistently deliver at the local level. Those programs and services are often shaped by the recipients. Certainly we use data about elective surgery waiting lists and about time spent in emergency departments but we also have to consider the drain and the pressure on health-care systems. Both parliament and federalism are core features of the Australian Constitution which created an indissoluble federal commonwealth based on the consent of the people of the Australian colonies.

The bill will change the title of the act to be the National Health Reform Act 2011. It amends the current act to distinguish between the two new authorities and introduces provisions relating to secrecy and disclosure of information. Why would you want secrecy if we are being transparent? Why wouldn't we want to make sure that everybody had the information that is being collected so it is relevant and seen by all?

These authorities came from the first set of commitments made under the Rudd health reforms and outcomes of the COAG meeting that was held in April 2010. I spoke against the original bill and questioned the need to establish three new authorities given the existence of the Department of Health and Ageing, the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. I turn to these bodies. In the Australian Bureau of Statistics Act 1975 it states:

ABS is one of many providers of statistics (albeit the largest) that are used to inform research, discussion and decision making within governments and the community. The organisations and arrangements, formal and informal, which together provide such statistics, form Australia’s national statistical system.

Section 6(1) of the act outlines the function of the ABS, and I want to cite two of these:

(a) to constitute the central statistical authority for the Australian Government and, by arrangements with the Governments of the States, provide statistical services for those Governments;
(b) to collect, compile, analyse and disseminate statistics and related information;

Why wouldn't you use the ABS and extend its role and function without having to create another layer of bureaucracy?

Secondly, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare informs community discussion and decision-making through national leadership and collaboration in developing and providing health and welfare statistics and information. The Australian government, through AIHW, collects health and welfare statistics related to the information they seek and then develops specialised statistics standards and classifications relevant to health, health services and welfare services in conjunction with the ABS. The AIHW is prescribed as a Commonwealth authority under the Commonwealth Authorities and Companies Act 1997, and it has a leading role in supplying national data for reporting on a range of performance indicators and output measures for the national agreements adopted by the Council of Australian Governments. The institute develops, collects, analyses and reports high-quality national health information, and I have been a user of those reports. The information contained in those reports is very informative and publicly available and it helps with some of the planning directions that need to be set. AIHW works with the Australian government, state and territory governments and other stakeholders to ensure that high-quality and consistent data and information are available to underpin the COAG reform agenda and the health reform agenda.

Finally, we have the Department of Health and Ageing, which has a broad functional role but is still one of the key Commonwealth bodies. So we have three
significant bodies and if I were in the position of determining whether we needed another one, I would determine that we did not. I would argue that we should use those bodies effectively, sending the money and funding to front-line health services that are badly needed in rural and regional Australia, and then through the hospital networks. It is a pity that we become consumed with the establishment of additional bodies that collect and report data, and certainly the Senate inquiry had its own findings with respect to the legislation.

Western Australia, in correspondence signed off by the Premier of Western Australia, made the following point:

Firstly, in relation to the scope and functions of the NHPA, the Bill as currently drafted allows for the possibility that the real work of the NHPA could be broadened in scope beyond that contemplated by the HoA.

In other words, there is a capacity to extend its role and function. There is not a requirement, as the WA letter goes on to say, to go back and deal with those issues. In a major rebuff, the health ministers in a communiqué stated:

Health Ministers agreed that States and Territories are the system managers and as such the performance managers of public hospitals in Australia. The Performance Authority will report on the performance of hospitals and health networks, and these reports will be provided to State and Territory Health Ministers, as the system managers, prior to public release;

Then they go on and talk about the watering down of powers, the role of the NHPA, empowering state ministers and requiring the Commonwealth minister to seek state ministerial and, in some instances, COAG approval for the role of the authority. This is not a bill that I would support. I would certainly support its referral to a Senate committee to have a look at the issues within the bill, to identify and look at how the roles and functions of those three existing Commonwealth authorities operate and provide that service now, and also to look at the cost-effectiveness of the use of taxpayers' money, which could be better directed to frontline services that would see the reduction of elective surgery lists, see better health care being delivered at the point of need and the underpinning and support of the local Medicare networks that will come into place.

I believe that we do need real action and real reform, but there is also a reality in this day and age that we do not have an endless bucket from which we can pull all of the initiatives that are being announced and all of the bodies that are being established under various pieces of legislation. I ask the government to be much more considered in the establishment of this authority, be more frugal in expenditure and utilise the resources that are currently in place that have served health systems at the state and territory level and at the Commonwealth level. There are also the COAG processes that complement the work that they do.

Ms RISHWORTH (Kingston) (19:38): I rise to support the National Health Reform Amendment (National Health Performance Authority) Bill 2011. This government has consistently demonstrated a real commitment to improving and transforming Australia's healthcare system. Those on this side of the House believe that everyone, no matter where they live, deserves access to a first-class healthcare system close to home. That is why we have now ended the blame game through a national agreement—and I must commend the Prime Minister on this national agreement—to boost hospital funding, increase local control and expand primary and aged care services Australia wide. The National Health Reform will mean more money, more beds, less waste and less waiting in public hospitals.
This Labor government's record in health reform and funding highlights our commitment to improving the healthcare system for all Australians, and it is a record that I am very proud to support. Since entering office, this government has made a number of considerable improvements to the healthcare system, including new elective surgery equipment for over 125 hospitals, the delivery of over 70,000 more elective surgery operations, upgrades to more than 37 emergency departments and an increase in the number of nurse places in universities by over 1,000 each year. In addition, I was very pleased this year to see in the budget $2.2 billion over five years for mental health services. This includes a $269.3 million boost for community mental health services. This represents the largest Commonwealth commitment to mental health in Australia's history, and I commend the government on its continued support for these much needed services in communities right around Australia, including my electorate of Kingston. I know that in my electorate the residents have certainly welcomed the government's considerable investment in mental health services.

I was very pleased, earlier this year, that the government announced a further $1,296,000 to be allocated to the Mental Illness Fellowship of South Australia to continue their work in providing the personal helpers and mentors program. I have visited and seen firsthand how this program really affects the lives of many who rely on it. It is an example of people with lived experience of mental illness actually working with those who are suffering to link them into services and to help them through perhaps an acute episode of mental illness. I think it is a wonderful program and I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate all of those involved in it. All of the workers do a great job. The funding extension that I have just mentioned will allow this wonderful service to continue, providing people within our community whose lives are severely affected by mental illness with some assistance and help.

In my electorate there has been another government announcement that shows its commitment to mental health. The commitment is that the youth-specific mental health service Headspace is going to be established at Noarlunga in Southern Adelaide. We know that two-thirds of all people with mental ill health experience their first symptoms before the age of 21, so it is critical that we do have these youth-specific facilities and services available. This service will provide local young people with not only mental health services but also appropriate physical health care and other help when it comes to drugs and alcohol, so it is a collaboration of a service that I think will make a real difference to people in the area. I look forward to working with the Southern Division of General Practice, who have been named as the lead organisation to establish the Noarlunga Headspace.

Those a just a few examples from my local area of how the government is making real improvements to mental health in my community. They are also examples of things that are happening all around Australia. In addition, of course, we have had significant investment in the local area through the building of the GP Plus Super Clinic at Noarlunga and the investment at Flinders Medical Centre, in both the elective surgery and accident and emergency areas. I must also mention the Primary Care Infrastructure Grants. These have been important grants that have helped doctors' surgeries in my local area to expand their services, provide practise nurse services and provide allied health services. So, a whole range of different services are now available in the local area.
This government has been committed to putting services on the ground, and I would dispute with the previous speaker that authorities like this do not help deliver these important services on the ground. We are fortunate to have a world-class public health system. This is a system that provides all Australians with access to public hospital care where they can receive treatment from world-class doctors and nurses. However, we are still faced with a health system that is highly fragmented, under-resourced, unsustainable and suffering under the pressures to provide for patients with increasingly complex needs. While this government has consistently committed crucial investment towards reshaping our healthcare system, fundamental reform is required to ensure that it remains on a sustainable path. This fundamental reform is what underpins the bill before the House today. This bill seeks to provide safer and higher quality services and to ensure the effective reporting and monitoring of health service providers.

The bill before the House today introduces a new watchdog for Australia's healthcare system—namely, the National Health Performance Authority. The main function of the National Health Performance Authority will be to monitor and publish reports on the performance of local, public and private hospitals as well as primary healthcare organisations. The hospital performance reports and healthy community reports will be made publicly available through the internet and will allow Australians to determine where they can receive the best treatment. I think this is a critically important part which illustrates that this government is committed to transparency. The information that will be provided will not just be used by government departments; it will be available. In South Australia I must commend the Minister for Health, the Hon. John Hill, who has already taken great strides in ensuring that now there is a lot of information made available not just for the department but for the public. The authority will open up the performance of the health and hospital system to new levels of national transparency and accountability. It will also identify areas of the healthcare system that require improvement. Overall the National Health Performance Authority will improve quality and drive value for money in the healthcare system. This will be important, as we want to move towards a more sustainable system.

The bill before the House is taking decisive action to deliver a better deal for patients and a better deal for communities. This is part of this government's commitment to national healthcare reform. As we have heard recently, we have developed a National Health Reform Agreement, which has now been signed off by the states and the Commonwealth. It will see the Commonwealth injecting an extra $19.8 billion into our public hospitals to 2019-20. I believe it needs to be noted that this is a stark contrast to the previous Commonwealth government, led by Prime Minister Howard, which spent a lot of its time working out ways to dud the states instead of paying its fair share to the public health system. So I am very pleased that we are looking at long-term sustainability, where the Commonwealth will step up and transparently ensure that we contribute to making this system sustainable into the future.

A new national funding pool will also be created, meaning all hospitals will be paid in the same way to ensure transparency in the way hospitals are funded. Increased transparency will improve public services and empower the public to make health decisions based on a wide range of relevant information. Advice from the National
Health and Hospitals Reform Commission stated that performance reporting is the most effective way to promote continuous improvement and improve consumer literacy on the health system. The establishment of the National Health Performance Authority by this bill will further drive the system of performance reporting that Australia's healthcare system requires. Furthermore, its independence will provide Australians with nationally comparable information. It will allow Australians to better gauge how their health services are performing in relation to other areas of Australia. This principle will significantly drive improvements in patient care and therefore enhance Australia's health system. Finally the National Health Performance Authority will build on the government's MyHospitals website, established last year, which allows Australians to compare the emergency department and elective surgery performance of public hospitals around Australia.

Guiding and securing Australia's health system into the future is one of the most important challenges facing the current generation. This government recognises that Australia must strive to ensure that we have a healthcare system that is providing all Australians with access to quality care. It also recognises that Australia's population is rapidly ageing and that our health system must be significantly improved to meet the challenges that lie ahead.

It is no wonder that the opposition leader is opposing these reforms, given his track record as Minister for Health and Ageing in the previous government. Between 2003 and 2006 the current opposition leader, then Minister for Health and Ageing, cut funding for public hospitals by over $1 billion. The opposition leader clearly does not understand the importance that Australian families place on getting access to health care when they need it. He is clearly out of touch with the needs of Australians.

While the opposition leader continues to do what he does best and say no, this government is committed to improving health services for all Australians through a transparent health system that is appropriately funded nationally and run locally. The bill before the House represents groundbreaking reforms that will positively transform Australia's healthcare system into one which is modern, integrated and high performing and which represents and supports Australians now and into the future. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Minister for Health and Ageing on the introduction of this significant legislation, and I commend the bill to the House.

**Mr SIMPKINS** (Cowan) (19:50): As always, I welcome the opportunity to speak on the bills that come before the House and that I have a special interest in. It is always good to follow the member for Kingston, and it is funny how it has worked out on so many occasions in recent times—although I would say that obviously we see things in a completely different light.

When you go to front doors around this country and have the opportunity to speak to people and you ask them what issues are of concern to them, it is normal that the default issues, if they can think of nothing else—if they can think of nothing that affects their street or that is really burning them—are always health and education. So the feeling of Australians all the way around this country is that everyone is interested in better health—and obviously education, but on this occasion I speak of health. It is one of those default issues that we will often see and often hear about, and therefore it remains forever in the minds of Australians. It is also the case that everybody in this
country—and in this parliament—wants better health. There is no doubt about that. As I also say in schools within the electorate of Cowan, both sides of this parliament believe in making this country the best it can be but the way to get there is where the difference is. The way we make this country as good as it can be and the way we make the health system in this country as good as it can be are the differences between the two sides. This is certainly the case tonight and in the debate on this bill.

When you look at what the government proposes—and I will go into some more detail on these things a little bit later—there have been plenty of grand statements and the usual thrown-in lines of 'decisive', 'historic' and maybe even 'groundbreaking'. In the end there is no doubt that there have been big promises. Unfortunately, in the case of this government, as is also the case with the big bureaucracies, there are calls for revolution and historic agreements, but at the heart of it you will always find a big bureaucracy that just appears. As always, that is the illusion of progress on the government side.

I begin my contribution tonight by congratulating Colin Barnett, the Premier of Western Australia. It was he who led the way for the states standing strong against the federal government and getting the government to back down so comprehensively on these so-called hospital reforms. As usual, what was on offer represented a further degradation of the relationship between the government and the powerhouse of this nation—I am of course referring to my home state of Western Australia. It represented a further loss of federal support to Western Australia and a further drift of a fair go from the west to the east, and therefore in our opposition to the federal government's plans we assisted in providing the opportunity for Colin Barnett to extract a better deal for our state. We should feel vindicated on the value of holding such a deal up to the light of scrutiny in this place.

The federal government originally said that it would take back a third of the GST. It was going to rewrite the intent of the GST—that growth funding for the states—and take that money back for the Commonwealth. Yet what we have seen is the big back down in a complete reversal of that 30 per cent GST clawback, which is to be replaced instead by an additional $1.6 billion for Western Australia over six years. This is another back down and further evidence of the inability of this Gillard-Brown government to match what it announces with what outcome eventually results. There have been plenty of such failures, but in order to remain relevant to this bill tonight I will have to go there on other occasions. I will not reiterate the failings of this government beyond the policy areas that we are discussing tonight and as relate to this legislation.

I would, however, like to set the scene before moving on. When I speak in my electorate I remind people that the job of government is to establish the basis on which people can succeed. It is not the role of government, at least under the coalition's political philosophy, to be at the centre of national life. Rather, we should see individuals, families and small businesses as the centre of our national success, supported with the tools to enable that success. Government should be in support, rather than telling individuals in a prescriptive manner how they should do everything in their lives. The first resort of this Gillard government is more regulation and, as we see time after time, more and more taxes. Less regulation is required, not more. Greater freedom for innovative Australian businesses and individuals is required, not the stifling nature of an increasing regulatory burden and additional bureaucracies, although more
Public Service positions in Canberra are no doubt welcomed by the members for Canberra and Fraser, particularly as the cost is borne by the rest of the country.

When I speak of additional bureaucracies it brings us to the bill that we are debating today, the National Health Reform Amendment (National Health Performance Authority) Bill 2011. This bill has the central intent of establishing the National Health Performance Authority and it will also see the establishment of the Independent Hospital Pricing Authority. The task of the National Health Performance Authority is stated to be the monitoring and reporting on the performance of local hospital networks, public and private hospitals, primary healthcare organisations and other bodies that provide healthcare services. Reflecting more locally on this, I wonder whether the authority will be able at some point to report on the Wanneroo superclinic—or perhaps they would do so if they could find it. I note, as we approach the fourth anniversary of the announcement of the Wanneroo superclinic, that it still does not exist and many are wondering how many more anniversaries will pass before a patient is actually seen at this illusory superclinic.

Should the Wanneroo superclinic ever open, it should meet the expectations of the people in my electorate. By that I mean it must be in the suburb of Wanneroo, it must be in addition to existing clinics, it must have a significant increase in the number of general practitioners available to be seen and it must comprise allied health services that are not just moved from elsewhere in Wanneroo to this other location but provided in addition to those allied health services already in existence within the Wanneroo area. What I have described are the expectations of the people of Cowan and particularly the people of Wanneroo. Those are the expectations that were built up in the lead-up to the 2007 election by the then opposition and now government. I support the delivery of exactly those additional health services as I have described on behalf of the Wanneroo community. I also reject any attempt to rebadge existing services and their representation as new services, because that would be nothing but spin. If this bill is successful, perhaps the National Health Performance Authority will be able to support the spin or, if they are truly independent, they will tell it like it is. We will see how this bill proceeds and then how the authority proceeds in the future. Of course, a lot has changed since the time when the so-called health reform plan was conceived. What we have seen is that the plan has been greatly modified, and not only along the lines of the backflip that saw a better deal extracted for Western Australia. Having been beaten up by Colin Barnett, leading to that backflip, the plan had other changes made to it as well. We can look at those changes to see how that original plan has been changed dramatically. Firstly, under this bill the substantial involvement and power of the federal health minister over the authority has been wound back. The submissions to the Senate inquiry noted how the original plan neglected the role of the states as managers, owners and operators of the state hospitals and other health service deliveries. The latest Australian Health Ministers Conference resulted in an agreement limiting the actions of the federal minister without state agreement and empowering the role of states in dealing with matters associated with the National Health Performance Authority, whilst recognising in this legislation the states' roles and authority over local health networks as well as public hospitals and providing for greater involvement and oversight from the Council of Australian Governments.
Specifically, the amended bill that we have here will see the acknowledgement of the role of state and territory health ministers as health system managers in relation to local hospital networks and public hospitals and that, in relation to local health networks or public hospitals, the federal parliament intends that the National Health Performance Authority should have regard to the role of state and territory ministers for health. In fact, the amendments that this bill brings forward will establish the National Health Performance Authority with regard to and involvement of the states but with less involvement by the federal minister. The reality is that the states, led by Western Australia, have forced the government to back down repeatedly on health matters.

Let me now be very clear about this bill. The coalition opposes the establishment of these sorts of new bureaucracies, and that will always be the case. Like so many other stakeholders who gave evidence before the Senate committee, we believe it is the right thing for this bill to be deferred until more information and the regulations are available, so that all the matters concerned with the authority can be properly assessed. As in our direct action plan on health at the last election, we oppose new bureaucracies. We instead believe that the funding for the new bureaucracies should be directed to actual frontline services, as outlined in our Real Action on Hospitals and Nursing policy and our Real Action Plan for Better Mental Health policy.

This country does not need an increase in bureaucracy, a complicated funding structure and no guarantee that funding will flow to frontline services. Rather, a health policy in Australia should be the 'beds and boards' policy of the coalition: direct action that will make a real difference by directly tying increased funding to the delivery of increased services—in effect, the productivity that this country so much needs in so many ways but that unfortunately has been missing in recent times. The government wants more bureaucracy, while we as a coalition government would reduce centralised bureaucracies and allow hospitals to better respond to the needs of patients and healthcare workers. As we know, the differences between the Labor Party and the coalition do not end there. We at least appreciate that our plan, Real Action on Hospitals and Nursing, must take pressure off the public system, and part of that involves work to ensure private health insurance premiums remain affordable. That is one of the tenets that we stand by, that we must retain full private health insurance rebates for all Australians.

The reality is that our health system is fundamentally a good one. Of course, it can always be better. When you visit most of the rest of the world you can see that our system really does stack up very well compared to others. But that should never remove the requirement for us to look for ways to improve our system. The reality is that we are better than most competing nations of our standard and those in the region. But our assessment should be based on our own criticism of ourselves, not on looking at other systems as being more favourable than ours. It is certainly the case that we need to improve, and we should always be looking at the fundamental responsibility of the parliament as a way to improve our health system.

When you look at what this bill puts before us, there is a shortage of information. There is a need for more to come out about this and for the regulations to be looked at. The stakeholders agree with this. So the right thing for the government to do is to take this bill off the program until all that information is available.
Dr LEIGH (Fraser) (20:05): On 2 August I was pleased to visit the Canberra Hospital in the company of the Prime Minister, the Minister for Health and Ageing, the member for Canberra, and Katy Gallagher, the Chief Minister of the ACT. We were generously shown around the Canberra Hospital by our ACT Health hosts, Lee Martin, Rosemary Kennedy, Kate Jackson and Sarah Majeed. It was a real eye-opening visit to see hospital reform in action; to see what is already occurring in Australia's hospitals as a result of having a federal government that is committed to improving health. Our party met with 16-year-old Jake Floro and his mother Kerrie-Anne Floro. Jake had a hip operation on 15 April and he is recovering really well.

This visit through the Canberra Hospital, one of the great hospitals in Australia, reinforced the positive experiences that I and my family have had at both the Calvary Hospital and the Canberra Hospital over recent years. I learned a lot from those personal experiences. As the dad of a couple of young boys who seem to always be falling off things, I have spent my fair share of time in emergency wards. But I have also learnt a lot about the ACT hospital system through speaking with my friends, Caroline Fahey, Mary-Ann Kulh and Mike Hall. At the outset I will speak generally about the bill, but I want to return to some ACT specifics of this bill at the end of my speech. The National Health Reform Amendment (National Health Performance Authority) Bill 2011 will deliver another $20 million in extra funding for public hospitals. In practical terms, that means more beds, more local control, more transparency; it means less bureaucracy, less waste and less waiting. Under the new health agreement that was struck with all the Australian states and territories on 13 February this year, the Commonwealth will permanently pay for 50 per cent of the growth in hospital costs. Initially, from 2014-15, the Commonwealth will pay 45 per cent and then from 2017-18 it will be 50 per cent. There will be a national funding pool, so hospitals will all be paid the same way regardless of whether they are in Bourke or Ballarat. That will deliver unprecedented transparency in hospital funding arrangements.

Across a whole range of public sector management issues, transparency drives reform. We see this in early childhood, in schools, in universities and in hospitals. The states and territories, under this historic agreement, have agreed to deliver substantial reforms. They will provide greater local control of hospitals. There will be a national price for activity based funding. As a former economics professor, and I would like to think a current economist, I regard this as a great way of driving efficiency and reducing waste. We will have new national standards and new targets to cut those waiting times in emergency departments and in elective surgery waiting lists. As someone who has spent a fair number of hours sitting in emergency departments, I know the stress that can build up while waiting for service. It is really important we do what we can to cut those emergency waiting times to make sure that those families that do not need to be in emergency rooms are not there and those who need to be in emergency rooms are seen quickly.

As a result of this legislation, there will be a new National Health Performance Authority. It is a key element of the government's health reform agenda and the COAG agreements. Its role will be to monitor and report on local hospital networks, public and private hospitals, Medicare Locals and other healthcare service providers. It will deliver clear, transparent performance reporting. There will be a new framework that will provide Australians with
information about the performance of their health and hospital service in a relevant way and which is nationally consistent. As with the MySchool website, where parents can now compare schools right across the country, patients will have more information on their local healthcare services and those patients will spur reform. The authority will produce clear reporting. It will produce Healthy Communities reports for every Medicare Locals geographic area. You will be able to see, for example, how your local healthcare services are performing, preventive risk factors and access to GP services.

I moved a private member's motion earlier this year about the importance of transparency across the board and about the reforms that are driven by having a MyChild website, a My School website and a MyHospitals website. The MyHospitals website, which went live in December last year, compares the emergency department and elective surgery performance of public hospitals around Australia for the first time. The MyHospitals website is a critical element in ensuring that Australian health services are as good as they can be.

I move on to speaking from an ACT perspective about what this means. The ACT government—has already taken action to make sure the ACT health system can respond to growing health service demand. For the ACT, one of the big challenges is that many of the patients who are served in Canberra's hospitals come in from New South Wales. That is particularly true in the ski season when many people who find themselves injured on the slopes will eventually end up in a Canberra hospital. There is a lot of pressure placed on Canberra's hospitals, which they respond to well.

A part of the reforms the ACT government has put in place is a program called Your Health-Our Priority. It is a major infrastructure program which is facilitating investments such as a new cancer centre at the Canberra Hospital. There are also important investments that the ACT government is making in e-health. I note that this is an area of major difference between the two parties in this place. Those opposite would be quite happy to do away with e-health. They would be quite happy to stick with the old paper records, the errors and the inefficiencies that are inherent in using a paper based system. But the ACT government, as with the Gillard government, is committed to moving towards e-health and recognises that faster broadband will offer new opportunities in the future. And right now we can start getting those e-health records to ensure that, if you turn up to a different GP from the one you usually see, your new GP will be able to see your entire health record. That new investment is going to be absolutely critical to reducing error rates and ensuring patients do not have to repeat their health history every time they go to see a new doctor. These big investments will ensure the ACT health system is greatly improved. The Independent Hospital Pricing Authority will be a key part of this.

The ACT Legislative Assembly has established an ACT Local Hospital Network as part of this new reform. That will be a network system that holds service contracts with ACT Health. It will comprise the Canberra Hospital, Calvary Public Hospital, Clare Holland House and the Queen Elizabeth II Family Centre. The ACT government will continue to manage the system-wide public hospital service planning and performance, including the purchasing of public hospital services, and it will be responsible for the management of the
performance of the ACT Local Hospital Network.

That Local Hospital Network, as I mentioned, will be overseen by a high-powered board. That board includes Michael Peedom, who is the Director of Legal Services of the ACT Regional Office of the Australian Government Solicitor's Office; Professor Nicholas Glasgow, the Dean of the ANU Medical School; Lynette Brown, a member of the ACT Health Council; Mary Montgomery, a member of the Calvary Health Care ACT Community Advisory Board; Colleen Duff, the Secretary of the ACT Branch of the Australian Nursing Federation; Dr Rashmi Sharma, a director of the ACT Division Of General Practice; Michael Moore, a former ACT health minister and a long-time campaigner for better health services in Canberra; John Runko, CEO of the property industry; Darlene Cox, a member of the Health Care Consumers Association; and Megan Cahill, and Associate Director in the Health and Human Services Practice of KPMG. These dedicated Canberrans will be an important part of ensuring that the Local Hospital Network serves all Canberrans.

Another exciting health reform for Canberra, which I know many of my constituents are looking forward to, is the establishment of a GP superclinic in the ACT, a GP superclinic that will ensure that we bring together many of the skills we have here in Canberra, joining together strong medical research teams, medical training teams and their expertise in delivering primary health care.

I want to use this opportunity too to pay tribute to the West Belconnen Health Co-op. My friend Michael Pilbrow has been heavily involved in this. The West Belconnen Health Co-op has done a great deal to boost bulk-billing rates in the ACT and to bring new doctors into Canberra. They are servicing one of the more disadvantaged parts of the ACT and they have expanded from their Charnwood site to open a new site in Belconnen. As part of that, they are really serving a great mission of community medicine, ensuring that doctors are there for those who need them and bringing specialists in to the West Belconnen Health Co-op so that patients do not have to travel all around Canberra to see an expert. Once a month, say, a specialist will come in and see people with particular issues.

Winnunga Nimityjah is another health centre in the ACT, an Aboriginal health service operating out of Narrabundah but servicing many people on the north side of Canberra. Winnunga Nimityjah often drives its clients down to the health service. They go above and beyond to provide a level of health care to Indigenous Canberrans. And of course, if we are to close the gap, it will be through initiatives such as Winnunga Nimityjah. I would like to use this opportunity to pay tribute to those workers there.

All of these are mainstream reforms. You would expect them to be supported by both sides of parliament. But what we have seen is the coalition opposing efficient pricing and opposing transparency. It is of a piece with much of what we have seen from the current Leader of the Opposition. The current Leader of the Opposition only has one word in his vocabulary and that word only has two letters. The Liberal Party has become the party of 'no': the party of opposition to everything. In the case of private health insurance, the current Liberal Party says that Australians without private health insurance who earn the minimum wage should be subsidising the private health insurance of millionaires. They are unwilling to means-test the private healthcare rebate for millionaires. This is what we might expect
given that the Leader of the Opposition is the man who ripped a billion dollars out of our healthcare system. It is a sad thing to see that those opposite are so committed to an ideological oppositionist agenda. The reforms that we are putting forward are sensible reforms, reforms that will deliver more beds, more transparency, more efficiency to our healthcare system. But those opposite seem only able to learn from the scare campaigns of the US Republicans and their Tea Party friends. They seem to have decided that whatever issue comes up, they have to oppose it. Maybe the next time we start talking about efficiency here, we are going to hear those opposite start to raise spectres of death panels, as the US Republicans have done.

It is sad that the modern conservative parties have now become fringe oppositionist parties. It is very different from the mainstream parties of small 'l' liberalism that the Liberal and National parties once were. They have now become the party of 'no', the party of rallies, the party of radicalism. The modern Liberal and National parties have lost touch with what ordinary Australians want. When I hold my community forums and mobile offices, Canberrans tell me that what they want is quicker access to doctors. They want access to GPs and they want to make sure that when they go to hospitals they get seen as quickly as possible. They want to know about the performance of their local hospitals and they want to be able to compare those local hospitals. They want to be sure that at all times their healthcare system is operating as efficiently as possible.

My constituents know, as, sadly, those opposite appear not to know, that a more efficient system means that we can spend more dollars on high-priority areas. We can invest in cutting waiting times, we can invest in closing the gaps and we can invest in e-health, ensuring that the technology of the future is available in Australian hospitals today. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr RAMSEY (Grey) (20:20): I rise to speak on the National Health Reform Amendment (National Health Performance Authority) Bill 2011. Just before I begin, I am just drawn to comment on the remarks by the member for Fraser, who suggested that the opposition had become a fringe opposition. I suggest he might prevail upon his Prime Minister to call an early election and we might test that opinion in the public arena and see whether in fact the majority of Australians agree with his assessment.

This bill is a demonstration that rhetoric is cheap; action is difficult. Once again we are witnessing the results of 'thought bubble' government. This government has continued to over-promise and under-deliver and this latest agreement on national hospitals is so far away from Kevin Rudd's original plans that it is barely recognisable. We on this side of the House go on almost ad nauseam on the government's failures, but it pays to reiterate them. I am sorry, but you are going to have to wear it again. Policy areas where we have seen backflips and changes of direction include Fuelwatch, GroceryWatch, pink batts, green loans, the NBN, the mining tax, asylum seeker policy—what a debacle that is—the Murray-Darling Basin reform, the live cattle disaster, the ETS and of course now the carbon tax. Paradoxically, the government is failing to deliver on the thought bubble of no carbon tax and they are actually delivering something which they said we would never have. Mr Deputy Speaker, I said this would make you a bit nauseous, a bit sick. It makes me a bit sick and that is without even mentioning the subjects of debt and surplus.

Government members have been on the doors of this place in the last few days telling us that this year, 2011, is the year of delivery
for the Gillard government. They are claiming this bill, which is really a humiliating capitulation on health reform, as one of the delivered goods. They are also claiming the national disability insurance scheme as a delivered good. It is a good idea, but it is a long way from being delivered. They say the forestry agreement is a delivered good, when in fact it is wallowing in the Tasmanian parliament again. They say the Malaysian people deal is a delivered good. They say Manus Island is a delivered good. It is far from delivered. In fact, I have even heard the fast train said as being almost a delivered good, and that probably has a 20-30-year time frame.

Dr Mike Kelly: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I believe we are discussing the National Health Performance Authority. I have not heard a word about this bill so far. I ask the member to be relevant to the discussion.

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise on the point of order. I thought I had been exceedingly generous previously. If the minister across the chamber wishes to take this point, I will enforce it very stringently on theirs.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr KJ Thomson): I note the point of order. I invite the member for Grey to debate the bill and to relate his remarks to the bill before the House.

Mr RAMSEY: I am very pleased to do so because this bill is just latest in a raft of policies that are watered-down goods. This is a bill to establish yet another layer of bureaucracy, another statutory body, and it is another attempt to improve inadequate legislation. Why is this a watered-down bill? How did we get to this point? We have to consider the record. The previous Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, gave the states 12 months to rebuild the health system or he would enforce a full takeover. He promised to end the blame game. The outcome of that commitment from Kevin Rudd was the 60 per cent funding formula, which was to take 30 per cent of the states' GST. Sixty per cent of funding was to come from the Commonwealth, and 40 per cent from the states and the Commonwealth was to meet the majority of all new costs. It was to implement activity based funding. The federal government was to take responsibility for standards and throughput. With that federal funding came the commitment—and this is very important—of local management. We were offered federal funding and local management.

When the deal fell through, when that thought bubble went away, there was the 50-50 deal, which finally came out as the meek and mild 45 per cent of increased costs from 2014-15. Interestingly enough there is to be nothing until after the next election. This funding commitment is to rise to 50 per cent in 2017-18—50 per cent of increased spending, not overall spending, and that will be after yet another election, two elections away. This is the year of delivery, and we are talking about 2018!

The government has indicated an extra $175 billion over 20 years. Twenty years is a long time for people to be able to foresee the future. It is 16 years outside the forward estimates. Chernobyl was 20 years ago. I am informed the internet was born 20 years ago today. Who 20 years ago would have predicted what influence the internet has on our lives today? To predict that there will be an extra $175 million over the next 20 years is very brave indeed. Perhaps we will put it in a time capsule. Significantly, this deal has given up the promise of Commonwealth control. The Commonwealth are instead to become a monitoring agency. The government has rolled over to the states on just about every issue. We were promised
federal funding and local control, and we have to ask: what has happened?

The federal government has totally capitulated to the South Australian government because in fact there is to be no change to the current modus operandi. The state is to keep managing public hospitals and the local management is to be achieved through one body. There is one body for the whole of South Australia, and that body is to be Country Health SA. The regions of South Australia cover around one million square kilometres and we are to have one body, which answers to itself and ultimately to the government, to run the whole hospital health system. The government has implemented hospital and community committees, which have no power. They are muzzled. They are unincorporated advisory committees. That is the South Australian government tipping its hat to local control. My electorate alone has more than 30 hospitals, including two community hospitals. I will say a little more about them later.

It gets worse because we are dealing with the whole of South Australia, not just my electorate. There will be one local board to cover all the hospitals. From Mt Gambier to Ceduna is over 1,000 kilometres by road. From Yorketown to Coober Pedy is 900 kilometres by road and to the Marla clinic— if Country Health takes responsibility for the Marla clinic, as it should do—it is 1,300 kilometres. People who are required to have knowledge about Mt Gambier also need to have a working knowledge about Marla or Coober Pedy. Where will this powerful body reside? Adelaide. This new agreement just does not stack up as local control. The news from SA Health is that they do not expect to make any changes. In their opinion the current management models meet the criteria. For the record this means: no local boards, regional bureaucrats, HACC committees with no teeth and effective control in Adelaide. So this country health board, the author of the now disgraced and discredited country health plan in South Australia, which was a plan to shut down and downgrade country hospitals, is to be given full control by the Commonwealth government of hospitals in South Australia, just as they have done in the past.

I thought back on where we had been in this debate when I was planning what I would say in the House tonight on this bill. I looked at a newsletter I published in May last year for interest. It said:

There is no detail on the commitment to local control, but it won’t mean local boards. There are vague references to Local Hospital Networks established by appointment. The news from Health SA is they don’t expect to make any changes, in their opinion the current model meets the criteria! For the record this means, no local boards, regional bureaucrats, HACC committees with no teeth and effective control in Adelaide. No change!

The government has promulgated a view that state governments are broke and the Federal Government has a bottomless bucket of money. The fact is, while both have the ability to raise taxes to pay for services, whichever level of government raises the tax, it is the same Australians who will pay the bill.

That is what I said in May last year, I think with a better degree of a view of the future than perhaps the prediction of what we will see with the next 20 years of hospital funding. So there is no change—no change in the line of responsibility, no change to local management. Watered down is hardly the word for this health agreement the government lists as one of its delivered objectives.

I spent 10 years on local hospital boards servicing country South Australia. I can only speak for South Australia, but I have been appalled by the decline in local services, particularly over the last 10 years as the city-centric government in South Australia, the
Rann state Labor government, has grasped control of hospital management. There are communities where surgery and birthing services have been withdrawn, requiring people to travel hundreds of kilometres for services their parents took for granted. This withdrawal of services leads to deskillng of local staff, dismantling and removing equipment, general rundown of hospital facilities and deferred maintenance until eventually this remote body, Country Health SA, declares the hospital is only fit as a first aid post and the locals will be better off without the service.

It is worth pointing out that the current South Australian state Labor government with the latest agreement has been endorsed as the operator of hospitals in South Australia. It is a great sadness that this government, which promised local control, has allowed that opportunity to slip. It has said: just keep doing what you are doing. I said I would mention the community hospitals affected in South Australia by the state government withdrawing funds. In fact we have passed motions in this House and in the Senate, both condemning the South Australian government and asking them to restore the funding to these three hospitals. These three hospitals are community hospitals and are serving the need just as public hospitals do in the system, but there has been no motion from the South Australian government to fix the problem and, I regret to say, it seems there has been little activity from the federal minister to actually carry out the wishes of this House and the Senate to get on the phone to John Hill and say, 'Put the money back.' In fact, the federal government, as you well know, Mr Deputy Speaker Thomson, has immense power over state governments because they provide the bulk of their funding.

Country people cannot understand how they continually pay more and more for health services but are losing their basic services. Why do they no longer have birthing services? Why can't they have elective surgery in their community? Why can't they in some cases get a broken arm set locally and instead have to drag children hundreds of kilometres? I am well aware of cases in this area enduring long hours of pain and delay waiting for something to be done that used to be delivered in their local hospital.

Remember when the midwives came to Canberra last year? They were campaigning for insurance and the right for people to have their babies in the home. That is well and good and I support them. But let me say, and I said it at the time, that women in my electorate were not coming to me and saying, 'Please, can I have a baby at home?' They were coming to me and saying, 'Please, can I have a baby in the hospital?' They were allowed to have a baby at home with a midwife but they were not allowed to have the baby in a hospital with a doctor. Instead, they have to travel. If you live in Roxby Downs, you have to travel 600 kilometres to Adelaide or 200 kilometres down the road to Port Augusta. If you live out where I do in Kimba, you are expected to go 160 kilometres to Whyalla to have a baby. I was born in the Kimba hospital and so was my—

Mr Vasta: Not that long ago.

Mr RAMSEY: Not very long ago, I must say. To think that we are actually going backwards in provision of services is of great concern to communities. To think that we are re-empowering the state government and Country Health SA to keep riding roughshod over these communities is a great loss of opportunity and an undelivered promise from this government. (Time expired)

Dr MIKE KELLY (Eden-Monaro—Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry) (20:35): What an
exciting time it is to be a member representing a rural and regional seat in this parliament and as part of this government. What a pleasure it is to be standing alongside the Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government, who is doing such a magnificent job in carrying forward regional and rural development. The most exciting part of that agenda is our health reform agenda. There is absolutely no question that for people in rural and regional areas the No. 1 issue was the neglect of their health services through those many Rip Van Winkle years of the Howard government, particularly the damage done by the Leader of the Opposition in allowing the Commonwealth's contribution to health services to drop to 40 per cent, effectively ripping a billion dollars out of the system.

This was setting state budgets in health on an unsustainable path. There was no question about it. We knew in New South Wales, for example, that by around 2045 the health budget would consume the entire New South Wales state budget. That was simply unsustainable. In addition to that we have to find more efficiencies and more savings in the system to also meet the future budgetary demands of the changing demographics and other issues that we face in this community. Also very encouraging from my point of view is the emphasis that the government is placing on preventative health to help ease the burden—an area totally neglected by the previous government. In my own region this is a critical issue. Last year I conducted a survey of the electorate and I had over 7,000 responses. It was a magnificent response from the community, engaging with me genuinely in a conversation about the needs of the community. The No. 1 issue among those 7,000 responses to that survey was health—no question about it.

The previous speaker talked about delivery, and delivery has certainly been happening apace in health in my region. This reform, the National Health Performance Authority, is part of that magnificent package that now forms the National Health Reform Agreement. It is part of those oversight and efficiency mechanisms—the three columns, as we might refer to them—which also include the clinical standards monitoring authority. Certainly we have had some issues in our region in relation to clinical standards, including the famous, or infamous, Dr Reeves incident, and we certainly know how important it is to monitor those clinical standards. We in rural and regional areas just are not prepared to put up with second best, as we are not prepared to put up with second best in relation to the National Broadband Network, which will also underpin the efficient delivery of health services in our regions. Another column is the pricing authority, which will establish the efficient cost of the delivery of these activities in our health performance agreements, our health performance monitoring authority and the performance that is delivered in the various levels of health services in the region.

The National Health Performance Authority mechanism will include functions of monitoring and reporting on the performance of local hospital networks, public and private hospitals, primary healthcare organisations and other bodies that provide healthcare service, and it will publish reports. It will also perform the functions of formulating performance indicators, collecting, analysing and interpreting performance information, and promoting, supporting, encouraging, conducting and evaluating research. You cannot run a system without information. We must be constantly keeping on top of what is a changing dynamic in the health area, with the improvements in technology, issues with
costs as they evolve and also the demographics in particular communities.

That is important for a region like mine, where there were certainly great concerns about the Greater Southern Area Health Service. There were many decent and hardworking men and women who served faithfully in the Greater Southern Area Health Service, but I think it is fair to say that there was a great deal of dissatisfaction with the way that that service worked. Mainly those people were victims of the structure of that organisation. Now we have stepped forward to cure that with the establishment of local hospital networks. These networks do give the community a voice in their system to bring it back to a more local scale that will enable it to meet, reflect and respond to the regional needs, interests and issues that the community raises. Within those local hospital networks, you will have clinical representation and you will have consumer and community representation. That is already up and running and operating successfully in Eden-Monaro. This performance authority will be able to monitor the performance of the governing councils of those local hospital networks and to ensure that they are performing to the standard necessary. There will be transparency associated with this. The minister will have the ability to publish reports as they see fit, while of course ensuring confidential material is not revealed, and certainly there are privacy protections in this legislation.

Also we have preserved the relationship with the states through this system. The state and territory health ministers will be sent copies of any reports where there is an indication of poor performance of a local hospital network or public hospital and then they will have 30 days to provide comments on the report. Once the consultation period has expired, the ministers will be provided with a copy of the final draft report and be invited to provide any further comments within 15 days of receiving that report. So the engagement with the state authorities will be effectively enshrined in here. It is important to emphasise that the difference with the previous proposal is that the states have insisted on retaining responsibility for their local hospital systems. It will now be important for the state government in New South Wales to deliver on promises made in my own region in that respect. They have asked to retain that authority; therefore they have no-one but themselves to answer to in relation to the delivery of outcomes in my region, including the undertakings that have been made to the Pambula hospital, for example.

There are many other aspects to this health reform that make up this matrix. An exciting announcement was made today by the health minister, who I believe will go down in the history of this country as the most successful health minister we have ever seen, delivering groundbreaking reform for this nation to set us on the path for a decent health service. I congratulate her on her work and the work of the government in general in delivering this package. The announcement made today—around the IT infrastructure for electronic health delivery for the personally controlled electronic health records system—is a great milestone and step forward in delivering our e-health. This e-health objective is critical because we know that up to 80 per cent of the mistakes that are made in treating patients are made through faulty record management or difficulties with record management. We also know that a lot of costs in the system arise from double servicing or over-servicing of patients. Certainly an effective and efficient e-health system will help reduce or eliminate those inefficiencies and save money in the system in that respect as well. This is another great
step forward for the system and I congratulate the minister on that announcement.

When we see the National Broadband Network rollout, we will see huge advances for regional health in terms of the delivery of telemedicine opportunities. We have already seen the Medicare schedule adjustment so that there can be combined consultations with specialists. Patients in rural and regional areas will be able to sit with their GP and consult with specialists who may be halfway around the world if necessary, without even leaving their local town. We have also seen the delivery of home based services through telemedicine for patients who may not even need to leave their home in certain circumstances. This will be a tremendous outcome for rural and regional areas: the National Broadband Network underpinning the delivery of this health system.

Certainly, we also know that there is a lot to catch up on in relation to our rural hospitals. We intend to maintain the block funding arrangements for those small rural and regional hospitals. It is very important that we do so; there is a lot to catch up on there. I know that the minister visited the Bega hospital with me and understood clearly what the situation was there, and understands the situation generally around the country.

The previous speaker talked about delivery. I am intensely proud of what we had already delivered even before the agreement was secured in my own region. As I indicated, we had urgent problems in relation to a deficiency of doctors and facilities. You will not attract decent health workforce personnel to poor facilities in isolated areas. You need to provide the support mechanisms, the incentives and the facilities. I am pleased to say that we are doing that. We have seen already the GP superclinic open and operational in Queanbeyan, doing that wonderful job of meshing our allied health services with our GP services and providing after-hours services which are so necessary.

We have seen the advancement of the GP superclinic for Jindabyne. That will be open by 2013. The process is in progress there, with consultations with council and the Southern General Practice Network. We have seen very crucial and timely investments in places like Bombala, with $260,000 to assist with a doctor's house and surgery facilities to enable us to attract a new doctor. The local doctor in Bombala, Dr Colin Pate, was just about ready to fall over with the workload that he had. He was close to packing up because he could just could not cope. That timely investment of money enabled us to attract the doctor. It is true that that doctor has now decided to move on, but because we have made that investment we will be able to attract a replacement for her.

We have also seen, of course, many investments in GP clinics all around the region to add medical training facilities for students, and this is attracting students into our region. They see the benefits and the beauty of the lifestyle in our wonderful region. We are, in fact, one of the happiest regions in the country. If you look at the wellbeing index you will see that it rates just about at the top of happy areas in this country. So once you demonstrate the lifestyle to medical students you have a better chance of hanging on to them. The facilities are there to provide good training and to give them the range of experience that you get in rural practices, which is helping to keep those personnel in our region.

There was $500,000 for the Bombala Street medical practice in Cooma. We have seen $500,000 going into the Queen Street practice in Moruya and we established a new
practice in Tuross Heads for $212,000, new dental facilities in Dalmeny for $200,000, and a mobile dental service to help with our Indigenous community for $380,000. We have paid $100,000 to a number of clinics to establish after-hours services, such as at the Brindabella practice in Queanbeyan, at the Blue House Surgery in Narooma, and also in Bungendore. There have also been investments in Braidwood to establish dental services there.

I am of course really proud to say that, most importantly of all, there is the new regional hospital—the only C1 hospital in our region—at Bega, where funding of $160 million of federal money has been committed for a brand new hospital, adding to that $10 million of state money which will bring home the final piece of the puzzle for us. This will be a magnificent, state-of-the-art facility which will take advantage of all that new technology and will add magnificently to the capacity of health service delivery in our region. On its own and in its own location it will be able to do pharmacy, pathology and imaging services. There will be 136 beds in this facility, including for the first time an expanded possibility for mental health beds. It will have an expanded emergency department and will be able to take advantage of the available technology in telemedicine and the latest developments there.

This is a facility that has been welcomed with open arms within my community. They have been absolutely delighted by this investment. But I have to say that we know that it is all under threat. All of these things—all of this health reform—is under threat. There is the $70 billion hole that we know is coming our way if the coalition were to succeed at the next election. This threatens all of this—all of it would go, including the NBN that would underpin these health services for these rural and regional areas.

You would need fibre cable to deliver it: it would go. The regional hospital in Bega would go. You would not be able to fund that hospital by taking $70 billion out of the budget, and we already know that the coalition says they would pull the pin on this health reform. It would all go; it would not be there. The funding would not be there.

My community knows that; they know what they voted for at the last election and they are seeing the delivery of it. That was the choice at the last election: there was no commitment to a regional hospital by my opponent at the 2010 election. All he offered was a paltry amount of about $1 million for the Bega hospital, which was even under costed for what he was promising.

This is the big risk: $70 billion will rip the guts out of our health system, will once again betray rural and regional Australia. It will take away all these reforms and deliveries that will finally see the sorts of services that the previous coalition government ripped off rural and regional areas or neglected to deliver to them. Now that people are seeing it they will not let it go. They have their hands on the prize, they understand what is at stake and they will not be treated as second-class citizens with the city getting the Bentley in the NBN and the country getting the Commodore. They are not going to put up with that either. The choice is very simple, and my community is ready to make that choice.

Mrs Prentice (Ryan) (20:51): I rise to speak on the National Health Reform Amendment (National Health Performance Authority) Bill 2011. It proposes yet another statutory authority, to be named the National Health Performance Authority.

We are here tonight speaking, yet again, on an amendment. But this time the legislation being amended was not introduced when Labor first came to
government in 2007, four years ago, giving us time to see what changes needed to be made. It did not even come in two years ago, or even 12 months ago. We are debating amendments to legislation passed by the House as recently as 21 March this year, less than six months ago. This seems incompetent even for this government. Then again, the legislation we are debating for amendment tonight, the National Health and Hospitals Network Bill 2010 was part of the reform put forward by former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd. With that in mind current Prime Minister Julia Gillard's attitude towards the legislation is perhaps less surprising.

The former Prime Minister and the then Minister for Health and Ageing promised that reform of the health system would not create further bureaucracy, yet here we are again debating substantive change that creates yet another layer of bureaucracy. I understand that tonight's debate is regarding just the first of two proposed authorities, two more bodies that will generate boards, administration offices and staff, growing the bureaucracy instead of providing more hospital beds and hands-on carers. Given that two bodies are being proposed under changes to the health system, I wonder why we are debating their establishment separately. Why not put both bodies forward at the same time, as the coalition called for last year? Could it be that the government is concerned that the costs involved in establishing two new bureaucracies could be better spent?

We see horror stories, absolutely terrible stories, every day in our papers about how the health system is failing Australians, how patients cannot get surgery, how patients need to be rushed to larger hospitals sometimes hours away to be treated and how patients are dying unnecessarily. This week alone I read news articles about a young boy in Sydney who unnecessarily lost his life after suffering through 12 hours of a burst appendix, a diagnosis correctly made by the first doctor he saw. I read another story about a 13-year-old girl who gave birth on a runway in transit to a larger hospital as the local facility did not have the capacity to help her. We all know these stories—we have heard them in this chamber tonight—from the terrible conditions in Townsville to Gladstone patients being stabilised before being rushed to Rockhampton, two examples from members in my home state of Queensland alone.

Hopefully based on this, the government have identified that Australia needs major reform of the health system. They are right—something historic needs to be done to improve our health system. But their solution is more bureaucracy, a bureaucracy that will be charged with monitoring and reporting on the performance of local hospitals, primary healthcare organisations and other bodies that provide healthcare services. That is a very broad role for the National Health Performance Authority. It is an especially broad task when you read through the legislation and discover that nowhere is there a definition of 'performance'. This is a body set up to monitor performance without clarity on what a well or performing health service actually is.

This is obviously cause for reservations. There are no key performance indicators, KPIs. How then will this statutory body assess performance? That is a big question which has been left unanswered. It is a question that could have been resolved through a proper inquiry. The government did conduct an inquiry. However, true to form, it was brief, it was conducted in haste and it did not address many major questions and concerns that continue to hang over this debate, questions that none of the members opposite has been able to answer. The haste with which this inquiry was conducted is
made clear in a statement made in the dissenting report:

… that a number of stakeholders that wanted to contribute to the Inquiry were unable to due to the haste with which the Inquiry was conducted.

It seems to me that the Gillard government may be trying to rush this amendment through for political reasons, rather than as true reform which will actually address health problems and provide real outcomes for Australians. Major stakeholders have concerns, including the Australian Medical Association which is calling for the legislation to be deferred as it would like to see an assessment of the impact of the legislation and details of what data must be provided to the authority by health provider organisations. That is right: as well as having no performance indicators, it is unclear what data health services have to provide.

Those opposite have spoken tonight about accountability, fixing hospitals and historic reform, but how will health providers be accountable to this body? It has no disciplinary powers. There is no way this body will be able to compel the states to improve services. Is it simply going to be a toothless tiger? Simply establishing an authority, a body of bureaucrats with the word 'performance' in its name, does not improve services. It does not make anyone accountable or improve performance in any way. Without any definitions, without indicators or benchmarks, how will this body work? That is the question stakeholders want answered, that is the question the coalition wants answered and that is the question Australians deserve to have answered.

Furthermore, as stated by the Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association, the legislation:

... fails to recognise the formal role of state/territory governments as majority funders and system managers of public health services including overall responsibility … for the performance …

It is not real reform. It is, in fact, a backward step from what the current Prime Minister's predecessor announced. Then Prime Minister Rudd promised historic reform, yet when that agreement simply could not be reached, perhaps for reasons mentioned previously, Prime Minister Gillard still heralded her 'historic reform'. However, it seems that, while the current Prime Minister was busy announcing historic reform, her Minister for Health and Ageing was quickly realising that without some serious consultation with the states and subsequent amendments this legislation would be unacceptable since so many changes had been made without the states' agreement. An emergency meeting was called and the resulting communiqué from that meeting stated that ministers from the states and territories insisted that they are the performance managers of public hospitals in Australia. So what is the new body now going to do?

On top of this, we have heard tonight from the member for Hasluck that there are already many organisations that collect data about the performance of health providers—yet another example of duplication which again raises the question of why this body is needed. Why funnel more taxpayers' money to bureaucracy for information that is already being collected? Every dollar that goes into funding data collection for a statutory body is yet another dollar removed from frontline care, from saving the lives of those such as the young boy who died from a burst appendix.

Members opposite have attacked the Leader of the Opposition tonight, accusing him of standing in the way of Australians accessing health care. A statistic is not health care. A patient who is suffering in a waiting room for hours is not comforted by the knowledge that someone somewhere is
recording how long they are waiting. They are confused and angry because that data collection just soaked up funding that might have meant they would see a doctor sooner.

A local surgeon in my electorate, Dr Christian Rowan, came to see me the other day. We were discussing the health system in Queensland, and he reminisced to me about completing his residency in Brisbane during the 1990s, recalling that an entire wing of his former hospital that was once full of beds is now full of bureaucrats. Queensland Health proudly announces on their website that they are the third-largest employer in Australia; however, a report put forward by the Australian Medical Association's Queensland branch shows that in 2008-2009 they employed 13,645 managerial and clerical staff—an increase from just 5,060 in 1995—compared to just 6,715 doctors. Additionally, these 6,715 doctors spend approximately 20 per cent of their time filling out paperwork, caught up in red tape. That is 20 per cent of their time not spent with patients, not addressing the 180,000-plus patients on the elective surgery list—20 per cent of time spent on bureaucracy on top of the paperwork already being administered by a bureaucracy twice the size of the doctors workforce.

This report was compiled back in the first round of 'historic reform' under former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and was put together to ensure such reform would be right for Queensland. I cannot imagine the disappointment that organisation would feel knowing that we are currently debating reform that is proposing to establish a bureaucratic body to somehow measure the performance of the health system that already suffers a problem with bureaucracy. When the legislation has no clarity, how will providers know how they will be affected? How will they know how their patients will be affected? Do the bureaucrats who will comprise these bodies know? Simply announcing 'historic reforms' does not cut it.

We need less talk, we need fewer bureaucrats and we need fewer amendments. We need more action; indeed, we need more outcomes. What we really need are more patients receiving better treatment, resulting in more healthy Australians. This bill simply does not give me any confidence that this will happen. It is unclear, it overlaps and it creates a growing administrative burden. It is flawed legislation, and I have grave doubts that it will provide any real outcomes for Australians.

Ms Saffen (Page 21:03): I rise to speak in support of the National Health Reform Amendment (National Health Performance Authority) Bill 2011 and in support of what this bill will do. The bill has two clear purposes. One is to insert a new chapter into the act. That will contain the provisions that will establish the performance authority. It will also amend the act to differentiate the commission from the performance authority. It will insert provisions to do with secrecy and information disclosure as well. The reason I speak in support of the bill is that, contrary to what I just heard from the opposition, it will do the things that it is designed to do. It will ultimately be about patient care and patient outcomes. That is what health is about. Why would you amend an act and set up an authority if that is not what the goal is? That is what it is all about. We talk about historic health reforms—and they are historic—but it is action, not just talk. I heard plenty of talk on the other side but there was little action over the last few years and over the 12 years they had in which to do it. They did not do it; they did not tackle the hard things in health reform.

I also speak with a little bit of experience, having served on health boards, set up health
services and been a health advocate in my area. I have had some experience and involvement in some reforms that have had to happen at the local level. One of the things in health that can be difficult is measuring performance, because we measure performance in objective ways. I can understand that some of the medical and health personnel can feel a bit apprehensive about that: 'Is it measurement of me?' A lot of people can feel like that in any workplace. Originally, it was quality assurance. When that was introduced to a hospital where I was on the board there was some nervousness about it. It was being done at a local level but also at a state level when we rolled it out, and there was a whole discussion that went on around that.

I see that the National Health Performance Authority will be a good thing in terms of patients and patient care. There is widespread support for this bill. This bill does five key things at the operative level. It changes the title. That might not seem a dramatic thing, but it is really important because it brings together a number of operations. This bill changes the objects to include the performance authority and adds some corresponding definitions. It inserts distinguishing provisions regarding the members and CEO of the commission and the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health, and introduces provisions relating to the secrecy and disclosure of information to the commission, which I will mention a bit more about later in my contribution. The bill does add that new chapter, which is a seminal chapter, to establish the performance authority. Then there are also some miscellaneous provisions. Firstly, I will deal with the secrecy and disclosure, then turn to the performance authority and its roles and functions and locate it within the policy framework of the federal Labor government since we were elected in 2007 together with the historic health reforms the health minister so rightly referred to, which were negotiated recently with Prime Minister Gillard. An offence provision is to be inserted so that anyone who is or has been an officer of the commission and has obtained information in that capacity is not able to use or disclose that information. To do so can incur a penalty by way of sentence. The sentence is substantial; it is two years imprisonment or 120 penalty units or both.

This bill also causes the insertion of parallel provisions relating to the commission, and there are, of course, permissive as well as prohibitive provisions, as the information I am talking about in this context is to be used for lawful purposes. The way I have read that is that the legislation gives it a coverall with some overriding application pertaining to patient protection, because that it is what this is about. It is about patients, so anything that is in the act that pertains to the patient is about patient protection. The policy that gives rise to this comes from the health reform that I talked about that was embarked upon in 2007 and has continued since then.

In looking at the benefits of the health reforms for patients, I understand that within the broad health reforms there are a couple of key things. First of all, there is more money. I am going on memory here, but I think there is $19.8 billion more going into the health system and going into patient care. More money does not resolve everything, but more money certainly helps. We know of the escalating costs in health and we know that they have been rising faster than state governments have been providing for in patient care. It is important to have that injection of funds. There has already been an injection of funds, and there are more funds that will be injected into the system over a period of years.
I know in my seat of Page that people who are patients—I know some people call them consumers or clients; I say 'patients' as I know when I use health services I still like to be called a 'patient', so I will stick with that word—have benefited in a number of ways. Firstly, there has been extra capital available, and in my area you only have to look at the integrated cancer care centre at Lismore Base Hospital to see the benefits there. There was additional money that came through from the federal government to allow it to come online one year sooner than it would have, so extra money was committed to capital costs to make sure that the centre was open a year ahead of time. That meant that people did not have to travel to get radiotherapy; they could have it in their area.

Also, across the road from Lismore Base Hospital, where the regional integrated cancer care centre is, we in the community are refurbishing and remodelling a 20-room accommodation building. We have put about $2.6 million into that and another $900,000 has gone in to make sure that patients and their families are able to stay close by when they are having treatment there. Money has also gone into Grafton Base Hospital. These are things that had not been provided and that communities were crying out for. When people in the opposition talk about no benefit to patients, it is absolute nonsense. You only have to look around Australia. It is not just in my electorate or just in Labor electorates; it is in electorates across Australia that these health reforms are starting to kick in.

This is a continuation of that package. So, even though I am straying a little bit off the bill before us, I am talking about the framework that this bill is located in. So, Mr Deputy Speaker, I am being indulged a bit but not too much as it is still within that framework. The performance authority is not merely a part of the health reform; it is a key element. It is part of COAG agreements and the National Health and Hospitals Network agreement. The heads of agreement was signed by all states and territories earlier this year, I think in February. That required that the performance authority would be established this year. The main purpose of the performance authority is to monitor and report on local hospital networks. It will cover Medicare locals as well, as they are being rolled out—another great initiative under the health reforms—and other healthcare service providers and, of course, the hospitals.

The authority will also deliver clear and transparent performance reporting, and it will be set against a new performance and accountability framework. For the first time, that will provide Australian patients and other people with information about the performance of their health and hospital services, and it will do that in a way that has consistency. It will be consistent at a national level and it will also be of relevance at a local level, because everything is local. We have to do things that sit and are situated within a national framework and we have to have a rational approach—we have to make sure it is set up like that—but it has to speak at a local level, and this clearly will do that. It will allow patients to have more information if they want it—and a lot do—on their local health services. Ultimately, if you have more information and people can access that, that leads to improvements in patient care, because that is what the system is set up to do.

The authority will also be able to report on the performance of our local hospital networks and the hospitals within them. I understand there will be regular performance reports on hospitals, and there will be reports within our Medicare Local geographic areas as well. That will be very useful for primary care in particular. These reports will include information about how well local health
services are performing. They will also look not only at direct patient care but also at patient care that is preventative and at access to GP services.

We have all seen the government's establishment of the MyHospitals website, www.myhospitals.gov.au. I know that a lot of people have been looking at that, and it shows some of the emergency department and elective surgery performance; it is about looking at elective surgery performance. That is really important, again, for people to know. Local people know their local hospitals. We now have the local hospital networks in place. We have the governing councils—locally we still call them the committees—and they are in place. People who know them know well how their local hospitals are working, but this gives us another measure. It is about a system that is nationally consistent and locally relevant, and it is about having a system that is our system and is not alien to us. Sometimes the health system—how it works and how it operates—can be a bit of a mystery to people, and we live in a day and age when that is just not acceptable. Things like that have to change, and this amendment—this bill—is part of that whole national health reform package. In closing, I want to say that I commend the minister for the really good work—rather exacting work—that she has been able to do in this difficult area.

Mr BUCHHOLZ (Wright) (21:18): This bill, the National Health Reform Amendment (National Health Performance Authority) Bill 2011, proposes to establish a statutory authority known as the National Health Performance Authority. It introduces amendments to the National Health and Hospitals Network Act 2011, which was only passed by the House on 21 March this year. The National Health and Hospitals Network Act establishes the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care as an independent statutory authority. If enacted, this bill will amend the National Health and Hospitals Network Act 2011 by changing its title to the National Health Reform Act 2011. Still to come is further legislation which will establish a third statutory authority, the Independent Hospital Pricing Authority. When the initial bill was introduced last year, the coalition called for the government to make all provisions to establish all of these bodies at the one time. But, as usual with the government, what we have is a piecemeal approach of bill after bill and amendment after amendment.

It is worth recounting the history relating to this bill, the authority that it creates and the warnings and concerns that have been sounded loudly. It is an outstanding example of the ineptitude of this government. When the minister introduced the initial bill, the National Health and Hospitals Bill, in September last year, as with virtually anything this government attempts to do with health, it was described as 'historic' and as delivering on the government's health reform agenda. Of course, the so-called reform agenda was somewhat different back then. These were the Rudd-Roxon reforms and, as the minister told the House, they were all about the hospital networks that would be funded nationally and then run locally. At that time the current Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, was still on board with Kevin Rudd's reforms, telling the Committee for Economic Development of Australia in November last year:

From July 1, the Commonwealth's share of hospital funding will increase to sixty per cent … GST retention and dedication to health care will commence.

As with so many of this government's promises, that just did not happen. Julia Gillard earlier this year unceremoniously dumped the Rudd clawback of the GST and the commitment to the major funding of the
public hospitals and is now going to provide only around 40 per cent of the public hospital funding. Yet in last year's election campaign the Prime Minister also stated:

... I regard health care as one of the greatest responsibilities of any government.

... ...

If my government is returned to office on August 21, I will pursue our national reforms until the job is done.

We all know that standing by commitments and promises to the Australian people is not high on this Prime Minister's list of achievements for her government. Her action in health is every bit as vigorous as the reversal of her promise that no government she led would introduce a carbon tax, a tax that Australian people do not want yet one that she steadfastly insists on inflicting on them by the middle of next year.

The National Health Performance Authority is to be charged with monitoring and reporting on the performance of local hospital networks, public and private hospitals, primary healthcare organisations and the bodies that provide health care services. It was to be an incredibly wide-ranging brief. Unfortunately, the bill provides absolutely no performance indicators that the proposed authority would monitor and report upon. It just sounds hard to fathom that a bill with such intense overtures has no performance indicators. The government controlled House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health and Ageing held an inquiry into this bill. There was one extremely brief public hearing for the Department of Health and Ageing to answer seemingly one question and a report from the committee was then tabled with one recommendation, that being for the House to pass the bill with a minor amendment requiring an annual report to the parliament.

Given that submissions to the inquiry outlined serious reservations regarding this legislation, coalition members presented a dissenting report that it would be unwise for the House to pass the legislation until stakeholder concerns were addressed. The dissenting report noted:

... there are far too many unanswered questions about the National Health Performance Authority ...

The House should not debate this bill until the Government clarifies ...

matters. It also noted:

... a number of stakeholders that wanted to contribute to the Inquiry were unable to due to the haste with which the Inquiry was conducted.

This debate has been on the agenda for many months and to think that the process would have been rushed through is unthinkable, so it is worth looking at some of the detail of what the stakeholders said about this legislation. The explanatory memorandum to this legislation states that its measures will have no regulatory impact on business or individuals. However, the AMA bluntly responded, 'We do not believe that this is a true statement.'

The Australian Private Hospitals Association has concerns that this new authority will simply add 'yet another layer of compliance burden for both the public and private hospital sectors'. Its submission to the House committee inquiry stated that the national data collection must replace the current system of multiple reports to multiple government agencies which it says place 'a significant regulatory compliance burden' on private hospitals.

The bill was also the subject of a Senate committee inquiry. The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners warns that the provisions of this bill hold long-term threats. They will:
... harm the current high standard of medical services, and consequently health services, delivered to the community.

Catholic Health Australia held similar concerns in its submission to the Senate and stated:

The legislation as currently drafted is very broad – indeed vague – on the scope, range and detail of data that will be required to be submitted.

It wanted to see detail set out in the regulations that would enable the parliament to exercise oversight. It said such detail was needed to avoid unintended consequences. Looking at a particular incident in the UK, it said:

We need, for example, to learn from the recent experience of the Mid-Staffordshire NHS Trust in United Kingdom, where it has been reported that between 400 and 1200 excess deaths together with appalling lapses of patient care and hygiene occurred between 2005 and 2009 as a result of the local board and hospital management focusing more on meeting performance and cost cutting targets than on actual patient care.

The College of General Practitioners pointed out that it was unclear whether general practice will be monitored by the authority and clarity is needed on this issue.

Catholic Health Australia echoed many of those points and also called for clarity on the role of the authority, noting that the Australian Commission for Safety and Quality in Health Care, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and the Australian Bureau of Statistics already collect data on hospitals and health services. CHA also wanted the legislation drafted in such a way that the governance arrangements of the authority would reflect the makeup of the Australian health system and therefore would have members with knowledge of public and private hospitals, primary health care and private or non-government healthcare provisions. A submission to the Senate inquiry from the Council for Procedural Specialists queried the very need for the authority and said it could find ‘no justification or compelling case as to why it is needed’.

There were recurring themes throughout many of the submissions to the House and Senate committees, namely, that there is a lack of clarity about this legislation and the authority it will establish, vagueness about what it will do, a lack of goals and objectives, concern about duplication with other new agencies this government is establishing and with existing agencies, worries about the administrative burden being placed on health service providers and concern about the composition of the authority board.

Predominantly, this bill tries to speak to the intent of giving power to the regions by having their own boards. However, the confronting reality is that the boards will neither have the power to make local decisions nor employ staff on a needs basis. This is just another expansion of Labor’s overarching centralised policies which continually haunt the political landscape. This bill does not speak to decisive action on waiting rooms, yet it speaks to predetermined goals of 90 per cent of patients being treated within four hours. When I speak with my local practitioners, who are already under duress, some suggest these goals are laughable.

This bill gives no guarantees to people on waiting lists—at either my Beaudesert Hospital or the Gatton Hospital—that they are going to be treated any quicker. Introducing another layer of bureaucracy does not assist the frontline staff in meeting their day-to-day demands. These reforms are not patient focused and it would appear that the only focus of this government is to create a record number of bureaucrats in an already bloated public sector.
What we are looking for is flexibility for the people on the ground to be able to make decisions that impact on their workplace on a daily basis without having to deal with another layer of bureaucracy, without having to deal with a regional body that could be based hundreds of kilometres away and without having to play second fiddle to larger hospitals that will have their own priority lists. Once more, regional Australia will be left out in the cold.

As I have alluded to in my speech, too many of the peak body groups are starting to lose confidence in this system. More changes at the top, increased bureaucracy and unanswered questions ultimately end up producing fewer results on the ground.

Mr Oakeshott (Lyne) (21:28): In the very short time that I have to speak on the National Health Reform Amendment (National Health Performance Authority) Bill 2011 tonight, I will refer to some administrative matters. One is that I understand there is a second reading amendment before the House from the coalition which states:

... the House declines to give the bill a second reading until provisions establishing the Independent Hospital Pricing Authority, including its functions and responsibilities, are presented to the House for its consideration.

Likewise, I will be presenting in detail an amendment as recommended via the House committee that worked on some aspects of this bill. That will be in the consideration in detail stage and I understand there are substantial government amendments to be presented at that stage. I encourage all members to have a look at those amendments because in many ways what we started with when it was first introduced in this parliament—

Debate interrupted.

**ADJOURNMENT**

The Deputy Speaker (Hon. B.C. Scott): Order! It being 9.30 pm, I propose the question:

That the House do now adjourn.

**Murray-Darling Basin**

Dr Stone (Murray) (21:30): I rise to speak on a matter of great concern to food and fibre producers in the Murray-Darling Basin. While the Gillard government is hell-bent on the false economy of buying water off financially stressed irrigators through tenders, removing it from food production use for all time, the coalition, the water authorities, state government agencies and the communities in the basin understand that the most cost-effective and nation-building thing to do is invest in on-farm irrigation system water use efficiency measures. There is, however, a remnant of the coalition's $10 billion 10-point national water plan funding that the Gillard government has allowed to be used for on-farm water use efficiency measures. The first round was delivered a little while ago and the second round of this funding, some $150 million, was announced by the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, Tony Burke, on 7 July this year.

You can imagine the basin community's shock and derision when they saw, amongst the list of nine successful delivery partners to receive a share of the $150 million, a brand new company called Irrigation Efficiency Partners Pty Ltd, with a registered address in a private house in Lavington. This bid received the second highest grant amount: $32,291,000. Successful delivery partners applicants are supposed to supply three years of annual reports and audited financial statements of their business activity for the last three full financial years. But this new company only became registered with an
ABN on 21 March 2011, a mere 10 days before the closing date for applications. As well, the directors and shareholders include companies and organisations that appear to me to contravene the quite clear and specific guidelines about who is and is not eligible to become a delivery partner. On page 8 of the guidelines for the on-farm irrigation efficiency program, round 2, it says organisations cannot be delivery partners if, for example, they are 'organisations which directly supply or install irrigation equipment'. The trouble is that, while that is quite clearly stated on page 8 of the eligibility criteria, there is also another government document, the DSEWPC document called 'On-Farm Irrigation Efficiency Program Questions and Answers', which sets out on page 3 who is not eligible to submit an application as a delivery partner. It says that where an organisation does supply or install irrigation equipment, they are still eligible to apply as a potential delivery provided:

(a) The equipment supplied does not form part of a proposed project type, or
(b) … if the equipment supplied or installed does not form part of the proposed project type then Australia Government funding will not be sought for that equipment supplied or installed with the relevant cost met as part or in kind cash contribution of the applicant.

I am concerned about this because listed as a director and shareholder of the brand new Irrigation Efficiency Partners is Centre Irrigation Pty Ltd of Ballarat. To me that seems in clear contravention of the criteria, depending on which bit you read, but I am afraid it is spelled out in the government agency document. It does not sound like the equipment is going to be a gift from the delivery partner either. So what is going on?

I have not yet mentioned that there are three former Labor MPs who are shareholders of Sustainable Soils and Farms Pty Ltd, which in turn is a shareholder of the delivery partner Irrigation Efficiency Partners Pty Ltd. These three former Labor MPs are Mr Neil O'Keefe, who is a director of Water for Rivers, Mr Gavan O'Connor and Mr Bob Sercombe. The Victorian minister for water, Peter Walsh, has already called on Mr O'Keefe to assure him that he has no conflict of interest with the various hats he tends to wear, for the previous Victorian Labor government and now the federal Labor government. I think this is a very serious matter. I have written to the minister about it. He says the job is right, there is no real problem. I think there is a problem. The $32 million needs to go to an organisation which will deliver on-ground water use efficiency measures. Our irrigators and food and fibre producers must have this money spent wisely by organisations that are playing by the rules and money must be given out conscionably by government.

Blair Electorate: Roads

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (21:35): I wish to commend the Prime Minister, who came to my electorate of Blair on 21 July 2011, for the commitment of a further $478 million towards repairing flood damaged roads in Ipswich and for the Lockyer Valley, which is now in the seat of Wright but used to be in the seat of Blair. This funding is part of Operation Queensland, the largest reconstruction task in the state's history. The funding will reconstruct sections of the
The highway between Ipswich and Toowoomba. A total of 62 kilometres between Marburg and Withcott on the Warrego Highway will be rebuilt.

The federal Labor government's response to the flood crisis has been swift, direct and generous. The floods damaged about 101 kilometres of road in Ipswich and the Lockyer Valley. The funding is essential for rural parts of my seat of Blair. Sixty per cent of Ipswich is rural. Farmers in the Lockyer Valley, small-business operators and the mums and dads who work in Ipswich, Toowoomba and Brisbane rely on those roads. The ongoing road repair will create 1,400 jobs in the region over the next three years.

It is vital to understand that the flood reconstruction phase is really only beginning. What we have been doing since January 2011 is getting emergency repairs done to these roads. The roads that will be reconstructed include the Warrego Highway. The state LNP member for Lockyer has been campaigning for a long time on this issue, failing to acknowledge, of course, that the Howard government capped road funding for the Warrego Highway and that it was this government that massively increased the funding its repair and maintenance. The Warrego Highway is a particularly important highway for the electorate of Blair as it links Ipswich and Toowoomba. It is also important for the whole of South-East Queensland. The Warrego Highway will be fixed at various places as a result of the road reconstruction. The Karrabin-Rosewood Road, which is particularly important in rural parts of Ipswich, is an important road infrastructure project which needs to be repaired for the RAAF Base at Amberley.

The Lockyer Valley Regional Council mayor, Steve Jones, contacted me before the big flood hit around 10 January this year and asked me to engage with the federal Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government, the Hon. Simon Crean. Minister Crean came out to the Lockyer Valley and Mount Sylvia, and the member for Wright tagged along. I was pleased to see him there. We talked to farmers. It was devastating to see what had happened. He also, at my request, met with the council CEOs and staff of Ipswich City Council, Somerset Regional Council and Scenic Rim Regional Council. We poured a lot of money into helping these councils with community infrastructure, bridges and roads, but it is particularly important that we note that this is critical to get South-East Queensland back on its feet.

The coalition, regrettably, has failed to support South-East Queensland in the recovery and reconstruction by failing to support the flood levy. I think the coalition has shown a pattern of contempt for Queensland in this regard. The Leader of the Opposition has made this crystal clear by his failure to understand the geography or the electoral demography of South-East Queensland and his failure to recognise the electorates which were damaged in the flood. The opposition to the one-off flood levy, which is the cost of a weekly cappuccino, is a disgrace. The opposition has failed to support the reconstruction of South-East Queensland.

The roads are being recovered and reconstructed because we made a commitment to do so against the opposition of those opposite who failed to care for the road infrastructure in South-East Queensland. They were promising for many years to duplicate the Toowoomba bypass, but their failure to do so showed contempt for the people of Toowoomba. The opposition treated them disgracefully by promising and promising and not actually delivering. There was a failure to fix the
Blacksoil Interchange in Ipswich, which is crucial for all of South-East Queensland, for 11½ years. Again, they have shown contempt for the people of South-East Queensland with their opposition to the Ipswich Motorway reconstruction. Once again, roads are being fixed up in Ipswich and in the Lockyer Valley because the federal Labor government committed to road infrastructure in South-East Queensland against the opposition of those opposite. I cannot count the number of times the coalition have campaigned locally against road infrastructure like the Ipswich Motorway, like the Warrego Highway and like the Brisbane Valley in South-East Queensland. The coalition failed to fund these areas, which are particularly important.

(Time expired)

National Disability Insurance Scheme

Mr EWEN JONES (Herbert) (21:40): I remind the member for Blair that he is in fact in government and can do these things. He does not have to rely on the opposition's blessing.

I rise to speak on behalf of and in favour of the National Disability Insurance Scheme. The only time that all four candidates in the election for Herbert last year were in the one place at the same time was at a disabilities forum at the RSL in Townsville. The four candidates for Herbert were there in front of a disabilities audience and were asked to explain our positions on disability. Scott Stidson was one of the key movers. One of the big things that came out of that meeting, the one that really got to me, was a lady who stood up and said it was her first afternoon off in 14 months and she had chosen to take it to come to the forum. During the cyclone she rang me and said that she had tried to hook up her husband's bed to a generator to enable him to tilt and to move. One of the lessons that we learnt from the cyclone was that there are not so many disabled people in a suburb that the council or the SES cannot go round and knock on the door and just say, 'Are you okay?' That alone stood out as to how important disability is in North Queensland and how seriously all sides of this House take disability.

Since then I have been besieged with people that have come to see me—people from Cootharinga North Queensland. I was the very first and still have been the only MC at the Cootharinga North Queensland—it used to be the North Queensland Spastic Welfare League—cocktail party, which is held every year and raises up to about $40,000 or $50,000. I am chief MC and auctioneer. I am not very good but, by jingo, I am cheap. That organisation has grown a great deal and does a lot. The cocktail party is now one of the must-go-to events in North Queensland.

The NDIS is going to cost this country a lot of money, but is it money that we need to spend? Is it money that we should spend? Is it money that we can spend? I would say yes to all three. I am sure members on both sides of this House say that as well. As I have said to everyone in the disability sector in North Queensland, it is not so much whether we get it in or not but how it is implemented that will be important.

I was at a disability morning tea the other day organised by Cootharinga North Queensland and at that morning tea every state member of parliament had ticked yes, they support the NDIS. Every councillor had ticked yes, they support the NDIS. I was the only federal politician that had ticked yes. Other people had obviously either not been canvassed or not given a response. I stood up at that morning tea and said that the problem we have is not so much whether it will be implemented or not but how much of a noise we can possibly make. I made the point to
the people there that I hold the seat of Herbert by 3,124 votes. If you get 3,125 people to change their mind on one single issue, and that is disability insurance, I am gone. It has to be done seat by seat, area by area, state by state, nation by nation until we get this across the line. That is how serious this is. I said to the councillors who were there, 'It is all very well and good to be in favour of the NDIS now, but what if the system comes up and it is going to be levied through your rates? Are you still going to be in favour of it?'

The question is: how is this thing going to be implemented? It is not a matter of whether it is going to be implemented or not but how it is going to be done, and that is what has to be done.

We have a guy in Townsville by the name of Garth—I will not give the guy's full name—who was in a workplace accident and is now in a wheelchair. When the ABC radio was doing the cross on the NDIS, they were talking to the Spina Bifida Association, the Endeavour Foundation and Cootharinga. We are all just 30 seconds—one bad accident—away from being in a wheelchair. We have to keep that in mind. Garth is trying to raise money to buy an all-terrain wheelchair to roll around Australia. I have said that I will help him with that. If nothing else, it will get him out of Townsville and out of my hair for the next six to eight weeks, because every time I see him he says, 'How are we going with that NDIS?' I say to you, Mr Deputy Speaker: we in this House need to be fully supportive of that.

**Homelessness**

**Mr LYONS (Bass) (21:45):** I endorse the comments of the previous speaker. In disability it should not be about how you obtain the disability; it is about how we should look after the vulnerable.

I rise tonight to discuss a very important issue in society today: homelessness. The recent National Homeless Persons Week is a timely reminder that homelessness in Australia is real. Many people are without a home and are not lucky enough to have a warm, safe and welcoming place to stay. It is estimated that 105,000 Australians are homeless on any given night. According to Homelessness Australia:

Each day nearly one in every 200 Australians is homeless, without safe, secure or affordable housing.

The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program Act 1994 defines a homeless person as a person who does not have safe access to secure, adequate housing. This includes housing that may be damaging their health, threatening their safety, marginalising the person, in threatening circumstances or without security of tenure. A person is also considered homeless if he or she is living in accommodation provided by a SAAP agency or some other form of emergency accommodation.

I recently joined with Senator Helen Polley to accompany a local support group, City Mission, on their late-night run in Launceston to provide food for those on the street. I was amazed at the number of people who came to the van for a hot drink or something to eat. What I found particularly concerning was the number of young people who were on the street. Youth made up the majority of the people who came to us for a chat. I would like to take this opportunity to publicly congratulate City Mission in Launceston on the fantastic work that they do in supporting the homeless and, in some cases, the substance affected, population of Launceston.

I would also like to congratulate the students of St Patrick's College who are willing to give up their time late on a Friday night and into Saturday morning to volunteer...
their help to serve the hot drinks and food. It is heartening to see young people getting involved with those less fortunate than themselves in our local community.

According to Homelessness Australia, 23 per cent of Australia's homeless are children—an amazing statistic—and, of every 42 children under the age of four, one has experienced homelessness. These figures are astounding and very saddening. Homelessness may be the result of a range of factors, some of which include poverty, unemployment, domestic violence, family breakdown, drug or alcohol abuse, gambling or a lack of suitable available housing. As Homelessness Australia explains, homelessness results in social and economic costs not only to the individual but also to families and communities. I quote:

Homelessness means that every day almost one in every 200 Australians lives without their most fundamental human rights as they are often excluded from participation in a range of social, cultural and recreational activities because of their circumstances.

Homelessness is real. Too often people try to ignore it and turn their heads. These people need support.

The Labor government is offering support. The Australian Labor government is committed to supporting the homeless in our population. There has been an additional $5 billion directed to homelessness since 2008. A national plan of action on homelessness is in place which is set to halve the rate of homelessness by 2020 and offer support accommodation to those who seek it. This is being done through supported accommodation packages and other support programs and services. Thousands of new houses have been built for the homeless. In addition to this, the Labor government is delivering about 80,000 affordable and social housing dwellings. Additional services for the homeless have also been rolled out across the country. I have attended the opening of some of these accommodation places. People are just so grateful. It is amazing. One woman said, 'I have never been in a house that has been mine.' It is a very sad statement, but she is extremely happy.

The Labor government is committed to providing services for the people in need and to provide the services required to prevent homelessness from happening in the first place. Homelessness is all around us, but we need to do what we can to offer support and the services required for these vulnerable people so that they have the opportunity to create a future. (Time expired)

**Ryan Electorate: Glenleighden School**

Mrs PRENTICE (Ryan) (21:50): I have previously spoken in this parliament about a unique school in my electorate of Ryan: Glenleighden School. Glenleighden is the only school of its kind providing invaluable support, assistance and education for children with a serious disability. Catering for children with severe speech and language impairment, they provide a multidisciplinary program involving a range of specialist therapies within an educational setting.

Glenleighden School provides invaluable services. Having been a supporter of the school for many years, I know just how important it is to children and families who live with primary language disorder. Primary language disorder is a debilitating disability that severely impairs a child's capacity to communicate and participate in schooling and life in general. The difficulties children with PLD face in dealing with the complexities of language impact dramatically on their overall development particularly their capacity to access an education curriculum. PLD children struggle with learning, can be easily distracted, are readily given to frustration, and can be reluctant to learn new skills. In short, it is a...
disability that has a significant lifelong impact on a child. Not being able to communicate, to understand others and to deal with the complexities of life in general is a very serious disability. The Gillard government do not agree with this. They do not recognise children with PLD as eligible for their flying start for children program, leaving these children and their families in limbo as Glenleighden struggles to raise its own funds even to continue to operate, let alone meet increasing demands. This is exacerbated by the Queensland Bligh Labor government. As the My School website reveals, the Glenleighden School is the most poorly funded special education facility in all of Queensland.

Both Vikki Rose Graydon of the Glenleighden School and I have written to numerous ministers regarding this lack of recognition that sees PLD children not covered by the flying start program; however, no minister has been able to provide an answer as to why the disability is not recognised or indeed why Glenleighden receives significantly less funding per student than any other independent school and other special assistance schools around Australia. No minister can explain why Glenleighden, the only school of its kind in the Southern Hemisphere, must charge their students' families higher fees for a service that they cannot get anywhere else simply because they do not get enough support and recognition from the government at any level.

It was interesting to note, however, in Minister Garrett's response that the government has proudly told Glenleighden that children with a disability will soon have access to services such as occupational therapy as part of their education. Glenleighden has been in operation for 30 years and offers not only occupational therapies but also physiotherapy, psychology, speech pathology, music therapy and other specialised, multidisciplinary approaches to ensure children have the best chance of reaching their potential.

I have seen the outcomes of Glenleighden's work. There have been 30 years of quiet achievement for their students, who are seemingly so often overlooked as their impairment is not always physical. It seems, perhaps because of this quiet achievement, that Glenleighden itself is now being overlooked. That is why they are speaking up. Vikki Rose Graydon, Cae Ashton, Bruce Grundy and the entire team at the school have taken up the challenge to have language disorders classified nationally as a disability. It is vital that this school receive enough funding to continue its work.

There is no cure for neurological based language disorders but appropriate support and therapy can significantly accelerate the development of language and cognitive skills. Most importantly, it is believed that the earlier therapy begins the better the results achieved. This is why Glenleighden needs adequate funding. Parents, having finally discovered the root of their child's impairment, should not then have to face the stress of an unaffordable education. The Glenleighden School, which does so much, should not have to struggle to accept a child in need because its funds are already stretched too thin. This Gillard Labor government must recognise primary language disorder with a national disability classification and give the Glenleighden School and its students a fair go.

Industrial Relations
Disability Services

Mr LAURIE FERGUSON (Werriwa) (21:55): Over the last month the State Secretary of the New South Wales CFMEU, Mal Tulloch, has received some media
coverage with regards to the undermining of conditions and wages of New South Wales building workers through the utilisation of foreign labour. Often people are very desperate and unaware of the nuances of Australian industrial practice and are clearly exploited by Australian based companies. This is not the only form of exploitation that bedevils the industry. Recently the case of William Hodge from the Campbelltown region has started to receive some notoriety. William, despite being persuaded by his employer to take out an Australian business number—supposedly the total criteria as to whether you are an employee or not—for 11 years has worked as a bricklayer for DMW Bricklaying, whose principal is Mr Darren Williams.

The superannuation rules and employment rules state that if 80 per cent of your time is with a particular employer and they in reality determine your hours and conditions, then you are an employee and thereby you are entitled to superannuation payments. In the course of 11 years this man, who has a mortgage, a wife and three dependent children, has received no superannuation payments from this company. In addition, there has been no holiday pay, sick pay or wet weather pay. With regard to superannuation, the total amount due is now $70,000.

This is not an unusual circumstance in the industry. It is estimated that approximately 170,000 people in the building industry are in fact sham contractors. Basically pieces of paper are exchanged and thereby there has been some attempt to construe them as not being in fact employees. In the industry they also obtain a front person, who is usually a person of very little means, to set up a company, exploit workers for a period of time, collapse that company and start all over again.

I am pleased to note that Unions New South Wales, the state organising body of the trade union movement, has taken up this case. William Hodge is currently conducting a one-man picket outside the offices of Skyton Developments. Skyton come into this because they are a large development company that in due course subcontracts to DMW Bricklaying. Whilst DMW are technically the employer, the reality is that companies such as Skyton should not get away scot-free when they utilise contractors, ask no questions and do not care whether the subcontractor who has a close relationship with them in fact abides by conditions. They are simply going for the lowest price possible. By doing that of course they exploit workers in the industry.

I very much associate myself with Mr Hodges's efforts to make sure that Skyton, who indeed have a very attractive website and are currently finishing a project in Warby Street Campbelltown, come to the party and their state manager, Mr Gus Martinez, gets a little more active about finalising this matter. I intend to publicise his efforts far more in the near future. I hope the CFMEU is successful in this campaign.

I will now briefly turn to the recent disability efforts by a variety of groups in my electorate, including the Share Care Centre, Northcott Disability Services, the Australian Foundation for Disabilities and the Macarthur Community Representatives Network. All of these actively campaign for national insurance with regard to disabilities. I was approached by and interviewed Sherie Avalos, the CEO of Share Care and a former Disability Services Australia and Macarthur Disability Services employee. I am impressed by the efforts of parents, carers, community organisations et cetera in the Campbelltown-Macarthur region. I have to say that, having represented Reid for 20 years, the level of activity on these issues
was nothing like I have witnessed over the period that I have represented Werriwa. Whether it is because of the presence of housing department properties or an inclination by some communities to be more open in their discussion of these problems, Campbelltown, Werriwa, Macarthur et cetera are characterised by incredible activity on this issue. Constituents would be pleased that the current government has reversed the Liberal Party's record of disability cutbacks and funding freezes. They would be keen to note that the current government has brought in the $7.6 billion National Disability Agreement and that it has in recent days announced its support for national insurance in this field.

Wright Electorate

Mr BUCHHOLZ (Wright) (22:00): I rise to inform the House of proceedings which have happened recently in my electorate. We are still rebuilding from the floods. We are dealing with families who are still struggling to get paid out by insurance companies to this day. We are referring claims to the finance ombudsman, and Legal Aid are advising us that they are only experiencing a one in six change in determination from the insurance companies as a result of that external dispute resolution. However, as a community we will continue to rebuild and put our best foot forward.

On a lighter and good note I want to take this opportunity to commend the Lockyer Valley Regional Council, their mayor, Steve Jones, and all councillors on a magnificent piece of rebuilding initiative. It speaks to the council's ability that they were able to release a couple of hundred acres on top of some high ground and break it up into 90 house lots. More recently the council has conducted a land ballot swap. To people on the lower ground whose homes have been condemned or who are unable to rebuild because they are in low lying areas, the council have simply said: 'Go to the top of the hill and pick out a couple of blocks that you would like to put your preference on in the ballot. On 4 August come along and we will pull your name out of the hat and you'll end up with a block of land on the top of the hill. So, when your insurance company does pay, you can go and settle up there and know that you will be safe from future floods.' That is a great thing that they are doing in that community.

However, that is about the end of the good news stories in my electorate. I have 100 dairy farmers who are extremely concerned about investing confidently into their market with the continual pressures of the Coles and Woolworths milk pricing mechanisms and the 'Down, Down' campaign. They are unsure as to what their future holds. I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge Dolores and Alan Stock, a couple of local dairy farmers in the Lockyer Valley area who do a great job in informing my office and updating us from a dairy perspective.

I would also like to bring to the attention of the House the concerns that my beetroot growers have. It may be unknown to the House that every single beetroot grower that used to produce for Golden Circle comes from either the Lockyer Valley or the Fassifern Valley, which are both horticultural valleys in my area. They now have 20,000 tonnes of beetroot and no market at Golden Circle to take their beetroot. Being a root crop they will probably switch to growing carrots. Whilst losing 20,000 tonnes of beetroot may not raise concerns, the concern for my growers is that dropping another 20,000 tonnes of carrots onto the market could potentially have an impact on the sensibility of the whole national carrot market. So there are some troubles ahead there. I would like to acknowledge Linton Brimblecombe who is working closely with a group of beetroot
growers and Golden Circle in trying to work out a restructuring package, which I would trust that the federal government would assist with as well.

We have also had a number of outbreaks of the hendra virus in our area. It is a big horse area. You may remember the story the other day about Liz and Neil Fearon from near Boonah. The normal passage of the hendra virus is from bat to horse to human. For the first time the virus left that path and was picked up by a canine, Dusty the dog, a little two-year-old kelpie. The dog did not show signs of having the hendra virus but showed signs of building antibodies to the virus where on that very property they had put down three horses. We believe that that dog had a lot of research potential and ongoing benefits, but under the current biosecurity regulations in Queensland the dog's life was terminated. My heart goes out to the Fearon family in particular for losing not only three horses but also the family pet.

When you mix all that up with the carbon tax I just hope that I will be able to stand here in the near future and tell you a good story about my electorate.

**Television Sports Broadcasts**

Mr GEORGANAS (Hindmarsh) (22:05): I rise tonight to speak about a very important issue in the chamber—one that affects not only many thousands of the residents in the electorate of Hindmarsh but a great many South Australians. I have been very concerned to read reports recently in the local media that ABC television may cease the broadcast of the South Australian National Football League games in South Australia. These reports are of great concern to me as they are to many of my constituents, who stand to lose a vital connection to the community as well as the enjoyment of participating in, watching and following sport if this does go ahead.

The SANFL broadcasts on ABC Television provide great enjoyment to thousands of my constituents and many South Australians, especially those who cannot attend the local games due to age, infirmity, disability, financial status, distance, or family or caring responsibilities. Many of my constituents in these situations rely on the ABC telecasts of the SANFL games to allow them to continue to participate in the excitement and enjoyment of following their favourite team in their local state competition. For many, paid television subscriptions are not an option.

ABC television has been broadcasting SANFL games for more than 25 years in South Australia and, in recent weeks, many SANFL chief executive officers, including those from clubs in my local area, have made comment on the nature of the stellar 25-year partnership that the SANFL and the ABC have had to date. I would like to share some of those comments from CEOs with you. I have been a fan of the West Adelaide Football Club for many years and am the club's No. 1 ticket holder. The CEO of West Adelaide Football Club, Kym Russell, has said ABC coverage has been fantastic for the game. He said in an interview:

I think they provide a very good service for the state and it would be a shame for someone in Sydney to make a decision to cut a local product. I couldn't agree more with Kym. The CEO of the Glenelg Football Club, Rob Nelson, has said:

I can say, without knowing all the details, SANFL coverage by the ABC as a long time broadcaster is highly important and critical to our presence in the market place.

The Woodville-West Torrens chief executive, Chris Davies, said:

From our perspective the ABC coverage to the SANFL competition is critical.

And Port Adelaide general manager, Neil Rawlings, said:
I think from the clubs point of view it would be devastating ... I think it will suffer.

Most importantly, it is clear that the community does not want to lose this wonderful part of our history, our culture and our identity. An afternoon watching the local footy at home with your partner, your kids, your pets or your friends is one of life's simple pleasures in South Australia.

There is a Facebook group called Save the SANFL on the ABC which has over 2,600 members as of today and which I encourage South Australians to join. Today, I have personally written to the Managing Director of the ABC, Mr Mark Scott, to ask for his assurance that SANFL broadcasting will not be axed. I look forward to reporting back a successful outcome to the people of Hindmarsh and to all South Australians, but in the meantime I encourage everyone to do whatever they can, whether it be writing, emailing, faxing, phoning or using social media, to join the campaign to Save the SANFL on the ABC.

For the SANFL competition as the best-supported football league outside of the AFL, this speculation is cause for concern. The ABC telecast is a key component of the SANFL's commitment to growing and promoting the nation's strongest state based football competition. Research shows that nearly every South Australian follows both an AFL club and a South Australian National Football League club. The SANFL continues to go from strength to strength in South Australia, with attendances up on 2010 figures by two per cent after a season in which minor-round crowds exceeded 276,000 and the grand final attracted 35,000 spectators.

The opportunity for South Australians to watch the progress of their SANFL club on the ABC is something that is very, very important to a significant portion of the South Australian community. News of the ABC's intention to axe this telecast is of great concern. The SANFL has invested more than $200,000 in the last three years and is totally committed to this investment into the future. The ABC telecast will play a major role in this expansion. (Time expired)

**Dawson Electorate: Diuron Fertilizer**

Mr CHRISTENSEN (Dawson) (22:10): They have battled Cyclone Ului, a deluge of unseasonal rain, Cyclone Anthony and Cyclone Yasi, and now it seems that cane growers, particularly in my electorate, are going to be subject to the machinations of the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority in their deliberations over the continued use of the agrichemical diuron. The APVMA have come to the conclusion that continued use of diuron in many areas, including cane growing, poses an unacceptable risk to the environment. There is not much detailed information as to how they have come to that conclusion, but I am aware that a couple of recent studies have come out. The APVMA have requested that the manufacturers of this chemical show cause as to why the product should not be suspended, so it is under threat.

For the benefit of those in this place who do not know much about diuron, it is an important residual herbicide that is used quite extensively in the sugarcane industry. Diuron and products containing diuron, including Velpar K4, as well as tank mixes using diuron, gramoxone and 2,4-D are very widespread throughout the industry to manage broadleaf weed and vines throughout cane-growing areas.

There is a story going around that it will be all right if diuron is suspended because there are other chemicals that the industry can use. I have to say that that is quite a furphy. According to cane growers, there is no viable alternative to this chemical. I was
speaking to the Chairman of Mackay Canegrowers yesterday and he told me that, while there are other products that could be used, they are massively more expensive to the farmer and quite out of reach, in fact. So, if this goes, the whole thing goes.

A report came out that was quite well timed, I might say: the first report card into the Great Barrier Reef. The media coverage made it sound extremely bad. Cane farmers were tipping thousands of kilos of diuron down the waterways and into the reef. It sounds bad, but the measures were conducted against extremely rigid environmental criteria. This was done before a lot of extra management practices were put in place by the industry. They found that there was only some minor reduction in seagrass. In some areas seagrass had grown and, in fact, there was no impact on the coral in the Great Barrier Reef in the areas that were utilising this product.

That just goes to show that the industry has been doing good things. In fact, the usage of diuron has contracted from about three kilograms per hectare to 1.8 kilograms per hectare in the last few years. Canegrowers have been doing many other things to improve the environmental conditions of the industry. In fact, as part of a $65 million plus package that involved state and federal government, just over 1,000 cane farmers invested almost $42 million of their own cash to improve practices on almost 400,000 hectares of cane-growing land. They improved fertiliser practices on 126,000 hectares by budgeting crop nutrition more precisely and using state-of-the-art technology to apply fertiliser. They have improved pesticide application to 61,000 hectares and are now using calibrated spray nozzles and the latest spraying technology. There have been all of these things done to improve the environmental situation of the cane-growing industry, but now they seem to be coping it again and they have copped it from one too many sides. The World Wide Fund for Nature photo shopped photos of rivers to make them look worse, then put that propaganda out to school kids. Then the state government made onerous reef regulations. Now there is a carbon tax which is going to hit the industry to the tune of $80 million. They do not need another hit right now. What they need is for government to get off their backs and let them do their jobs; let them continue the good environmental work that they have engaged in over the past few years.

I would say to the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority: do not ban the use of this chemical. It is needed in this industry. Without it there will be serious repercussions for canegrowers right up and down the Queensland coast. If the APVMA will not act, I ask that the minister does.

**Greenway Electorate: Building the Education Revolution Program**

Ms ROWLAND (Greenway) (22:15): I rise this evening to discuss the record investment in education that is occurring in my electorate of Greenway thanks to the government's Building the Education Revolution, the extremely positive local reception of each of these investments, and to pay tribute to the schools of Greenway.

Over the winter recess I had the privilege of attending eight Building the Education Revolution recognition ceremonies in Greenway. At every single opening teachers, support staff, parents and students could not have been more supportive or appreciative of the federal government's investment in education.

In my first speech I discussed the power of education to effect change. This government has committed to ensuring that education remains one of the top priorities in our plan for this country's future, and that is
why when we were faced with the global financial crisis we chose to invest in the future of this country: we chose to invest in education. I can think of few things more appropriate in times of global economic distress than to invest in the future of our children, and to keep decent, hard-working local tradespeople in work.

North-west Sydney, in which my electorate lies, is Australia's nursery. The Blacktown local government area, which is shared by the electorate I represent and the electorate of Chifley, has 75,000 people under the age of 14. That will surely increase when the latest census results are known. For this reason, investment in west and north-west Sydney is indeed an investment in the future of our country.

By investing in Girraween Public School, Hambledon Public School, Seven Hills Public School, Parklea Public School, Quakers Hill East Public School, John Palmer Public School in the Ponds, Our Lady of Lourdes Primary School in Seven Hills and Riverstone Public School we have indeed invested in this country's future.

I would like to pay tribute to all the principals and assistant principals of these schools, including Peter D'Ermilio, Louise Payne, Colin Ross, Steven Jones, Suzanne Dennis, Ross Sutherland, Karen Junor and Christine Burke. All of these fantastic schools have been granted the opportunity to construct brand-new facilities, which would not have been possible without this federal investment. Now that these projects are complete, teachers and children are enjoying teaching and learning in the best possible facilities.

I reiterate my view that in today's labour market, which is truly a global market, we cannot let luck determine the educational and career prospects of our children. This is why it is necessary to invest in the very best facilities and resources for our young people to give them the best possible opportunities, regardless of where they live or learn.

The opening of these brand-new facilities in my electorate coincided with the release of the BER Implementation Taskforce's final report into the nationwide project. It found that the majority of education authorities have successfully grasped the opportunity to build quality new school facilities, and have attained value for money in the BER implementation. This was indeed the case at every school I had the pleasure of visiting since I became the local member, and how great it was over the break to hear principals, project managers and P&C members delight in how hard they made these investment dollars work for their own projects.

I would like to recognise the commitment of all school communities in my electorate who helped make these developments possible. Without the cooperation of principals, teachers, support staff, families and local workers these schools would not have the 21st century facilities they so richly deserve and now enjoy. As I have said on many occasions, I firmly believe that the future of our country lies in our growth sectors of west and north-west Sydney, and I reiterate this government's commitment to invest in education in Greenway.

I would also like to mention the great success that was Public Education Week, which was held from 1 August to 5 August. During this week I had the pleasure of attending many schools, including addressing Barnier Public School in Quakers Hill to discuss the importance of public education. I would like to thank principal Rod Gibbs and all his team for their hard work, and I reaffirm my commitment to supporting public education.

There are few things in my job that I find more enjoyable than visiting the schools in
Greenway, and I would like to thank all schools and their principals for their support, hospitality and—as I promised I would mention—their fantastic morning teas during my visits over the past few weeks.

### Murray-Darling Basin

**Mr McCormack** (Riverina) (22:20): Yet another delay of the draft Murray-Darling Basin Plan has caused considerable angst for already desperate irrigation communities. The plan was supposed to be finalised by mid-2010. It was delayed with the guide to the draft of the final basin plan then released on 8 October 2010. The draft was then due in July this year, put back to August, then mid-October and now November. Some are wondering if it will be released at all.

The delay of the draft created more uncertainty for regional Australia. Uncertainty: that was the word members of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Regional Australia heard again and again as we toured the basin from late last year through to the May release of our 253-page report, *Of drought and flooding rains: inquiry into the impact of the guide to the Murray-Darling Basin Plan*.

At the start of that report there were seven pages containing the committee’s 21 recommendations. I commend them to the minister. I commend them to the Murray-Darling Basin Authority, headed by Craig Knowles. The MDBA is, as we have heard time and again in this chamber, an independent organisation. It need not keep delaying this draft. The 21 recommendations had unanimous bipartisan support. The regional Australia committee was headed by the member for New England, the Independent who keeps these flimsy shambles of a minority government in office. Surely, if ever a committee chair needed listening to by a government it is the one who heads this committee. But, no, this government is not listening and is not heeding the wise suggestions of the committee headed by the member for New England. These suggestions have the support of the six Labor, four Liberal, one National and one Independent members who form the regional Australia committee for the purposes of this inquiry. Investment in irrigation centres in the Riverina has been at a virtual standstill since the flawed guide came out. Confidence has not been helped by the delay of the draft by the MDBA, and the government’s tardiness to act on the 21 recommendations. This is supposed to be the year of delivery and decision if you believe the words of the Prime Minister. Then again, fewer and fewer Australians are believing what the Prime Minister says these days. Now it has been revealed the Labor government has been wasting water funds. It has been revealed that the government raided the nation’s $5.8 billion irrigation infrastructure fund to pay its own bureaucrats and fund projects outside the Murray-Darling Basin. Shame!

National Irrigators Council analysis shows the federal Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities has allocated: $195.8 million to cover the office costs of the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder, Ian Robinson; $190 million to fund the water minister’s department expenses; $59 million to fund the Murray-Darling Basin Authority's drafting of the Basin Plan; $13 million to repay the Snowy River's Mowamba borrowings account; $8.5 million for communications strategies—more spin; and $5 million for a Queensland coal seam gas water recovery study. Shame! National Irrigators Council Chief Executive Danny O’Brien had this to say:
The department and the Minister have been picking off chunks of the infrastructure fund like vultures around a carcass.

After four years the federal government has spent only $70 million on infrastructure projects within the Murray-Darling Basin. It is using the rest of the $5.8 billion infrastructure fund established by the Howard coalition government as a slush fund for television ads, consultants, bureaucrats and focus groups. National Irrigators Council analysis shows the federal government has allocated almost $2.4 billion of the $5.8 billion Sustainable Rural Water Use and Infrastructure Program fund to many projects which are urban or outside the Murray-Darling Basin. Meanwhile the government has pumped $1.6 billion of its $3.1 billion buyout fund into buying one million gigalitres of irrigators’ entitlements for the environment. Shame! The purchased water is managed by Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder, Ian Robinson—as I said—yet the government’s own documents show Mr Robinson’s office is funded from the $5.8 billion infrastructure fund.

We have to get the water issue right. It is too important not to. If nothing else, let the latest delay ensure the MDBA gets it right so that hardworking family farmers, those in the Riverina, can continue to grow the food and fibre for this nation. We should expect and demand nothing less.

Newcastle Electorate: Hexavalent Chromium Spill

Ms GRIERSON (Newcastle) (22:25): I raise a grave matter affecting my electorate. Last Monday, Orica accidentally released 10 kilograms of hexavalent chromium, which spread over the neighbouring suburb of Stockton. Orica manufactures ammonium nitrate and nitric acid. It is an inherently dangerous business. In Newcastle we understand that, but regretfully we now better understand the health impacts of this toxic chemical, well chronicled in the film Erin Brockovich.

According to the New South Wales Department of Health prolonged exposure can cause cancer, including lung, gastrointestinal and stomach cancer. One would assume then that both Orica and the New South Wales government would immediately act to notify affected citizens and provide advice on precautions to take if a leak occurred. Such faith has proved to be misplaced. The people of Newcastle are justifiably irate. It took Orica 16 hours to inform the New South Wales Office of Environment and Heritage of the leak, which had occurred for about half an hour before Orica either detected or realised the full nature and extent of the leak. We remain unsure of the exact circumstances.

Compounding this failure it took the New South Wales Minister for the Environment, Robyn Parker, an inexcusable 56 hours to notify the public and explain what precautions affected residents should take—three days for the minister to do her job. Stockton residents are outraged by this incompetence. Living side by side with major polluting and dangerous industries for decades, residents have done their job and attempted to build genuine relationships and consultative processes with their corporate neighbours and the state. Now they feel betrayed. What justification can there be for waiting 56 hours to advise residents to prevent their children from playing in gardens, not to eat home-grown leafy vegetables or fruit, not to drink water from rainwater tanks, to wash all home-grown root vegetables, to wash down surfaces and to drain swimming pools?

After blame shifting and buck passing between Premier O’Farrell and Minister Parker they now lay the blame at the feet of
Orica, who, in fact, notified within the requisite but unacceptable 24-hour period. There are legitimate questions to be asked about Orica's notification delay and the proper fulfilment of their duty of care to employees and residents, but the facts are that it took the New South Wales government three times longer to notify the public than it took Orica to notify the New South Wales government. Kate Johnson, on behalf of concerned citizens of Stockton, has written an open letter to Orica asking why it took so long for the community to be notified, how the impact area was defined, what Orica's emergency incident response plan is and whether it was abided by. They want answers and genuine engagement on this incident.

Today it has been reported that the impact area was five times larger than previously admitted by the New South Wales government, causing even more uncertainty and anger among Stockton residents. That ignorance and uncertainty remains over a week after the incident and demonstrates how poorly this issue has been handled. It is not just Orica that needs to come clean. The O'Farrell government has some serious explaining to do. It is difficult not to conclude that Premier O'Farrell's recent downgrading of the role of the Minister for the Environment contributed to this fiasco. Under changes he introduced after his election, the director-general of the Department of the Environment now reports directly to the Premier's own portfolio, supposedly so that environmental issues would 'be given immediate and direct attention by the Premier'. That certainly did not happen in this case. With an environment department that no longer reports to the environment minister, it is no wonder that dangerous blunders like this have occurred.

The O'Farrell government has failed in its most basic obligations to the people of Newcastle. A full and independent inquiry into this incident, as proposed by New South Wales opposition leader John Robertson and shadow environment spokesperson Luke Foley, is urgently required. But in my view more needs to be done and it needs to be done now. There needs to be an immediate, thorough risk assessment of all the activities undertaken on Kooragang and in the Port of Newcastle, and an appraisal of their current and potential individual and cumulative health impacts. There need to be 24/7 air and water quality monitoring, and alert and notification systems in place. And the adequacy of the provisions and enforcement practices under the New South Wales Environmental Protection Act should be urgently reviewed.

Eastern Star Gas has recently applied to locate a plant next door to Orica. It is this type of potentially explosive combination in a critical incident that needs proper appraisal under a proper industrial risk assessment framework. As the Newcastle Herald rightly pointed out today, we are no strangers to industrial risk in Newcastle. Currently BHP Billiton are spending over three-quarters of a billion dollars remediating toxic waste from the former BHP steelworks site and adjoining Hunter river. Let us not repeat the failures of the past. Let us be proactive and manage industrial risks properly now. I sincerely hope that this toxic leak will prove benign and that no resident's health will be affected. But I also hope that something better will come from this critical incident and the failure of the O'Farrell government. (Time expired)

The SPEAKER: Order! It being 10.30 pm, the debate is interrupted.

House adjourned at 22:30
NOTICES

Mr BRADBURY: to present a bill for an act in relation to business names, and for related purposes.

Mr BRADBURY: to present a bill for an act to deal with transitional and consequential matters in connection with the Business Names Registration Act 2011, and for related purposes.

Mr BRADBURY: to present a bill for an act to amend the law relating to Indigenous affairs, and for related purposes.

Mr HOCKEY: to present a bill for an act to amend the Charter of Budget Honesty Act 1998, and for related purposes.

Mr CROOK: to move:
That this House:
(1) notes that:
(a) Goods and Services Tax (GST) revenues are distributed to the States and Territories in accordance with a formula driven by Horizontal Fiscal Equalisation (HFE) principles and are legislated for in the Federal Financial Relations Act 2009;
(b) for 2010-11, Western Australia received just 68 per cent of what it would have received if GST revenue was distributed across Australia on a per capita basis—the lowest relativity applied to any State since the formula was introduced; and
(c) every other State and Territory, by contrast, received not less than 91 per cent of what it would have received if GST revenue was distributed evenly across Australia; and
(2) calls on the Government to amend the Act to stipulate a minimum GST revenue-sharing relativity of 75 per cent, which would allow continuing respect for the principles of HFE, but with proper recognition for population, and without Western Australia being unfairly penalised for its disproportionate contribution to our national economic prosperity.

Mr JOHN COBB: to present a bill for an act to amend quarantine legislation in relation to the importation of apples, and for related purposes.

Mr BANDT: to move:
That this House directs the Prime Minister to immediately establish a full and independent inquiry with:
(1) powers equivalent to a Royal Commission to investigate the bank note bribery scandal concerning the Reserve Bank of Australia, Secuency and Note Printing Australia; and
(2) terms of reference that require it to investigate and report on at least the following matters:
(a) allegations of corruption in securing note printing contracts and payments to overseas agents into offshore tax havens;
(b) what the Reserve Bank of Australia, Austrade and the Australian Government each knew about the alleged behaviour, and when they knew it;
(c) what due diligence was applied and what investigations were conducted into the allegations;
(d) whether there has been appropriate governance by public institutions and companies;
(e) what action has been taken to prevent improper dealings occurring again and whether that action is sufficient;
(f) recommendations regarding future actions that should be taken by government and agencies to prevent similar problems in the future; and
(g) any related matters.

Mr HAYES: to move:
That this House:
(1) recognises and acknowledges the significant contribution that officers across all Australian policing jurisdictions make to our local communities as we approach National Police Remembrance Day on 29 September 2011;
(2) remembers and commemorates the ultimate sacrifices made by all police officers who have been killed in the course of their duties, in particular, that we commemorate the lives of:
(a) Detective Constable William Arthur George (Bill) Crews of the NSW Police Force who was killed in Sydney on 9 September 2010;
(b) Sergeant Daniel Stiller of the Queensland Police Force who was killed on 1 December 2010; and

(c) Detective Sergeant Constable Damian Leeding of the Queensland Police Force who was killed on 1 June 2011;

(3) honours the courage, commitment and memory of the many fine men and women who lost their lives during the execution of their official duty made in serving our community;

(4) pays respect to the work of Police Legacy which undertakes vital services in looking after the families and friends of the fallen police officers;

(5) supports and thanks all serving police throughout Australia for their invaluable dedication and commitment to make a difference, defend our way of life and safeguard our communities.

Mr WINDSOR: to present a bill for an act to amend the Environment Protection Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999, and for related purposes.
QUESTIONS IN WRITING

Ministers: Staff, Capital Works and Acquisitions
(Question No. 268)

Mr Briggs asked the Minister for Veterans' Affairs, in writing, on 3 March 2011:
(1) How many personal staff are employed by the Minister.
(2) What is the (a) total cost, and (b) breakdown of costs, of all capital works and acquisitions in the Minister's private office since 3 December 2007.

Mr Snowdon: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:
(1) The employment of staff under the Members of Parliament (Staff) Act 1984 is administered by the Department of Finance and Deregulation (DoFD). On 22 February 2011, the Department tabled with the Senate Finance and Public Administration Committee a list of Government Personal Staff Positions as at 1 February 2011.

(2) The cost of capital works and acquisitions for ministers' offices is shared by the Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS), DoFD and home departments in line with Appendix 2 of Supporting Ministers, Upholding the Values.

The Special Minister of State has responded on behalf of all ministers in respect of costs incurred by DPS and DoFD.

I am advised that the costs incurred by the Department of Veterans' Affairs is $43,952.11. The breakdown is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Capital Works Expenditure</th>
<th>Nil</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acquisitions Expenditure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desktop leasing (estimated total annual cost)</td>
<td>$9,692.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laptops</td>
<td>$6,400.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronic Whiteboard</td>
<td>$1,580.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portable Printer</td>
<td>$375.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scanner</td>
<td>$1,074.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Videoconferencing equipment</td>
<td>$20,784.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe – 4 drawer B-class</td>
<td>$4,045.39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note that I was appointed as Minister for Veterans' Affairs on 14 September 2010. As such, no data is provided for the period prior to this date.

F111 Aircraft
(Question No. 349)

Mr Robert asked the Minister for Defence Materiel, in writing, on 12 May 2011:
(1) In respect of all variants of F-111 aircraft, how many has the department decided to
   (a) scrap, and
   (b) preserve for historical purposes.
(2) Of those in part (1)(b), how many
   (a) have been allocated to
      (i) government museums, and
      (ii) private and/or not-for-profit aeronautical heritage organisations,
   (b) have not yet been allocated, and
(c) are to be held and maintained by the department for historical purposes.

(3) Has the department approached the United States Department of Defence about International Traffic in Arms Regulations regarding the disposal of Australian F-111 aircraft to non-government administered museums or heritage institutions; if not, why not.

(4) Where is asbestos located in each F-111 aircraft and in what quantities; and if the asbestos is not disturbed, does it need to be removed to render an F-111 aircraft safe for public display.

(5) What is the estimated cost per aircraft of removing
   (a) all asbestos from a single F-111 aircraft; and
   (b) such smaller amount as may allow an F-111 aircraft to be deemed safe for public display.

(6) What portion of asbestos
   (a) was removed from the F-111 aircraft currently on display at Point Cook, Victoria, and
   (b) will be removed from F-111 aircraft planned for display at both RAAF Amberley and Edinburgh.

Mr Clare: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

Response to all:
Two at the RAAF Museum, Point Cook Victoria;
Two at RAAF Base Amberley, Queensland; and
One at RAAF Base Edinburgh, South Australia.

A number of other aircraft are currently being assessed to determine if they can be preserved by public or private museums for heritage purposes.

Providing aircraft to public or private museums requires two things: United States Government approval and finding a way to deal effectively with the asbestos on the aircraft.

The F-111s were produced in the United States and are subject to United States legislation. This requires the Australian Government to seek United States Government permission to transfer the aircraft to non-Government or non-Defence organisations. Based on previous experience this is difficult and takes some time.

I am advised by Defence that over 80 per cent of the aircraft's surface panels have the potential to contain asbestos.

Defence is currently assessing how asbestos could be removed, remediated or safely contained, so that the aircraft could be safely displayed in public and private museums.

Superclinics
(Question No. 368)

Dr Southcott asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, in writing, on 23 May 2011:

In respect of the ten operational GP Super Clinics, how many presentations (a) were made while the clinics were offering early services, (b) have been made since the clinics became operational, and (c) have been made each month since September 2009.

Ms Roxon: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

As at 16 June 2011, there are currently 11 operational GP Super Clinics.

As advised previously, the Department of Health and Ageing provides self reported numbers of service presentations at an aggregated level only. Self reported services numbers for individual clinics are not made publicly available as:
(i) there are commercial-in-confidence and privacy protection considerations around releasing data at the individual clinic level; and
(ii) service numbers are not comparable (depending on when the Clinics commenced services, the size of the community, the number of service providers engaged etc) and could be open to misinterpretation.

The current presentation data collection framework was implemented from 1 February 2011. The framework provides for the identification of GP, nursing and allied health presentations and the collection of data every two months by the Department from operational GP Super Clinic sites and those delivering early services.

(a–b) Noting that a number of sites providing early services became operational part way through a reporting period, it is estimated that of the approximately 428,000 presentations at the 11 operational GP Super Clinics sites as at 31 May 2011, approximately 371,000 presentations were while sites were operational and 57,000 were early services provided prior to clinics becoming operational.

(c) Prior to 31 January 2011, there were approximately 289,000 presentations at the eight operational GP Super Clinic sites, including early services that had been delivered, if any, at those sites.

From 1 February 2011 to 31 March 2011, there were approximately 66,000 presentations at the operational GP Super Clinic sites.

From 1 April 2011 to 31 May 2011, there were approximately 73,000 presentations at the operational GP Super Clinic sites.

**Superclinics**

(Question No. 369)

Dr Southcott asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, in writing, on 23 May 2011:

In respect of the GP Super Clinics Program, how many presentations were made in (a) October, November and December 2010; and (b) January, February, March and April 2011.

Ms Roxon: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

(a–b)

The current presentation data collection framework was implemented from 1 February 2011. The framework provides for the identification of GP, nursing and allied health presentations and the collection of data every two months by the Department from operational GP Super Clinic sites and those delivering early services.

Prior to 31 January 2011, there were approximately 289,000 presentations at the (then) eight operational GP Super Clinic sites. This figure includes early services that had been delivered, at some of these sites. In addition, there were approximately 273,000 presentations at those sites delivering early services but not yet fully operational.

From 1 February 2011 to 31 March 2011, there were approximately 66,000 presentations at the operational GP Super Clinic sites. In addition, there were approximately 35,000 presentations at those sites delivering early services.

From 1 April 2011 to 31 May 2011, there were approximately 73,000 presentations at the operational GP Super Clinic sites. In addition, there were approximately 52,000 presentations at those sites delivering early services.
Superclinics  
(Question No. 370)

Dr Southcott asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, in writing, on 23 May 2011:

Of the $280.2 million allocated to the 2007-08 GP Super Clinics Program, what amount was spent in (a) 2007-08, (b) 2008-09, (c) 2009-10, (d) 2010-11, and what sum is in the forward estimates.

Ms Roxon: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

The $280.2 million allocated over 5 years to the 2007-08 GP Super Clinics Program included:

- $184.3 million for the GP Super Clinics Program (including $2.6 program support costs);
- $36.8 million for Pharmaceutical Benefits flow on costs;
- $50.0 million for Medicare Benefits flow on costs; and
- $9.2 million for Veterans' Entitlements flow on costs.

Medicare Benefits, Pharmaceutical Benefits and Veterans' Entitlements are demand driven programs funded under Special Appropriations Acts. As such, actual costs incurred are not able to be separately identified against estimated flow on measures.

(a—d)

Of the $184.3 million Administered funding allocated to the GP Super Clinics Program, as at 30 June 2011, actual expenditure was:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Actual Expenditure</th>
<th>Forward Estimates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) 2007-08</td>
<td>$6.2m</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) 2008-09</td>
<td>$23.9m</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) 2009-10</td>
<td>$90.5m</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) 2010-11</td>
<td>$38.5m</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011-12</td>
<td>$17.1m</td>
<td>2012-13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$8.0m</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All figures are rounded to one decimal place which may affect totals.

Salt Ash Air Weapons Range  
(Question No. 378)

Mr Baldwin asked the Minister for Defence, in writing, on 23 May 2011:

(1) Was the 2002 Parsons Brinckerhoff Study into the Salt Ash Weapons Range released to (a) the public, (b) Port Stephens Council, (c) the National Library of Australia, and (d) the Auditor General;

If so, when; if not, why not.

(2) What data and/or reports does he use to qualify that the continued use of Salt Ash Weapons Range is safe for the surrounding community.

(3) When approving the use of the Salt Ash Weapons Range, did he take into consideration the NSW Pollution Control Commission's statement that the F/A-18 Hornet's use of the Salt Ash Weapons Range does not meet its environmental criteria; if not, why not; if so, why was approval still given.

(4) Why was the site between Tea Gardens and Nerong not seen as a viable alternative to the current target and danger area at the Salt Ash Weapons Range, and was the cost of transporting Defence personnel to this alternative site a factor in the decision not to use it.
(5) Has he considered the risk to Defence personnel and civilians, of a single engine aircraft such as the Joint Strike Fighter, if shrapnel was to enter its only engine during strafing exercises at the Salt Ash Weapons Range.

Mr Stephen Smith: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

(1) Defence is not aware of a Parsons Brinkerhoff study in 2002. There was a study by PPK Environment and Infrastructure ((PPK) a Parsons Brinckerhoff Company) in 2000. This study was provided to the Community Consultative Committee which comprised representatives of Defence, Port Stephens Council and residents. The study was also included as an appendix to the 2002 Hawk Aircraft Environmental Impact Statement which was made available to the public and the National Library of Australia. Defence has no record of providing the PPK report to the Auditor General.

(2) Information used to determine the continued use of Salt Ash Weapons Range is safe for the surrounding community includes:

- Range standing orders—control procedures of activities specific to Salt Ash Air Weapons Range,
- Air Force publications on procedures for safe use of weapons on all air weapons ranges: and
- The Defence Training Area Management Manual – a Tri-service publication on training area management.
- Air Force also review post activity performance reports every three months on the performance of weapons practices.

(3) No. The Environmental Impact Statement for introduction of the F/A-18 Hornet, including its use of Salt Ash Air Weapons Range, was approved by the (then) Minister for Home Affairs and Environment on 5 July 1983. The Pollution Control Commission statement was made on 13 July 1983 as part of its submission to the Public Works Committee for the F/A-18 facilities development at RAAF Base Williamtown.

(4) According to the 2000 PPK study, considerable residential development was predicted in the Tea Gardens study area and would likely result in a higher number of complaints than was occurring at Salt Ash. The study also found that disturbance to internationally important habitats and a breeding colony of Goulds Petrel could be significant impacts. Additional costs to transport personnel were considered to be minimal and were not a factor in deciding where to conduct testing.

(5) The operation of aircraft with a single engine has been considered for all military operations, including those conducted at Salt Ash Air Weapons Range. All strafe passes developed by military aircraft, which include those conducted at Salt Ash Air Weapons Range, are designed to avoid the fragmentation envelope of delivered weapons. At no time are aircraft planned to fly through areas that could be affected by ricochet from the ground. Aircraft operations at Salt Ash Air Weapons Range are such that if a catastrophic engine failure was to occur, for any reason, sufficient energy is available to ensure the pilot can manoeuvre the aircraft safely away from populated areas. The RAAF operates, and has operated, single engine aircraft throughout its history, such as the Hawk, Macchi, Mirage and Sabre.

Family Tax Benefit
(Question No. 379)

Mr Fletcher asked the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, in writing, on 24 May 2011:

In respect of Table J-5 (Appendix J) in her department's 2009-10 Annual Report which indicates that in 2008-09, six families with incomes over $1,000,000 received Family Tax Benefit A, and three families with incomes over $1,000,000 received Family Tax Benefit B, what criteria were used to assess the eligibility of these families for such payments.
Ms Macklin: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

The criteria used to assess Family Tax Benefit eligibility for those families with more than $1,000,000 in annual income was the same as that used for all other eligible families, as outlined in the Family Assistance Act 1999.

Key factors taken into consideration when assessing eligibility to Family Tax Benefit include family income throughout the financial year, changing circumstances such as a new birth, separation or partnership, receipt of income support payment, child age and the residential status of the claimant.

As stated in the explanatory notes for Table J-5 in my Department's 2009-10 Annual Report, there are a number of reasons families with high incomes can receive payment.

These include customers receiving income support for part of the year and earning higher incomes for the remainder of that year, customers whose partnership status changes during the year and whose new partner's income is high enough to preclude payment for the remainder of the year, Disability Support or Age Pension recipients who are legally blind and not required to declare their income or assets and customers who were eligible for a minimum rate of Family Tax Benefit for a specified Carer Allowance or Double Orphan Pension child.

The six families with income over $1,000,000 who received Family Tax Benefit A and the three families with income over $1,000,000 who received Family Tax Benefit B all fall into one or more of the above categories.

Broadband

(Question No. 380)

Mr Fletcher asked the Treasurer, in writing, on 24 May 2011:

Is the $18.1 billion of funds to be invested in the National Broadband Network included in the 2011-12 budget deficit of $23 billion and the forward estimates figures for the underlying cash balance over this period; if not, why not.

Mr Swan: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

As outlined in the Budget papers, the Government will invest $3.1 billion in 2011-12, and $18.2 billion over the period 2011-12 to 2014-15, in NBN Co. This investment is in the form of an equity injection to a public non-financial corporation (PNFC), and therefore has no direct impact on the underlying cash or fiscal balances. This is because the equity injection involves swapping one financial asset (cash) for another (equity).

The classification of NBN Co as a PNFC is determined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in accordance with the guidelines set out in the Australian System of Government Finance Statistics Concepts, Sources and Methods 2005.

Additional public debt interest (PDI) costs associated with debt issued to finance the equity injections will impact on the underlying cash and fiscal balances. The Australian Office of Financial Management undertakes a single PDI calculation on the basis of the Government's overall financing requirement, which is outlined in Note 10: Interest Expense on page 9-21 of Budget Paper No.1 2011-12.

Superclinics

(Question No. 381)

Dr Southcott asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, in writing, on 24 May 2011:

In respect of the GP Super Clinics program and clinics offering early services, (a) which clinics have offered early services since November 2007 and over what timeframe have early services been offered,
and (b) how many total presentations have been made to (i) GPs, and (ii) allied health practitioners, at GP Super Clinics which are offering early services.

Ms Roxon: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

(a) The following clinics are offering/have offered early services since November 2007:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Early Services Commenced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bendigo (VIC)</td>
<td>8/2/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue Mountains (NSW)</td>
<td>1/3/09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cairns (QLD)</td>
<td>10/6/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devonport (TAS)</td>
<td>30/4/10 (Operational 22/7/10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gladstone (QLD)</td>
<td>2/12/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modbury (SA)</td>
<td>22/11/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noarlunga (SA)</td>
<td>6/12/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Central Coast (NSW)</td>
<td>10/9/09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palmerston (NT)</td>
<td>15/12/08 (Operational 4/10/10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riverina (NSW)</td>
<td>1/2/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Lake Macquarie (NSW)</td>
<td>3/8/09 (Operational 15/12/10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Townsville (QLD)</td>
<td>14/7/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wodonga (QLD)</td>
<td>1/3/10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(b) As at 31 May 2011, the sites that were providing early services and were not yet operational had provided approximately 360,000 presentations. Of these, approximately 207,000 were GP services and approximately 153,000 were nursing and allied health services.

In addition, as at the end of May 2011, the 11 operational GP Super Clinics reported approximately 428,000 presentations, including early services, if any, at those sites. Of these presentations, approximately 318,000 were GP services and approximately 110,000 were nursing and allied health services.

Noting that a number of sites providing early services became operational part way through a reporting period, it is estimated that approximately 57,000 of the 428,000 presentations were early services provided prior to clinics becoming operational. These are estimated to include approximately 47,000 GP services and approximately 10,000 nursing and allied health services.

Broadband

(Question No. 392)

Mr Fletcher asked the Minister representing the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, in writing, on 26 May 2011:

Further to the Minister’s answer to question in writing No. 110 (House Hansard, 10 May 2011, page 47), was the Implementation Study a feasibility study.

Mr Albanese: The Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:

The purpose of the Implementation Study was to advise the government on how best to implement its stated policy objectives, not to evaluate those objectives, given that the policies had already been agreed by the government. The report focused on translating high-level policy objectives into tangible actions for both the government and NBN Co to implement.

Specifically, the Implementation Study did not:

- evaluate the government’s policy objectives;
- evaluate the decision to implement the NBN via the establishment of NBN Co;
• undertake a cost-benefit analysis of the macro-economic and social benefits that would result from the implementation of a superfast broadband network.

**TS Pioneer: Air-Conditioning**

(Question No. 396)

Mr Christensen asked the Minister for Defence, in writing, on 26 May 2011:

1. Is he aware that a request for air-conditioning in the sleeping quarters of the Training Ship Pioneer Australian Navy Cadet (TS Pioneer ANC) in Mackay that was made by the TS Pioneer ANC Parents' Committee in late 2007 is still unfulfilled even though the Committee offered to pay for the entire cost of the air-conditioning system, including installation.

2. Is he aware that, while the TS Pioneer ANC parents' committee gained a quote for $25,000 for the purchase and installation of the air-conditioning system, his department, after consideration of the request, costed the purchase and installation of an air-conditioning system at $80,000.

3. Can he explain why there is such a discrepancy between the quote obtained by the TS Pioneer ANC Parents' Committee and the estimate provided by his department for the purchase and installation of this air-conditioning system.

4. Can he explain why an air-conditioning system has been installed inside the wet mess at the Komiatum Barracks before an air-conditioning system is due to be installed inside the neighbouring TS Pioneer ANC sleeping quarters.

5. Is he aware that temperatures reach 36 degrees Celsius inside the TS Pioneer ANC sleeping quarters, which is in breach of Comcare regulations.

6. Is he aware that the TS Pioneer ANC Parents' Committee has been advised by his department that the purchase and installation of the air-conditioning system at the TS Pioneer ANC sleeping quarters could occur in 2011-12.

7. Is there anything preventing the installation of this air-conditioning system from occurring on 1 July 2011; if so, what, and on what date then, is the installation scheduled to occur.

Mr Stephen Smith: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

1. Defence is aware of an offer by the Parents' Committee to provide funding to air condition the dormitory. Defence does not generally accept funds from third parties to undertake facilities works on Defence owned buildings. Defence has agreed to fund the purchase and installation of an air-conditioning system into the dormitory.

2. Defence does not have a copy of the quote obtained by the Parents' Committee but understands that it was for the purchase and installation of off-the-shelf split air-conditioning systems. The Defence cost estimate of $80,000 is for an engineer designed solution that meets the requirements of Commonwealth and Defence building codes that apply to all Defence facilities and are stringently applied to sleeping areas.

3. Defence is unaware of the process, design parameters, or compliance requirements that the Parents' Committee may have used to obtain their quotation and is therefore unable to discuss a direct comparison between the Parents' Committee quote and the Defence project costs.

   Defence is required to follow a very prescriptive process through design and procurement to ensure that the designed solution achieves compliance with the Building Code of Australia, Defence fire protection engineering requirements, energy efficiency and environmental regulations, and competitive tendering. Defence needs to ensure maintainability and fitness for purpose for the life of the systems. This discrepancy is assumed to be a result of the differing approach taken by the Parents' Committee.
(4) The air-conditioning installed in the mess area at Komiatum Barracks was a maintenance upgrade to an existing system not a new installation. This upgrade was part of a separate project for refurbishment of the existing structures at Komiatum Barracks.

(5) The Komiatum Barracks' dormitory is designed to be cooled with flow through ventilation and ceiling fans. Defence is not aware that the temperature reaches 36 degrees Celsius inside the Komiatum Barracks' dormitory.

(6) Defence has approved funding and a project to air condition the Komiatum Barracks' dormitory for the financial year 2011-12.

(7) A procurement process will be undertaken shortly and once a sub-contractor has been identified the purchase of the air conditioners and installation works can commence. The works are planned for delivery in the July to September 2011 quarter.

Climate Commission Forum
(Question No. 397)

Mr Christensen asked the Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency, in writing, on 26 May 2011:

(1) What was the total cost (including the pro-rata rate of Commissioners' wages, employees' wages, hall hire, equipment, advertising, etc.) of staging the Climate Commission's recent forum in Mackay.

(2) Is he able to indicate what total amount of carbon dioxide emissions was created as a result of this forum, including those produced by Commissioners, staff and contractors, as well as the energy sources used to stage it.

(3) Were the carbon dioxide emissions created as a result of the forum offset; if so, at what cost, to whom, and for what.

(4) Is the Climate Commission funded to support the Government's carbon tax policy; if so, how can it operate independently; if not, why did Commissioners at the forum
   (a) indicate there is no bipartisan support for climate change, and
   (b) refer to 'carbon pricing'.

Mr Combet: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

(1) I am informed that the cost of the Climate Commission's (the Commission) two-day visit to Mackay and community forum held on 20 May 2011 was $59,222.

   This includes costs of event management services (including venue and equipment hire, technical staff, filming and onsite editing, security and host fees), forum catering, travel costs for Commissioners and GST.

(2-3) I understand that the Commission is monitoring emissions generated by its airline travel and will review its total emissions at the end of 2011 to consider options for purchasing appropriate offsets.

(4) The Commission is an independent body and, as stated in the Commission's Terms of Reference, will not comment on policy matters nor provide policy advice or recommendations.

Salt Ash Air Weapons Range
(Question No. 403)

Mr Baldwin asked the Minister for Defence, in writing, on 31 May 2011:

(1) Is land within a one kilometre radius of the Salt Ash Air Weapons Range (SAAWR) essential for the training requirements of personnel operating from the Royal Australian Air Force Williamtown Base, and/or operation of SAAWR.
(2) If so, is the Government interested in voluntarily acquiring this land, specifically residential property in the vicinity of Rookes Road, Salt Ash, NSW, 2318.

Mr Stephen Smith: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:
(1) No. Land within a one kilometre radius of the Salt Ash Air Weapons Range is not essential for training requirements.

(2) Defence has no current plans to acquire residential properties in the Salt Ash area, including residential property in the vicinity of Rookes Road, Salt Ash.

Army Cadet Ceremonial Uniforms
(Question No. 404)

Mr Christensen asked the Minister for Defence Materiel, in writing, on 31 May 2011:
(1) Is it a fact that restrictions have been imposed on Australian Army Cadets concerning the use of polyester style ceremonial uniforms.

(2) If so, what will happen to the existing stock of such uniforms.

Mr Clare: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:
(1) The removal of the polyester uniforms from the cadet block scale was identified as a part of the rationalisation of garrison uniforms which has been undertaken by the Army. The decision was made to remove this uniform due to its infrequent use by Cadets and to reflect the reduction in the overall issue within Army. Cadets are still able to perform ceremonial activities in the standard Disruptive Patterned Camouflaged Uniform (DPCU). Cadets will continue to maintain access to polyester uniforms if requested for specific activities such as representational duties. Each request will be assessed by Army Headquarters on a case by case basis.

(2) All existing, unused stock will be returned to the supply chain for use by Army.

Border Management
(Question Nos. 409 and 410)

Mr Morrison asked the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, in writing, on 1 June 2011:
What total sum of funding is provided by the Government to Malaysia and Indonesia as part of any regional, bilateral or other arrangements to improve the sophistication of border clearance procedures and technology generally, and specifically in relation to the (a) installation of (i) forgery detection, and (ii) bio metric identification, technology at primary clearance points, and (b) training of immigration and border officers in detecting fraud.

Mr Bowen: The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

The Government does not provide funding to Malaysia and Indonesia. The Government provides technical assistance to these countries through the provision of training and capacity building activities. Under the Regional Skills Development Program (RSDP) my Department provides training to immigration officials on document examination, intelligence, facial recognition and investigation.

My Department has also supported the installation of Indonesia’s border management system which has delivered sophisticated border management systems to 30 ports in Indonesia to enable reliable detection of people of concern to Indonesian authorities. This work includes the installation of biometric technology. My Department has been working with Indonesia since 2006 on this project.

In 2010–11, the Department and the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service provided the Immigration Department of Malaysia with document examination equipment that is being used on a daily basis at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport.
Afghanistan: Tiger Helicopter
(Question No. 417)
Mr Robert asked the Minister for Defence, in writing, on 2 June 2011:
(1) Can he indicate what caused a French Eurocopter Tiger helicopter to crash in Afghanistan's eastern district of Lateh Band, near Kabul on 5 February 2011.
(2) What:
(a) lessons were learnt from this crash, and
(b) subsequent changes in procedures and training has the Australian Defence Force adopted to prevent a similar occurrence happening to one of Australia's Tiger Armed Reconnaissance Helicopters.
Mr Stephen Smith: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:
The results of the French Tiger accident investigation are yet to be released to Australia. The French continue to operate the Tiger in Afghanistan.
(a—b) Any lessons learnt and changes to procedures will be considered in detail when accident investigation information is made available to Australia.

Asylum Seekers
(Question Nos 418 and 419)
Mr Robert asked the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, in writing, on 2 June 2011:
In respect of irregular maritime arrivals detained at RAAF Base Scherger, does Defence monitor the (a) phone calls that detainees make, (b) and (c) emails that detainees send; if so, does Defence keep a log of what is monitored; if so, have detainees visited pornographic websites, and/or websites considered to be violent in nature; if so, can he provide a list of those websites that are considered to be violent in nature.
Mr Bowen: The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:
The Department of Immigration and Citizenship and its Detention Service Provider do not monitor phone calls, websites or emails of Irregular Maritime Arrivals detained at RAAF Base Scherger; due to the requirements of the Privacy Act (2001).
However, clients are supervised when accessing the internet to ensure appropriate behaviour, age-appropriate material and equitable access is maintained.
Furthermore, computers at all Immigration Detention Centres have content filters, which block access to inappropriate websites.

RAAF Base Scherger: Irregular Maritime Arrivals
(Question No. 420)
Mr Robert asked the Minister for Defence Science and Personnel, in writing, on 2 June 2011:
In respect of irregular maritime arrivals detained at RAAF Base Scherger, does Defence monitor the:
(a) phone calls that detainees make,
(b) websites that detainees visit, and
(c) emails that detainees send;
If so, does Defence keep a log of what is monitored;
If so, have detainees visited pornographic websites, and/or websites considered to be
Mr Snowdon: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

In respect of irregular maritime arrivals detained at RAAF Base Scherger:

(a) Defence does not monitor phone calls that detainees make.

(b) Defence does not monitor websites that detainees visit. The Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) has a service provider, SERCO AP which provides all internet services at the site.

(c) Defence does not monitor emails that detainees send. The DIAC service provider SERCO AP provides all email services at the site.

Defence does not monitor calls, websites or emails for detainees at RAAF Base Scherger. Defence provides 25 extensions from the Private Automatic Branch Exchange (PABX) at RAAF Base Scherger for the Department of Immigration and Citizenship's ( DIAC's) use. Defence logs call events for the purposes of cost recovery from DIAC as a tenant at RAAF Base Scherger.

Better Start for Children with Disability Program

 Asked the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, in writing, on 16 June 2011:

In respect of the Better Start for Children with a Disability program, why is eligibility restricted to a child having one of only five identified categories of disabilities, and not instead based on an assessment of the needs of an individual child with a disability of any description.

Ms Macklin: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

The Government's Better Start for Children with Disability program commenced on 1 July 2011. It will help ensure children with disabilities that affect their development have access to early intervention therapies and treatments. Around 9000 children diagnosed with cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, Fragile X syndrome and sight or hearing impairments will be eligible to receive up to $12,000 for early intervention services.

The categories of disability included in the Better Start initiative were based on existing evidence that targeted early intervention in the preschool years is effective in preparing this cohort of children for school.

The Parliamentary Secretary for Disability and Carers has asked my Department to seek expert advice about evidence for early intervention in relation to other types of childhood disability and developmental delay, including an analysis of current research. Along with the planned evaluation of Better Start program, this will help inform the future direction of the program, including consideration of extending it more broadly.

Asylum Seekers

 Asked the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, in writing, on 16 June 2011:

Does the proposed arrangement with Malaysia on irregular maritime arrivals include provision for the education of children; if so, will all children transferred be sent to school for the entire duration of their stay.
Mr Bowen: The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:
Negotiations with Malaysia are well advanced. The Australian Government will ensure that appropriate measures are in place as part of the formal arrangement for the education of children.

Asylum Seekers
(Question No. 429)

Mr Morrison asked the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, in writing, on 16 June 2011:
What audit process is intended to be implemented to monitor and report on the disbursement of funds in Malaysia provided under the proposed irregular maritime arrangement, including how the Government will report to the Parliament, and whether the disbursement of funds will be subject to scrutiny by the Auditor-General and how often.

Mr Bowen: The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:
The transfer arrangement with Malaysia will be managed in accordance with standard arrangements for agreements between governments. Disbursement of funds in Malaysia to organisations such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organization for Migration will be managed in accordance with standard requirements and processes for the expenditure of public money. The Department will report on its activities through its annual report, as required by section 63 of the Public Service Act 1999.

Bookstores
(Question No. 435)

Mr Craig Kelly asked the Minister representing the Minister for Small Business, in writing, on 21 June 2011:
(1) In respect of the statement made by Senator Sherry in June 2011 that in five years time, other than a few specialty bookshops in capital cities, bookstores will cease to exist because of online distribution, was the Minister's statement based on any evidence currently available to the Government; if so, is the Minister able to say:
(a) What proportion (as a percentage) of current total retail sales of books will be transferred from bookstores to online book retailers over the next five years.
(b) How many bookstores in Australia will close down in the next five years.
(c) How many jobs in bookstores will be lost in the next five years.
(d) What proportion (as a percentage) of bookstore sales will be lost to online retailers based (i) overseas, and (ii) in Australia.
(2) Is the Minister able to estimate the potential loss of revenue (ie, GST and import duty) from the predicted shift in sales by Australian consumers from bookstores to online off-shore retailers.

Mr Shorten: The Minister for Small Business has provided the following answer to the honourable member's question:
(1) There is no evidence currently available to the Government which states that in five years time, other than a few specialty bookshops in capital cities, bookstores will cease to exist because of online distribution. However, an unpublished study conducted by PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PwC) on behalf of the Department of Innovation has estimated that up to 24.6 per cent of total book sales could be made online by 2014.
At the core of my comments was that businesses need to recognise and adapt to the changing marketplace to ensure that they stand out among their competitors. They need to be innovative, develop
new niche markets and new business models. Many bookstores are already being proactive and adapting to the digital and online age by building their capacity to sell online and providing the capacity for customers to access digital books in store.

Bookstores that set themselves apart from their competitors by offering services that are not available online are already cementing their future success. Many bookstores, particularly in regional and rural areas, act as a community hub, offering personal book recommendations and reviews; book clubs; live readings; and author events. Many also contribute to local literacy programs by providing free books to schools, hospitals and other community groups.

The Government is committed to ensuring that Australia's book industry remains sustainable and thrives in the digital economy. Senator the Hon Kim Carr, Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research formally established the Book Industry Strategy Group (BISG) in April 2010 to address the challenges of the increasingly digital industry. The BISG has undertaken extensive consultations with the public and industry and will present its final report to Minister Carr in September 2011. I congratulate the retail book industry for working closely with the BISG to ensure that retail bookstores adapt to technological change and remain sustainable into the future.

(a) As stated in response "1" above an unpublished study conducted by PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PwC) on behalf of the Department of Innovation has estimated that up to 24.6 per cent of total book sales could be made online by 2014 but there is no evidence to prove that all of these sales will be transferred from bookstores. Studies in the United States and Europe have provided evidence which show that the growth of e-books, in particular, expand the entire market for books and therefore the impact on print book sales is not proportional to the growth in e-books. However, the full impact of these changes, including the impact of the online sale of printed books is still unknown and unquantified.

(b) There is no information available that projects and quantifies the number of bookstores that will close down in the next five years.

(c) There is no information available that projects and quantifies the number of jobs in bookstores that will be lost in the next five years.

(d) There are no projections on what proportion (as a percentage) of bookstore sales will be lost to online retailers based (i) overseas, and (ii) in Australia from any increase in online sales.

(2) No.

Mackay Division of General Practice

(Question No. 436)

Mr Christensen asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, in writing, on 21 June 2011:

(1) Is she aware of allegations of financial mismanagement of Government funding by the Mackay Division of General Practice (MDGP); if so, (a) how did her department become aware of the allegations, (b) can she indicate the substance of the allegations, and (c) what investigation of the allegations has her department undertaken, and can she indicate the outcome(s).

(2) Is it a fact that a staff member of the MDGP substantiated the allegations; if so, was this because her department's system for monitoring the expenditure of funding did not independently identify the problem.

(3) Did her department (a) suspend all funding to the MDGP specifically as a result of its investigations, and (b) require General Practice Queensland to continue the administration of federally funded clinical services in the Mackay Region after funding of the MDGP was suspended.
Ms Roxon: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

(1) Yes.
   (a) The Department has been concerned about MDGP's financial position since late 2009 as a result of losses incurred in property transactions and business ventures reflected in audited financial statements for MDGP, submitted to the Department under the Divisions of General Practice Program (DGPP) funding agreement. These concerns resulted in a monthly payment and financial reporting regime being instituted for MDGP in 2010.
   (b) The substance of the allegations was ongoing financial problems and inappropriate use of Commonwealth funds.
   (c) A review of MDGP's financial records was undertaken by the Department's Audit and Fraud Control Branch. The review concluded inappropriate allocation of Commonwealth funds. A Debtor Tax Invoice was provided to MDGP for unspent/inappropriately used Commonwealth funds.

(2) Yes, staff confirmed the Department's concerns.

As outlined in 1(a), the Department's system for monitoring expenditure had already identified MDGP as a concern and had already put additional monitoring in place.

(3)
   (a) Funding was suspended as a result of the Department's investigations.
   (b) The Board of MDGP indicated to the Department their intention to cease trading on Friday, 6 May 2011 and recommended that General Practice Queensland (GPQ) would be an appropriate organisation to continue providing Commonwealth funded services which were currently provided by MDGP. The Department and GPQ agreed and entered into a contract with GPQ to assume responsibility for auspicing Commonwealth funded services in the Mackay region.

Mackay Division of General Practice

(Question No. 437)

Mr Christensen asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, in writing, on 21 June 2011:

(1) Is she aware that (a) all employees of the Mackay Division of General Practice (MDGP) were terminated as a result of the Government suspending its funding to MDGP, and (b) some of these employees were offered ongoing employment with General Practice Queensland (GPQ) on Friday 3 June 2011, at which time, they were told that the offer was contingent on their immediate acceptance of an employment contract.

(2) Why were these former employees of MDGP not given more time to consider the terms of the contract for employment with GPQ.

Ms Roxon: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

(1)
   (a) Yes.
   (b) The Department does not interfere with, or have control of, employment matters of independent entities.

(2) This is a matter between the Mackay Division of General Practice and General Practice Queensland.

Adult Migrant English Program

(Question No. 457)

Ms Gambaro asked the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, in writing, on 6 July 2011:

Ms Gambaro
Why did the Adult Migrant English Program cancel its tender for the NSW Adult Migrant English Service.

Mr Bowen: The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

The Request for Tender for the Provision of the Adult Migrant English Program and Related Services was released on 25 November 2009 and closed on 22 February 2010. The successful tenderers were announced in April 2011.

The NSW Adult Migrant English Service, under consortium arrangements with the NSW Department of Education and Communities, successfully won contracts in three NSW contract regions: Northern Sydney and Other Rural, Hunter/Newcastle and Illawarra/Wollongong. They were not selected to provide services in the other NSW contract regions.

The selection of preferred tenderers was made in line with the principles of Commonwealth procurement policy which include: value for money, the need to encourage competition, ensuring the efficient, effective and ethical use of resources, and consideration of the need for accountability and transparency. All tender responses were evaluated against publicly advertised evaluation criteria, taking into consideration the technical merit, relative risk, price, and financial viability of each tenderer.

Tourism Australia: Expenditure
(Question No. 460)

Mr Baldwin asked the Minister for Tourism, in writing, on 7 July 2011:

In 2011-12, what total sum of expenditure has Tourism Australia allocated to each country, and what proportion (as a percentage) of the total budget for Tourism Australia is this sum.

Mr Martin Ferguson: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Market</th>
<th>Amount in AUD Millions</th>
<th>% of Global Marketing Budget (rounded)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>12.82</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>6.55</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>4.73</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NZ</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>2.01</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rest of World</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>63.95</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>