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SITTING DAYS—2012

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FORTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION—SEVENTH PERIOD

Her Excellency Ms Quentin Bryce, Companion of the Order of Australia, Commander of the Royal Victorian Order

House of Representatives Office holders
Speaker—Ms Anna Elizabeth Burke MP
Deputy Speaker—Hon. Bruce Craig Scott MP
Second Deputy Speaker—Hon. Bruce Craig Scott MP

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

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

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

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

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

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### Members of the House of Representatives

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<td>Wilkie, Andrew Damien</td>
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<td>Makin, SA</td>
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**PARTY ABBREVIATIONS**

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

### Heads of Parliamentary Departments

- Clerk of the Senate—R Laing
- Clerk of the House of Representatives—B Wright
- Secretary, Department of Parliamentary Services—C Mills
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<td>Senator the Hon Stephen Conroy</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td><strong>Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on the Centenary of ANZAC CABINET SECRETARY</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Treasurer</strong></td>
<td>The Hon Wayne Swan MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Deputy Prime Minister)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Assistant Treasurer</td>
<td>The Hon David Bradbury MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer</strong></td>
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Each box represents a portfolio. **Cabinet Ministers are shown in bold type.** As a general rule, there is one department in each portfolio. However, there is a Department of Veterans’ Affairs in the Defence portfolio. The title of a department does not necessarily reflect the title of a minister in all cases.
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<td>Senator Arthur Sinodinos</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs</strong></td>
<td>The Hon Julie Bishop MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Minister for Trade</strong></td>
<td>The Hon Teresa Gambaro MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Deputy Leader of the Opposition)</td>
<td>Mr Darren Chester MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Minister for Infrastructure and Transport</strong></td>
<td>Senator the Hon Eric Abetz</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Leader of The Nationals)</td>
<td>Mr Michael Keenan MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Roads and Regional Transport</em></td>
<td>Senator Gary Humphries</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Senator the Hon George Brandis SC</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Leader of the Opposition in the Senate)</td>
<td>Senator Mathias Cormann</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Employment Participation</td>
<td>The Hon Joe Hockey MP</td>
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<td><strong>Shadow Attorney-General</strong></td>
<td>Senator the Hon Tony Smith MP</td>
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<td><strong>Shadow Minister for the Arts</strong></td>
<td>The Hon Sussan Ley MP</td>
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<td>Mr Luke Hartsuyker MP</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Senator Fiona Nash</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. AE Burke) took the chair at 11:00, made an acknowledgement of country and read prayers.

BUSINESS

Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House and Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) (11:01): by leave—I move:

That, unless otherwise ordered, so much of the standing and sessional orders be suspended as would prevent the following arrangements applying for this sitting:

(1) during the period from 11 a.m. until 2 p.m. any division on a question called for in the House, other than on a motion moved by a Minister during this period, shall stand deferred until the conclusion of the discussion of a matter of public importance;

(2) during the period from 11 a.m. until 2 p.m. if any member draws the attention of the Speaker to the state of the House, the Speaker shall announce that he will count the House at the conclusion of the discussion of a matter of public importance, if the Member then so desires; and

(3) any variation to this arrangement to be made only by a motion moved by a Minister.

Briefly, I thank the Manager of Opposition Business for his cooperation on this arrangement, which was agreed to in advance some weeks ago to provide some certainty for members. The Manager of Opposition Business and I will also have discussions about business during the week. It is possible that we might need to sit later on either Wednesday and/or Thursday due to the amount of business before the House. I am letting people know this at the first possible opportunity, but we will have those discussions. If things run smoothly, it will not be necessary. I thank the House.

Mr OAKESHOTT (Lyne) (11:02): On the motion before the House, I make the same point as I made at the end of the last sitting. It is the point about the backlog of private members' votes. I note they are not on the order of business for today. There are at least 13 votes that have been pending for some time now. They have been recommended by the House of Representatives Selection Committee. Each time they have missed their spot until now. It has been understandable but I would hope on behalf of all members in this chamber that a priority of business for this week is that those private members' votes get dealt with.

Question agreed to.

BILLS

Greenhouse and Energy Minimum Standards Bill 2012

Greenhouse and Energy Minimum Standards (Registration Fees) Bill 2012

Transport Safety Investigation Amendment Bill 2012

Legislative Instruments Amendment (Sunsetting Measures) Bill 2012

Statute Law Revision Bill 2012

Customs Tariff Amendment (2012 Measures No. 1) Bill 2012

Customs Tariff Amendment (Schedule 4) Bill 2012

International Monetary Agreements Amendment (Loans) Bill 2012

Maritime Legislation Amendment Bill 2012

Statute Stocktake (Appropriations) Bill (No. 1) 2012
Tax Laws Amendment (2012 Measures No. 4) Bill 2012

Assent

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

COMMITTEES

Australian Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity Committee

Membership

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke) (11:03): I have received a message from the Senate informing the House that Senator Milne has been appointed a member of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on the Australian Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity.

BILLS

Dental Benefits Amendment Bill 2012

Second Reading

Debate resumed on the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr BANDT (Melbourne) (11:04): After the last election, of which everyone knows the result, the voters of Melbourne put me in the fortunate position of being able to sit down with the now Prime Minister to negotiate the formation of government. On behalf of the people of Melbourne I said that we would support the Labor government on a number of conditions.

We have stood by this government and provided our rock solid and stable support. I am very happy that we are now seeing one of these conditions being met by the introduction of the Dental Benefits Amendment Bill 2012. We said when we sat down and negotiated the formation of government that we wanted to see action on climate change, we wanted to see the study into high-speed rail completed and we wanted significant reform in the area of dental health. As a result of that agreement struck back in 2010, we now have the Dental Benefits Amendment Bill 2012. I am very happy indeed to rise to speak in support of it.

This bill is a big step forward for Australian health care. It heralds a massive investment in the dental health of Australia's children. That is a smart investment and it will be handsomely rewarded in the future. It is also an achievement that the Australian Greens are proud of. By working with the government on this dental reform package, we have delivered for Australians. We have demonstrated what can be achieved by a minority government when different sides of politics work together. It is not a moment too soon that we in this chamber have turned our attention to dental health. Australians are lucky to have an excellent health system. It is a system that, with few exceptions, is there for us when we need it. We have a universal system. Anybody can access it, whether or not they have insurance and whether they are rich or poor. There is room for improvement in our health system, but we can say that no Australian who is sick needs to suffer alone or fear the financial consequences. That is surely something to be proud of.

That is all true unless you are suffering from a certain type of medical problem. If you have a broken toe or damaged spleen, we will look after you. But if the problem is in your mouth you are out of luck. When it comes to teeth, getting help can be out of the reach of many people. This has terrible consequence for the health of the nation. That dental care was left out of Medicare is a historical accident. Today, the vast majority of dentists work in private practice. Spending on dental health mostly comes straight from the hip pocket, either directly or through health insurance. Dentists set up shop where people can afford to see them—generally in big cities and in more affluent areas. Dental
care is expensive. That comes as no surprise to any Australian.

That means that for certain segments of the population, going to the dentist is a luxury that they cannot afford. Unfortunately, when you do not get the health treatment that you need your health gets worse. Simple dental decay can become an infected abscess. A cheap filling can become a hospitalisation. Life can become a misery for some people. Because so many struggle to find the money to get to the dentist, dental visiting patterns in Australia are poor. About a third of people do not go as much as they need to for good oral health. About the same number report delaying visits or delaying the treatment that they need due to cost. The data shows that this trend is worsening over time.

If you do not go to the dentist regularly, you lose teeth. You are four times as likely to end up with an extraction as somebody who goes as often as they should. You have four times the decay. You end up with fewer working teeth in your mouth. And unfortunately income is an excellent predictor of oral health: the lower your income bracket, the worse your indicators are. As someone who represents the electorate that has the largest number of public housing dwellings, I speak from firsthand knowledge when I say that it is incredibly important for the people of Melbourne that this reform is made. I know that the number of decayed, missing or filled teeth doubles as you go from the highest income bracket to the lowest.

If you are Indigenous, the situation is worse. Indigenous Australians in their late teens have eight times the decay and 11 times the incidence of periodontal disease than those in their late teens in the non-Indigenous population. Older Australians also suffer. One in five people in aged care are suffering pain or discomfort due to dental issues at any time. In regional and rural Australia, services are even more difficult to access, so country Australians fare worse than those of us who live in big cities. All of this adds up to massive inequity.

And the problem is only getting worse. The oral health of our kids was once among the best in the OECD. But it has been steadily slipping. It is high time to act to address this growing health crisis. I am pleased to be speaking to a bill that begins to do precisely that.

The Australian Greens have been campaigning for dental healthcare reform for a long time. Nothing is more important than the nation's health. We recognise this and have made getting dental care into Medicare one of our top priorities for reform. Our vision is for comprehensive dental health care that is universally accessible. We have not been shy about saying that. It is a vision that we continue to strive for and one that Australians share. People know that getting access to adequate dental care can be a challenge. I have spoken to many constituents and others around Australia about it. When you point out that it does not have to be this way—that the country could afford to bring dental care into Medicare—you have an instant policy convert. Why can't it be covered? There is no good answer.

When the Greens signed the agreement with the Labor Party to form government, we made dental health a part of that understanding. We know that reform will be an incremental process, but it has to start somewhere and it started with the Greens. We have consistently defended the role of Medicare. We know that a single-payer model is the most efficient. Australia must avoid going down the road of treating public health care as a safety net, only available for
those who cannot afford top quality health care. We do not want a two-tier US-style health system here. It is less efficient and it is less equitable. We should not only not chip away at Medicare but we should expand it. Dental health is the obvious omission.

To advance this cause, we worked with the government to get the National Advisory Council on Dental Health established. They were an independent panel of dental experts tasked with assessing the reform options for Australia. The options that they came up with are consistent with a long-term universal access scheme. This is a goal that many in the health sector share. But this is not just a health issue. It is as much an issue of social justice as a health issue. The pain of poor dental health affects the poor. It affects migrants and those of diverse backgrounds. It affects Indigenous people worst of all. In a practical sense, it can affect your chances of finding meaningful work able to sustain you and your family. If you front up for a job interview with your teeth missing, you are less likely to get that job.

These statistics translate into real consequences for people, such as constant pain, loss of sleep, malnutrition and sometimes even a life-threatening infection. Sometimes the consequence is social exclusions. As I said, getting a job or even getting a rental property is all the more difficult if your health is bad, let alone if you have missing teeth. Imagine being too afraid to smile lest somebody see the gaps and judges you for them. The Greens care for people. Dental health reform is for the people who are falling through the cracks and suffering as a result.

I am pleased to say that we are making progress. By making dental health a priority, we saw over half-a-billion dollars in the last budget put into dental health initiatives as a down-payment on a bigger reform. Now, by working with the government, we have achieved the next phase of reform. In August, a $4 billion dental reform package was announced. This includes $1.3 billion in new money for the nation's public dental services so that they can hire more dentists, build new infrastructure and stay open longer. We also achieved $225 million for grants so that nobody will miss out. Rural and remote communities and other areas that are missing out will be able to access this money to ensure that every Australian has access to services when they need them.

But the biggest reform of all is a new Medicare entitlement for kids, with $2.7 billion to be spent over four years to give all kids in families receiving family tax benefit a access to essential preventative and restorative dental care. That is 3.4 million kids who will be able to go to the dentist of their choice, hand over their Medicare card and get seen. This is the biggest dental reform in Australia's history. It is a big injection of funds and it means millions of Australians will get better care sooner. It is also a better investment. By investing in the dental health of our children, we ensure that there will be a generation of adults who have better dental health than many of us could boast today.

This bill implements the first stage of this reform. It alters the Dental Benefits Act to enable all children in family tax benefit A families to access a schedule of services that will enable them to get good dental care. This entitlement can be used in public or private clinics. You can take the kids to the dentist that you prefer, from the family dentist to the dentist in the school dental van. The entitlement will be for $1,000 in services every two years.

Unfortunately, part of this reform involves the closure of the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme. This scheme had many
inefficiencies. It was also inequitable, as it was not means-tested. Some people could get thousands of dollars in treatment while others who did not qualify under the uncertain definition of 'chronic disease' could get nothing. Still, it was publicly funded dental care and we do not deny that many people got treatment. That is why the Greens kept it open for an extra four years while we negotiated something for the future. It is regrettable that some people will lose an entitlement, but as part of this package we have ensured that the public system will have as many extra resources as possible so that those in dire need will have somewhere to go. In the end, the new reform will lead to greater equity. More people will get the services that they need to stay healthy.

The Greens believe that everybody deserves access to the best in dental care. Nobody should miss out. We will continue to build on this reform until we have achieved that vision and nobody is excluded. This bill is consistent with that goal. By establishing the Child Dental Benefits Schedule we have taken a big step towards universal dental care, giving 3.4 million young Australians access to Medicare funded dental care. But it is only a first step. One day, going to the dentist will be like going to the doctor. We are a rich nation and we can afford to do it. We should strive to lead the world in health care. There can be no better way to spend the divide of our prosperity than on better health care. There can be no more equitable way to spend than to share that care with those who presently cannot afford it.

Yes, we are not there yet. If we had our way, the Greens would get us there much faster. This bill and this reform involved many compromises. But they serve as an excellent example of what a minority government can do when people from different sides of politics get together to work in good faith. I congratulate the government on this reform and I am proud of the role that the Greens and the people of Melbourne have played in it. It will make a difference in the lives of many people, and not a moment too soon. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr BRIGGS (Mayo) (11:17): I rise to speak on the Dental Benefits Amendment Bill 2012 and the disallowance motion moved by the shadow minister for health. It will not surprise people to learn that I will be taking a different approach to the one the member for Melbourne took in his remarks in this respect. In fairness to the member for Melbourne, what he said was true to his heart and true to his ideological view of the world. Paraphrasing, he said that the Greens and their coalition partner, the government, are happy to announce a dental scheme without allocating the funding for it and without thinking through the consequences and how much this will cost. That is a position that the Greens take very regularly. They do not have a particular view about economic responsibility. They believe that government should be there at every step of people's lives and to hell with the consequences. The Greens are not renowned for fiscal responsibility.

However, it is shameful for the Labor Party—who claim that they are trying to build a surplus, and this current government has never delivered one—to have stood alongside the Greens when this was announced. The health minister, representing the Labor Party, announced this policy without announcing how it would be funded. It is one of the policies which add to the $120 billion black hole of commitments that the government has made in the last few months, as reported by the Australian Financial Review. These are commitments that the government is announcing without thinking through the consequences and without allocating the appropriate
appropriation from the budget to pay for these big new policies into the future. We know that adding dental care to Medicare would be hugely expensive. In fact, it was a former Labor finance minister, Peter Walsh, who commented some time ago that the quickest way to bankrupt the Commonwealth would be to add dental care to Medicare.

This is an issue that needs to be thought through carefully, and that is the approach the coalition has announced it will take. In January this year the Leader of the Opposition made a very good speech in respect of managing Australia's economy and managing Australia's budget in an appropriate manner. In that speech he said that we have an aspiration to ensure that the dental needs of Australians are looked after better than they are now but that we need to do it in a well-thought-through and budgeted way so that we are not just adding additional cost to the Australian budget without thinking about the impact on Australian taxpayers, because ultimately it is taxpayers' money that we are about here.

Much is said about the benefits to children who will be covered by the scheme from 2014, which we heard the member for Melbourne talking about. But little is ever thought about the consequences for those same children when they get older and have to deal with increasing debt and deficits because of commitments made by previous generations, and that should always be one of the considerations that we give in this place. All the needs of society need to be tempered by the fact that there is a limited resource in the federal budget. Already we have a government that is spending more than it earns each year and that is why we have a record debt. The government will boast that it is a low debt compared with the rest of the world, but of course you do not compare your mortgage to that of your next door neighbour; you look at the way you can address your mortgage yourself within your means. What we are seeing now increasingly is that the Australian budget is becoming more and more difficult to manage because the government continues to make inappropriate and badly-thought-through decisions in relation to expenditure. We have seen that on a range of policy issues. Most famously is the pink batts scheme—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): Order! The member for Mayo will return to the bill before the chair.

Mr BRIGGS: I am, Madam Deputy Speaker Burke. I am talking about the cost of the dental scheme. I think that is a very important point that we need to think about. Time after time we have seen examples of the government making announcements about policies, as the Minister for Health did in this respect, standing next to the Greens spokesperson on this—in coalition with the Greens—without thinking through the consequences of the bill. She made an announcement without saying where the money is coming from. We have seen this time and time again with this government: disaster after disaster. Whether it be the pink batts scheme or whether it be the overpriced school hall scheme, there have been a litany of examples of the government not having thought through the consequences.

In addition to that, what I thought was disappointing about the member for Melbourne was that he just walked away from those people who are currently receiving the support of the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme. Time after time we and the shadow minister for health have said that, if there are problems with this scheme, we will work with the government to fix those inefficiencies and problems—of course we will—but what we would not do, and what we do not support, is just hanging people out to dry who are currently getting the benefits
of these schemes. We have example after example in our electorates of people who are currently getting the benefit of this scheme who are now going to be left without the assistance that they expected—and in some cases in very poor circumstances.

At the Port Elliot Show in my electorate on the weekend numerous people raised with me the fact that they are midway through treatment and it is going to be cut off. On the attitude of the government, a constituent of mine, Sharon from Strathalbyn, told me that the Minister for Health's office advised her that there is nothing that could be done about it. That was the response from the Minister for Health's office when she contacted the Minister for Health to say that it was a real problem for them. Sharon said that she had some serious dental work that needed to be done, and still needed to have her bottom teeth removed. On her dentist's advice she has to wait until her gums recede properly before having the dental work completed. But come the 30 November scheme cut-off, which will happen before she can have the work completed, she will miss out on having it done under the scheme even though she is midway through the treatment. Labor members of parliament come in here time after time to tell us how they stand up for people in society who need their support, but they stand by the policy that the Minister for Health and their coalition partners, the Greens, are advocating: to get rid of the chronic support scheme. It is a disgrace.

There is not only one example—another is Diane from Victor Harbour, whose 20-year-old daughter has an eating disorder. She had an appointment arranged for 17 September; however, the appointment, which had planned for dental work, has been cancelled because the practice is trying to deal with the backlog of people. She will not get into the chronic support scheme.

What does the Labor Party say to these people? What is its answer? The answer according to the minister's office is that there is just nothing you can do about it. We have a policy where we see that the details have not been thought through as to how this is to be paid for in the future. It is the aspiration of doing good things without thinking through the consequences for those people you are trying to do good things for—in order words, the increased tax they will have to pay in the future and the increased debt that it will build up—and without thinking through properly how to put this policy in place. We are also seeing a litany of examples in each of our electorates—as well as, I am sure, in the electorates of Labor members—where this scheme that is being cut short mid-stream for many people receiving this treatment is causing great difficulty and great damage. We know the details of this dental scheme have not been thought through, just like so many other Labor Party messes that have been inflicted upon our country in the last five years. This adds to that mess.

The people in my electorate who have been affected by this have been shocked at the lack of regard that the health minister, her office and the government have had for the concerns that people have raised in this respect. It seems to be a further example of the way the Labor Party operates in government, in this case in coalition with the Greens. I support very strongly the move by the shadow health minister to have the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme continued and to disallow this move by the government because it will make a genuine difference for people who are mid-stream with their treatment. It is shameful that they are to be left hanging and waiting without any possible way to fix issues which, on advice, they have not been able to fix prior to the scheme closing at the end of November.
In summing up my view on this bill, improving Australia's coverage for people's dental care is an important policy to pursue, and the Leader of the Opposition made it very clear in January that this would be something we would aspire to do in a proper, well-thought-through way. Labor is doing it in this manner, without thinking through the consequences. When the minister for health stood with her coalition partner, the Greens, at the media conference announcing this, she was asked how she was to pay for it. She said, 'Don't worry, we'll tell you about that later.' That summed up exactly the Labor Party's attitude to the federal budget: 'Don't worry about it, we'll tell you later.' The $120 billion black hole: 'Don't worry about it, we'll tell you later.' These are people who purport to represent the people who have to pay for this excess, this lack of foresight, these badly thought through plans and, indeed, this lack of planning for how these schemes will work.

What we see all too often with this government is that it is about the politics of the day, about trying to ensure that the Prime Minister survives until Christmas and gets through the crisis developing within the party's leadership. This morning we saw the resignation of the caucus chairman, which no doubt adds to that pressure. That is what this bill represents: politics. It does not represent good policy. As Peter Walsh, a former Labor finance minister of much renown, said: without thinking through putting dental in Medicare you will bankrupt the Commonwealth. This is what the Labor Party is seeking to do not just through this action and this announcement but also through a series of actions and announcements. It is shameful the way the party has gone about it; hanging people out to dry mid-treatment, not thinking through the consequences for future generations and the impact on their budgets and their decisions that they will get to make with their money. The shadow minister for health's motion is worthy of support, and a better-thought-through dental scheme will be announced by the coalition leading up to the next election.

Ms RISHWORTH (Kingston) (11:29): I am very pleased to speak out on the Dental Benefits Amendment Bill 2012. I think this side of the House and certainly I have always been very focused on how we better provide dental care to those who need it most. Having good quality of teeth and having good dental care does make a huge impact on various aspects of our lives. First and foremost is the impact on our general health and wellbeing. Living with poor dental health can be a painful exercise, affecting speech, sleep and eating, with certain foods even triggering off nerve endings. For some people, chewing anything can hurt because of rotten teeth and decay. If we do not look after our teeth and we lose the ability to chew then it is really a nightmare for many, many people and a severe impact on their quality of life.

Having poor dental care and poor teeth and oral health can also have very severe adverse interpersonal social impacts on a person's poor health, which can drive a person to withdraw from their life. People can suffer from the embarrassment of the appearance of their teeth, which can lead them to avoiding eating in public or having meals with friends, and even being afraid to smile and show their teeth in photos. Unhealthy-looking teeth can also cause people to miss out on job opportunities due to their outward appearance not meeting the employer's expectation. I think it is important to note that if people are not able in childhood to have good oral health then this poor oral health can follow them into
adulthood. That is why I have been an advocate for a long time about supporting preventative care and preventative treatment to ensure that small problems in childhood are addressed and these issues are not carried on and do not get worse into adult life.

I think it can be said that the overall dental health of children has been improving over the decades, but this trend is not necessarily improving over the last two decades. It is shocking to look at some of the statistics from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare report, which shows that almost 20,000 children under the age of 10 are hospitalised each year due to avoidable dental issues. It is also shocking that more than half of young people have tooth decay by the age of 15, with 45.1 per cent of 12-year-olds reported to have decay in their permanent teeth. Perhaps more alarming is that just under half of children who have just started school had a history of decay in their baby teeth. This is of concern and something that we on this side of the House are very, very driven to address.

I think it is important to look at the effect that income has. For so long, we have treated dental health as separate to physical health—separate to our normal health for which we can go to the doctor. Our dental health has been set very separately. It is not as easy for those that have a more modest income to afford to go to the dentist, unlike going to the local GP with the universal health care that we have. It is not as easy for people to be able to go and visit a dentist, especially if they are on a modest income. Many families cannot really afford the prospect of going to the dentist just to do preventative work. I think that is so important.

I am so pleased that this bill is going a long way to actually saying that, for those families that suffer from cost-of-living pressures and need assistance with their children's health care, we are going to provide that assistance. We are going to provide it for those to ensure that their children are able to access the health care that they need and ensure that the issues that they may experience in their childhood get addressed and do not continue on and plague them in their adult life. So I think this is incredibly important.

I also hear many cases in my electorate of adults who are in pain, putting up with poor dental health. I have seen firsthand the devastating impact that it can have on their lives. For many of these people the necessary treatment with a private dentist is too out of reach for their budgets, so they go on putting up with poor teeth.

We have heard a lot from the opposition today about their great plan for dental care, which they have not announced; there are no details. They say they will have a plan but there are no details. When they were in government, when the Howard government was elected, they ripped millions upon millions of dollars out of public dental care. In my electorate, at Noarlunga, as it was around the rest of the country, that led to huge waiting lists being accumulated. So many people could not access dental care because of the funding withdrawal by the coalition. Today we are seeing some crocodile tears when it comes to dental care. Their record while in government showed they ripped money out of the public dental system. Of course, those on a low income, who cannot afford a private dentist, use the public dental system and rely on the public dental system. In government, the opposition ripped money out of that.

We have not been doing that. We have been ensuring that we are putting money back into the public dental system and we have already made significant dental care investments. The government has provided,
in its most recent budget, $515 million to have a blitz on public dental waiting lists. This is a quite shocking statistic: those who earn more than $60,000 a year have seven more teeth, on average, than Australia’s poorest people. That shows quite clearly the income gap that causes the difference between those with good oral health and those without. We need to ensure that the public dental care system is accessible. We need to ensure that those on the lowest income who cannot afford to go to a private dentist can actually access the care they need. While the Liberal Party in government pulled out money, we are putting money back in.

I see the member for Boothby here, who has been very critical about the GP superclinic at Noarlunga. It is very disappointing that he has not recognised the important services that are available there. At the Noarlunga complex we have been able, with a partnership between the state and federal government, to triple the number of dental chairs. We have seen a rise from six dental chairs to 24 dental chairs.

Dr Southcott: You closed the school clinics. Good one!

Ms Rishworth: If the member for Boothby would look at the bill, maybe he would see the massive support we are providing for children in this bill, and then he might actually consider the bill and vote for it. It is disappointing that he will not vote for helping children get appropriate dental care. He seems to be opposed to this in Noarlunga, and I am sure the residents of Noarlunga would be very upset if he is opposed to increasing the number of dental chairs from six to 24, which is expected to provide 32,000 appointments for adults and children each year. This is an important boost. Importantly, we will provide the services to those who need it the most: those on a modest income.

We have heard a lot today about the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme, which the Liberal Party is so proud of. The now Leader of the Opposition introduced that scheme while he was health minister. As I have tried to illustrate, income plays an important role in whether or not you can get access to health care. When armed with these facts, you would think that when the Leader of the Opposition was looking at the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme he might look at the equity in dental care. That equity being: perhaps means test this? Perhaps means test this to ensure that the public money is being directed to those who need it most.

Of course, the now Leader of the Opposition—the then health minister—did not means test this program, and this provided another important inequity. That was that if people had a chronic disease then they could access a significant amount of money to get dental treatment. If you were poor or on a modest income, and did not have a chronic health condition, you could not access any money from it. It was poorly targeted and not means tested, so public money was going and, indeed, as the program continued there seemed to be increasing problems with the program.

Of course, first there was the cost blow-out; a complete cost blow-out that the then Leader of Opposition said would cost around $90 million each year. It ended up costing $1 billion each year. And there were still so many people who did not have a chronic disease waiting on the public dental waiting list because they ignored the public dental waiting list, and ignored the people that need it the most. So first of all there was the poor targeting: $1 billion targeted very poorly, not means tested and available to people on a very high income.
The scheme was also poorly managed, receiving 1,000 complaints and with reports and evidence of wide misuse of the scheme. This includes some practitioners ordering dentures that did not fit, unnecessary crowns or other work and charging up to $4,250 for doing very little work. We often hear the opposition talk in this place about using taxpayers' money responsibly. Unfortunately, they do not have a very good track record on this. They might talk a lot in this place about using taxpayers' money very wisely but, unfortunately, while in government they failed to deliver this, and the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme was one of those.

Unfortunately, it has been left to this government to fix it up and actually to ensure that the money that is spent by taxpayers on public dentistry is done in a way that ensures that those who need it most do get access to it. We announced a policy of shutting this scheme down. We believed straight away that this money was poorly targeted and that it was being, quite frankly, rorted in a lot of cases—therefore, we felt very strongly about it. To those on the opposition benches who say that this is such a surprise: this has been our policy for a long time and we are now delivering on that policy to ensure that that money is used responsibly, that that money is not wasted and that that money is actually directed, as I said, to those who need it the most.

The bill before the House today is the first step in our dental reform package, which really seeks to bridge accessibility issues. These reforms build on the work that the government has done so far to turn around the impact of the coalition government's cuts to the public dental scheme when they were in government. Quite frankly, there is the fact that the coalition ignored the dental health of children when they were in office. It provides $2.7 billion for around 3.5 million Australian children, who will be eligible for subsidised dental care under the children's dental scheme, Grow Up Smiling. That will commence on 1 January 2014. As well, we are providing $1.3 billion for the states and territories on 1 July 2014 to expand the services for millions and millions of adults in the public system who are low income earners, to ensure that they do have access to better oral health care. I was speaking also to the dental service at Noarlunga, and they are now embarking on being able, with the injection of money from the Commonwealth, to engage in preventative check-ups to ensure that they do not let problems just go into emergencies—go into chronic problems—but are actually having preventative check-ups to stop the problems from occurring.

This does build on the work that we have— (Time expired)

Mr BRUCE SCOTT (Maranoa—Second Deputy Speaker) (11:45): I rise to speak on the Dental Benefits Amendment Bill 2012. The coalition do support an investment in dental health; however, we have real concerns about the way the government is going to administer this bill should it pass the parliament and also about the fact that it has already announced that it is going to close the Medicare Chronic Disease Dental Scheme, the CDDS, effective on 30 November this year while the replacement scheme is not due to commence until 2014. It appears that this government is trying to yet again find a savings measure during this financial year to deliver some fictitious or thinly veiled surplus next year.

The closure of the Medicare Chronic Disease Dental Scheme really does concern me. The scheme was introduced by the coalition—in fact, by the now Leader of the Opposition when he was the health minister. I know from discussions with my constituency that many people on low
incomes and means will not be able to afford any other dental services without the scheme we introduced when we were in government. They have very real concerns, and I will outline a few of those in my contribution.

We do support investment in dental health, but the problem we have is the intent of this bill and the fact it is going to leave a gap between November this year and 2014 in any scheme that will support families and people, particularly those with chronic diseases, who have already received and need dental services. The other aspect of it is that children will lose access to treatment on 30 November this year with the closure of the CDDS. This is a real concern. Not only people with chronic health issues but also many children will lose access to it.

I want to outline for the benefit of the House a couple of examples that have come to my notice in my constituency. I have had many people very alarmed about the closure of this scheme. They have already been advised by their dental service that they will no longer be able to access the Medicare Chronic Disease Dental Scheme. A constituent in Nanango needs major dental work. He is a 49-year-old disability pensioner who has been on the disability pension for some 16 years. He is currently suffering from abscesses and bleeding of the gums and is in serious pain. On 14 September this year he made an appointment to see his general practitioner. His local GP told him that the dental scheme was cancelled in early September this year and nothing would be available to him until 2014, notwithstanding the condition he is in and the very important reason why he needs access to dental services—he is a disability pensioner. My constituent is investigating other options for financing the dental work himself. I can assure you—and I hope members on both sides of this House would understand—that the ability for anyone on a disability pension to access dental services and pay for them is very limited. This constituent has accessed the Medicare Chronic Disease Dental Scheme because of his need for dental work, and without continuing dental work his whole health will deteriorate.

Another couple who live in Tara in my constituency have received a letter from their dentist to say that the dental benefits scheme is being scrapped. The wife has a litany of dental problems and is also legally blind and hearing impaired and needs both her knees operated on. She is not in good health: she is legally blind and hearing impaired. The couple relied on this dental scheme for their dental services for the benefit of their health, because—as the scheme that was introduced by the Howard government, when Tony Abbott was health minister, says—it is Medicare funded for a chronic disease dental scheme, for people who need this for a chronic health reason to be able to access the service to get that dental work done, because not having that work done is going to be very detrimental to their overall health. There is nothing—to replace access to a dental service for this couple who live in Tara, particularly the lady, who is legally blind and hearing impaired.

I have received another email from a Gordonbrook constituent on 3 October, only a few days ago. These are quotes, and these are constituents who write to me, email me or phone me and let me know their situation. They are not examples that I am making up. These are actual examples of constituents who have very real concerns. They have been accessing the Medicare Chronic Disease Dental Scheme but are going to lose that access as a result of what this government is doing in its approach to try and identify, through a savings measure, a scheme that has worked well. The
government has no plans to put in another one until 2014. I quote from this email:

I am 65 years of age, and was diagnosed with diabetes 15 years ago, with complications of tooth decay and gum disease. During recent years, with the support of my doctor and dentist, I have received considerable help under the Medicare Chronic Disease Dental Scheme—the scheme introduced by the coalition when Tony Abbott, now the Leader of the Opposition—was health minister. I go on:

The recent decision by the government to end the Scheme came as a shock. Would you please support the retention of the Medicare Dental Scheme after 30 November this year?

He ends his email by saying, 'Thank you for listening.' I can assure the House that I am listening to my constituents. The coalition is listening to the broad range of people out there who have gained considerable health benefits by being able to access the Medicare-funded Chronic Disease Dental Scheme that this government wants to scrap, with no plans to put anything in place until 2014. It is time that the government listened to emails such as this one from this constituent from Gordonbrook or the couple from Tara or the man from the Nanango who is on a disability pension—all within my constituency. I know members of this side of the House have examples—numerous examples—from their own constituents. I am sure the government members would be hearing from their own constituents who have examples like that with these people who have chronic health issues to deal with, who do need dental work and who—as it has been up until it was announced that it would be scrapped in September this year—have been able to access that dental work through the Medicare-funded Chronic Disease Dental Scheme.

One of the other concerns that are related to dental health is the access to rural health services for health and wellbeing of people living in rural and remote Australia. Recently, Humphreys and Wakeman from Monash University and the Centre for Remote Health in Alice Springs, a joint centre of Flinders University and Charles Darwin University, published a discussion paper entitled 'Primary health care in rural and remote Australia: achieving equity of access and outcomes through national reform'. What they found in that report is alarming. This is a university study. It is not a political party; it is a university study by credible universities and professors. They found that rural and remote Australians have a life expectancy of up to seven years less than their city cousins. The population that they described in rural and remote—as described in the discussion paper—is one-third of the total population of Australia. That is about seven million people, covering something like 7.5 million square kilometres of the land mass of Australia. They have poorer health outcomes due merely to their geographic location.

Recently on the ABC there was a report which should also send alarm bells through the halls of this parliament. It concerned the outback treatment of oral health—the TOOTH trial program that the Royal Flying Doctor Service is conducting in rural New South Wales. A dentist who is part of that program is looking at the dental health of people in north-western New South Wales and what he said should sound alarm bells every hour of every day in this place. He said the dental health that he had seen in rural Australia, where he was operating, was worse than he had seen in third world countries.

Using the examples of three constituents in my electorate using the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme, which was introduced by the Howard government, that is why the coalition has introduced a disallowance motion to ensure that we can see the
continuation of access to a dental scheme. We would like to work with the government to refine the dental health scheme; it is not as though we oppose it. We support access to a dental health service for those who can least afford it where, without that dental work, it will have a detrimental effect on their health.

The work done by Monash University, the Centre for Remote Health in Alice Springs and at Flinders University, or The Outback Oral Treatment and Health Program by the Royal Flying Doctor Service and work they have done with dentists in that program, demonstrates to me—and it should demonstrate adequately to this government—that it is wrong to end a scheme that is still bringing benefits, particularly better health outcomes, for those who cannot afford access to dental services. Without that access there will be detrimental effects to their health. It means they will most likely end up on the health budget through Medicare because their health will deteriorate without access to the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme for their teeth.

For too long, in many ways, we have looked through the prism of Medicare to address the health needs of people. I acknowledge, too, that for too long dental services were not included in Medicare. I know that state governments have a public scheme. The problem for those constituents of mine who I have just described is that there is a 650,000-long waiting list to gain access to the public scheme, which I understand some doctors have suggested to my constituents they should try to do. Are they going to join a queue of 650,000 people because the government cancels this very successful scheme without any plans to introduce a new one until 2014?

I say to the government: listen to the examples that I have brought to the attention of the chamber. Listen to the people out there who desperately need dental health to be addressed through a Medicare-funded program. We will work with you to make sure we can refine the current scheme. We are committed to that. But please, do not leave people out on a limb without any access for the next 15 to 18 months, probably closer to two years, which appears to be the government's approach. What this will mean is that we will move a disallowance for the closure of the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme to protect those patients who otherwise would have to go without treatment for at least 19 months for adults and 13 months for children until Labor's proposed alternatives are due to commence.

Mr PERRETT (Moreton) (12:00): I rise to speak on the Dental Benefits Amendment Bill 2012, which amends the Dental Benefits Act 2008 to set up the legislative framework for the Child Dental Benefits Schedule that will commence operation in January 2014. I noted with interest the comments from the member for Maranoa, particularly about his constituents in Tara. For his benefit, I will point out that last night, I was at an event in Brisbane for the Republic of China—Taiwan—and met some constituents of mine who run a charity called the Tzu Chi Foundation. They were out in Tara on the weekend. They are a charity, but they take dental chairs out to Tara. I might send him the information, because I think that he would like to send them a letter congratulating them on the charity work that they do. I met them last night at this event and the Minister for Health, the Hon. Lawrence Springborg, was there as well. This is a charity that did great work in the flood. They gave out almost $1 million to people in my electorate. On the weekend, they were out helping the member for Maranoa's constituents in Tara. I just mention that in passing. It does show—as the member for Maranoa pointed out, with that
waiting list in Queensland of 650,000 people—how important it is that we get dental care right. It is a big issue. I would acknowledge that, as stated by the member for Maranoa.

The Child Dental Benefits Schedule form part of the Gillard Labor government's $4.1 billion dental reform package, which was announced by Health Minister Plibersek on 29 August 2012. The Commonwealth's power to legislate on the provision of dental services was added to the Constitution following a referendum in 1946 which authorised the insertion of the whole amendment as it stands today. As anyone who knows the history of referendums in Australia knows, we have had only eight out of 44 actually get up, so it was significant when section 51(xxiiiA) was initially introduced by the Chifley Labor government in order to pass the Commonwealth's Pharmaceutical Benefits Act 1944.

The then Leader of the Opposition, a bloke whose last name was Menzies—perhaps some of those opposite might have heard of him; he went on to other things—actually supported the extension of the Commonwealth government's power to legislate for the provision of maternity allowances, widows' pensions, child endowment and unemployment, pharmaceutical, sickness and hospital benefits, but he was opposed to the extension of the power over medical and dental services. The Parliamentary Library gave me some information showing that the opposition claimed that the proposed amendment would give the Commonwealth constitutional power to nationalise the medical and dental professions and make them members of one government service, which they argued undermined the right to professional independence held by medical and dental practitioners and the right to personal autonomy in a doctor-patient relationship. Although Dr Evatt, the then Labor Attorney-General, was less than clear about the issue of nationalisation, it became clear during the course of the parliamentary debates that some members of the Chifley government were in favour of introducing a similar scheme to the National Health Service trust in Britain. To prevent this possibility, Mr Menzies then proposed an amendment that extended Commonwealth powers to the provision of medical and dental services but not so as to authorise any form of civil conscription. This was accepted by the Chifley Labor government and was put to the people in September 1946 and was carried both nationally and in all six states. So you have there Ben Chifley, Bob Menzies and Doc Evatt all on the same page on this issue in terms of clarifying to the Australian people how important it is that we get our dental services right and bring them into the Constitution.

If it had not been for a good Labor government like Ben Chifley's and also the Gillard Labor government of today, we would not be in the position we are in today to introduce programs like dental for kids which will help over 3.4 million children have access to better oral health care. The child benefit schedule will replace the Medicare Teen Dental Plan. The legislation means that, for over three million children, going to the dentist will be just like seeing their GP. I am sure the member for Mayo—and I take note of his position sitting at the dispatch box and congratulate him on his promotion—would be in favour of this, in terms of giving dental care to young children.

It means that 3.4 million children whose families receive family tax benefit part A, Abstudy, carer payment, disability support pension, parenting payment, special benefit, youth allowance, double orphan pension, the veteran's children education scheme or some
military rehabilitation and compensation act education and training scheme will qualify for this new scheme, the dental scheme for kids. Families will be entitled to $1,000 per child every two years over the life of the package. Importantly, parents will be able to take their children to either private or public dental services to access this program. Whether it be the QEII dental clinic, which is in my electorate, or the school dental clinic at Yeronga, also in my electorate, working families in my electorate will receive more assistance when they go to the dentist.

In addition to the dental scheme for kids, the dental reform package will provide extra funding for 1.4 million additional services for adults on low incomes, including pensioners, concession cardholders and those with special needs, to have better access to dental health care in the public system. The program will also mean more services and more dentists in areas of most need, particularly outside capital cities and large regional centres. As I mentioned in the discussion with the member for Maranoa, when you have a charity from my electorate who have connections to Taiwan going out to Tara—a town I used to play football against when I was growing up in St George—to offer dental work, you know that we do need to do more work. The package comes on top of the $515 million allocated in the last budget, which included a blitz on public dental waiting lists, and, taking the member for Maranoa's figures for Queensland, a waiting list of 650,000 people. That is obviously no comfort whatsoever if you have a toothache.

Now, I have had a lot to do with QEII hospital. In particular, I have been to the waiting area of the dental hospital a lot. I particularly remember the lead-up to the election of 2004, which was held eight years ago today. One of the members opposite was elected on that day, eight years ago; I congratulate the member for Cunningham on that anniversary. That election was not as good for me; there was no second prize in 2004. But I spent a lot of time at the QEII hospital, because it was obviously a big issue in that election. We were trying to bring in more dental services. I remember the former member for Werriwa talking about dental care at the time, because it is important that we get it right. I remember that election well in terms of looking at providing the appropriate support. I remember the Medicare safety scheme put forward by the Minister for Health at the time, the member for Warringah. He gave a rock-solid, ironclad guarantee on Four Corners that that was going to be the policy. So on 9 October that was the policy but, by March the next year—only four or five months later—they rolled over.

Now, in that Westminster tradition, did he resign and say, 'I gave my guarantee.' It was like a blood oath without blood. It meant absolutely nothing; he rolled absolutely rolled over. His word, whether written, signed or whatever, was shown to be worth absolutely nothing.

Mr Briggs interjecting—

Mr PERRETT: So you are saying it is exactly the same as that, member for Mayo? He is saying it is exactly the same as that.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Dr Leigh): Order! The member will direct his comments through the chair.

Mr PERRETT: I am sorry, Deputy Speaker. So oral health has been declining since the mid-1990s, as the former health minister—now Leader of the Opposition—would know, with almost 20,000 kids under the age of 10 hospitalised every year due to avoidable dental issues. With two boys under 10, I know how difficult it can be to get children to brush their teeth twice a day, let alone getting them to brush their teeth for
longer than 20 seconds. Oral health is not only important to your appearance and your sense of wellbeing but also to your overall health. Studies have found that cavities and gum disease can contribute to many other serious conditions, even leading to things such as diabetes and respiratory diseases. Untreated cavities can also be painful and lead to serious infections and other health complications.

Now, I have been in this parliament for only five years, but for much of that time I slipped into a habit that I had never had in my life of occasionally, during question time when it got a little dull, having a lolly. My dentist pointed out to me the other day that it is a classic case of someone taking up sweets later in life. I have had to stop that. I now have to pay attention to everything that goes on in question time without any treats.

There have also been studies that have found correlations between poor oral health and heart disease and even between poor oral health and women delivering pre-term babies. Poor oral health certainly affects your appearance, your self esteem and your quality of life. There is nothing worse as a male, in terms of the things that affect you, than having bad teeth or a toothache. It can also be linked to sleeping problems as well as behavioural and developmental problems in children. By age 15 three out of five kids in Australia have tooth decay—60 per cent of them. Untreated, decay and fillings are similar across income ranges, but if you earn more than $60,000 a year you have, on average, seven more teeth than Australia's poorest people, those earning under $20,000.

Sadly, in Queensland, I am embarrassed to say that this has traditionally been worse because for many years in Queensland there was a culture that did not have people put fluoride in the water. I remember hearing a story from someone I know in the RAF who talked about her job as a forensic pathologist. She said they were able to identify the Bali victims from Queensland by their teeth. That is a horrible statistic, but it is just a reality because, unless they were from Townsville, no-one in Queensland had fluoride in their water and so their teeth were not the same as the rest of Australia's people. I saw a retrograde step by the Liberal National Party government, which took the onus off communities to have fluoride in the water, and that is a sad backwards step.

Mr Tudge interjecting—

Mr PERRETT: With respect, I suggest that talking about fluoride is an important correlation in terms of dental health. Good oral health is about much more than having those pearly whites; it is about preventing other major health issues and diseases over the course of your life. That is why the government is getting in early through the introduction of the Dental for Kids program. Good habits and intervention early head off a world of troubles and costs later in life. The Dental for Kids program is an investment in prevention because we know that our oral health as children is the best predictor of our oral health as adults.

It was Queensland Labor that introduced fluoride into our water supplies, as it is the Gillard Labor government that recognised that prevention is far better and far cheaper than cure. We all know this of health but it is equally true for cost-effectiveness, as preventative oral health means fewer trips to the dentist, less waiting time and lower costs for families. In stark contrast we have the Liberal National Party Premier of Queensland, Mr Newman, saying that he would consider allowing some Queensland communities to opt out of having fluoride
added to their regional water supplies but would not reverse fluoride in those communities that already have it. This is short-term populism of the worst kind, and very short-sighted.

As usual, the Liberal National Party is having an each-way bet on the outcome and is not focused on the long-term oral health prevention strategy for our children. This is, of course, while Premier Newman cuts over 4,100 staff from Queensland Health and cuts important central agencies like BreastScreen Queensland. Undoubtedly, some of the 4,100 are those who provide oral health services to Queenslanders. In fact, I read a few weeks ago that some Public Service dentists were sacked. Hopefully, I misheard this, because Public Service dentists are our real health heroes. They forgo significant money for that special place in heaven that comes with looking after public patients. Anyone in the dental services knows that public health dentists could make two, three, four or five times as much if they were in private practice; instead, they like the challenge of looking after the poorest in our community. Hopefully, we will not have to rely on charities like the Tzu Chi Foundation in my electorate to provide dental services in the bush.

This side of the House is committed to the best environment for our children's future, whether it is in education, health or the environment itself. That is why I am a strong advocate for the Dental for Kids program in my electorate and why I proudly commend the bill to the House.

Mr TUDGE (Aston) (12:14): We have sat here for 15 minutes listening to the member for Moreton, but he barely, if at all, discussed any reason as to why the government are cutting the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme, which is the central focus of this bill, the Dental Benefits Amendment Bill 2012. I think the reason that he did not want to discuss that is that he is embarrassed by it. He knows that by cutting this scheme there will be hundreds of thousands of people who will no longer be able to get the dental care they so desperately need. That is why he does not want to discuss it.

I spoke on the disallowance motion concerning this package, so I do not want to go over all of the arguments which I presented in that debate. What I would like to do in the time I have available is to quickly summarise some of the points which I made in relation to this legislation and add some additional new material and particularly some comments constituents of mine have brought to my attention in the intervening period.

Mr Deputy Speaker, as you would be aware, the effects of this government's dental package is threefold. Firstly, it abolishes the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme almost immediately. Secondly, it ensures that there is absolutely no coverage for the people who were benefiting from that scheme until, at the very earliest, July 2014. Thirdly, it holds up hope—and hope only—that there will be a replacement scheme from July 2014. I say 'hope only' because there is in fact no money allocated towards that scheme and there are no details in relation to it. So, really, it is just an election commitment. So they are abolishing a scheme immediately and putting up what is really just an election commitment which does not have any money attached to it as yet.

The Chronic Disease Dental Scheme has been a tremendously successful scheme. It has treated 1.5 million Australians who have had chronic problems with their mouths. There have been over 20 million consultations since the beginning of this scheme, which Tony Abbott introduced when he was health minister. Importantly, it
treated the mouth for the first time in the same way that we treat the rest of the body from a public policy perspective—that is, that there is a universal healthcare system for your mouth as there is for the rest of your body.

So why do the government want to close this scheme down given that it has been successful and it has benefited so many Australians over the course of the last few years? The government have given us three reasons for closing down this scheme. Firstly, they say that the costs have overblown for the scheme. It is true that it has become more expensive than what was initially envisaged, but the reason that it has become more expensive is not that it has been managed ineffectively—as we saw with the school hall program, for example, where school halls were built for twice the cost for which they should have been built. This scheme has become more expensive than forecast because the program is a demand-driven program and more people have sought assistance through this program than we initially anticipated. That is the reason that costs are greater than what was initially anticipated. The cost per consultation has in fact come down quite considerably, so over time this program has become more efficient rather than less efficient. The cost has gone down from $2,225 per patient to $1,117 per patient. So it has actually been a successful program. More people have benefitted from it than we had anticipated, and the cost per patient had been coming down. So the argument that the government put forward that 'the costs have blown out and therefore we are shutting it down' does not stack up. If that were the real reason—that the government are concerned about the overall cost to the budget—then why not put on the table some amendments to the program to maybe limit the type of procedures that would be covered by the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme? That would be consistent with a concern about the cost blowing out and we would have sat down with the government to try to work through that.

The second reason the government has stated as to why they want to close down the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme is that the program is untargeted—that is, that millionaires are getting access to this particular program. But the figures do not demonstrate this. In fact, 80 per cent of all the people who have benefited from this scheme are concession cardholders. Indeed, this evidence is backed up by Associate Professor Hans Zoellner, who is Chairman of the Association for the Promotion of Oral Health at the University of Sydney. He says: Government claims that the system is used extensively by millionaires and that it is greatly rorted, are not supported by the available evidence. All statistical evidence is that the scheme has been used primarily by people on low incomes, and that patients have received the type of treatment expected after a prolonged period of without service.

That is what one of the health experts from the University of Sydney says: it has not been used extensively by millionaires, as the government claims, but largely low-income people have benefited from this scheme. Indeed, even if some wealthier people have accessed this scheme over the years, that is perfectly consistent with the universal health system that we have for Medicare. Under Medicare it does not matter how much money you earn, you can go to a public hospital and get treatment.

If the government is saying that we have to scrap the program because millionaires can access the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme, the logical implication is that the government is also looking at the Medicare scheme and is either going to means-test it or somehow scrap it. That would be the logically consistent argument if you were to
follow that through. That is not the right reason for them to do this.

The final reason the government has put forward for closing the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme is that they say the program has been rorted. Yes, there have been some irregularities in the operation of the program, just like there probably is in every entitlement program across the country; but no amount of red tape or oversight of bureaucracies can ever eliminate people being fraudulent. In this particular program the number of irregularities was only one in 1,500, which is actually quite a low figure and again is consistent with my understanding of the irregularities with the general Medicare program. This argument does not stack up.

What are the government proposing through this package to replace the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme? They are proposing the promise, as I mentioned before, that by July 2014 there will be more money given to public dentists in order to treat patients who have previously benefited from the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme. That is the promise. What they are offering for certain is nothing in the short term—absolutely nothing until at least July 2014. Then there is a promise that something might be offered from July 2014 if they find the money for it, and currently there is no money allocated towards that scheme. Even if the government did find the money they are promising to put towards reducing the waiting lists for public dentists, it would still not have the same sort of impact. It would not be sufficient.

I go back to Associate Professor Hans Zoellner from the University of Sydney, who said:

Government intends only a 30% increased public dental spending, which is very much less than would be needed to satisfy even current demand, so people with chronic disease will not receive timely or comprehensive care needed.

Again the verdict from the expert is that if the government are re-elected at the next election and if they do find the money to invest towards the scheme which they are promising the Australian people then it will still not be sufficient to cover even the existing waiting list, let alone all the new people who will be on the waiting list after the abolition of the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme.

Since we have been debating this in the parliament, I have had many constituents come up to me concerned about the axing of the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme. I would like to just read out a few of those comments from constituents of mine. First of all, we had Anya Filek of Wantirna South. She is a young person, a disabled pensioner, who relies on the scheme to help her with dental problems relating to her chronic illness. She says:

I must visit my dentist every 4 months and now that the scheme is gone I will no longer be able to afford it. It's so hard being a young person on a pension and being unwell. They can't leave us out in the cold like this.

Also, I refer to Adriana and Joe Rapisarda, who are both pensioners living in Bayswater. Adriana has lupus and as a result must have regular dental work to prevent gum disease. She has been a recipient of the Medicare Chronic Disease Dental Scheme for the past two years and has to get vital work done every three or four months. Similarly, her husband, also a pensioner, uses the scheme, as he has had a stroke and heart attack. He needs dental work to limit the harmful effects of medication on his gums. He is therefore utilising the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme. That is going to be axed now. He is a pensioner. You have voted for this, Mr Deputy Speaker, to restrict the access to these two—

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Dr Leigh):** Order! The member for Aston is reminded of
the independence of the chair. He is welcome to refer to actions of the member for Fraser, but will not reflect on the chair.

Mr TUDGE: I withdraw that comment. The member for Fraser is supporting this, Mr Deputy Speaker, so that these two pensioners will no longer be able to get the type of dental care which they so desperately need. Kevin McMurrugh of Ferntree Gully, another constituent of mine, he also will suffer as a result of these cuts. He says:

I cannot believe the Government would have reached this decision suddenly or without due consideration.

We are going to have many thousands of people who will no longer be able to afford dental care, me included.

A Rowville man, who did not want to be named, said that the cuts to the scheme would be a devastating blow to him financially. He had already battled Paget's disease and bowel cancer and was undergoing treatment for prostate cancer. He said he will be unable to afford the vital dental work he requires on an ongoing basis as a part of his recovery. He says: 'I am thoroughly disgusted with the way we are currently being treated by this government,' which I think is a very accurate summation.

I think that every member of the government should reflect on some of those people I have read out, who will be affected by the cuts to the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme—people like Mr and Mrs Rapisarda. They are pensioners, they have been ill and they have had heart attacks, and because of their medication they get gum problems or teeth problems. So the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme can help them out. They will no longer be able to afford to get the vitally needed dental work they require.

I also call on the Independents, who will have the casting vote in relation to whether or not this scheme survives. I ask them to consider people like Mr and Mrs Rapisarda, like Ms Filek and like Mr McMurrugh, from my electorate, who will no longer be able to afford the dental work they so desperately need.

I think that the real reason that the government are cutting this scheme and why they are not putting any money towards any new scheme is that they have so categorically blown the budget with so many wasted programs that they are now desperately cutting absolutely every possible thing they can find in order to try to get a budget surplus. There have been many lows for this government over the last five years, but the cutting of this scheme I think will go down as one of the lowest of them all.

Mr SYMON (Deakin) (12:29): I speak in support of the Dental Benefits Amendment Bill 2012. This bill will amend the Dental Benefits Act of 2008 by setting up the legislative framework for the Child Dental Benefits Schedule to start in January 2014, and it is a component of the $4 billion six-year package announced by the Minister for Health on 29 August this year. In addition to this measure, there was an announcement of $345 million in this year's federal budget to alleviate pressure on public dental waiting lists, a program that commences from January 2013. This package will replace the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme and the Medicare Teen Dental Plan.

On commencement of the scheme there will be around 3.4 million Australian children who will qualify for the Grow Up Smiling dental scheme. This scheme will see the federal government assume the primary responsibility to fund basic dental services for children from their second birthday through to the time of their 18th birthday in families that receive family tax benefit part A, which is a particularly good way to judge where the need should be. The current
income cut-off threshold for families with two children for family tax benefit part A is around $112,000. The recent 2011 census figures have come out recently and, for my electorate of Deakin, they show a median family income of $1,601 per week as an annual figure. That works out to be about $83,252. On that measure most families in Deakin with children will have access to the Grow Up Smiling scheme as the median family income is well below the cut-off threshold for family tax benefit part A. It is estimated that 7,147 families with 12,451 children will be covered within the electorate of Deakin.

Up to $1,000 of dental services will be funded over two years for each child in families—not only in my electorate of Deakin of course, but right across the country—that qualify for family tax benefit part A, and this continues for the life of the package. Importantly, because it is hard to access public dental services in my area, it will be the parents' choice as to whether to have these services done in public or private dental services. Services covered by the scheme also include those performed by para-dental professionals such as oral health therapists and dental hygienists, as already covered by the existing Medicare Teen Dental Plan. One of the key aims of the bill is to make a visit to the dentist to be no more difficult than a visit to the doctor for the 3.4 million children that will be covered.

The benefits of preventative health of the population in the future are not always easily quantified in today's dollars because there are so many unknowns. However, I think we can look at statistics and trends to form a good idea of where this record federal government funding in dental services will lead. A great resource that I often look at in terms of health debates is the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and the reports that they produce on a regular basis, which I know many members in this place do read large sections of. In particular the report titled *Oral health and dental care in Australia, key facts and figures 2011* makes some very interesting reading. The report goes over a number of years and lists in detail reports of various surveys from 2004 to 2010, so it is not just a flash in the pan or a snapshot.

In 2006, from a survey of children attending a school dental service, the percentage of children with decayed, missing or filled baby teeth increased from around 40 per cent in the four- to five-year-old group up to around 60 per cent in the six- to eight-year old group. I found that to be quite a disturbing figure, but the report brought further concern when it came to the number of children with decayed, missing or filled permanent teeth. That figure rose from 1.4 per cent for children at five years of age up to 29.8 per cent for children at 10 years of age and 58 per cent for children at 15 years of age. That is not baby teeth; that is permanent teeth.

The National Survey of Adult Oral Health from 2004 to 2006 reported that, for adults, the overall average of decayed, missing or filled teeth for a person aged 45 to 64 was 19.8 teeth per person. Of those 19.8 affected teeth, 0.5 were decayed, 7.2 were missing and there were around 12.1 fillings per adult person between the ages of 45 and 64. People without dental insurance had a higher number of teeth missing due to decay and untreated decay, but a lower number of filled teeth. Obviously that is coming from the fact that they would not be able to afford as many visits to the dentist in some cases.

The highest proportion of untreated decay was seen in persons earning less than $12,000 per year, while the lowest prevalence was seen in people who lived in households with an income of more than
$100,000 per year. These numbers are just small samples taken from the AIHW report. The report contains many more tables and surveys, including the national dental telephone interview survey of 2010. One particular finding was that the average number of missing teeth was inversely related to household income. That pretty much follows the previous report.

Australia should not be a country where only those on higher incomes have access to proper dental treatment. I believe that Australia should be a country where all children have access to dental services so that the average number of decayed, missing and filled teeth drops as a result of preventative and restorative dental work that is done early in life before many of these conditions become more severe.

I mentioned the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme earlier, a scheme that was introduced in 2007 by the now opposition leader and then health minister Tony Abbott. Over the four years that that scheme ran, the forecast expenditure was $384.6 million. But by May 2010 the benefits paid out by the scheme had already added up to $916 million and the amount of claims and payments have increased at a massive rate since then. The Chronic Disease Dental Scheme is now costing the Australian taxpayer around $80 million a month. A quick calculation is in order here. At $80 million a month, that works out to be around 10 times the amount that the scheme was costed at back in 2007: $8 million a month versus $80 million a month. That is a huge increase. Many times in debates in this place we argue over dollars, but rarely is there such a huge differential between what was forecast and what the outcome was: $80 million a month. With that sort of addition, it is no wonder that, when it comes to election and policy costings, the Liberals have a $70 billion black hole.

But there is not only the direct cost to consider here; there is also the cost of opportunities along the way. The Chronic Disease Dental Scheme is not means tested, and therefore we have seen huge amounts of public money being paid to the well-off—the very group that the figures I talked about before show are least in genuine need of welfare or assistance from the government. The rorting of the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme has reached huge proportions and has been reported on consistently over the years. A stream of media reports has come out ever since the federal Labor government tried to shut this scheme in 2008 and again in 2010. In both cases, the Senate disallowed the motion to shut the scheme.

Some of the media reports speak for themselves. Mark Metherell, writing in the Sydney Morning Herald on 14 March 2009, said:

The Senate has twice blocked Government moves to abandon dental Medicare, which costs about $250 million a year and rising.

If you look at the figure, it was $250 million in 2009. It has risen way beyond that. In another article Mark Metherell, this time in the Age on 5 November, said:

Medical leaders have told The Age that dentists are advising patients who are not eligible to seek doctors’ referrals, which can authorise Medicare coverage of up to $4250 in dental work, including dentures and crowns. The scheme is meant to be restricted to patients with chronic medical diseases linked to their dental conditions.

In the Australian on 11 March 2010, in an article titled "Senate block "letting dental rorts thrive" by Adam Cresswell, the figures had changed. The article said:

Latest figures show the scheme has cost taxpayers $732 million between its relaunch with increased benefits in November 2007 and last December. The December referred to was December 2009.
The *Sunday Herald Sun* of 21 March 2010 had an article by Clair Weaver and Sharon Labi which said:

... investigators have uncovered systemic fraud in two programs that allow doctors and dentists to claim generous rebates for writing plans and treating the chronically ill.

Whistleblowers warn the system is being abused, with medicos getting rich and patients who shouldn’t even qualify being given thousands of dollars worth of taxpayer-funded treatments.

The dental costs have blown out by 325 per cent to more than $800 million, while GPs who wrote chronic disease management plans have earned $914 million since they were introduced in July 2005. That budget has blown out by 200 per cent …

They are just some examples, and they are actually not recent ones because there has been some work by the department in this area to go after some of the most egregious examples—and that needs to be done in any program—but they are indicative of why the figure keeps rising. As with any scheme where there is no actual budgeted amount, while it may not appear in the budget figures it still has to be paid for. Obviously part of the change from the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme to the dental package we are now going to is that it is going to be something that can be quantified and measured over the years.

In terms of the announcement and the bill we are now talking about, the Consumers Health Forum of Australia puts out a large amount of information on both medical and dental issues. Sometimes it makes very good reading and sometimes it is critical of the government too. Carol Bennett, the CEO of the Consumers Health Forum of Australia, on 29 August put out a press release, which said in part:

Cost is the big barrier preventing a large section of the community from accessing preventative dental services, which in turn contributes to development of chronic conditions that place major demands on our health resources.

She went on to say:

This is a big win for the whole community. If you improve the health of those who can’t afford a decent standard of dental care, you raise the general health of the entire community.

I agree with that statement. We have always found in relation to what the government funds that prevention is far better than attempting to cure. The Dental Benefits Amendment Bill 2012 is a great step along the path to getting prevention to be a natural first step rather than having to get people into the dentist many months or years later to fix problems that have taken a long time to develop. It has always made sense to me that our efforts be directed at prevention so that down the track hopefully we as a nation end up with a far smaller health bill in that area than we do at the moment. I commend the bill to the House.

**Ms GAMBARO** (Brisbane) (12:42): I rise to speak on the government’s latest unfunded policy farce—the Dental Benefits Amendment Bill 2012—and its astonishing political decision to axe the Howard government’s Medicare Chronic Disease Dental Scheme. This farce began on 29 August this year when the Minister for Health, Tanya Plibersek, and the Greens health spokesman, Senator Di Natale, announced an unfunded $4.1 billion dental program that is not even due to commence until 2014, right after the next election.

Sadly, policy announcements based on phantom funding to be delivered on the never-never timetable are becoming par for the course under the Gillard government. What is more disappointing is that, despite knowing ‘Wasteful’ Wayne has delivered a $120 billion budget black hole that is rising by the day, the Gillard government continues in its deceit of the Australian people in
making promises that it cannot possibly keep.

The situation keeps getting worse. When the government attempts to explain where this $4.1 billion is coming from, it cannot quite give us the answers. The Prime Minister and the health minister clearly were not reading from the same song sheet on 29 August this year. They had a press conference where they sent out mixed messages as to where the money was coming from. The Prime Minister said:

The announcement today is about a large saving. That is through the closure of a scheme designed by the former government, by the Howard government.

But then the Minister for Health claimed that the scheme would be new money. Apart from contradicting the Prime Minister, the health minister contradicted her own response when asked where the funding was coming from. Yes, where is the funding coming from? The minister's response was that the government will find the savings in the budget which will be outlined in the Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook later this year. That fiscal outlook is going to show just how badly the Labor government continues to drag the country into debt.

So, after first saying it was going to be new money, which was then contradicted by the Prime Minister, who said it was a savings, the minister then said:

We have a very good record of finding savings in the budget … We found $30 billion of savings in the last one.

The government must come clean; is it a saving or is it a spend? The government's inability to explain where the money is coming from is very disappointing, especially when we remember what Prime Minister Julia Gillard told Australians in a press conference on 11 February last year. She said:

Every time we announce something we properly account for it …

It seems she forgot about that promise. Then again, this is the same Prime Minister who told the Australian people that 'there will be no carbon tax under a government I lead', and we all know how that worked out.

There is a rather unfortunate pattern emerging here of Labor and the Prime Minister promising they will do one thing and then doing completely the opposite. This is their status quo. It would appear from recent media reports that even the Labor caucus is worried. A number of caucus members asked at a meeting a few weeks ago, 'Where's the money coming from?' They are very worried about where the money is coming from. The fact that the government has no money to fund this proposed dental scheme will inevitably lead to higher taxes. We recently heard the government's own Treasury official commenting that there is only one place where money can come from; he outlined a number of areas, and higher taxes were included in that.

The Dental Benefits Amendment Bill does not commence until 1 January 2014. The bill makes some minor amendments to the Dental Benefits Act 2008, changing only the eligibility age of the current Medicare Teen Dental Plan from 12 to 17 years to two to 17 years. It makes other minor terminology changes to provide for a change from the Medicare Teen Dental Plan to the Child Dental Benefits Schedule. A schedule of services, fees and details of how the scheme will be funded is still not available, but this government is always very poor on the detail.

Apart from the fact that there is no money to fund this scheme, the government is rushing the bill through parliament without the detail I have just mentioned, and it does not commence for well over a year; that is, a
year after the next election. The government's actions suggest this is all about the politics of the issue rather than some really good policy decisions. The minister has acknowledged that services for most children will cost less than the proposed $1,000 cap. There will be children on the Medicare Chronic Disease Dental Scheme who will require more services but, alarmingly, there is no provision to ensure they will continue to receive adequate treatment, especially in the period before the bill commences.

Available data suggests that well over 60,000 services have been provided to children under the CDDS thanks to the policies of the Howard government introduced by the Minister for Health at the time, Tony Abbott. It seems that whatever the coalition giveth the Labor Party is intent on taking away. Thanks to Labor and the Greens, the closure of the scheme on 30 November will leave a gap of 13 months for many children currently receiving treatment. There are children in the midst of treatment who will not be able to have their treatment covered or completed by 30 November. Those families will have nowhere to turn. This is how Labor cares for Australian families—false promises of future programs with phantom funding. The minister and the Greens should explain why Australian children must suffer for 13 months with incomplete treatment and no certainty of the schedule of services that are to be provided—assuming, of course, that the government actually delivers on its unfunded promise in July 2014.

As I said, the CDDS was introduced by the coalition when we were in government and it has been an enormous success. It is the only Medicare dental scheme that provides treatment for adults. It has provided 4,250 Medicare dental benefits over two years for eligible patients with a chronic health condition, and approximately 20 million services were provided to more than one million patients since 2007. Labor has repeatedly tried to close the scheme for political reasons—simply because it was established by Tony Abbott as health minister and it has been a success in improving access to treatment. Despite Labor's claims of expenditure blow-outs, the average claim per patient, according to the Department of Health and Ageing, is $1,716—well below the allowable $4,250—and some recent estimates suggest the average cost per patient has fallen to below $1,200. The coalition offered to work with the previous health minister to refine and improve the scheme, including working through a process to provide high-cost items such as crowns and bridges, but all offers were rejected.

It was quite amusing to listen to the member for Deakin when he said earlier on that this was a scheme for the rich. Well, it has been reported that 80 per cent of services under the CDDS were provided to concession card holders or low-income earners. It should be noted that Medicare is a universal scheme that all Australians pay for through the Medicare levy and the taxation system. But this evidence suggests that the dental services have been predominantly utilised by low-income Australians. Many of these people would otherwise have been forced to go without treatment or they would have added to the 650,000 people who are already on public dental waiting lists.

Thanks to Labor and the Greens, as from 30 November this year patients will be left without access to treatment and many will be unable to afford the full cost of private treatment. The government's vague promise to provide funding to the states and territories for public services is not due to commence until mid-2014—and we know what a great success that has been in the past.
when services were not provided to people or there was a go-slow and the states took the money but the delivery of services was very dubious.

Some patients in the midst of complex treatment will not be able to complete their treatment by 30 November. This will have serious health, economic and social ramifications for these people. Under this bill Labor is proposing to provide funding of $1.3 billion to state and territory governments for public dental services, but this funding will not commence until July 2014. It seems as if Labor is hoping it might win the lotto in the meantime to pay for it, because that is the only place it is going to get this money. That is why the government is not saying where the money is coming from. So, from 30 November this year many patients on the CDDS will lose access to treatment and will have to wait 19 months to see if the government delivers on its promise and provides more funding to state governments. Again, not surprisingly there is no detail on how much funding will be provided by the end of the year, with the possibility that the bulk of the money might not be provided until the end of the six-year period, in 2018, if at all. There are already 650,000 people—400,000 adults, according to the government—on public dental waiting lists. The minister has said Labor's plan will only provide 1.4 million additional services over six years. The CDDS has provided approximately 20 million services, including seven million in the last financial year alone.

In 2008 Labor promised the Commonwealth Dental Health Program, which it never delivered. The program promised one million services by providing funding to the states and territories. It was revealed in Senate estimates that the Commonwealth did not assess the capacity of the public dental workforce to provide projected services and the number delivered may have been significantly less than was promised. The number of services to be provided over the full six years under Labor's recent proposals is only 20 per cent of what the CDDS provided last year alone. What is worse is that there are no guarantees that there is any capacity to deliver the proposed services through the public system in terms of workforce or infrastructure. A lack of infrastructure, particularly in the public system, will impede capacity to deliver the projected number of services.

The $225 million measure under the government's proposal to develop infrastructure will not be available prior to the commencement of the new initiative. An invitation to apply for funding under the Flexible Grants Program for dental infrastructure, both capital and workforce, will not commence until 2014 so projects are unlikely to be completed or provide tangible benefits until years later. All in all, this bill does not set out a properly funded dental scheme that inspires any confidence whatsoever.

There is hope, however, for Australian families that the coalition supports investment in dental health. The coalition is very concerned that many patients receiving treatment under the CDDS will miss out on the treatment during the gap period between the closure of the CDDS and the proposed commencement of the government's measure. The coalition renews its commitment to work with the government to refine the CDDS in the meantime, including reviewing the process to provide in certain high-cost items such as bridges and crowns. I call on the minister and all Labor backbenchers and the Independents to put aside their political churlishness and to act in the best interests of Australian families and in the best interests of their dental health.
Mr CHAMPION (Wakefield) (12:56): I rise to speak on the Dental Benefits Amendment Bill 2012 and it is good to be talking about dental care. It is a particularly important thing in my electorate. I have often noticed constituents who have had significant tooth decay and how that has affected their lives, their job prospects, their social prospects and just their everyday quality of life. It is obviously an important issue to both sides of this House.

One should not forget the history of this. Dental care is a state responsibility in the main and the first intervention by a federal government into this area was by the Keating government. In the last few years of the Keating government a significant package was announced to reduce state waiting lists, which were blowing out at the time as the state governments reduced funding for dental care in the community. Traditionally it was one of their responsibilities but, sadly, it is one that state governments have neglected over time.

Increasingly it has needed the intervention of federal governments, and the Keating government was the first to announce a significant investment in trying to reduce those waiting lists. That has been the traditional way of dealing with this issue. It is an unfortunate fact of life that that scheme was cancelled by the Howard government in its first year of office, along with a lot of other promises that were important to my electorate like the expansion of the main north road and a few other things in South Australia which were important at the time.

What then followed was a decade of neglect when state governments across the board often did not spend enough money on public dental health care. The federal government was less than interested as well, until former Prime Minister Howard hit the twilight years of his time in office and the boom started to roll in with all the money.

Mr Briggs: Are we getting a history lesson or a debate on the bill?

Mr CHAMPION: He could not stop himself spending. I know the member for Mayo was there at that time. It must have been a glorious period announcing those sorts of schemes. What we got was the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme, which when it was announced was speculated to cost $90 million a year. It now costs the Commonwealth $1 billion a year. We know those last few years in office for Mr Howard were—

Mr Briggs interjecting—

Mr CHAMPION: The scheme was supposed to cost $90 million a year and it ended up costing the Commonwealth taxpayer $1 billion. That is hardly good accountancy; it is hardly good book keeping. It was a prime example of John Howard’s spending abilities in his final years. There was a lot of wishful thinking of what things would cost versus what they ended up costing the budget. It started out supposedly costing the Commonwealth taxpayer $90 million and ended up costing the taxpayer $1 billion—not unlike the subsidy for private health care which, of course, had similar calls on the Commonwealth budget.

Of course, the reason why that scheme has not served the taxpayer well is that, first of all, it is not means-tested. It is an open-ended scheme, and it can provide up to $4,250 to people of any income. So presumably, if a millionaire goes to his doctor and gets a care plan, he qualifies for taxpayer-subsidised dental care. This happens at the same time as many of my constituents—who live in the poorest suburbs of Australia and often do not have a good relationship with their general practitioner, or else have a sporadic relationship with their general practitioner because of the nature of general practice these days and the nature of their
socioeconomic situation—often cannot get a cent at all, or they find it very hard to access the health system to be able to get dental health care. Many of them wind up on the public waiting list after some time. So what we have here is a very long period where the Commonwealth has been involved in dental care but, perhaps because of state governments not doing their jobs and secondly because of the spending that was associated with the first mining boom, there were some schemes that perhaps were not the best use of taxpayer's money.

We know dental waiting lists are very high around the country. I am pleased to say that my state has had some success in reducing the waiting lists. In 2002, under the previous Olsen-Brown government, there were some 93,000 people on the waiting list for dental care. That has been reduced by a quarter, down to 70,287. That is still too high and obviously we want to reduce that waiting list, but we can see from that situation that, when the South Australian state government put resources in and spent more money, what happened is that those waiting lists came down. There were fewer people on them. Of course, what also happened is that the waiting times—that is, the times that people waited to get to see the dentist to get the work done—also reduced, and they reduced dramatically. In 2002, the waiting time in South Australia was some four years. Obviously, during that time people's problems got worse and worse and worse, and obviously that ended up costing the taxpayer more in the long run because there was not prevention factored into this scheme. With dental care, a little bit of money and care at the start often prevents chronic problems later on. This year the waiting time is just 16 months, so the waiting time has dramatically reduced. That shows that, when you put public money in, you can reduce dental waiting lists and dental waiting times.

That system works well; it is just that the state governments have not been putting the resources in up until now. They should be ashamed about that. It really is a shocking abuse of the public interest in my opinion.

That said, the South Australian government has been allocating resources and doing a better job than most other states, and we have seen it put some resources into my local area. The GP Plus clinic in the Elizabeth city centre has dental beds, and I have met many of my constituents who have been fortunate enough to receive care there. They are, as I said before, some of the poorest people. That, I guess, is the difference between Labor priorities and the priorities of the coalition. The coalition do not mind if people on very high incomes get $4,250 of taxpayers' money to fix their teeth. They do not mind if cosmetic work is being done. That is not to denounce cosmetic work as unimportant. It is important, but it is not as important as fixing people with really desperate problems who are really without the means to fix them. It is very important that we put resources in where they can yield the greatest benefit for the taxpayer. Most importantly, it is important that we reduce those public waiting lists, which are the product of state government neglect.

This bill is focused on children and, as I said before, a little bit of money at the start of a person's life can set the patterns of care. Being taken to the dentist as a child is not an enjoyable thing to do. I still have vivid memories of being taken in primary school to the government dental service. I did not enjoy it that much but it set in place a bit of a standard. I would not say I have the best teeth in the world but I had some experience with the dentist. That is why focusing this bill on children, making sure that parents are able to take children to the dentist, and making sure they can get up to $1,000 per child, public or private, in order to set those
patterns of a lifetime, is a particularly important thing. It speaks to Labor’s priorities for preventative health.

The reason the Howard government scheme blew out by such a degree—it was meant to cost $90 million and ended up costing taxpayers $1 billion a year—is that it was preceded by a decade of neglect in this area by the Howard government. That government reaped the whirlwind and did not take into account preventative health. We hear people decrying politicians all the time for not looking at the long term, but the health system is all long term. Preventative health—that is, setting people’s lifestyle habits early, encouraging them to see a dentist, encouraging them to be mindful of diabetes and other chronic diseases—is all about setting good lifestyle patterns early on by, for example, making sure kids go to the dentist and making sure people’s diets and lifestyles are not going to cause problems down the track.

The Labor government has done its very best to make sure that preventative health is the way we want to go. We know that in the long term that is the only way to reduce the burden on the health budget and to safely protect the taxpaying public’s interests. If we go around simply putting band-aids on everything, we will end up with the Howard government experience of a chronic disease scheme blowing out by vast amounts of money. Of course, this was not the only Howard government scheme to blow out; it went on a bit of a spending spree in the last few years of office, placing a great deal of pressure and leaving a lot of time bombs on the federal Commonwealth budget, and these were revealed when the global financial crisis wrecked revenues across the world.

Dental care is particularly important. It is important, firstly, for us to have a blitz on public dental waiting lists, working with the states to make sure that their systems work. State governments have a responsibility to make sure they work. It is not good enough for state governments to simply withdraw from this field. More and more over the last decade or so we have seen state governments neglecting their responsibilities while the Commonwealth government, of whatever persuasion, becomes responsible for it by dint of public pressure and because we are the people who collect the taxes. That is not the way the Federation is supposed to work. State governments are supposed to take responsibility for their responsibilities. The alternative will be that we eventually end up with universal coverage of dental care. That is a possibility, but it will require state governments to play their role by either handing over the power and resources to do that or pulling their weight.

The second thing we need to do is to, like I said, focus on preventative health. This bill is focused on children and on making sure that it sets habits of a lifetime, not just for parents in making sure that they do not leave dental care until the last moment, but that they have the resources, the help, the assistance and the nudge. The Commonwealth resources will put the idea into a parent’s head that they should be going to the dentist regularly. They will probably spend more than $1,000 but, of course, every dollar spent in the first years of life from ages two to 18 will help set the patterns of a lifetime because generally people do not want bad teeth. It is only when it sneaks up on them that they end up with great difficulties.

On that note I commend the bill to the House. I urge the House to adopt it.

Mr JOHN COBB (Calare) (13:11): Today I rise to speak on the Dental Benefits Amendment Bill. There is an old saying, which those opposite would do very well to
learn and to obey: 'If it ain't broke, don't fix it.' For some reason the government seem to have an obsession with taking a good scheme or successful policy—usually one introduced by this side of the House when in government—and dumping it for no apparent reason and to the detriment of the Australian public. One has to suspect in this case that it is something to do with money and with trouble in getting the books in order, which I think the Treasurer might have a lot of problems doing at the moment. The Labor government take good schemes, especially those introduced by our side when in government, and trashes them for no good reason. There are a couple we can think of—off-shore processing and temporary protection visas—which would be a couple of good ones to bring back in, and now it is dental care they are doing it to.

Last month I used an adjournment speech to detail just how devastating the Labor government's changes will be for dental patients, particularly in my electorate of Calare. I referred to the case of local pensioner, Ted, of Raglan, near Bathurst, who contacted me to express his outrage, and that of neighbours in his street, at the government's decision to scrap the highly successful Medicare Chronic Disease Dental Scheme. They are not only to scrap it now but have no alternative for care until Labor's new, untried, untested and unfunded dental health care scheme is introduced sometime in 2014. The government are scrapping a scheme introduced by the opposition leader when he was Minister for Health. As we heard mentioned earlier, it is a scheme that has provided more than $4,000 in Medicare dental benefits over two years for eligible patients, like Ted, with a chronic dental health condition. It is a scheme that has helped approximately one million patients with more than 17 million services since 2007.

Since my adjournment speech last month I have had quite a number of constituents contact me to express their fears, their concerns and, to be quite honest, their fury at Labor's changes to a highly successful and efficient dental healthcare scheme. I would like to share with the House and with the parliament a couple of these constituents' thoughts. I received a letter from Marion, a pensioner in Bathurst, regarding the scrapping of the Medicare Chronic Disease Dental Scheme. She wrote:

I am writing to complain about the government … the way it closed it so soon. I am a diabetic and widower. I went to the doctor on 5 September and he wrote me out a referral to the dentist. I went on Monday morning 10 September, only to be told it closed on Saturday the 8th. The receptionist said I would probably be out of pocket. I thought we were entitled to $4,250. Now I cannot get my teeth fixed. It is unfair. I have paid taxes all my life, now to be left without any help.

This is part of a letter I received from self-confessed 'desperate aged pensioner' Geoff, from Forbes, regarding dental health work he needs:

With the Prime Minister's latest decision concerning dental health, does this mean I will be put on hold? All of this is affecting my health, dignity and self-esteem. I am an aged pensioner. I am afraid to appear in the public eye. I don't feel comfortable mixing with people in social outings. To make things worse, I suffer from depression.

And this is part of an email I received from David, in Oberon, which was aptly titled 'Things that worry me':

I have Diabetes. Part of the management of the disease is having closely managed good dental health. It is well known that Diabetes can turn fatal if a diabetic doesn't maintain good dental health. I know this because my doctor told me and when he put me on the Medicare Chronic Disease Dental Scheme.

He also told me that this was part of the medical management for which he was being paid.
by the government to manage my disease. Will the scrapping of the scheme now mean that the government isn't really serious about looking after senior people in ill health? I am able to pay for the ongoing management of my dental health within reason but it could mean that the crown I am in the process of getting or the regular maintenance of my teeth may now be delayed if the cost is too great.

In turn that may mean that infection could enter my body by way of my mouth that could exacerbate my Diabetes and in turn cause me to seek other medical treatment possibly in hospital that would be far more expensive to the government via Medicare than the cost of prevention.

Has the government thought this aspect through or don't they care about people with chronic diseases who look after themselves and are good Australian citizens?

Now to the specifics of today's amendment. The coalition's greatest concerns about Labor's plans to change the dental care scheme are that there is no alternative plan between the end of November and 2014 and that their plan appears to be entirely unfunded. It is a little hard to have a plan for dental care that has no money attached to it. You might be going to wish people well, but that will not solve many problems for them.

This bill makes very minor amendments to the Dental Benefits Act 2008, only changing the eligibility age of the current Medicare Teen Dental Plan from 12 to 17 years to 2 to 17 years. We understand that more than 60,000 services have been provided to children under the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme. The closure of the scheme next month, on 30 November, will leave a 13-month gap for many children currently receiving treatment. There are children in the midst of treatment who will not be able to have their treatment completed by 30 November. Those families will have nowhere to turn. The minister and the Greens should explain why these children must suffer for 13 months with incomplete treatment and no certainty of the schedule of services that are to be provided, assuming the government actually delivers on its unfunded, unexplained promise, in 2014. We in the coalition support investment in dental health and do not oppose the intent of the bill, but our concerns must be addressed.

I have no doubt the main reason for dumping this is the fact that the Treasurer has the country, the government and himself in one heck of a mess in his budget. Heaven only knows what kind of a deficit we are really looking at in the 2012-13 budget. In a desperate attempt to mitigate it, the Treasurer and the Gillard government are willing to play with the medical and dental health of people who cannot afford it. The previous speaker talked about it not being subject to only those who cannot afford it. We are talking about people who really have serious problems and really cannot afford it. If you were serious, then, instead of scrapping it, why don't you amend it? But you are not. This government is scrapping it irrespective of what financial situation people are in. As we have said before, they have no alternative. They have a vague promise for 2014. It is a disgrace. The people of Calare are not alone in wondering what sort of a government walks out on them on a program that has done a lot for a lot of people.

Mr STEPHEN JONES (Throsby) (13:20): For over a decade now members of the Illawarra Dental Health Action Group have been campaigning for reform in dental care. The action group is chaired ably by Ms Alice Scott, a constituent of mine, who is a very active member of the community, not only in dental care but in a whole raft of other areas of community life. This group has been agitating not only for an improvement in existing services but in pointing out where local dental providers are not doing the right thing under existing
government schemes, advocating on behalf of local community members, particularly members on low incomes who are attempting to get access to the public dental scheme, and, lobbying government, having come here to Canberra on several occasions with a bigger than life-size pair of teeth to draw attention to their cause.

So they have been working for over 10 years to see some reform in the way dental health is delivered in this country. Their objective, quite simply, is to ensure that the mouth is treated no differently to any other part of the body when a person seeks medical or health treatment. That is, if somebody has a problem with their oral health then they are able to deal with it through a Medicare provided service in the same way that they could have an ailment in any other part of their body treated through a primary health care provider and paid for by the Medicare system.

So I am not surprised that when the Minister for Health announced the government's $4.1 billion Dental Health Reform Package on 29 August this year it was welcomed by the Dental Health Action Group. It was a guarded welcome, I have to say, because their long-term objective, as I have said, is the full Medicare-isation of dental health care, but they could see that this was a first and significant step.

What we are doing through this $4.1 billion dental reform package is ensuring that, for about three million children, going to the dentist will be just like seeing a GP—3.4 million children whose parents get family tax benefit part A or are receiving a range of other government income support benefits will be able to have access to the government's dental care package for kids. Families will be entitled to $1,000 per child every two years through the package to provide for dental care for their kids. Parents will be able to take their children to either a private or a public dental service to access the program. In addition to the dental care for kids arrangements, the reform package will provide additional services for 1.4 million adults on low incomes, including pensioners and concession card holders and those with special needs, to give them better access to dental health care in the public system.

We must remember that this does not stand alone. It builds on the nearly half a billion dollars that was set aside in the Labor government's last budget to fund a state government blitz on public dental care waiting lists. As you would know, Madam Deputy Speaker O'Neill—because you represent a similar electorate to mine—many people who are currently on public dental waiting lists are seeking access to free or significantly subsidised dental care simply because they cannot afford it themselves. This package goes a long way towards ensuring that those people have that much-needed dental care.

The issue of dental care for children is particularly important. We know that the oral health of children in our community has been declining since the mid-1990s. Almost 20,000 kids under the age of 10 years are hospitalised every year because of avoidable dental issues. By the age of 15, six out of every 10 kids have tooth decay. We know that if we nip this in the bud early we can ensure not only that we are improving the oral health of these kids but that we are saving both them and the public system a hell of a lot of money down the track. If tooth decay is prevented or treated early then a child's problems can be treated by way of a filling instead of removal of a tooth or several teeth and instead of long-term gum disease. It is a significant investment—and I say it is an investment because we are investing in the oral health of our children to
ensure that we do not need to pay significantly more down the track when significant dental disease occurs.

So this has been very much welcomed by the dental health advocates within my electorate, and it will mean a lot to kids within my electorate. There are about 52,000 kids—about 28,000 families—in the region who will be able to gain access to the government's subsidised dental care. That is indeed a significant benefit for people in the Illawarra and Southern Highlands. In my own electorate around 19,000 kids, coming from around 10,000 families, will have direct access to the scheme. They will see a benefit, straight up, that they do not currently enjoy. It will enable us to tackle, head on, that decline in oral health standards that has been occurring since the 1990s, particularly in kids from low- and middle-income families.

A number of comments have been made within the course of this debate, including by the last speaker, about why we were closing the chronic diseases scheme. I think he used the words, 'If it ain't broke, why fix it?' Nothing could be further from the truth. In my own electorate I have received numerous complaints from constituents who have accessed the scheme only to find that they have been treated for ailments that they did not believe they had and that, on second opinion, they found they did not have; that the cost of the treatment they received was wildly inflated so as to access the entirety of the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme budget for their individual allocation; and that shoddy work was performed on more than one occasion.

I had somebody come into my office and seek my assistance because they had been provided with a dental plate that did not fit. They were unable to eat in the normal way that you and I would expect somebody who has just undergone significant dental treatment and had a new plate fitted to be able to do. They could not even chew on a sausage, such was the poor quality of the work. So somebody saying, 'The scheme isn't broke, so why fix it?' shows that they are clearly out of step with the community and out of touch with reality—and that is before we get to the cost of the scheme.

The scheme that was introduced by, I believe, the current Leader of the Opposition, who was the then Health Minister. He brought in the legislation to bring about the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme. We were told it was going to cost $90 million a year. It is currently costing over $1 billion a year, so no more evidence is needed as to why something is wrong. We have heard numerous examples of how the scheme has been rorted. It is not means tested. It is poorly targeted. So it was a poorly designed scheme from the get-go. Its aims, I will say, were absolutely laudable. I think the aim of ensuring that people with chronic dental diseases have a mechanism by which they can have those diseases treated, and treated in an affordable way—and treated quickly—is laudable and would enjoy the support of all members in this place. But to have a scheme that is aimed at ensuring that extended from everyone on a pension to those on multimillion-dollar salaries, and to have a scheme which is so poorly designed as to allow the sorts of rorting that has gone on, is not in the public interest. That is why we are moving, through this legislation, to reform the scheme and replace it with one that is means tested, that is targeted and that I hope will become the Medicare-isation of dental health care in this country—and it matters a lot.

This is aimed at children and aimed at improving the public health dental waiting list. But there is another group of people we should be focused on. On more than one occasion I have had employers talk to me
about this issue and the importance of dental health to improving somebody's employability. If they have two job applicants come through the door and sit down for a job interview, and one starts to talk and they have are poor, decayed and gapped teeth, and the second person, sitting alongside them, has all the same aptitudes but does not suffer the same diseases and the same problem, the second person is more likely to be employed. I do not endorse that approach, but it is a reality. I have had job seekers say the same thing to me as well. So it is not just a cosmetic thing, and it is not just a health thing; it actually impacts on somebody's capacity to look for work and to be successful in job applications. I think the bill before the House is a first and important step in overhauling this scheme and will provide real benefits to people who live in electorates like mine.

I will conclude by once again congratulating the tireless work of the Illawarra Dental Health Action Group, its chairperson, Alan Scott, and the many people who have campaigned for over a decade to provide support to local constituents and advocated on behalf of public dental health patients. It has been an important organisation in ensuring that we get the sort of change that we are debating in this chamber today. I commend the legislation to the House.

Ms MARINO (Forrest—Opposition Whip) (13:33): The Labor government is cutting $1.5 billion from the health budget through the Dental Benefits Amendment Bill. The minister has confirmed the cuts, saying that this is a direct savings measure—and we know why that is necessary, don't we? It is necessary because of the combination of Labor's absolute addiction to wasting billions and billions of taxpayers' funds and as a result of what we now know is $120 billion worth of unfunded spending promises: whether it is the NDIS, whether it is the Gonski review changes, whether it is the unfunded submarines or whether it is border protection—the list is almost endless. And we do know that this particular bill is part of that government-unfunded $120 billion worth of promises. It is $4.1 billion worth of a dental program that will not actually commence until 2014—well after the next election, interestingly.

The bill before the House is not really about a broad policy debate on dental health, and it certainly does not go to any of the questions of the longer-term issues about dental health management in this nation. I do know that Sydney University oral pathologist Professor Hans Zoellner has said that approximately 1.5 million people have accessed this program, 80 per cent of whom were actually healthcare card holders. They are the people who have accessed this program, who need this sort of support. He also said that this Medicare scheme is actually well targeted. In spite of the comments that have been come from the other side, it is targeted, because it is delivering, generally, to people on low incomes. And, as I said, Professor Zoellner's comments were that 80 per cent of those who have received this level of care were healthcare card holders.

But if the government are looking at longer-term dental health care in this country, why have they refused the coalition's bipartisan offer to work to basically refine the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme, the existing scheme? Instead, they have just closed the program—because they are really chasing that budget 'surplus' and have to find the money from somewhere—and are proposing that some time in the future, an alternative program, the source of funding for which, as I said, is yet to be announced, will be in place. It is another never-never plan, and well out beyond the
next election. This is a pattern for Labor. It is also a pattern for Labor to take funding from one group of Australians and simply redistribute it to another.

We are talking here about people who are midway through treatment. Since 2007 we do know that people with chronic diseases, whether it is diabetes, whether they are in remission from cancer or having treatment for leukaemia, or whether it is heart disease—people who have depended, and do depend, on dental services to protect their health. It is not a cosmetic issue for people with these types of diseases. This is a very serious issue, and they have relied on this scheme to assist them through probably the toughest times in their lives, some of the toughest health challenges they are facing. This CDD Scheme is the one that has supported them during their time of most need.

But from December this year, Australians with chronic diseases who need dental treatment will have their funding cut by this government. Instead, the government will fund a dental scheme for children, maybe in a year's time. Typical of Labor, it is taking with one hand and—after having pocketed the money—in the run to the next budget it may at some time give some of that money back with the other hand. It reminds me very much of the whole debate over youth allowance. We had the government taking with one hand and eventually being forced to give it back with the other, but only partly. Now we have the same thing with dental care.

As we know, the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme involves Medicare payments for the services provided by dentists, dental specialists, and dental prosthodontists in their surgeries. Patients admitted to hospitals are not covered because they come under a state management system. Eligible public patients can receive up to $4,250 in Medicare benefits for dental services over two consecutive calendar years. That is, and has been, available to patients who have a chronic medical condition with complex care needs that must be managed by a GP under a specific Medicare care plan. It is aimed at patients whose oral care is also impacting on their general health. The patient must be referred by their GP to the dentist.

We also need to consider what impact the sudden closure of this program is going to have in a broader sense in relation to the states. Members of this House would certainly be aware that the majority of dental care is funded by state governments, not the Commonwealth government. This bill does nothing to address the impact this decision will have on dental waiting lists in each of those states. This issue that the government has deliberately created—not only a funding gap but a time lag for services—is going to add to the waiting lists.

In my electorate in Western Australia, the dental services that are provided are provided by the Public Community Dental Services and the Country Patients Dental Subsidy Scheme. The Public Community Dental Services operates a 10-chair public dental service in Bunbury in my electorate, and that is funded by the WA government. The Country Patients Dental Subsidy Scheme is also a state government scheme that provides payments to eligible people in country locations where there are participating private dental practices and no public dental clinics.

The Chronic Disease Dental Scheme takes some of the pressure off each of these public dental schemes. The closure of this scheme will add to waiting times. I would really like to know just what consultation the minister and the government have had with the states and with the state ministers on the inevitable
impact these changes will have on them and the services they are providing. Given the history of this Labor government, I will not be making an assumption that this discussion has taken place.

The coalition has raised other concerns in relation to the dental issues. In particular, there are children who will lose access to treatment on 30 November with the closure of the CDDS, including children whose current treatment will not be completed by 30 November. What about those children? There is the unfunded $2.7 billion cost of the measure the government is proposing. The schedule of services and fees is not available, as the bill, as we know, is just being rushed through the parliament—which is another habit of this government. Of course, the government is working overtime on that budget surplus issue.

There are real and valid concerns that I have mentioned, and they reflect the lack of a long-term plan for dental care and what is probably the arrogance of the government in failing to work with service providers and the states. We have proposed an inquiry that would consider all of these issues and seek to provide an integrated and inclusive approach—that is what is needed, given the role of the states. The Labor scheme announced last month proposed to provide $1.3 billion to state and territory governments for public dental services. What it failed to announce was where this proposed money was going to come from. It has to be funded. Again, this fits the Labor pattern.

The provision of government funded dental care in Australia has a long and varied history. Of course, the government is not willing to engage in a broader plan. We have made that offer; that has been refused by this government. And, of course, we are once again debating a small component of dental care. The broader issue here is exactly where the funding is going to come from: the length of the lag time between the end of one program and the start of another, which is at least 14 months, during which people will be unable to access services.

Those are the concerns I have with the bill before the House.

Dr JENSEN (Tangney) (13:43): I rise to speak on Dental Benefits Amendment Bill 2012. I guess one of the important things in communication is the ability to relate. So I will relate the words of a famed communist back to Labor. It was Nikita Khrushchev who said: ‘Politicians are the same all over. They promise to build bridges even when there are no rivers.’ And so it is with this Dental Benefits Amendment Bill. The facts, as stubborn as they are, are that, under the current scheme—a coalition scheme—20 million services have been provided to over one million patients since 2007. And 80 per cent of services under the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme have been provided to concession card holders.

The people in my electorate are indignant that Labor is playing politics with their health. The reality is that Labor has gone to great lengths to undermine the CDDS because it was established by Tony Abbott as Minister for Health and Ageing and has been a success in improving access to treatment. The alternative Prime Minister is a man tackling our roughest challenges with fidelity and diligence. Tony Abbott is not a man who plays politics with people's lives or with their children's lives. He is a firm and considered servant who does not make empty promises, for a promise made is a debt unpaid.

This is the kernel of the coalition problem with this bill: it is not costed, it is not funded and it is not fair. The coalition are crystal clear in our unwavering commitment to the health of all Australians. I cannot support
any bill that will burden the hardworking families of Tangney with another unnecessary government debt. But this is what we have seen time and time again from this tired and troubled Labor government. They promise now and we have to pay later. One thing is for certain: the promises of yesterday are the taxes of today. And we know Labor hate accountability.

What we have, then, is a $4.1 billion commitment that is unfunded. Where will the money come from? The money will come from you and me. Increasing borrowing is Labor’s answer to everything. In fairness, Labor should make this their fall-back, because it is the only thing they deliver on. They have borrowed and borrowed. In fact, they have got better at borrowing other people’s money the older they have got. Just by way of example, Labor has turned net government interest payments from $1.02 billion in earnings into $6.5 billion in payments. That is more than enough to implement every single one of the Gonski education recommendations for the next four years.

These are the facts. Labor over promises and under delivers. It is said that we promise according to our hopes, and perform according to our fears. Labor has a lot to fear, because when the people of Willetton, Bull Creek, Applecross and Attadale find out that they will be left with nothing for 19 months they will be angry. The Dental Benefits Amendment Bill will stop the successful CDDS on 30 November and leave nothing in its wake—nothing. There is no outline of what will fill the gap between November 2012 and July 2014, when the proposed measures are to come into place.

And look more closely at the proposed measures. Under the current scheme, the successful coalition CDDS, up to $4,250 is available over a two-year period. Contrast this with the proposed bill and we see that Labor and the Greens have reduced the maximum amount by $3,250 or 77 per cent of that currently available. Reducing the amount available by 77 per cent and leaving the people of Tangney in the lurch for 19 months is, quite frankly, a disgrace.

The real anger of the silent majority demand and deserve answers. Labor’s most noble intention with this bill was to give a little to a lot, rather than a lot to a little. But what we find is that they will actually stop giving to everyone for 19 months. Conveniently, 19 months from now is July 2014. By then we will have passed the next election. It is hubristic to assume that Labor will still be in power by then. Government is not the gift of the unions and back-room boys but of the people.

Labor thinks it is better and more clever than Australians. This government is more interested in playing politics than discussing policy, and concerned about putting political profit before its duty to our nation. The political profit here is, of course, the much-vaunted budget surplus. And if it means that the parents of Riverton and Rossmoyne will be left scratching their heads, left in the dark and concerned about how they will fund their children’s dental bills, then so be it! The Prime Minister and Treasurer are unconcerned. They do not care, because they will be able to point to fact that they apparently delivered a budget surplus—a budget surplus at all costs.

We cannot pass this bill—a bill that will leave Australians worse off. We know that 30 November—less than 10 Mondays away; less than 60 days away—marks the end of a good, decent and effective policy. That is the day when the CDDS stops, and when spin over substance starts. If you are in treatment make sure it finishes by 30 November, and
by God make sure you do not need dental services again until 2014.

How much of a cop out is it that the maximum provided for under this proposed scheme is only $1,000, when the Department of Health and Ageing's own figure for the average cost of treatment is $1,716? This is in a country where the five-year average rate of inflation is three per cent, and the rate of rate increase in inflation is increasing. What a rort!

How can anyone in Tangney or anywhere in Australia ever consider this bill to be 'fair dinkum'? The coalition CDDS provides up to $4,250. Promise after promise, time after time, Labor are letting the people down. What happened to the Labor promise to their partners the Greens? What happened to the Commonwealth Dental Health Program? It is time to focus on facts. This bill is unfair, unfunded and unnecessary. If Labor do not and cannot value health, why should they be trusted on anything else? In measure, then, the government must know the rightful anger of the people when they are attacked. The consequences for the young and the sick are grave and urgent. It is time we return hope, reward and opportunity to all Australians.

Honourable members: Keep going! You still have six minutes.

Dr JENSEN: Six minutes? I thought you had someone on your side that was going to do it. Anyway, what does it say about people? Imagine you had painful and unsightly dental work that required treatment and you were told: 'Tough, you'll have to wait 19 months'? The people undergoing treatment right now are in grave danger of not having that treatment completed. They have to have that treatment completed by 30 November. What happens then? Say someone is halfway through a root canal treatment—they have had the hole drilled and a little bit of a plug put in. That is it; sorry, the rest of your filling will have to wait 19 months. Do you think there would not be any further degradation to that tooth? Do you think you would not get further rotting into maybe another part of the root system or further pain? This is a very real problem that this government refused to acknowledge. Clearly the government is completely embarrassed about the situation. Look at the plethora of speakers lining up on the other side to support this bill, which they vaunt.

The government says that the CDDS is in fact an unfair scheme and that it is going to replace it with a better scheme. Where are the government members to support it? Look, there is a row of empty benches opposite with no one supporting the bill. What does that say about the government's commitment to dental health? What it says is that this government has got a huge problem with its so-called budget surplus. It is a budget surplus which it is vaunting but which it finessed so much to such a great extent that it is doing everything it possibly can to pretend that it is going to be a real surplus.

There is $47-odd billion in NBN funding for the budget surplus, but guess what? It is not in the budget papers. It is off budget. It is like having a car and deciding you want to buy some mag wheels. You tell yourself, 'It's not coming out of my budget. I will not take it out of the household budget. I will pretend it does not come from that because when I sell that car it might even earn a profit due to the fact that it has mag wheels.' Is that a realistic assessment? Do you really think that the NBN is going to be able to make money on that $47 billion that is being spent? If that was the case, where is the cost-benefit analysis? We are still looking for that one. It has disappeared.
Here is a government that is looking at a mirage of a budget surplus that is never going to eventuate. It is doing everything it can to keep things off budget or otherwise hide things away. It will just get rid of the CDDS and what are we going to replace it with? I am pleased to see that the health minister has finally turned up. I am surprised that she has not been vociferous here in supporting this bill. There is a 19-month gap between when the CDDS ends and your scheme supposedly gets introduced.

Ms Plibersek: No there isn't. You made that up.

Dr JENSEN: Not true? Have a look at your own bill. You are going to leave people in the lurch. For people who are on treatment now, that treatment ends at the end of November. What happens to them, Minister?

Ms Plibersek: It is not true.

Dr JENSEN: There will be nothing until April 2014. You can wait, folks. That is okay; that is the Labor way: 'We make promises we cannot deliver on and we have borrowed so much money that we cannot really borrow any more. What sort of promises do we make? We are now promising to spend the states' money. We are not even spending money that the federal government is borrowing anymore'. They are making promises that they cannot deliver and so they are relying on the states to fund those promises. What a disgrace.

I notice the Treasurer is here. This is supposed to be responsible budgeting. It is a joke and it is getting worse. I almost do not know where to go—

Mr Windsor: We can tell.

Dr JENSEN: with where the government has got us. It is an absolute disgrace, member for Windsor. The government is so desperate in pushing a budget bottom line that it is prepared to leave people in the lurch for 19 months when they have chronic oral health problems. The government says it has got a great scheme but guess what? You have to wait 19 months. Your treatment will have to end by 30 November because otherwise there is a gap. (Time expired)

Mr HARTSUYKER (Cowper) (13:58): I welcome the opportunity to speak on this legislation because we do have a government that proposes to leave some of the most vulnerable Australians in the lurch. We do have a government that is being absolutely callous in the way it is treating these people. We do have a government that cannot manage its own budget and, because it cannot manage its own budget, Australian people will suffer. The government is so eager to wind up the scheme. It has been chasing the scheme on the basis of ideology. It shows that this government does not care for the neediest Australians. It shows that it does not care for those Australians in the very worst of health. It shows that this government is absolutely out of touch with the health needs of many Australians. This scheme provided much needed dental assistance payable under Medicare for Australians who would otherwise be totally unable to afford this treatment.

What has the minister said to these people? She said, on 30 November, 'Your treatment must stop; you have to go on the state waiting list; you may wait for two years; and I don't care.' This minister says, 'I don't care about sick Australians. I only care about Labor ideology.' This minister is leaving Australians in the lurch at a time when their health is most in need.

Debate interrupted.

MINISTERIAL ARRANGEMENTS

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:00): I inform the House that the Minister for Defence will be absent from question
time this week as he is attending the NATO defence ministers' meeting in Brussels. The Minister for Home Affairs, Minister for Justice and Minister for Defence Materiel will be acting as Minister for Defence during this time and will answer questions on behalf of the Minister for Defence.

The Attorney-General will be absent from question time today as she is attending the swearing-in of Steven Gagler to the High Court of Australia. The Minister for Home Affairs, Minister for Justice and Minister for Defence Materiel will answer questions on behalf of the Attorney-General.

The Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth will be absent from question time this week for personal reasons. The Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation will answer questions on his behalf.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Speaker

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (14:01): My question is to the Prime Minister. Does the Prime Minister continue to have full confidence in the Speaker? If not, what steps will she take to remove him from the speakership?

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:01): I understand why the Leader of the Opposition has asked this question today. What would be on his mind—and he has made some public comments about this today—is the publication of some text messages from Mr Slipper, a number of them from before the time he was Speaker. The contents of these text messages are offensive. I find sexism offensive wherever it comes from. I do believe that sexism is always offensive. You would expect me, as the first woman Prime Minister of this country, to say that.

On matters involving the Speaker more generally: as the Leader of the Opposition would be aware, the material he is referring to is material from a court case where the judge at the moment has reserved his decision, so I do not believe that it is appropriate for this parliament canvas in a full way this material, which is in evidence in a case where the judge has reserved his decision.

Mr Abbott: I seek leave to move that, as provided for by section 35 of the Constitution, the Speaker be removed from office immediately.

Leave not granted.

MOTIONS

Speaker

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (14:03): I move:

That so much of standing and sessional orders be suspended as would prevent the Leader of the Opposition from moving the following motion forthwith—That, as provided for by section 35 of the Constitution, the Speaker be removed from office immediately.

This is obviously a rare and unusual step that I take the start of question time today. But it is a necessary step. It is necessary that this parliament now suspend standing and sessional orders and consider the removal of the Speaker from the high office that he currently holds.

Mr Danby interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): The member for Melbourne Ports is warned!

Mr ABBOTT: It is clear that this Speaker is no longer a fit and proper person to uphold the dignity of the parliament. It is clear that he is no longer a fit and proper person to uphold the standing orders of this House. This Speaker is disqualified from high office not by the fact of the legal action
currently on foot against him but by the undenied, uncontradicted facts that have emerged in the course of this case.

First, there are the truly gross references to female genitalia. I regret to speak in this way to this House, but it is necessary to prosecute this matter.

Mr Dreyfus interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Isaacs is warned!

Mr ABBOTT: This is the vile and anatomically specific language to which this Speaker appears to be addicted. Finally—and no less importantly—there is the clear bias on the face of the record shown by the Speaker against a member of this chamber whom he had expelled that day.

Standing orders must be suspended because this Speaker has failed the character test. Standing orders must also be suspended because, I regret to say, not only has the Speaker failed the character test but also the Prime Minister has failed the judgement test. That is why standing orders should be suspended. This prime minister failed the judgement test when it came to the member for Dobell. Now she has failed the judgement test when it comes to the Speaker of this parliament. For months and years this Prime Minister ran a protection racket for the member for Dobell. Please let us not have the same protection racket run for the benefit of the current Speaker of this parliament.

Let us be clear exactly what happened in this place last November. Last November—and this is why standing orders must be suspended—the Prime Minister did a squalid deal to boost her numbers in this parliament. She knew that the government was about to lose the support of the member for Denison.

Mr Albanese: We will take the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition, and there will be four speakers a side with 10 minutes each.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): Is the motion seconded?

Ms JULIE BISHOP (Curtin—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (14:06): I second the motion. Standing orders—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Deputy Leader of the Opposition—

Ms Julie Bishop interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Yes, I know. We are in new territory. We are going to go back. The suspension will not proceed. We will go back to the original seeking of leave. We will start the clocks again. The Leader of the Opposition will have the opportunity to begin his remarks as if leave had been granted. The Leader of the Opposition has the call.

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (14:07): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I move:

That, as provided for by section 35 of the Constitution, the Speaker be removed from office immediately.

At the risk of detaining the House in a repetitive way, let me say that it is absolutely crystal clear that the Speaker is no longer a fit and proper person to uphold the dignity of this parliament and is no longer a fit and proper person to uphold and protect the standing orders of this House. I say that the Speaker is not disqualified by the mere fact of a legal action against him—that can befall any member of this House and of itself should not be a disqualification from high office. What must nevertheless be held against the Speaker of this parliament are the undenied, uncontradicted facts that have emerged, and that continue to emerge, in the course of the case currently on foot against him. At the risk of dismaying this chamber, at the risk of dismaying the public, I must allude—and I only allude—to the gross
references to female genitalia which are contained in the uncontradicted, undeniable evidence before the court about the conduct of this Speaker. I must allude to the vile anatomical references to which this Speaker appears to be addicted in his text messaging.

There is the clear bias in undeniable, uncontradicted evidence before a court against a member of this House by someone who is charged to act without fear or favour, by someone who is charged to act impartially towards all members of this House, by someone who is charged with the upholding of the standing orders of this House without fear or favour, against or in favour of any single member. Be you the newest member, be you the father of the House, the Speaker is charged with upholding the standing orders impartially for and against all members of this parliament, and on the face of the uncontradicted, undeniable evidence before a court this Speaker cannot do that. This Speaker has not done that. That is why this particular Speaker is no longer a fit and proper person to be the Speaker of this House.

But it is not just the Speaker who has failed the character test. It is indeed this Prime Minister who has failed the judgement test. This Prime Minister hand-picked the current Speaker for the top job of this parliament. This Prime Minister orchestrated the resignation of the former Speaker, the member for Scullin, a man of undoubted character, a man of undoubted quality and a man of undoubted impartiality in the conduct of this chamber. Does anyone think for a second that the member for Scullin, the former Speaker of the parliament—a man who loved this parliament, who loved the speakership as he loved his life—would have resigned to spend more time with his colleagues in the caucus? Ask the member for Banks what caucus is like these days. Does anyone think that the member for Scullin really resigned to spend time with members of the caucus? Clearly the member for Scullin resigned the speakership because he had been instructed by the Prime Minister, a Prime Minister who engaged and who masterminded a squalid deal to shore up her numbers in the parliament. And mark my words, Madam Deputy Speaker, what we will shortly see from this Prime Minister and ministers in this government is a defence of the indefensible, an attempt to say that someone who has clearly failed the character test is worthy of sitting in the greatest chair of this parliament. I say to this Prime Minister: just as the Speaker has failed the character test, you, Prime Minister, are about to fail the judgement test. And every day that you, Prime Minister, run a protection racket for the current Speaker, just as you ran for months and years a protection racket for the member for Dobell, you indicate your unfitness for high office as well.

Last November, when the Prime Minister feared she was about to lose the support of the member for Denison because she knew she would not be able to deliver on her poker machine pledge, she cooked up this deal. She knew she was about to lose the support of the member for Dobell. She feared she was about to lose the support in the parliament of the member for Dobell. She was apprehensive then, as always, about the actions of the former Prime Minister, the member for Griffith, so, in conjunction with the Leader of the House, the member for Grayndler, she dreamt up this brilliant political wheeze. She dreamt up this brilliant political tactic. Never mind if it involved the political assassination of a well-respected Speaker of this parliament; she knew that she could rely then, as always, on the Sussex Street death squads, which had already dispatched one Prime Minister, to deal with the Speaker of this parliament. Never mind that the squalid deal that the Prime Minister
cooked up last November involved placing in the chair of this parliament someone whom her own government was investigating for misuse of entitlements; all that mattered to this Prime Minister last November, when this brilliant piece of political manoeuvring was being dreamt up, was buttressing her position in the parliament. That is all that ever matters to this Prime Minister—her own survival in this parliament.

What is now absolutely apparent is that, while members on this side of the House were attempting to manoeuvre the Speaker out of the parliament, the Prime Minister and members on the other side of the parliament were giving him the biggest job in this parliament, apart from the prime ministership itself. In the process of managing the Speaker, not out of the parliament but into the speakership, this Prime Minister dudded a good Labor man who had done nothing—nothing at all—but discharge the duties of the speakership in a fair and impartial manner, but it was not sufficiently partial to satisfy the Prime Minister and the leader of this House.

Let us be absolutely crystal clear about the situation in this parliament right now. This Speaker is this Prime Minister's creation. This Speaker's actions are this Prime Minister's responsibility and this Speaker's standards perforce are this Prime Minister's standards unless she has the responsibility and the decency to remove this Speaker from his high office. We know, because we have been observing this Prime Minister now for a long time in this parliament, that 'sorry' is the one word she cannot say. We know 'I was wrong' is the one statement that she cannot make. Well, I say to this Prime Minister: please, for the sake of this parliament, for the sake of this country, for the sake of ordinary standards of decency, admit that you got it wrong when you engineered the member for Fisher into the Speaker's chair and just say, 'Sorry'. Just apologise to this parliament for the travesty that you inflicted on us in November last year.

As things stand, this whole sorry Slipper saga illustrates the ethical bankruptcy of this government. We have had minister after minister just about knocking over the microphones to stand up for this Speaker. We have had minister after minister tripping over themselves to defend this Speaker. We had the Minister for Foreign Affairs describing the accuser of the Speaker as 'more rehearsed than a kabuki actor'. We had the Leader of the House saying that anyone who criticised the current Speaker was guilty of engaging in the politics of personal destruction. We even had the Leader of the House compare court action against the current Speaker to Watergate. What sense of standard, what sense of proportion, what sense of perspective do these people have?

Worst of all, we had the one person in this House most charged with respecting due process, with respecting the ordinary processes of the courts, the first law officer of the Crown, the first law officer of this country—the Attorney-General herself—who went out in public again and again to say that those who were engaged in prosecuting this Speaker were somehow guilty of an abuse of process. She did not say it once—it was not a slip of the tongue in the heat of the moment—she went out and said it deliberately, cold-bloodedly and calculatedly again and again and again. It is interesting, isn't it, that the Prime Minister is now saying, 'Oh, I couldn't possibly comment on something which is before the courts. Oh, no, not me. Not me—upholder of standards, upholder of decency, always wanting to give someone a fair go.' Oh, yeah! This is what the Attorney-General said when picked up on the fact that she was prejudging a matter before the courts:
I think it's unrealistic given the public interest in this matter that there will not be commentary.

And wasn't there commentary! There was comment after comment. There was defamation after defamation of someone whose only fault was seeking to assert his rights at law against the Speaker of this parliament.

But what has happened since more has been revealed about the real character, the real nature, of the individual who holds the highest job that this parliament can bestow upon anyone? The Attorney-General has now taken the vows of a Trappist monk. The Attorney-General has now taken the vow of silence on this matter that the Prime Minister is now going to attempt to take. It is total, total hypocrisy. This is a government which is only too ready to detect sexism—to detect misogyny, no less—until they find it in one of their own supporters, until they find it in someone upon whom this Prime Minister relies to survive in her job. Then, of course, no fault can possibly be found—no evil dare be spoken. Well, the Australian public are not mugs. They know what is going on here; they know that this government is about to run a protection racket for something, which is absolutely contemptible for attitudes and values, which are absolutely and utterly indefensible.

Not only has the Prime Minister failed the judgement test, not only has the government failed the standards test, but this Attorney-General has failed the honour test. She has dishonourably failed to defend the ordinary judicial process of this country. Not only has the Attorney-General failed to defend judicial process, she has been the chief defender of the Speaker himself. She has been running his defence rather than defending the courts and the justice process of our country.

It is no accident that the member for Banks has today resigned as chairman of the government caucus. It is no accident that he has resigned today, because the member for Banks must be only too well aware of the fact that, back in November last year, it was he who was forced to nominate the current Speaker for the position that he now holds. It was the member for Banks who was forced by this government to endure 10 minutes of infamy, while he stood in this place to assert the virtues of the member for Fisher. He knew it was wrong then, he has known that it has been wrong every day since then, it has obviously been hanging on his conscience and now he has resigned. The member for Melbourne Ports also asserted the honour of the member for Fisher—an assertion that he knew then and has known every day since to be simply false. So far, the only honourable man opposite in this matter has been the member for Banks. I commend him for that.

I know that the Prime Minister is in a difficult position today. She has already lost her caucus chairman, she is fighting to avoid losing her Speaker and what she is frightened of ultimately losing is also the support of her caucus. Just as she has lost the caucus chairman, she will lose her Speaker—and I suspect she will shortly lose the caucus, because what this Prime Minister has done is shame this parliament. Should she now rise in this place to try to defend the Speaker, to say that she retains confidence in the Speaker, she will shame this parliament again. And every day the Prime Minister stands in this parliament to defend this Speaker will be another day of shame for this parliament and another day of shame for a government which should have already died of shame. The member for Fisher should never have been a Speaker in this parliament; he should not have been made Speaker last November and he should not be Speaker now.
Let me simply remind the Prime Minister, whom I presume is about to rise to her feet in this parliament and defend her personal selection of the member for Fisher as Speaker of this place, that on 24 November last year she said of the Speaker that he had shown 'a fierce sense of balance and appropriateness'. This Prime Minister thinks that this Speaker is a man of appropriate judgement. What this Prime Minister now needs to do is defend the conduct, the character and the words of this Speaker.

*Ms Macklin interjecting—*

**Mr ABBOTT:** I hear an accusation: 'How long was he in our party room?' We were trying to get him out of our party room and what did members opposite do? They put him into the biggest job in parliament. The Speaker is this Prime Minister's property. The Prime Minister owns this Speaker and, every day the Prime Minister stands in this parliament to defend him, the bonds between them will be closer. This Prime Minister should be ashamed of herself, she should be ashamed of her choice, she should be ashamed of her judgement and she should be ashamed of the fact that she is now having to defend the indefensible. This Speaker should be gone, and he should be gone today.

**Ms JULIE BISHOP** (Curtin—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (14:26): It is with a heavy heart that I rise to speak on this motion, for it represents a dark and ugly and shameful episode in this parliament. The Prime Minister's choice of Speaker was the member for Fisher. But this motion must be moved because his occupancy of the Speaker's role is no longer tenable. When this House votes to elect a Speaker, a heavy responsibility falls upon the shoulders of the person privileged to take that role—a responsibility to the House, a responsibility to the parliament and a responsibility to the Australian people. It is among the greatest honours in our parliamentary system to be chosen by peers to hold the most important office in this chamber. It is enshrined, no less, in section 35 of the Constitution:

The House of Representatives shall, before proceeding to the despatch of any other business, choose a member to be the Speaker of the House …

This means that the parliament cannot function without first electing a Speaker to preside over the workings of the House. The role of the Speaker rests upon 800 years of tradition, harking back to the early genesis of our parliamentary system in England. All nations that have adopted the Westminster system of parliamentary democracy have a Speaker, playing a critical role as an impartial judge, whose foremost duty is to uphold the dignity of the House, to enforce standards of behaviour and to represent the House and the parliament in the traditional and ceremonial roles that are required of the Speaker. The Speaker's role in the Westminster system has been described thus:

The office of the Speaker occupies a pivotal position in our parliamentary democracy. It has been said of the office of the Speaker that while the members of Parliament represent the individual constituencies, the Speaker represents the full authority of the House itself … symbolises the dignity and power of the House over which … presiding. Therefore, it is expected that the holder of this office of high dignity has to be one who can represent the House in all its manifestations.

The Speaker can only function if he or she commands the respect of the House. In terms of upholding standards, the authority of the Speaker can only be effective if the Speaker has the respect of members.

While the parliamentary authority of the Speaker cannot be challenged, it can be undermined by the conduct of the person who occupies the chair. While I do not
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I presume to speak for all of my female colleagues on either side of the chamber, I would personally struggle to show appropriate respect for the Speaker should the member for Fisher return to the role of presiding over question time. How the women in this House can be expected to show respect to the Speaker when we are now aware of the views that he holds of women is beyond comprehension. The published remarks of the member for Fisher have been read into evidence in a court case. They are uncontested, they are available to the public, they are on a website and they are reported in the media; they are not sub judice.

There has been running commentary on the case involving the member for Fisher and one of his staffers. That running commentary has come from no less a person than the Attorney-General, the first law officer of the land. For the first law officer to think it is appropriate to intervene in proceedings to protect the member for Fisher against a case calls into question her fitness for office. There are legitimate questions being directed to the Attorney-General about why she would intervene in those proceedings to provide special privileges for the member for Fisher that were not afforded to the other litigants in the proceedings. Indeed, the judge in these proceedings has given what I think is an unprecedented statement about the Attorney-General's failure to uphold the dignity of the court, for that is the first duty of the Attorney-General of this country.

These remarks of the member for Fisher that were read into the court transcript, that are uncontested, that are now on the public record, are offensive. Many of them are obscenely offensive and what female Labor members would describe as sexist and misogynist if anyone else had uttered them. One comment maliciously attacked a serving female member of parliament while the member for Fisher was occupying the chair as Speaker. It was a malicious, vicious comment showing the partial nature of the member for Fisher's role as Speaker. It was not impartial; it was impolite, it was obscene and it makes it untenable for the member for Fisher to occupy the position of Speaker. His attitude to women as revealed in these remarks that are now public is entirely, absolutely and utterly incompatible with what is expected of the Speaker of the House of Representatives. We do not need to see the outcome of the court case. We do not need to hide behind the fig leaf of sub judice. These comments are public. The public are judging this House and the actions we will take in relation to them.

This is also a very serious test for the Prime Minister and her leadership, because it was the Prime Minister who sanctioned the political deal with the member for Fisher that elevated him to the position of Speaker. The deal was done to allow the Prime Minister to break her written commitment to the member for Denison on gambling reform. I am sure the member for Denison has not forgotten that betrayal. The deal involved the removal of the member for Scullin from the speakership, a man who had conducted himself and the affairs of the House with enormous dignity. He had earned the respect of all members. Indeed, I recall at one point the Leader of the Opposition intervening when there was a question about confidence in the Speaker. The Leader of the Opposition intervened when members opposite did not to assure the Speaker, the member for Scullin, that he had our support. The member for Scullin is a decent man, an honourable man. Could anyone in this chamber imagine the member for Scullin making the remarks about women that have been made by the member for Fisher, the Prime Minister's choice for Speaker?
The Prime Minister must show leadership on this issue and acknowledge that the member for Fisher was her choice of Speaker. It was a grave error of judgement. There were very serious and deep reservations held about the member for Fisher before he was elevated to the position of Speaker. The Manager of Opposition Business moved that any number of Labor members be appointed to the position of Speaker—I am reminded that he nominated nine Labor members to be Speaker—yet every time the Manager of Opposition Business moved that another Labor member be appointed as the Speaker the government voted against it. On nine occasions we tried to inform the government that it was a grave error of judgement to appoint the member for Fisher but, because he was part of that grubby political deal, the Prime Minister went ahead and said, 'Damn the consequences.'

Sadly, the potential for this grubby political deal to drag down the reputation of the parliament has now been realised. The member for Fisher is still the Speaker, as Madam Deputy Speaker well knows. He still commands the salary. He is still carrying on the business of the Speaker behind the scenes. He just does not turn up for question time. This is all part of the ruse to enable the government to say he has stepped aside. He has not stepped aside. He is still the Speaker. He does not turn up for the public viewing of question time, but in every other respect, sadly, he is the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

Yes, the member for Fisher has been embroiled in a court case, a sexual harassment case brought by one of his staffers. It is in the course of that case that this evidence has come to light—and this is uncontested evidence, accepted by the court as evidence, as any lawyer would know.

The Prime Minister struggles to admit fault or errors of judgement, and there have been plenty of errors of judgement on the part of the Prime Minister. I guess it is a matter of pride that she does not like to admit when she gets it wrong, but this is an issue that goes beyond the pride of the Prime Minister; this is an issue that goes to the heart of our democracy. If members of this parliament lose respect for the Speaker, it follows that the broader community will lose respect for the office of Speaker and that will impact on the respect the community holds for the Australian parliament.

All members elected to this House know from their first days in this place of the important role of the Speaker of the parliament. We are keenly aware of the need to accord the Speaker the highest levels of respect and obey the rulings of the chair, and when we do not the Speaker takes action and we obliged. The current Speaker, if he is retained in this role by the Prime Minister, will be an embarrassment not only to members of this parliament but to the Australian public as he carries out the duties of Speaker.

Of course, it is important to our democratic system to have a Speaker who upholds the dignity of the House; it underpins our system of government. But the Speaker also holds a very public role: he is the senior representative of the parliament in welcoming foreign leaders—foreign female leaders—and entertaining foreign dignitaries. And yes, they too read the media. They too will be aware of the member for Fisher's views on women and the partial role he has played as Speaker in condemning a serving shadow minister in this House. He also leads delegations internationally. He is meant to be the person to lead our members of parliament
overseas, to represent the parliament, to lead female delegates. Does the Prime Minister think it is going to be easy for female delegates to go on trips overseas with the member for Fisher knowing the sexist, misogynistic views that the member for Fisher holds about women?

The Speaker also liaises with other governments and liaises with the Governor-General on our behalf. As the Prime Minister often points out, not only do we have a female Prime Minister of this country; we have a female Governor-General. She is meant to receive the member for Fisher, the man who the Prime Minister chose to uphold the dignity of the House. The Speaker also leads the staff of the parliament and is meant to set standards of behaviour for staff in the parliament, and we now know through this exchange of text messages how the Speaker, the member for Fisher, deals with his staffers. There is uncontested evidence of the most appalling kind.

The Speaker should be setting a personal example for others to follow. I remind the House of previous speakers who have set such an example: Speaker Harry Jenkins, Speaker Steve Martin, Speaker Neil Andrew and Speaker David Hawker. There are many, many more from both sides of the House—speakers who have upheld the dignity of the House. Can you imagine any one of those occupants of the chair ever descending to the type of sexist, offensive, obscene conduct that is enshrined in these text messages that the member for Fisher sent to his staff? I call on all members to maintain the high standards to ensure that the Speaker is a person of dignity. It is a grave situation that only the parliament can resolve by removing the Speaker from office and electing a new Speaker. (Time expired)

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:42): I rise to oppose the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition, and in so doing I say to the Leader of the Opposition: I will not be lectured about sexism and misogyny by this man. I will not. The government will not be lectured about sexism and misogyny by this man—not now, not ever. The Leader of the Opposition says that people who hold sexist views and who are misogynists are not appropriate for high office. Well, I hope the Leader of the Opposition has a piece of paper and he is writing out his resignation, because if he wants to know what misogyny looks like in modern Australia he does not need a motion in the House of Representatives; he needs a mirror. That is what he needs.

Let's go through the opposition leader's repulsive double standards when it comes to misogyny and sexism. We are now supposed to take seriously that the Leader of the Opposition is offended by Mr Slipper’s text messages, when this is what the Leader of the Opposition said when he was a minister under the last government—not when he was a student, not when he was in high school but when he was a minister under the last government. In a discussion about women being underrepresented in institutions of power in Australia, the interviewer was a man called Stavros and the Leader of the Opposition said: 'If it's true, Stavros, that men have more power, generally speaking, than women, is that a bad thing?' Then a discussion ensued and another person being interviewed said, 'I want my daughter to have as much opportunity as my son,' to which the Leader of the Opposition said: 'Yes, I completely agree, but what if men are by physiology or temperament more adapted to exercise authority or to issue command?' Then ensues another discussion about women's role in modern society, and the other person participating in the discussions says, 'I think it's very hard to deny that there is an underrepresentation of
women,' to which the Leader of the Opposition says, 'But there's an assumption that this is a bad thing.' This is the man from whom we are supposed to take lectures about sexism!

And it goes on. I was very offended personally when the Leader of the Opposition as minister for health said, 'Abortion is the easy way out.' I was very personally offended by those comments. He said that in March 2004, and I suggest he check the records. I was also very offended on behalf of the women of Australia when in the course of the carbon pricing campaign the Leader of the Opposition said, 'What the housewives of Australia need to understand as they do the ironing.' Thank you for that painting of women's roles in modern Australia! Then, of course, I am offended by the sexism, by the misogyny, of the Leader of the Opposition catcalling across this table at me as I sit here as Prime Minister, 'if the Prime Minister wants to, politically speaking, make an honest woman of herself'—something that would never have been said to any man sitting in this chair.

I was offended when the Leader of the Opposition went outside the front of the parliament and stood next to a sign that said 'Ditch the witch'. I was offended when the Leader of the Opposition stood next to a sign that described me as a man's bitch. I was offended by those things. It is misogyny, sexism, every day from this Leader of the Opposition. Every day, in every way, across the time the Leader of the Opposition has sat in that chair and I have sat in this chair, that is all we have heard from him.

Now the Leader of the Opposition wants to be taken seriously. Apparently he has woken up, after this track record and all of these statements, and has gone, 'Oh dear, there is this thing called sexism; oh my lord, there is this thing called misogyny. Who is one of them? The Speaker must be because that suits my political purpose.' He does not turn a hair about any of his past statements; does not walk into this parliament and apologise to the women of Australia; does not walk into this parliament and apologise to me for the things that have come out of his mouth—but he now seeks to use this as a battering ram against someone else. This kind of hypocrisy should not be tolerated, which is why this motion from the Leader of the Opposition should not be taken seriously.

Second, the Leader of the Opposition is always wonderful at walking into this parliament and giving me and others a lecture about what they should take responsibility for. He is always wonderful about everything that I should take responsibility for, now apparently including the text messages of the member for Fisher. He is always keen to say others should assume responsibility, particularly me. Can anybody remind me whether the Leader of the Opposition has taken any responsibility for the conduct of the Sydney Young Liberals and the attendance at their event of members of his frontbench? Has he taken any responsibility for the conduct of members of his political party and members of his frontbench, who apparently when the most vile things were being said about my family raised no voice of objection.

Government members interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): Order! Ministers on the front bench are not assisting.

Ms GILLARD: No-one walked out of the room, no-one walked up to Mr Jones and said that this was not acceptable. Instead, it was all viewed as good fun—until it was run in a Sunday newspaper, and then the Leader of the Opposition and others started ducking for cover. He is big on lectures on responsibility; very light on accepting
responsibility himself for the vile conduct of members of his political party.

I turn to the third reason why the Leader of the Opposition should not be taken seriously on this motion. The Leader of the Opposition and the Deputy Leader of the Opposition have come into this place and talked about the member for Fisher. Let me remind the opposition, and the Leader of the Opposition particularly, about their track record and association with the member for Fisher. I remind them that the National Party preselected the member for Fisher for the 1984 election, that the National Party preselected the member for Fisher for the 1987 election, and that the Liberal Party preselected the member for Fisher for the 1993 election, then for the 1996 election, then for the 1998 election, then for the 2001 election, then for the 2004 election, then for the 2007 election and then for the 2010 election. Across many of those preselections Mr Slipper enjoyed the personal support of the Leader of the Opposition. I remind the Leader of the Opposition that on 28 September 2010, following the last election campaign when Mr Slipper was elected as Deputy Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition referred to the member for Maranoa, who was also elected to a position at the same time, and went on:

... the member for Maranoa and the member for Fisher will serve as a fine complement to the member for Scullin in the chair. I believe that the parliament will be well served by the team which will occupy the chair in this chamber ... I congratulate the member for Fisher, who has been a friend of mine for a very long time who has served this parliament in many capacities with distinction ... They are the words of the Leader of the Opposition on record about his personal friendship with Mr Slipper and on record about his view of Mr Slipper's qualities and attributes to be the Speaker. There is no walking away from those words—they were the statements of the Leader of the Opposition then.

I remind the Leader of the Opposition, who now comes in here and speaks about Mr Slipper and apparently his inability to work with or talk to Mr Slipper, that he attended Mr Slipper's wedding. Did he walk up to Mr Slipper in the middle of the service and say he was disgusted to be there? Was that the attitude he took? No, he attended that wedding as a friend. The Leader of the Opposition is keen to lecture others about what they ought to know or did know about Mr Slipper but, with respect, I would say to the Leader of the Opposition that, after a long personal association, including attending Mr Slipper's wedding, it would be interesting to know whether the Leader of the Opposition was surprised by these text messages. He is certainly in a position to speak more intimately about Mr Slipper than I am and many other people in this parliament are, given this long personal association. Then, of course, the Leader of the Opposition comes into this place and says:

And every day the Prime Minister stands in this parliament to defend this Speaker will be another day of shame for this parliament; another day of shame for a government which should already have died of shame.

I indicate to the Leader of the Opposition that the government is not dying of shame—and my father did not die of shame. What the Leader of the Opposition should be ashamed of is his performance in this parliament and the sexism he brings with it.

Opposition members interjecting—

Ms Macklin: You used those words. It is a quote.

Ms GILLARD: That is a direct quote from the Leader of the Opposition, so I
suggest those groaning have a word with him.

On the conduct of Mr Slipper and on the text messages which are in the public domain—I have seen the press reports of those text messages and I am offended by their content. I am offended by their content because I am always offended by sexism. I am offended by their content because I am always offended by statements which are anti women. I am offended by those things in the same way I have been offended by things the Leader of the Opposition has said and no doubt will continue to say in the future—because if this, today, was an exhibition of his new feminine side, I do not think we have much to look forward to in terms of changed conduct.

I am offended by those text messages but I also believe that, in making a decision about the speakership, this parliament should recognise that there is court case in progress and that the judge has reserved his decision. Having waited for a number of months for the legal matters surrounding Mr Slipper to come to a conclusion, this parliament should see that conclusion. I believe that is the appropriate path forward and that people will then have an opportunity to make up their minds with the fullest information available to them.

But, whenever people make up their minds about those questions, what I will not stand for—what I will never stand for—is the Leader of the Opposition coming into this place and peddling a double standard. I will not stand for him peddling a standard for Mr Slipper he would not set for himself, peddling a standard for Mr Slipper he has not set for other members of his frontbench or peddling a standard for Mr Slipper which has not been met by the people—such as his former shadow parliamentary secretary, Senator Bernardi—who have been sent out to say the vilest and most revolting things. I will not ever allow the Leader of the Opposition to impose his double standards on this parliament.

Sexism should always be unacceptable. We should always conduct ourselves in such a way as to make it clear that it is unacceptable. The Leader of the Opposition says, 'Do something.' He could do something himself if he wanted to deal with sexism in this parliament. He could change his behaviour, he could apologise for all his past statements and he could apologise for standing next to signs describing me as a witch and a bitch—terminology now objected to by the frontbench of the opposition. He could change standards himself if he sought to do so. But we will see none of that from the Leader of the Opposition, because on these questions he is incapable of change. He is capable of double standards but incapable of change. His double standards should not rule this parliament.

Good sense, common sense and proper process are what should rule this parliament. That is what I believe is the path forward for this parliament, not the kinds of double standards and political game playing imposed by the Leader of the Opposition, who is now looking at his watch because, apparently, a woman has spoken for too long—I have, in the past, had him yell at me to shut up.

But I will take the remaining seconds of my speaking time to say to the Leader of the Opposition that I think the best course for him is to reflect on the standards he has exhibited in public life, on the responsibility he should take for his public statements, on his close personal connection with Peter Slipper and on the hypocrisy he has displayed in this House today. On that basis, because of the Leader of the Opposition's
motivations, this parliament should today reject this motion, and the Leader of the Opposition should think seriously about the role of women in public life and in Australian society—because we are entitled to a better standard than this.

Mr TRUSS (Wide Bay—Leader of The Nationals) (14:57): I take no joy whatever in speaking on a motion of this nature. I am deeply conscious of the gravity of this motion—how rare it has been in the history of this parliament for a motion to remove the Speaker from office to be put forward for debate. It is a subject of great importance and great significance. The decision by the opposition to take this action is one we have taken with the heaviest of hearts.

But these are circumstances which we have surely never before seen in this parliament. The Speaker has been the subject of a series of allegations over a long period of time and we now find that some of those allegations are supported by the Speaker's own words in his text messages. This is unsatisfactory conduct from the person whose primary responsibility is to uphold the honour and the dignity of this parliament, to set an example to other members, to set an example to the community and to be the face of the parliament. We should be able to admire the person in that office. We should be able to respect the man in that office not only because he holds an important office but because he carries out the responsibilities of that office with dignity.

This is no mere censure of a Speaker who has made poor rulings as chair of the parliament. It is not a dispute over standing orders or administration of the parliament. It is about the very fitness of the incumbent to hold this high office. There has been a dark cloud growing for far too long and the government has been prepared to stand in the shadow rather than come out into the light and condemn the behaviour of the man they chose to be Speaker.

They moved aside a man of great integrity, a person admired on all sides of the House, who had carried out his responsibilities with distinction. There had been no suggestion of impropriety. There had been no suggestion that he had behaved in a way which was anything other than fair and appropriate for the Speaker's office. The former Speaker was stood down.

Put in his place, entrusted with the responsibility for the traditions and standards of the parliament, was a person who did not have such a record. At the very time the member for Fisher was appointed Speaker, there had already been many months of articles in his own local newspapers questioning his integrity, questioning his use of his parliamentary entitlements, questioning his travel bills, questioning the quite strange travel patterns that had developed over the years. These questions were already in the public arena; they were already being considered and under investigation—yet this government chose to make him the Speaker of this parliament. He still holds that office now. He collects the full salary. He continues to collect the travel allowance and travel the world, to entertain in his office. He is marked present, as if he has been here, even though you, Madam Deputy Speaker Burke, have been conducting the most important part of his work.

The office of Speaker is more than just a privileged position. It is more than pomp and ceremony, and parades through the Members' Hall. The Speaker is the custodian of the dignity of this chamber and it reflects on all who are seated here. The Speaker is the arbiter in whom the public must have confidence if they are to believe in the fair workings of this parliament. Despite political
differences, the Speaker must be an impartial umpire over the people and the proceedings of the House. From time to time, the Speaker rebukes members—more members on this side, I must say, than others—because he believes they have not appropriately followed the standing orders. If he undertakes the job, he must earn the right to be respected in exercising that discipline. He is not respected just because he holds an office entitled to respect; he must build a reputation and earn that respect; and this Speaker has not done that.

How can you accept rebuke from a person whose own behaviour falls so far short of the standards that we could reasonably expect? The Speaker is the face of the parliament. He is the defender of the rights and privileges of all members. It is a position of honour, but the Speaker needs to bring honour to that post. The member for Fisher has brought dishonour to the post. Further, he has made it absolutely clear through the text messages which have now become public that he does not believe that it is necessary for him to carry out his task with impartiality. That is surely an absolutely essential quality of the person who holds the office of Speaker.

The members for Fisher's comments about the suspension of the member for Indi are a disgrace. They are a disgrace to the office of the Speaker. Of course, they are inappropriate and unacceptable in their sexist nature. But he also demonstrated that that decision was not made with impartiality. It was made because he did not like the member for Indi. He thought it was appropriate to suspend her on a day that was critical in the votes of this parliament: the day on which the carbon tax was to be inflicted on the Australian people. He thought that was good fun—to evict a member of the opposition in those circumstances. That does not reflect the level of impartiality that the members of this parliament have a right to expect from the person who fills the high office of Speaker. A solemn trust is vested in the Speaker. It is a trust that past speakers over the years have assumed with reverence. There is a long tradition of honourable men and women filling this post. All of them have taken their responsibilities seriously. Most of them have built on the reputation and standing of this parliament. But our current Speaker has demeaned that office. He has declared himself innocent of the charges in relation to his private expenditure, although his defence has never been on show. The allegations about his travel costs and cab charges are serious ones that need to be responded to. Nevertheless, in an act of political expediency, this government elevated the member for Fisher to this high office and in the process plunged the parliament into a parlous state.

The allegations of sexual harassment that followed engulfed the office of Speaker to the extent that the member for Fisher could not fulfil his duties in the chamber. He did the right thing in standing aside while those allegations were under consideration. But things have become so much worse because of what has come out of his own mouth, out of his own Twitter, during his absence from the chamber. Those allegations are so serious. They reflect so much his attitude towards women—and they reflect on the parliament. He is not fit to hold this office.

Madam Prime Minister, it is not a satisfactory defence of the current Speaker to indulge in a tirade of abuse against the Leader of the Opposition. The Leader of the Opposition is not on trial here; the Speaker of this parliament is. Over recent weeks, the government may well have tried to distract attention from their carbon tax, from their $120 billion black hole, from crisis after crisis of bad government management, by trying to slur the Leader of the Opposition.
That is unsatisfactory behaviour, and the people of Australia can make their own judgements about that. What the Prime Minister should have done today is provided a defence and given us as the parliament a reason to have confidence in this Speaker. In her speech, she should have given us a reason for not seeking to have the Speaker removed. She did not choose to do that. She spent her time criticising the Leader of the Opposition. She spent her time criticising other people and comments they may have made about her, but she did not address the crisis of confidence in the Speaker that there is in this place.

This is a man who has recently involved the government in a payout of $50,000 worth of taxpayer dollars. That suggests that these are more than just allegations against the member for Fisher. The government itself was prepared to pay out $50,000 to settle just one of these actions, along with three-quarters of a million dollars worth of legal expenses and who knows what else. So this is not just idle chatter. These are not just empty words from the man who occupies the Speaker’s chair. No matter how inappropriate, no matter how sexist, no matter how repugnant those words are to everybody in the chamber, these are words which now have had the credibility of court action and some degree of judgement and, in reality, in these circumstances, the Speaker is left exposed. The Speaker has no defence. The Speaker is bringing disrepute upon this parliament and therefore lacks the public confidence that the institutions of this government, of our democracy, are entitled to enjoy.

The revelations and the abhorrent text messages have really broken the camel’s back. They have shattered public confidence and left this government with no option but to sack the Speaker. The content of the messages is certainly vile. The messages are denigrating to women and even include reference to female members of this chamber. None of that is acceptable behaviour from a person who is supposed to be the custodian of the honour of this parliament. None of that is acceptable from a person whom we should be respecting in the office of Speaker. The facts are that, in truth, the poisoned texts of the Speaker say it all to everyone. The duplicity of the government is laid bare for all to see because of their defence of this Speaker, but the Prime Minister, who showed poor political judgement to support his selection in the first place, can still gain some honour from this shameful incident. She could still do the right thing. She could admit the error of judgement and support the motion that the parliament no longer has confidence in this man and wants to have a new Speaker.

The Prime Minister criticises the Leader of the Opposition but this is about the future of the Speaker. The Speaker must have the confidence of the House. This Speaker does not have the confidence of the Australian people. His behaviour does not befit a person in this important position. I call on the Prime Minister to end the torment of the Australian people—we have had enough—and to restore trust to this office. It is time to stand up for decency and integrity and the honour of the parliament. It is essential that we have a new Speaker to help restore the dignity of this House and the confidence of the Australian people.

Mr DREYFUS (Isaacs—Cabinet Secretary, Parliamentary Secretary for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency and Parliamentary Secretary for Industry and Innovation) (15:09): What a shameful day this is. Those opposite should be hanging their heads in shame at what they are seeking to do here—plucking a piece of evidence from an ongoing case in the Federal Court of Australia and bringing it here seeking a rush
to judgement before the Federal Court has even ruled on the abuse-of-process application in which this piece of evidence was tendered, seeking to rush to judgement, let alone before the actual case, before the case brought by Mr Ashby in the Federal Court of Australia is ruled upon. There are two stages in this case in the Federal Court. To remind members opposite, at the moment the judge has heard an abuse-of-process application which says that the whole case brought by Mr Ashby should be thrown out of court, and the judge is presently considering his decision in respect of that application—he reserved last week. In the course of that application for abuse of process the judge made some highly critical remarks about the conduct of this case, but those opposite would have us rush to judgement on the Speaker of this chamber before the judge in the Federal Court has ruled on abuse of process, before the judge in the Federal Court has ruled on the case brought by Mr Ashby and before anyone in this parliament has the chance to examine anything about these texts and anything about the context in which they were tendered in the Federal Court of Australia in evidence.

It might be said, and I picked this up from reading the newspaper accounts about these texts, that the particular text in question—and it is an offensive and sexist text; I do not make any bones about this—was an exchange that the Speaker of the House of Representatives had with Mr James Ashby before the member for Fisher became Speaker of the House of Representatives and before Mr Ashby became his employee, indeed when he was a Liberal-National member of this place. As the Prime Minister has said, the member for Fisher was preselected on no fewer than eight occasions—first by the National Party for the 1984 election, then by the Liberal Party of Australia and more latterly, the last four, five or six times, by the Liberal-National Party of Queensland.

We hear from their Leader of the Opposition, falsely it seems, saying, 'We were trying to get him out of our party room.' They were pretty slow about it. They have taken since 1984 to get the member for Fisher out of their party room. They were not exactly hurrying at the 2010 election when this Leader of the Opposition stood side by side with the member for Fisher and endorsed him for election as member for Fisher. The Leader of the Opposition comes in here not only inviting this House to act as a kangaroo court, which we should resoundingly reject, not only inviting this House to rush to judgement on the Speaker of our chamber on the thinnest piece of evidence plucked from the Federal Court of Australia, but also seeking to comment, if you please, on the merits of the case before court, saying of Mr James Ashby, 'His only fault was seeking to assert his rights against the Speaker of this parliament.'

The Leader of the Opposition should have a look at what Mr James Ashby did and might care to listen to the comments that Justice Rares made last week in the Federal Court of Australia. Extreme criticisms were made of Mr James Ashby by this judge in the Federal Court, in particular criticisms of the way in which Mr Ashby chose to bring his case against the Speaker of the House of Representatives and chose to make allegations of criminality which were given the most extreme publicity possible, only then to have them withdrawn. The judge commented as well on the publicity that Mr Ashby had sought to bring to every aspect of this case. And yet this opposition seeks—and I will come back to this—to attack the Attorney-General for doing her job, which is to explain the way in which proceedings involving the Commonwealth are being
conducted, because the people of Australia are perfectly entitled to be informed about the way proceedings are being conducted.

No institution is safe from this opposition. No convention is safe from this opposition. The courts are not safe from this opposition and this parliament is certainly not safe from this opposition. It is an opposition that does not believe in due process. It is an opposition that does not believe in fairness. It is an opposition that has no shame and is prepared to tear down any institution, tear down any convention, to get at its objective, which is power for this Leader of the Opposition. This is a Leader of the Opposition who will let no institution, no convention, stand in his way.

We have heard of that from the member for New England. No trick is too low, no stunt is too wild and no effort will be spared to create an atmosphere of disorder in this chamber when none exists.

The Leader of the Opposition should in fact be explaining to this chamber what the involvement of Mal Brough, a former member of this chamber, was in the bringing of this case in the Federal Court. The Leader of the Opposition could well explain the involvement of the member for Sturt in the planning of the attack on the Speaker of our chamber. Indeed, let us hear from the Leader of the Opposition about the involvement of Mark McArdle, a Liberal National Party minister in the government in Queensland, who was also, we have learnt from proceedings in the Federal Court of Australia, directly involved in the planning of this attack—using court proceedings in the planning of this attack on the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

I said a moment ago that there is a misguided attack being made in the speeches that we have heard from the opposition this afternoon. There is a misguided attack being made on the Attorney-General for comments that she has made in the course of this proceeding in the Federal Court about the way in which the case has been conducted. I say—and we should all say, loud and clear—that the comments made by the Attorney-General have been entirely appropriate. This has been, as the judge has commented himself, a very, very unusual case. Because it is such an unusual case—when the Commonwealth brings an application for the proceeding to be struck out as an abuse of process, that is a pretty unusual application—it is entirely appropriate for the Attorney-General to say: 'Yes, the Commonwealth's view is that this case is an abuse of process. This is the basis for the application we make to the court; this is the reason we have engaged lawyers to put that application to the court; and these are the details of it.' It is entirely appropriate for the Attorney-General to explain the basis on which the claim against the Commonwealth was settled.

As for the nonsensical statements that we continue to hear from those opposite about the expenditure of $50,000 in settling the case, as any legal practitioner would know—and there are a few on the other side who would know this—it is entirely appropriate to compromise proceedings. Compromise of proceedings, settlement of disputes, is what the legal system exists for—not to magnify disputes, not to exaggerate claims, which is what those opposite would always wish to do. No; the objective, the purpose, of the legal system, is to bring disputes to an end in an orderly way. It is always potentially entirely appropriate for any litigant, including the Commonwealth of Australia, to settle claims brought against that litigant if it avoids further cost, further difficulty and further trouble to the litigant to do so.

It has become very clear that there is no respect for the office of the Speaker of this House from anybody in the Liberal Party,
anybody in the National Party or anybody in the Liberal National Party of Queensland—none. It has become clear in the course of the proceeding which the Leader of the Opposition now seeks to take advantage of—the court hearing last week—that James Ashby did not complain to the Speaker about his conduct at any time before bringing the complaint in the Federal Court. Mr Ashby did not complain—

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**Mr DREYFUS:** I am now simply—

*Ms Julie Bishop interjecting—*

**Mr DREYFUS:** No, I am not talking about the evidence. I am just going to make clear the basis on which I am making these comments to those opposite, who seek to abuse court proceedings. I do not. I seek merely to repeat, for the assistance of members of this House, what has happened in this proceeding. What happened in the proceeding last week, in the course of the abuse-of-process application that the judge heard, was that the judge questioned counsel for Mr Ashby as to when he had made a complaint, and he questioned counsel for Mr Ashby as to whether or not it was possible for this claim to have been brought in some other way. No answer was provided, because it is the fact that Mr James Ashby did not complain to his managers; he did not complain to human relations officers in this place; he did not complain to the Department of Parliamentary Services; he did not use the processes provided by the Human Rights Commission—

**Ms Julie Bishop:** This is the evidence.

**Mr DREYFUS:** This is not the evidence; these are the actual contentions advanced in court last week. The judge made it clear—because this is one of the bases of the abuse-of-process application put to the court—that Mr Ashby did not use the processes provided for claims of this nature by the Human Rights Commission, which involve confidential communication. Far from it: assisted by operatives from the Liberal National Party, assisted by those associated with the opposition, and, it would appear, potentially assisted by the member for Sturt, Mr James Ashby brought this claim in the most public way, to cause maximum embarrassment to the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

I repeat: I am not seeking to comment on the merits of the claim brought by Mr Ashby; I am commenting on the way that this opposition, without shame, seeks to abuse the processes of the Federal Court and seeks to have this parliament sit as a kangaroo court, without giving any notice, without giving any proper opportunity for examination of this. I am commenting on the way that this opposition has sat silent during the attacks on the Speaker of the House of Representatives, has sat silent while the processes of the Federal Court have been used in the way that they have been to cause maximum embarrassment to the Speaker of the House of Representatives, because nobody who is in the slightest bit interested in politics in Australia could have failed to notice that what we have had this year is trial by media, where those opposite wish simply to cause trouble to the Speaker of the House of Representatives, to cause embarrassment to the Speaker of the House of Representatives. They do not wish to wait until the Federal Court rules on any question at all. They do not wish to wait until the Federal Court of Australia has ruled on the abuse-of-process application. They do not wish to wait until the Federal Court of Australia has ruled, let alone ruled on the actual merits of the claim brought by James Ashby. No, they wish to leap in. They wish to fan the flames of public embarrassment and the trial by media that we have had in this country since 20 April, when the
Speaker of the House of Representatives was bailed up by a phalanx of television cameras without any notice to him. Even before the proceedings in the court had been served on him, he was met at the airport by a barrage of television cameras and journalists.

The opposition sit silent. They have no regard for due process. They have no decency. They have no respect for institutions or conventions. If they had any decency, they would not have rushed so assiduously to assist James Ashby in his attack on the Speaker of the House of Representatives. They would not have rushed to help him drag down the Speaker of this House. They would have thought of other ways of resolving this complaint. They would have thought of other ways that are provided by the legal system for resolving complaints of this nature. They would have thought of other ways that are provided by human relations procedures both in this parliament in the Department of Parliamentary Services and by the Human Rights Commission—but no. Seizing on whatever pretext, they come to this parliament and invite this parliament, without notice, without examination of the material, to sit here as a kangaroo court and to rush to judgement—which was the way in which I commenced this speech.

It is extraordinary hypocrisy from this Leader of the Opposition, who has spent a lifetime making offensive comments about women, has spent a lifetime making sexist comments, starting way back in his student days when he thought it amusing to refer to the Chair of the Students' Representative Council at the University of Sydney as 'Chairthing'.

A government member: Thing!

Mr DREYFUS: ‘Thing’. Let us think about that. That is this Leader of the Opposition, and in almost every year of his life since he has been making offensive comments about women. (Time expired)

Mr PYNE (Sturt—Manager of Opposition Business) (15:25): I do not come to this debate with any sense of pleasure at all. I come to this debate with a great sense of a heavy heart. I have known the Speaker for the best part of 20 years, and when you serve as a colleague with another human being for 20 years you have many shared experiences over that time in opposition, in government, and in opposition again. I am very sad and very sorry that we have come to this pass in this place, and I know that other members of this House know exactly what I mean.

All of this could have been entirely predicted when the Prime Minister suspended her best judgement, yet again, to choose her own political survival over good judgement made in this place as Prime Minister. We do not seek to prejudge the court case that is currently underway in the Federal Court. The reason that the opposition brings this motion—a very serious motion to declare the speakership vacant to the House today is that the revelations that have arisen out of the court case are so heinous, so egregious, that it is the opposition's contention that the Speaker can never resume the chair in this place in any way that would lend confidence to the opposition that he would do so with impartiality, good taste and fairness.

The Prime Minister said in her defence of the Speaker today, when she associated herself with the member for Fisher, that there was a double standard being employed by this opposition. I remind the House that it was this Prime Minister who said in relation to the member for Dobell that a line had been crossed and that that line meant that he could no longer serve in the Labor caucus. But, in spite of the revelations about the current
Speaker, in spite of everything we now know about the Speaker, the Prime Minister still does not believe that any line has been crossed.

At the end of the day, this Prime Minister always puts her own political survival, her own ruthless ambition, ahead of the best interests of the Australian people and this parliament as their representative. She has always done it in her career. She did it to Kevin Rudd, the member for Griffith, when she promised that she would never seek the prime ministership and then ruthlessly cut him down in the dark of the night to seize the job before the 2010 election. She did it when she told the Australian people, 'There will be no carbon tax under the government I lead,' and then, to get the Greens into the tent after the election, broke that promise ruthlessly so that she could cling to power in this parliament. She has never had any regard for anything other than her own ruthless ambition and desire to grasp power in this country since her university days, when she was part of the far Left of the Australian Union of Students.

Let us deal with some of the things the Prime Minister said in her speech. She did not at any point rise to defend the Speaker, the member for Fisher, about the allegations that have been made against him and about the release of the egregious text messages. No, she played the victim. She attacked someone else. She said that any debate about these matters was pure sexism on the part of the opposition. She played the victim in an insipid and pathetic performance that was not prime ministerial.

But nobody forced the Prime Minister's hand in November 2011. Nobody came to her and said, 'You must axe Harry Jenkins, the member for Scullin, and put in Peter Slipper.' She came up with that idea all on her own—she came up with the idea of gaining one extra vote in this chamber. She never at any point was forced to crash her prime ministership on the rocks of her own self-regard and her own ruthless ambition to seize and hold power. The Prime Minister's judgement is in question today because time and time again this government lurches from one catastrophe to another and from one scandal to another, whether it is the member for Dobell, the pink batts fiasco, the schools disaster, the supertrawler mind-changing, the live exports fiasco or the carbon tax breach of promise.

The public of this country deserve so much better; the public deserve a government that puts their interests, rather than the government's own interests, first. I beseech some good members of the Labor caucus—and I am looking at them now—to recognise that the damage which has been done to this parliament in the last 12 months has damaged us all. The lack of integrity demonstrated by this Prime Minister in choosing one vote over principle has damaged the parliament and our Westminster tradition.

I am reminded of the scene from A Man for All Seasons when Saint Thomas More says to Richard Rich:

For Wales.

Why Richard, it profits a man nothing to give his soul for the whole world.

But for Wales.

Yet this Prime Minister, born of Wales, sacrificed her soul for just one vote—and the whole Labor caucus owns it. All the sanctimonious, supercilious members of the Labor front bench who come out and do press conferences day after day lecturing the opposition and the Australian people about misogyny are going to vote today to support the member for Fisher's remaining in the role of Speaker. Like lemmings, the Labor caucus is yet again going to follow this perfidious
Prime Minister over the cliff to protect her own ambition, her own ruthless desire to grab and cling to power. Surely it is time that the members of the Labor caucus started putting the Australian people first and this Prime Minister last, because that is what is going to happen.

Let us talk about the Prime Minister's double standard. She lectures the Leader of the Opposition about his past statements, but when the former member for Robertson said to the member for Indi 'evil thoughts will turn your baby into a demon', the only comment from the then Deputy Prime Minister Gillard was that 'the member for Robertson is a good member'. She throws our words back at us today, but let us remember her words: 'the member for Robertson is a good member'. Yet the then member for Robertson had said that the member for Indi's 'evil thoughts' would 'turn her baby into a demon'.

It does not stop there. When John Williams was the Labor candidate for Indi in 2004, he said that the member for Indi could not represent the people of Indi because she did not have any children, because she did not have a family. Because she was not married and did not have any children, he said that she could not possibly represent the constituents of Indi. Does this sound familiar? Julia Gillard did not come out and attack those appalling statements; after the comments had been reported in the Age she went and campaigned for and supported the Labor candidate for Indi, Mr Williams. The Prime Minister says to us that we fostered and supported the member for Fisher as a candidate for many years. But we did not support him to be put in the most important position in this parliament. We did not support him to be Deputy Speaker after the 2010 election; we opposed his election in 2010 to the post of Deputy Speaker, and the Labor Party supported him. In 2011 we opposed his election as Speaker of the House, and I nominated on that occasion nine different members of the Labor Party of whom I asked whether they had the integrity to take the chair. I nominated them to take the chair, and their responses were very interesting. You yourself, Madam Deputy Speaker Burke—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr KJ Thomson): I might have to pull you up in a minute, Chris.

Mr PYNE: said 'while I am loath to do so, I turn down the offer'. The member for Reid was good enough to be uncomfortable about the fact that he had to turn down the nomination. So it was not just this side of the House which knew that the Labor Party was crowing for no good reason; many members of the Labor caucus knew that the Prime Minister's judgement was seriously flawed in putting the member for Fisher forward for the post of Speaker. Her judgement has been catastrophically flawed today in defending the member for Fisher remaining in the post of Speaker and, worse, in driving her caucus over the cliff with her.

Madam Deputy Speaker, since the current Speaker has been elected—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr KJ Thomson): I will have to call you up, Chris.

Mr PYNE: Mr Deputy Speaker, since this Speaker has been elected—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr KJ Thomson): Thank you.

Mr PYNE: he has sat in the chair for 19 days during question time and not sat in the chair for 34 days during question time. For 34 days the current Speaker has been the Speaker with the full salary and emoluments of the post—the capacity for overseas travel, the higher travelling allowance and every other emolument that comes with the post—as well as the job of meeting foreign
dignitaries and greeting them at the chamber door et cetera. He has been receiving and doing all those things, but for 34 days he has not sat in question time while the member for Chisholm has fulfilled that role, and for only 19 days he has sat in the chair as Speaker since his election on 24 November 2011. It has become high farce; it is beyond a joke. The member for Denison, in fact, described it as beyond a joke—and he is correct. The public expect a great deal better from this 43rd Parliament. If today the House votes to make the Speaker's chair vacant, it will be the first occasion—though there have been many opportunities—that this 43rd Parliament has stood up for its own integrity and supported itself.

We also heard from the member for Isaacs; it was an extraordinary performance but his credibility on these matters is nil. This man represents the seat of Isaacs, Sir Isaac Isaacs being the first Jewish Governor-General in Australia's history and the first Australian-born Governor-General in Australia's history. The member for Isaacs himself is of the Jewish faith, yet he described the Leader of the Opposition as using Goebbels-like tactics. This is a man who it is alleged—and it was reported in the newspapers—called the member for Indi a bitch in this chamber and was forced to come back into the chamber, apologise and withdraw. Yet he stands in this House today and lectures the opposition on statements that we have made in the past. The hypocrisy of the member for Isaacs is breathtaking. He said that the text messages exchanged between the applicant in the case in the Federal Court and one of the respondents all happened before the member for Fisher was the Speaker. Quite frankly, so what? The behaviour since he was Speaker is the matter that is complained about by the applicant in the case. And the Speaker was also the Deputy Speaker. I remind you that the Labor Party appointed him to that role and appointed him to the speakership.

The member for Isaacs said that the opposition had no respect for the office of Speaker. We are in the House this afternoon debating this motion to make the Speaker's seat vacant because we are the side of the House that has respect for the office of Speaker. We would never have traduced it by axing a fine and honourable man, the member for Scullin, in order to gain one vote on the floor of the House. Like Banquo's ghost, that decision of this Prime Minister has come back to haunt her and it will hang around her neck like a millstone right through to the next election—another example of her bad judgement.

So I do commend this motion to the House. I call on those good members of the Labor caucus who are thoroughly sick of this Prime Minister to finally show the courage that you have and support the opposition in restoring integrity to this parliament, in restoring integrity to the jobs that we do as members of this parliament. I call on the House to support the motion.

Mr MELHAM (Banks) (15:39): As the member who nominated the member for Fisher firstly as Deputy Speaker of this House and then as Speaker of this House, it is appropriate that I contribute to this debate. I accept that. I have gone back over the words that I used, both when I nominated the member for Fisher as Deputy Speaker and then as Speaker, and I do not resile from anything that I said then. Indeed, the member for Fisher was so successful in his job at question time that, for the first time in over 20 years, he managed to silence me for fear of being thrown out of the parliament. That has never happened to me in 22½ years.

The debate before the House today is a very serious debate because precedents will be forged as a result of it. It has to be taken
seriously. This is not student politics, which is where I first observed the Leader of the Opposition, the member for Warringah, at Sydney University. This is the real show, the alternative government, the alternative Prime Minister. Student politics stunts are not enough to remove a Speaker, to cripple a House because people are upset that they are not on this side of the House. Let us have a look at the principles. I was trained as a lawyer, a criminal defence lawyer, so cases I did involved people going to jail if they were found guilty. That was the penalty. The Leader of the Opposition knows about being in court, about having false accusations made against you and what that can do, and allowing the process to go the full length.

In relation to the Speaker, there are no criminal charges that we know of. There is an investigation into Cabcharge documents—allegations that were withdrawn by the civil complainant, Mr Ashby, and were not pursued. So that is not before us. There is not a scintilla of evidence of abuse of Cabcharge documents—a criminal charge, not a civil charge, which is the more serious. I say to members of the opposition: where is the evidence of criminal involvement of the Speaker? There is none. Indeed, the presiding judge in the Federal Court made a number of statements last week which brought into question the filing of that affidavit in court in those terms and its subsequent withdrawal. What we are dealing with is a civil charge where the Speaker is contesting it as an abuse of process and the judge has reserved. What we are dealing with is a civil charge where the Speaker is contesting it as an abuse of process and the judge has reserved. The opposition want us to come in and adjudicate. I say to the crossbenchers—because I think they are the ones who will determine this debate—that that is a very dangerous precedent. The member for New England has previously cited the case of Nick Greiner, who was found by ICAC to be corrupt and was dumped as Premier. But subsequently a court of appeal acquitted him and found that ICAC had got it wrong. In the first instance, we should be waiting for the real court, not the kangaroo court.

The thing that is most disturbing is the other procedures. I used to be on the Privileges Committee and I have been on the Procedure Committee; I understand some of the history of this case. I remember the case of Fitzpatrick and Browne, who this parliament put in jail for three months in 1955. At least Fitzpatrick and Browne addressed the bar of the House. Where is the procedural fairness in this shonky motion? This is a Speaker who is absent, who does not have the opportunity to have someone address on his behalf, in a situation where the numbers are depleted because he has voluntarily not taken his place in the House, which was his decision alone. So he does not come in and vote, he does not come in and participate in debate and he does not preside in any way. What is the urgency of this?

I am not here to endorse private text messages. A judge of the Federal Court will adjudicate on what they constitute. I say: what if it were me? How would I want it adjudicated? Is this the way we are going to administer justice—hang, draw and quarter someone? It is not because we are impartial. Let's be very clear, the vote will be a partisan vote as far as the opposition is concerned. As far as the government is concerned it is not on independent grounds—we do not know what the Speaker's answers to some of these allegations are. We do not get, 'We're going to put this on the table to give an opportunity for this matter to be considered and dealt with later on,' but rather it gets brought on for debate. This is a very dangerous precedent.

I can understand some members having particular concerns, but this is not about Mr
Slipper. This is about principles. I am not going to sit here and try to say that I am better than you or whatever. My record speaks for itself. I have been in this place for 22½ years. The Privileges Committee, of which I have been a member, which operates impeccably towards all sides of the parliament has always operated unanimously. These are grave issues, but we are not prepared to give the Speaker of this House an opportunity to present a case—to have a case pleaded on his behalf. He is going to be one vote down. Where is the pair for him? If he sat in the chamber, the government is one vote down. These are things that need to be thought of. Why do I say that? Gee whiz, I remember 1975 and the appointment of replacement senators. We changed the Constitution.

Honourable members interjecting—

Mr MELHAM: I like the whingers and whiners: get up and put your point of view. The Leader of the Opposition verballed me, which is why I wanted to speak. He tried to misrepresent my position when, today, I announced that I was resigning as chair of caucus with this position. That is why I am speaking. I asked to speak, and I was never going to be stopped from speaking. If you want to get up and speak, get up and speak inside your four speeches. I am telling you about a situation that will govern this parliament in future. If we make the wrong decision, we will be bound by it and by the principle of it. I can understand rough and tough politics, but my plea to the Leader of the Opposition is that you are not at Sydney University now; you are the alternative Prime Minister. There are some places you do not go to, there are some places where you should show a bit of patience and allow people to flow.

I resent the fact that the member for Sturt attacks the Speaker for the 34 days he has not presided when, frankly, the Speaker offered to remove his position from criticism at the time. We have a situation where the judgement is reserved, so it is not a question of sub judice. I am not arguing sub judice per se. I am arguing a separation of powers. This is a civil matter where this parliament is entitled as a matter of course to have the judge's determination in front of it before it makes a decision in relation to the Speaker. Any bozo can see that, except the lynch mob, who have a political purpose. I am not trying to say that in a derogatory sort of way. I can understand people wanting to get swept up in it, but that is how it is. Call it as it is.

I am saying this as the person who nominated Mr Slipper, the member for Fisher, for this office. I do not say that the parliament does not have a right to remove him. That is not my argument. I am saying to you: before you proceed down that path, let the cards fall where they are going to fall in a Federal court. It may well be that the Federal Court gives you the ammunition for him to go voluntarily without being voted out by the House. I believe that that option adds further dignity to the House.

This motion is not dignified. To pull on a motion without notice where the Speaker's support is one vote down because he is not in the chair is not a true representation of this parliament. Be very careful, be very cautious, because I for one did not like what the parliament did back in 1955 when it sent people to jail for three months. But what it did have which we do not have was a conscience vote—not a vote on party lines to remove a Speaker. I am not arguing for a conscience vote, but I am re-emphasising the point I made to you earlier that we are involved in a party political debate which has ramifications for how this parliament is seen by those outside and by parliaments around the world. I say to the Independents: you will have an opportunity in the near future, I
assume, to exercise your judgement if you have doubts, but today is not the day. I say that in all sincerity, because the position is that we have to get this right. We cannot act hastily and get it wrong. What happens if we make the decision to remove the Speaker today and the Federal Court judge finds—

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr MELHAM: I will tell you something about text messages. I will show mine to the world. I do not think 226 MPs would and survive. This was not a public communication; this was a private communication that came out as a result of subpoenas. The difficulty here is that we each need to be very careful. I know we can engage in the theatre of a debate, but this actually has quite serious ramifications. I believe I have raised some fundamental issues which show that in proceeding to a vote today is flawed. Do not be too smart by half. These principles are bigger than Slipper; they are bigger than anyone in this chamber. We have a duty to maintain the dignity of this chamber. I do not believe the dignity of this chamber would be maintained if we removed the Speaker without him having an opportunity to present a case to us without a full complement of the House, without the wisdom of the Federal Court’s judgement in relation to the matter that is currently before him. I say: do not persist with this at this point of time. Leave it on the table and allow it to stand there. We revisit it when his honour delivers his judgement in the Federal Court case.

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House and Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) (15:52): Today is the day the Liberal Party discovered misogyny. Before today it did not exist. Before today, on the nine separate occasions on which the Liberal and National parties preselected Peter Slipper, they did not know anything about him. In spite of the fact that we have a court case where the judge reserved judgement just last Friday, today they come into the parliament and move this motion. It would be the first time that such a motion had ever been carried on partisan lines. They do this without any concern whatsoever for the standing of this parliament and the precedents that are set.

What we have seen, though, is some consistency from those opposite. We saw with their attitude over the issues surrounding the member for Dobell and the issues surrounding the member for Fisher that, when it is convenient, they say no-one should comment on these matters because they are before the courts. Remember that? Remember them out there—the member for Sturt, the Leader of the Opposition and others—being critical of me for making some comments? Yet here they are, once again, setting up this parliament to usurp the role of the courts. The fact is that these issues are of concern. I was asked whether I am concerned about the comments by the member for Fisher, and I stated unequivocally that, yes, I am concerned about sexism in any form. But that did not seem to matter as a precondition for holding high office for the Leader of the Opposition. The Leader of the Opposition, in an interview in the Good Weekend, made comments in a debate with Michael Costa in which he said, 'But what if men are by physiologia or temperament more adapted to exercise authority or to issue a command?' When Michael Costa spoke about the need to deal with the underrepresentation of women, he said, 'But now there is an assumption that this is a bad thing.' He said, 'Abortion is the easy way out when it comes to the difficult choices that women, and only women, should have the right to determine.'

The Leader of the Opposition has made all sorts of statements—not just over a year, not
just over a term, but over decades in public life. We saw of course a historical linkage between the Sydney University Liberal Club, with the speech from Alan Jones, and his political origins at Sydney University where he engaged in the sort of campaign that has characterised the hard Right at Sydney University from the seventies through to the current day.

He could not drag himself to condemn Alan Jones for saying that the Prime Minister should be put in a chaff bag and dragged out to sea. Indeed, this week he rang up Alan Jones to console him and he had a private conversation with him. The alternative Leader of the Opposition, who has more leadership in his little finger than this bloke, was straight out there on the Sunday morning to condemn the comments relating to the Prime Minister's father. But the Leader of the Opposition could not bring himself to say anything; he had to wait for Alan to do the press conference because he did not want to upset him. That was more important than doing the right thing and showing a smidgin of leadership just once. But what we have seen since 2010—and today is the logical extension of it—is the longest dummy spit in Australian political history.

During 17 days we saw statements from the Leader of the Opposition that he would dignify the parliament, that he would respect whatever decision the crossbenchers have made. Indeed, we had parliamentary reform that would have made it irrelevant who the Speaker was in terms of the partisanship of this chamber—agreed to not under coercion but voluntarily by those opposite and signed up to by the Manager of Opposition Business in the House and the Leader of the Opposition as well as the Prime Minister, me and the crossbenchers—to take away partisanship from the speakership of this parliament. Yet straightaway, like a kid who does not get to bat first going in and trashing all the stumps, from that day on he trashes parliamentary process. And he comes in here again and trashes question time, as he does day after day, and engages in political debate and strategy based upon wrecking the joint, or 'destroying the joint' as his mate Alan Jones would say.

This bloke does it day in day out. His whole political strategy has been to wreck the parliament. He has boasted about wrecking the parliament, and he has tried to do it on issue after issue. That is why more than 400 bills have passed this parliament without a single defeat. Those opposite are the first opposition in history to not worry about the actual policy that is going through the parliament and the key policy debates of the day. That might be acceptable if they were a rump, but they are almost half the parliament. In spite of the fact that they are in a position, with support from the crossbenchers, to make a difference to the way this nation operates, in policy terms they have not won a thing. Why? Because they do not care. Because it is all about political power for power's sake. We saw it from the Leader of the Opposition when he spoke about how difficult it was to be in opposition. Remember what he said? 'It is not quite like losing a spouse; it is like losing a parent.' That is what he had to say. He then went on to talk about the tragedy of losing some of his salary, showing just how out of touch he is.

But we absolutely see this day in day out. You would think that the Manager of Opposition Business, the Leader of the Opposition and others who have spoken in this debate had not met Peter Slipper, the member for Fisher. I tabled a reference from Tony Abbott to the Liberal preselectors for the electorate of Fisher. He said, 'The fact that Peter has chosen to stand in Fisher even though much of his existing electorate has become part of Fairfax is a sign of his
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...determination to be a team player.' He went on to say, 'Success in politics is hard won through long experience. I find it hard to imagine a better candidate to hold the seat.' That is what the Leader of the Opposition had to say about the member for Fisher. We know the friendship is there because he went to the wedding, along with the Deputy Leader of the Opposition.

Then we have the circumstances whereby the Leader of the Opposition is only sitting in the chair because he got the member for Fisher's vote when he won the leadership by one single vote. I did not hear him talk about it being tainted. He was happy to take that vote then.

Then we have the meetings of those opposite with Mark McArdle and the Manager of Opposition Business going into the Speaker's office to have a little drink with the Speakers' staff, including Mr Ashby. There have been multiple meetings with Mal Brough. Gee, he could not have an interest there, could he? He is running for preselection for the seat and trying to knock the bloke off and he is meeting with the bloke's staff about these issues! Joe Hockey, Mal Brough and Clive Palmer met at Coolum resort over Easter, from 6 to 9 April. There was contact after contact in the lead-up to these allegations being made.

The Leader of the Opposition was a bit slow off the mark the other Sunday when Jonesy was in a spot of bother, but he was pretty quick off the mark on the Saturday morning when the Daily Telegraph splashed spontaneously. At 9.15 am he was out there. He did another couple of press conferences the next day, and there were coalition members splashed across the Sunday morning TV programs, something they normally avoid like the plague. You are more likely to see this bloke on Lateline, 7.30 and Q&A than to see a coalition member subjected to scrutiny on a Sunday morning. But that was all okay.

Then on 22 April, when the Speaker stepped aside from chairing the parliament, the Leader of the Opposition said this: It's good that the Speaker has stepped aside until these matters can be resolved …

That is what he had to say then. He argued that the process currently in place should be put in place and, ever since, he has continued to trash that exact process. We know that throughout it all the 'no specific knowledge' defence was there. We know that most of these alleged text messages took place prior to the member for Fisher being the Speaker—when he was a member of the Liberal-National Party and the Leader of the Opposition was happy to accept his vote day after day.

What we are seeing here is just the latest in the Leader of the Opposition's determination to trash proper processes in this parliament. It is not appropriate that the parliament just go along with this. We see this aggression every day. Today, when I saw the member for Indi out there lecturing us on these issues, I recalled the demonstration outside the parliament with the Leader of the Opposition prepared to stand in front of a sign which said 'Julia: Bob Brown's bitch'. Do not lecture us about sexism when you did nothing to dissociate yourself from this group. When Alan Jones was promoting the demonstration outside my office with all of these signs still there, you sent a frontbencher interstate to Marrickville...
to engage in a demonstration which required the mass presence of the Australian Federal Police. If you light the fire, you should not be surprised that it occurs.

The Leader of the Opposition has called for a people’s revolt. He has engaged in language which is unprecedented in this parliament, which has incited people. He has said that this is not a legitimate parliament. He has been a part of saying that, yet he comes in here and gives it no respect whatsoever. I say to the Leader of the Opposition: it is a step too far to go down this path of moving this resolution today without any notice whatsoever to the government. It is consistent with his attitude of wrecking and trashing everything that he touches and his failure to grant any common respect. Can you try just one thing for the rest of the week: see if you can call the Prime Minister ‘Prime Minister’ instead of ‘she’ and you might have just a smidgin of credibility.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): The question is that the motion be agreed to.

The House divided. [16:11]

(The Deputy Speaker—Ms AE Burke)

Ayes.................69
Noes..................70
Majority.............1

AYES

Abbott, AJ
Andrews, KJ
Baldwin, RC
Bishop, BK
Briggs, JE
Buchholz, S
Christensen, GR
Cobb, JK
Crook, AJ
Entsch, WG
Forrest, JA
Gambaro, T
Griggs, NL
Hawke, AG
Hunt, GA
Jensen, DG
Kelly, C
Ley, SP
Marino, NB
Matheson, RG
Mirabella, S
Neville, PC
O’Dwyer, KM
Pyne, CM
Randall, DJ
Robert, SR
Ruddock, PM
Scott, BC
Simpkins, LXL
Somlyay, AM
Stone, SN
Truss, WE
Turnbull, MB
Vasta, RX
Wyatt, KG

NOES

Adams, DGH
Bandt, AP
B Bowen, CE
Brodie-Mann, G
Butler, MC
Champion, ND
Clare, JD
Combet, GI
Danby, M
Dreyfus, MA
Ellis, KM
Ferguson, MJ
Geoghegan, S
Gillard, JE
Grierson, SJ
Hall, JG (teller)
Husic, EN (teller)
Jones, SP
King, CF
Livermore, KF
Macklin, JL
McClelland, RB
Mitchell, RG
Neumann, SK
O’Connor, BPJ
Owens, J
Perrett, GD
Ripoll, BF
Rowland, MA

AYES

Irons, SJ
Jones, ET
Laming, A
Macfarlane, IE
Markus, LE
McCormack, MF
Morrison, SJ
O’Dowd, KD
Prentice, J
Ramsey, RE
Robb, AJ
Roy, WB
Schultz, AJ
Secker, PD (teller)
Smith, ADH
Southcott, AJ
Tehan, DT
Tudge, AE
Van Manen, AJ
Wilkie, AD

NOES

Albanese, AN
Bird, SL
Bradbury, DJ
Burke, AS
Byrne, AM
Cheeseman, DL
Collins, JM
Cren, SF
D’Ath, YM
Elliot, MJ
Emerson, CA
Fitzgibbon, JA
Gibbons, SW
Gray, G
Griffin, AP
Hayes, CP
Jenkins, HA
Kelly, MJ
Leigh, AK
Lyons, GR
Marles, RD
Mellnhm, D
Murphy, JP
Oakeshott, BJM
O’Neill, DM
Parke, M
Plibersek, TJ
Rishworth, AL
Rudd, KM
Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House and Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) (16:15): 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:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs—House of Representatives Standing Committee—Indigenous Australians at work: Successful initiatives in Indigenous employment—Government response.


Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry—Report for 2011-12.

Department of Finance and Deregulation—Campaign advertising by Australian Government departments and agencies—Report for 2011-12.

Finance—Final budget outcome for 2011-12.

Medibank Private—


Debate adjourned.

COMMITTEES

Treaties Committee

Regional Australia Committee

Membership

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke) (16:16): I have received advice

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from the Chief Opposition Whip nominating members to be members of certain committees.

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

That:

(1) Mr Briggs be discharged from the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties and that, in his place, Mrs Prentice be appointed a member of the committee; and

(2) Dr Stone be appointed a supplementary member of the Standing Committee on Regional Australia for the purpose of the committee’s inquiry into the Water Amendment (Long-term Average Sustainable Diversion Limit Adjustment) Bill 2012.

Question agreed to.

BILLs

Higher Education Support Amendment (Streamlining and Other Measures) Bill 2012

Federal Circuit Court of Australia Legislation Amendment Bill 2012

National Health Security Amendment Bill 2012

Reference to Federation Chamber

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

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

Question agreed to.

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Carbon Pricing

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott) (16:17): I have received a letter from the honourable member for Wannon proposing that a definite matter of public importance be submitted to the House for discussion, namely:

The adverse impact of the Government's changes to the carbon tax on the Australian economy.

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 TEHAN (Wannon) (16:18): As is the case with the government's approach to many other policy areas, the government's approach to putting a price on carbon, or implementing a carbon tax, is now in a shambles. It is about time that the Prime Minister came into this House and declared once and for all that this carbon tax experiment has failed, and she should remove it from the statute books. Why? Because the carbon tax is some 100 days old and yet already we have seen eight changes made to it. As a piece of legislation it is a mockery. It is a shame that this government is still standing by the legislation, given that in 100 days it has had to make eight significant changes to it.

Even the government's major supporters, the supporters who are backing this Prime Minister up, the supporters who put her in power, do not support the carbon tax. The AWU have let slip that they oppose the carbon tax because it will cost jobs, it will see jobs go offshore and it will raise the cost of living for ordinary Australians. So, given that the AWU have come clean and made it quite clear that they do not want the carbon tax, surely it is time for the Prime Minister to do the same.

Let us look at the eight changes that have been made to the Prime Minister's carbon tax—the tax that she said before the last election would not be introduced. Just before it was finalised, they bailed out significant
major companies in the hope that they would not collapse immediately after the tax was introduced. I know this because one of the companies given additional taxpayer money was Alcoa. There was a real threat that the two aluminium smelters in Victoria could close down as a result of the tax. As we have seen, not long after the introduction of the carbon tax, Point Henry had to undertake a serious review to consider its long-term future. At Portland in my electorate there were also concerns raised about the future of the smelter in 10 to 15 years time. We have seen a decrease in the share of the clean tech investment grant funding for small businesses, so further increases in funding for big business could be provided and those businesses, especially those ones that have strong union membership, can be looked after.

The Clean Energy Regulator has added more businesses to the big polluters list, taking the total to 315—there are now 315 of these so-called big polluters, and some of them are local governments or dairy processors. These are not big polluters; these are vital parts of government and the private sector in Australia. Yet now they are being labelled as big polluters.

I challenge the Prime Minister to go down to go to the Murray Goulburn plant in Koroit, which is in my electorate, and tell all the workers there that they are working for a big polluter. This is a company which, in 24 hours, turns milk into skim milk powder or whole milk powder and ships it off for export—helping to feed the rest of the world. That is not what I would call a big polluter.

The government has also changed the regulations to allow increased emissions of one million tonnes from pipelines and landfill. The big efficient landfills, the ones which are doing their job and producing little or no emissions, are now actually being penalised by this government's changes—because people are now flocking to the smaller landfills which do not have to pay the carbon tax. As a result, this government's policy will see emissions increase rather than decrease.

The government has abandoned the contract-for-closure program aimed at shutting down inefficient power stations. That means the carbon tax will have to increase in order to achieve the same reduction in emissions. Because it has a lot to do with his electorate, one member of this House has been very vocal about the contract-for-closure program—the member for Gippsland. He has been challenging the government over when they are going to honour their commitment on contract for closure. Day after day he has targeted the government on this issue, yet the government, in the end, abandoned its contract-for-closure program—another change to their carbon tax legislation, which is only a little over 100 days old.

The government has also scrapped the floor price, which was to have been $15, from 2015. The government had said that a floor price was needed for business confidence. The scrapping of the floor price is therefore quite consistent with this government's policy, because the last thing this government wants to do is give business confidence. With everything it does—its changes to its legislation, its changes to its policy approach—this government undermines business confidence. The government had been saying that the $15 floor price gave businesses the confidence they needed to invest. But, just 100 days in, what is the government now doing? It is destroying that confidence by removing the floor price. I would like to hear from those opposite about what they are now going to do to restore business confidence.
The government has also linked the scheme to the European system, a system which does not allow a two-way trade of carbon credits, putting Australian businesses at a disadvantage and resulting in Australia's carbon tax being set by the EU price. We have given up control of our carbon price to Brussels, to the EU. And hasn't the EU been so resoundingly successful recently at governing its economy? Why, at this stage, would you say, 'Oh, yes, EU, you have done a wonderful job bringing all the economies of the European Union together—it has been an absolutely fantastic success—so therefore we are going to hand over to you the running of our economy on this key issue'?

There is another point about merging these two processes, merging our carbon tax with that of the European Union. What does it mean for how emissions-intensive, trade-exposed sectors will be handled? It does not take much looking to see that emissions-intensive, trade-exposed industries in the European Union are treated differently from how they are treated in Australia. I will give one example of this, an example which is close to my heart: dairy processing. Here in Australia, dairy processors do not get any assistance from the government—none whatsoever. So they have to pay the full carbon price. In the European Union, dairy processors get free allocation of permits to 93 per cent. What does that mean when the two schemes are merged? The dairy processors in the European Union will be the beneficiary of EU export subsidies, so they will already have an unfair advantage over the Australian dairy sector. What, then, in its infinite wisdom, does this government do? It says, 'We will give them another advantage; we will allow those dairy processors in Europe a free allocation of permits of 93 per cent, yet we will do nothing when it comes to our sector.' So our dairy processors will pay the full carbon price; European Union dairy processors will not—they will pay only seven per cent of the carbon price.

All of our commodity producers operate in global markets. Given that, how can a government come up with a policy like this, a policy which ties our exporters' hands behind their backs, a policy which makes them internationally uncompetitive? Our exporters are already struggling due to the high dollar—and part of the reason for the dollar being so high is that this government has run the four largest budget deficits in Australia's history, which has kept interest rates high. Therefore, not only do they have to deal with a high dollar but they also have to deal with a government that is putting in place a taxation system that makes them less competitive.

What is the last area of the carbon tax that the government have changed in the first 100 days? They have halted the Clean Technology Investment Program grants. This came just weeks after the grants were announced and changed for the first time. So that really makes it nine changes, I suppose, in 100 days, because there was a change and then another change when it comes to this policy.

This government, sadly, never knows what it is doing when it introduces legislation. We saw it with the Margiris. The government introduced the legislation and then had to put amendments after amendment. We saw it with the government's initial approach to live animal exports—cutting off that important trade with Indonesia, which is about links with one of our most important regional trading partners. Bam! It was cut off overnight. I am still waiting to hear what the minister for trade had to say in the cabinet meeting when that decision was made, whether he thought, 'Gee, this might do damage to our long-term trading relationship with Indonesia.' He just
sits there mute. We are still waiting to hear what his response was to that. Did he sit there and say, 'I don't care if we harm our biggest beef and our biggest wheat export markets,' because that is what closing down this trade overnight was going to do? I do not know what he said about that, because we are yet to hear it.

The carbon tax legislation is just another example of a government that introduces legislation but does not understand what it is doing, such as the long-term harm it is doing to our international competitiveness, and has to make eight significant changes to the legislation within 100 days. Who knows what is to come? Maybe the Parliamentary Secretary for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency will be able to enlighten us as to what further changes he has in mind to try and fix this draconian piece of legislation, because I can tell you the Australian people would like to know what further impost you are going to put on their cost of living, particularly their electricity bills. Instead of just coming into this place day after day and changing the legislation bit by bit, why don't you forecast what you are going to do? Show us where you see further problems with this legislation. Maybe—and I think this is what the Australian people dearly want to hear—the parliamentary secretary could stand up and say, 'We've messed this up enough; eight changes in 100 days shows we didn't know what we were doing, shows how draconian this bill is and shows that we need to remove it from the Australian parliament.' But I doubt we will hear that. That is why I think ultimately we are going to have to wait for election day, when the Australian people will get the chance to cast their votes on the carbon tax, and I think it will be resoundingly clear that they want it removed from this parliament.

Mr DREYFUS (Isaacs—Cabinet Secretary, Parliamentary Secretary for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency and Parliamentary Secretary for Industry and Innovation) (16:33): It is with pleasure that I rise to speak on this matter, because the future of the Australian economy, our prosperity, fairness and equity, are of the greatest importance to the Gillard government. What we have heard today from the member for Wannon is yet more of the campaign of aggressive negativity that we have become accustomed to from the Leader of the Opposition and others opposite, and a bit more of what we have become very accustomed to, which is the opposition talking down and misrepresenting the state of our economy. The only major threat to business confidence in this country is the opposition and the way in which they wish to create a climate of uncertainty by talking down our economy. They like to talk about chaos and destruction. They like to talk about the supposed dreadful effects of the price on carbon. It is those opposite who are causing chaos, it is those opposite who are causing destruction, with their negativity. They talk down Australia's economy because they want to take cheap political advantage of job losses and business failures.

You will never hear those opposite talking about job gains. You will never hear those opposite talking about the fact that, since Labor came to office at the end of 2007, 800,000 jobs have been created in our country. You will never hear those opposite talking about the fact that our economy has continued to grow while other economies across the developed world have shrunk. Our economy, by contrast, has grown by 11 per cent since the start of 2008. But what we get from those opposite is more of the same: more wishing to go back to the days of inequity, the good old days of John Howard and Work Choices and, in fact, the days when we had higher taxes—because that is what the Howard government brought this
country; it was the highest taxing government this country has ever seen. And, of course, it brought far higher interest rates than anything the Australian people are experiencing now.

We have opposite us an opposition who want to gain votes not because it is in the public interest, not for the wellbeing of all Australians and not to implement policies that would drive growth and promote fairness. On the contrary, those opposite would have us believe that the carbon price—we heard this again today from the member for Wannon—is going to cause the destruction of our economy. I am not overstating that, because we have heard them say that. We have heard that it was going to destroy whole towns. We have heard that it was going to destroy whole industries. We have heard that it was going to lead to unimaginable price rises. We have heard that it was going to lead to the most unimaginable consequences. And, of course, we have heard the various animal metaphors from the Leader of the Opposition. There was going to be a 'cobra strike', but then, no, it was going to be a 'python squeeze' or there was going to be an 'octopus embrace'. I think that was at the fish markets! But there has been no cobra strike, there has been no python squeeze, there has been no octopus embrace. No matter what animal the Leader of the Opposition uses in his next metaphor to describe the impact of the carbon price, it simply will not be true—unless perhaps the animal is a bunyip, because the bunyip is a mythical creature. That might be a fitting animal metaphor for the Leader of the Opposition to use, because the impacts that the Liberal Party have gone on and on about are mythical, just like the bunyip.

Under this government the Australian economy continues to outperform other advanced economies and that is because of our investments in skills, in infrastructure and in education. It is because we, as a national government, acted to stimulate the economy at the right time. We acted fast and we acted large. That is what produced the economic prosperity that Australians are continuing to enjoy and that is what kept 250,000 Australians in work when they otherwise would have been thrown out of work. Our firm policies and our prompt action are what have kept the Australian economy from going down the track that, regrettably, many other Western economies have gone down.

I want to comment on something that the member for Wannon, in some of the further repetition of the wild overstatements and misstatements about the effect of the carbon price, has had to say today. He talked a bit about landfill. I need to say that the landfill industry in our country is predicted to earn $150 million over the next three years by capturing dangerous methane gas and either destroying it or turning it profitably into renewable energy. That is our carbon price scheme. It is a feature of our carbon price scheme that a whole different range of methods are being used to encourage abatement of dangerous pollution. For the landfill industry, its use of the Carbon Farming Initiative—which will give direct rewards to the landfill industry when it captures dangerous methane pollution—is a key plank of our Clean Energy Plan, not that you would get this perspective from listening to the member for Wannon or to anyone from the other side of this parliament. The member for Wannon was drawing attention to some companies which he suggested were experiencing some competition from small operators, while neglecting to mention some key details.

Across the Australian landfill industry there has been a wide-scale welcome of the price on carbon and general approval of the carbon farming initiative. In relation to large
landfills, there are economies of scale to make them vastly cheaper and more profitable to run than smaller landfills. The member would do well to explore a little bit further the turnover of the landfill companies he is talking about. It might put some of the complaints he has referred to into clear perspective.

The economic data that has been recorded recently for Australia puts a wrecking ball through the Leader of the Opposition's scare campaign, which has now been running for months and months. He said price rises would be unimaginable. He said that the carbon price would be like a wrecking ball through our economy, destroying jobs. In answer to that, let us look at the most recent statistic and economic prediction made about the Australian economy—that is the release today of the International Monetary Fund's October 2012 World Economic Outlook. That has reaffirmed the strength of Australia's economic fundamentals in the face of a weaker global recovery, with the Australian economy again forecast to outperform every major economy over this year and next. In case those opposite do not want to listen or are blocking their ears because it is inconsistent with all of the things they like to say in this place, I repeat: the Australian economy is forecast by the International Monetary Fund to outperform every major advanced economy over this year and next. In fact, this World Economic Outlook published by the IMF today shows Australia is now the world's 12th largest economy. It has leaptfrogged three places ahead under our Labor government, after slipping back three places under the previous government. And not only that, it is the forecast of outperformance of other major economies that you can point to.

Far from being destroyed, the Australian economy is now one of the strongest performers in the developed world. We have solid growth, low unemployment, low interest rates, contained inflation, strong public finances and an enormous pipeline of investment in resources. The Leader of the Opposition has recently been trying to suggest that the economy is not growing. I repeat: the Australian economy has grown 11 per cent since 2008 and is continuing to grow. It is an economic report card that most developed countries could only dream of at this moment. Of course, it is an impressive performance which is the product and the result of decades of reforms.

The government is building on this legacy of hard but necessary reforms. We are investing in skills, we are investing in education, we have invested in infrastructure like the National Broadband Network. We have reformed mining taxation to provide support to businesses not in the fast lane of the economy and we are putting a price on carbon. While the economy is strong, of course, too many Australians are still finding it hard to make ends meet and that is why we have put in place a package of measures—to help people make ends meet and to spread the benefits of the mining boom. That is why we are going to continue to work to improve services in education and in health. That is what Australians want—that is what Australians would far rather we were talking about in this place than the nonsensical claims of doom and gloom from those opposite.

Those opposite like to claim that Australia is acting alone on the carbon price, and this, too, is false. Every major economy is tackling climate change. Ninety countries representing 90 per cent of the global economy have committed to reducing their carbon pollution and have policies in place to achieve these reductions. Many of these countries are relying on a market based mechanism. It needs to be restated that some of those opposite understand this but some of
those opposite still have some vague commitment to the free market. A carbon price is the most cost-effective way to reduce emissions and is more efficient than other direct subsidy policies.

Some members of the Liberal and National parties understand the benefits of an emissions trading scheme and understand the benefits of a cap-and-trade mechanism. The member for Wentworth would be chief among them. I am pleased to say that there are some representatives of state governments who have a clear understanding of the benefits of putting a price on carbon as well. I am pleased to be able to quote from the statement made just today by the Western Australian Minister for Agriculture and Food, Terry Redman, who is quoted as saying that the introduction of a carbon price has given Western Australian farmers—I hope the member for Wannon is listening—another tool to manage salinity. This is the direct quotation from the statement today of the Western Australian coalition government's minister for agriculture:

Traditionally, many land managers in the northern Wheatbelt have attempted to address salinity through saltbush plantings, which also provides feed for stock.

However, the recent trend in the area towards fewer stock and increased cropping has meant this may no longer be a solution.

And here is the key bit:

With the introduction of a carbon price, the ability of salt tolerant native species to sequester carbon has the potential to provide farmers with another option to manage salinity.

He went on to announce $330,000 of state government funding—that is coalition state government funding—to test the sequestration properties of native plantings at various sites and examine the potential to use our Labor government's Carbon Farming Initiative as a means of managing salinity. Perhaps the next time the member for Wannon thinks about saying that the carbon price is in some way prejudicial to the interests of farmers in this country, he might like to talk to the coalition minister for agriculture in Western Australia, Terry Redman, who seems to have no doubt about the benefits of the carbon price.

Mr Tehan: I'll be happy to talk to him.

Mr DREYFUS: And you should talk to him often, because he seems to have no doubts about the benefit of the carbon price for Western Australian farmers.

I have said that a carbon price is the most effective way to reduce emissions, and that is why, by next year, 850 million people across the world will be living in a country, a state or a city with an emissions trading system. That includes countries like the United Kingdom, governed by a conservative government; Germany; France; Sweden; Norway; New Zealand, also governed by a conservative government; and Switzerland. Carbon trading is operating at the subnational level in the United States, Canada and Brazil.

Mr Tehan: Subnational!

Mr DREYFUS: Subnational—and I will come to that. The momentum is growing. California will commence emissions trading next year, on 1 January. On 14 November, they will have their first auction of carbon allowances. By 2015, California's cap-and-trade program will be the world's third-largest emissions trading market, after the European Union and the Korean ETS. The scheme is remarkably similar to the scheme that we have in Australia. It will cover 85 per cent of California's emissions. I can speak with pretty direct and recent authority because I met with senior officials of the Californian government some two weeks ago.

Mr Tehan: When are we linking with that!
Mr DREYFUS: And we agreed to work together towards the development of regional and global carbon markets. California, which those opposite deride as being subnational, is in fact, if looked at as a stand-alone economy, the world's eighth-biggest economy, with 37 million people. That is why an agreement with the officials from the Californian government to work with them towards linking and to explore options—which we will be doing, of course, with the Europeans as well—to link the carbon markets of California, Europe and Australia over the longer term is absolutely in the interests of Australia. The recognition by the Californians of the worth of linking schemes shows that that is the direction the world is going in.

China is developing pilot emissions trading schemes in seven cities and provinces, and that will commence next year. Korea's emissions trading scheme will commence in 2015, and countries like Turkey, South Africa, Thailand and Chile are also working to develop carbon pricing schemes. The rest of the world is acting, and those opposite should stop disregarding the facts and the direction of the world. (Time expired)

Mr MATHESON (Macarthur) (16:48): I rise to speak on today's MPI because I hold great concern for the people of my electorate, Macarthur, and the people of Australia, especially families, pensioners and small business owners, who will suffer most as a result of the government's carbon tax and the changes that have been made to it. Today's MPI is about the adverse impact on the Australian economy of the government's changes to the carbon tax. I have many concerns about these changes, especially when so many people in my electorate are already suffering as a result of this tax.

It has been only three months since the government introduced the tax on 1 July. Since then, I have received many phone calls and letters from local families and small business owners in my electorate who have sent me their electricity bills to show the effect this tax has had on their cost of living. One example is a local high school which received a carbon tax charge of $447 in the first month of the carbon tax being introduced. If you take this first month as an average, that means the carbon tax will cost the school and similar schools around Australia between $5,000 and $6,000 per year. This is money which teachers say could be better spent on interactive whiteboards, textbooks, computer programs for design, music or art or urgent maintenance that is not funded by the government. The costs of electricity will also increase the costs of canteen food for students and staff, as most canteens are privately run. Last time this school's carbon tax charge was brought up in parliament, those opposite said these figures were not true. Well, I have this electricity bill right here if those members opposite would like to take a look. It is proof that this government has no regard for local students and families who are being forced to pay for this ridiculous tax.

Let us look at the tourism sector. The director of Quest Apartments in Campbelltown, Mark Drinkwater, has contacted me with his latest electricity bill. There is a carbon charge of $827.24 for one month, which will mean around $10,000 per year for his business. This does not include the $1,000 per month increase in the network service charges the hotel is also being slugged with. This means an additional $20,000 to $25,000 per annum in electricity alone compared to last year. Then add the carbon tax increases in the hotel's gas and other utilities expenses, and the increase in the expenses of dozens of creditors and
suppliers, which will be passed on as well. Mr Drinkwater has told me that the hotel's target market is the corporate sector, which is looking to rein in spending, so, for this hotel, passing on the cost to its customers is very, very difficult. Mr Drinkwater made another good point when he asked me: 'If the plan is to encourage us to modify our operations to reduce our footprint on the environment, why couldn't they just legislate that, which would surely be a great stimulus for those industries and create jobs, as opposed to businesses inevitably putting people off?' Loss of jobs will occur in his business. Mr Drinkwater said that, like most businesses, his hotel was already trying to be cleaner and greener so it could be cost-effective and a good corporate citizen of this country. This business is run by a husband-and-wife team who are about to have their first child. This carbon tax has the potential to send them to the wall, and the government does not care.

Local schools and the corporate sector are not the only ones being affected by this tax. I have also been contacted by several seniors in my electorate who are outraged by their electricity bills since the tax was introduced. Mr Brian Ellis of Campbelltown has sent me a copy of his latest electricity bill, which has increased by 20 per cent, despite his usage decreasing during this bill period. Mr Ellis is 70 years of age and is not on the pension, so this increase of $100 per month in his electricity costs is simply not good enough.

Mr Ellis is not the only self-funded retiree facing these increased costs at a time in his life when he can least afford it, and with no compensation. I have been contacted by a couple in my electorate who have concerns about the financial implications of the carbon tax on their lives. The husband is a self-funded retiree living on a pension from his superannuation which is less than $45,000 a year. His wife, 59, has no income apart from a very small amount of bank interest. The husband is aged 60, is no longer paying tax and is not eligible for a promised tax rebate. He is less than 65 and yet not a pensioner, and so he is not eligible for a pensioner bonus. What is the government offering for people in this situation? Absolutely nothing. I have been contacted by a local resident in a retirement village who tells me that the carbon charge directly increases his general supply charges by 45 per cent—another example of the huge increases that the carbon tax imposes on some of the most vulnerable residents in my electorate.

And, if the past three months have not been bad enough for people in Macarthur, the government now want to make major structural changes to the carbon tax which will only do more harm than good. They want to remove the legislated floor price from the carbon tax and link the Australian carbon tax with the European ETS. They are also trying to increase the carbon unit auction limit from 15 million to 40 million for 2015-16. They want to alter the arrangements applying an equivalent carbon price for liquid fuels and synthetic greenhouse gases. They want to make amendments concerning the measurement of potential greenhouse gas emissions and make further amendments concerning natural gas liabilities.

It is not just the coalition who are concerned with the impact of the tax on our economy and trade industry. In March this year, the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry's director of economics, Greg Evans, told the media that Australia should not impose a carbon tax before a confirmation of international agreement on emissions cuts. He said that the carbon tax would have a negative impact on all trade-exposed industries, which actually cannot pass on the costs associated with a carbon price, because they are competing
internationally either through import or through export competition.

It is quite clear that the government is making policy changes relating to the carbon tax on the run, and each of these changes represents uncertainty, instability and consequences for all Australians. Removing the floor price of the carbon tax and linking it to the European carbon price leaves the Australian economy in the hands of Europe. Australia's electricity price will be largely set by European bureaucrats. The regulation impact statement published by the government shows us that having the price set by a completely different economy on another continent would create additional administrative costs for some small businesses due to the potential change in treatment of international units.

The government is also proposing to increase the carbon unit auction limit from 15 million to 40 million. This change means a potential extra $725 million in revenue from forward permits to help prop up the budget for 2014-15. In addition to this, the Energy Supply Association has said that forward-selling permits will lead to higher electricity prices. When is the government going to start to listen? I can tell you that further hikes in electricity prices are not going to go down well with the people of Macarthur, and I doubt they will be welcomed by any family, pensioner, school or small business across the country.

These changes show a great deal of unreliability in relation to the government. On 11 occasions, senior members of the government have expressed to us that the floor price was crucial to the stability of the carbon tax. We simply cannot trust that the government will follow through with what it says. Yet, despite making eight changes to the carbon tax before it had its three-month anniversary, the government says it still stands by its Treasury modelling. Some forecasts doubt that the European price will reach Treasury's forecasts, meaning a budget black hole for Labor—nothing different. The current Treasury modelling relies on all forecasts falling 100 per cent into place in one of the world's most volatile economies.

What also concerns me is that the government is moving full steam ahead with this policy despite not having it formally agreed with the European Union. The negotiations to form a one-way linkage will happen in July 2013, and negotiating an agreement for the full link will occur by July 2015, over 2½ years away.

I must also share my concern for Australian farmers, as we have many farming families living in Macarthur. The government's amendments are a bad deal for our farmers. In relation to the Carbon Farming Initiative, Australian farmers have been excluded from selling carbon credits to Europe until 2018. The deal the government negotiated allows Europe a virtual monopoly in selling carbon credits to Australia, while Australia is locked out of Europe until 2018.

Mr Tehan: Only this government could do something like that.

Mr MATHESON: Magic policy! The carbon tax is obviously in a mess. Since the tax was introduced three months ago, there have been eight major changes. No wonder the people of Australia are so confused by this tax and fed up with this government. If you look at the changes in detail, it is obvious that the tax and this government are in chaos.

The government bailed out major companies using taxpayer funds on the eve of the carbon tax being introduced, including funding to Energy Brix and Alcoa. They decreased the share of Clean Technology Investment Program grant funding for small businesses so as to further increase funding
for big businesses. The Clean Energy Regulator added more businesses to the big polluters list, taking the total now to 315. The government changed the regulations so as to increase real emissions from pipelines and landfill by one million tonnes. They abandoned the Contract for Closure program to shut down power stations, which will mean that the carbon tax will have to increase to achieve the same emissions reductions.

They scrapped the floor price, which was to have been $15 from 2015. The government had said the floor price was needed for business confidence. They are looking very confident out there at the moment! They linked the scheme to the European system, which does not allow a two-way trade on carbon credits, putting Australian businesses at a disadvantage and resulting in Australia's carbon tax being set by the EU price. They halted the green technology investment grants. This came just weeks after the grants were announced then changed.

Mr Deputy Speaker Symon, these changes show that the government has lost control of its carbon tax and is making changes on the run, which I am sure you would agree is a very dangerous thing to do. This is simply not good enough, especially when we are talking about an economy-wide carbon tax which is already having such a negative effect on families, seniors and small business owners across Macarthur and Australia.

I come from a local government background. We are not even seeing the impacts of what is happening at local government. I know that for the Campbelltown City Council there is about a $600,000 impact to their budget in relation to the carbon tax, and they have not even begun to pass on the operational costs like street lighting and the electricity in the buildings. The associated costs of running the council are not being passed on to local residents, and this will be reflected in the direct loss of services. Their rates will go up. There has already been a $20 increase this year. They are going to go up and up and up under the carbon tax policy. This government should be ashamed of itself.

Mr ZAPPIA (Makin) (16:58): Last month at the University of Western Australia the member for Wentworth, giving the George Winterton Lecture, said: For the last two years the questions from the Opposition have been almost entirely focussed on people smuggling and the carbon tax. Are they really the only important issues facing Australia?

When it comes to debates on matters of public interest, the very same point could be made. It is clear that members opposite have simply ignored the comments of the member for Wentworth, who was quite right when he said, 'Are they really the only important issues facing Australia?' The reality is that the matter of the MPI today is starting to wear thin out there in the community, and members opposite have brought forward this MPI in order to try and keep it alive.

The fact is that when I go out into my community—and I do that on a very regular basis—people out there want to talk to me about a whole range of things, not only about a carbon tax and about people smuggling. What they want to talk to me about is the issues that really affect their lives, such as aged care, disability support, education, health care, dental care, mental health, national infrastructure and the like. It is those day-to-day issues, which truly and directly affect their lives, that they are most interested in. When I speak to people in the community it is clear that the coalition's claim that the carbon tax is going to bring gloom and doom to the lives of Australians
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is simply not correct. The price on carbon has now been in since 1 July, and the examples given just a moment ago by the member for Macarthur of the doom and gloom that is occurring in his electorate as a result of the carbon tax are simply not in tune with reality. I do not for one minute deny that there are people throughout Australia who are struggling to make ends meet and who are doing it tough, and I do not deny for a moment that the cost of living is part of the problem. But I do deny that the problem is all due to the 'carbon tax', as members opposite would have you believe. The reality is that the carbon price introduced by this government has had a relatively minor effect on the total increase in people's cost of living. In fact, I have looked carefully at the contribution of the carbon price in examining claims that electricity costs in my own state have skyrocketed as a result of the 'carbon tax'. The reality is, according to information provided by the energy industry association of South Australia, that the contribution of the price on carbon towards the increase in the cost of power in my home state has been 4.6 per cent—that is all—and this figure is consistent with the Treasury figures of this government and with other figures which have been put together in order to try to quantify what impact the price of carbon will have on the cost of living in Australia.

The facts remain—and these facts continue to be reinforced by the latest science—that climate change is real and that rising greenhouse gas emissions are a factor in climate change. The price of ignoring these facts will ultimately be measured in dollars and in environmental and social costs. This matter of public importance discussion is about the cost to people of what this government is doing; I put it to members opposite that, if we do nothing about climate change, the cost to Australian families will be much, much higher than if we act in the way we have acted so far. This government accepts the science and has acted on several fronts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, to invest in alternative energy technology and to assist Australians with the transition away from high carbon and other greenhouse gas emissions. In doing so, the government acknowledges that climate change is a global problem which requires global commitments and global cooperation. The member for Wentworth knew that, and that is why he supported global action on climate change. Unfortunately, not all members of his party agreed with him and he lost his leadership over taking the principled stand that climate change is real and that we need to act to prevent it.

The government's strategy on climate change is quite simple. Placing a price on carbon puts a value on it. When something has a value, it can be traded. The Australian economy cannot compete in a global environment while we restrict the trading of carbon emitted in Australia to the Australian market. The government also acknowledges the changing global response to climate change. The response to climate change is not standing still; we learn more each day and each country reacts differently each day, and therefore we need to be flexible in our response to the issues we are confronted with. Regrettably, the economic crisis across the world over the past three years has distracted countries—particularly Western countries—from the importance and urgency of dealing with climate change. The positive thing about this is that the slowdown in the growth of Western economies over recent years has served to slow down greenhouse gas emissions. Those countries across the world which acknowledge that they may have slowed down their commitment to doing something about climate change nevertheless understand and have embraced their responsibility to the global cooperation
which is required to address climate change, which is indeed a global problem.

Governments across the world, as the parliamentary secretary has quite rightly pointed out, are now acting. He has talked about Europe, the UK, China, the USA, Korea, South Africa, Turkey, Chile, Indonesia and Vietnam, which are all coming on board and acting in a manner which suits their respective economies. Whether they are acting at a national level or at a state level within their own countries makes little difference; what is important is that they are acting. According to reports to this parliament 89 countries, representing 80 per cent of the global emissions of the world and 90 per cent of the world's economy, are acting to reduce greenhouse gas emissions across the world. Clearly each country is responding in a way which best suits its individual ability. Some countries are responding by investing in renewable energy or more efficient energy systems; others are putting a price on carbon; some are doing both. The fact is that they are acting.

The suggestion of members opposite that we should stand alone, restrict the trade in carbon permits to this country and not be part of the international response to climate change makes absolutely no sense. I thought that they were advocates of the free market both in Australia and across the world, so I am totally bewildered by their argument that we should not link in with other world markets. It is simply inconsistent with the positions they take on other issues and the positions they constantly put to this government on how we should operate in managing the Australian economy. I do not know whether, with the transition in 2015 from a price on carbon to an emissions trading system, the price of carbon will go up or down. That is not the important thing here; the important thing is that, wherever the carbon price lands, Australia be part of an international system and so remain competitive.

Members opposite talk about the way that this whole scheme is going to impact on families, on the people of Australia. The member for Macarthur talked about some specific examples in his own electorate. Members opposite have claimed that, if they are elected to government, they will rescind the carbon-pricing legislation. But what are they going to do in 2015? Are they going to move to an emissions trading scheme or are they not? They have not answered that question. In fact, they have never addressed that question. My question to them is this: if they do not do that then what will they do? Are they going to proceed with their so-called direct action policy, which has been discredited by a number of economic analysts and which will cost each Australian family in the order of $1,200 to $1,300 a year? Is that what they are going to do to try to help the families of Australia? Or are they going to embrace the logical and sensible policies of this government? Those policies link our efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in this country with those across the world, which creates one market and enables industry and business in this country to trade with overseas industry and business and therefore remain competitive. The policies of this government are the sensible policies—(Time expired)

Mr O'DOWD ( Flynn) (17:08): I rise today to support my colleagues from Wannon and Macarthur and to talk about the adverse impact of the government's changes to the carbon tax on Australia's economy. The simple fact is that the government has made eight changes to the carbon tax in the last 100 days, since 1 July. It highlights how fundamentally flawed its carbon pricing system is. The government has shifted the goalposts eight times on the Australian people. This directly affects Australian
industries, Australian jobs and Australian businesses.

In my electorate alone, which we call the carbon capital of Australia, there are industries struggling as I speak. It is no good saying, 'You are rumour-mongering; you are not confident' et cetera. There are jobs being lost as I speak—95 jobs from the Boyne smelter alone—as a direct result of the carbon tax. One week after the carbon tax was announced, Rio Tinto, the third largest miner in the world, put their Boyne smelter up for sale. It is now owned by Pacific Aluminium. Isn't that an indication that companies are concerned? Rio Tinto alone employ 6,000 people in Gladstone and a lot more in Perth. They are worried about it. They have spoken to me directly and no doubt they have spoken to the government about their business going forward.

Those opposite said that it was all going to stop on 1 July—what a load of poppycock! What did the government think was going to happen on 1 July? Did they think the whole world was going to stop because Australia introduced a carbon tax? Of course not. It is only now, when electricity bills are rolling in, that people are saying: 'Whoa, hang on, what is going on here? Tony Abbott was right.' It is affecting industry and it is affecting household costs. It is affecting the cost of living in my town and across Australia. Those opposite thought it was all going to stop on 1 July. How naive, how stupid. How can they have thought that? What do we do now with companies across Australia? Do we credit some? Do we take credits back? In relation to the car industry, we will exempt people's personal cars but we will hit the farmers down the track on fuel. Some aluminium companies have got credits and some have not. The aluminium companies in my town do not have the credits that some other companies have. These credits diminish over time but of course the carbon tax will go up next year and in the years after that.

It is a time for leadership and stability in an increasingly uncertain global environment. By shutting down industries in Australia and transporting them overseas to China or wherever, we are still not going to decrease global emissions. In some cases, we will actually increase global emissions. Those opposite talk about LA and California. When I was last in California, Beijing, Bangkok and Hong Kong—all self-funded trips, by the way—I never saw the sun, and I was in those places for quite some time. As I move around my home state of Queensland, the skies are blue and the seas are green, yet we have to be the first in the world with this monstrous carbon tax—$400 per person versus $1 per person in Europe. We have to cop it and our industries have to cop it. Is it any wonder that Australian companies are moving offshore at a very fast rate?

When you put mining taxes on top of carbon taxes, it is sometimes the last straw. Is the government aware that, in Mongolia alone, 171 Australian companies operate in the mining field? We have become very good at transporting our expert mining personnel offshore to countries like Mongolia, Indonesia and Africa. There are over 250 Australian companies with Australian staff and Australian expertise in the mines in those countries looking at their resources and helping them with their economy. They have given up on Australia; they have walked away. How much longer can this go on? How much longer can we keep taxing Australian companies out of existence?

Unfortunately, BHP and Rio Tinto are not Australian companies any more. They are worldwide companies and they will go to the country which offers the best deal. What are we going to do? We have our manufacturing
industries reeling; we have our retail businesses not functioning very well. They are all squealing out for help, and yet we sit here and tax them more. If we start taxing our banks and start looking to tax superannuation funds, where are we going to end up as a nation? Mr Murray, the former CEO of the Commonwealth Bank, summed it up last week when he said that if we keep this up we will end up like Greece. It just goes on and on and on.

The South Australian government has said that if a carbon tax is extinguished by Tony Abbott's government, the price of electricity will definitely come down. That is the Labor government in South Australia who said that. The eight changes that have been made here suggest that the government did not think the carbon tax through at all and that it had to make some rapid changes. But it does not give certainty. We have not built a power station in a long, long time—whether it was gas or coal—because we are going to close the brown coal power stations in Victoria. Now there has been a change of heart and they are going to be kept going. The power station in Gladstone, which is coal fired, is at sixes and sevens and does not know what to do, because there is no future in coal. Bob Brown told the Labor Party that there is no future for coal fired power stations. What are we going to do? 'Oh, we will go to gas.' That did not work out either. We were going to go to nuclear and that did not work out. So, what are we going to do?

This country was built on cheap electricity and cheap water, but under this Labor government we have neither of them. If we are going to become a food-producing country again, we are going to have to give our farmers cheap water, and we will have to supply our industries with power at a reasonable cost.

We had the Canadian ambassador talking to the government here saying that Canada is not going to move on any carbon tax or any emissions system until America moves. The last time I did a count, there were over 50 states in America. Does one state in America mean that the whole American nation is going to move? I do not think so. One in 50 or one in 51—I would not base anything on that—but the Labor government mentioned LA today. They are going ahead, but to what extent we do not know. I am concerned about what is happening in my patch in Flynn and about what happens to Australian industries. We cannot keep killing them by taxing, taxing and taxing. This government has a set of rules, so keep to it. As a final example, there were 250 big polluters, then it was 300, then it was 315. What will it end up with? There is only one answer to all this: scrap the tax. (Time expired)

Ms SMYTH (La Trobe) (17:18): I am delighted to follow that contribution. My comments this afternoon will reflect on the various Liberal Party and National Party members who have endorsed previous versions of emissions trading schemes and carbon price mechanisms. I will look at the realities of what is happening around the globe and what is happening with our trading partners, not only those countries which are part of the EU, but also other international markets with which Australia might link up its emissions trading scheme in the future. Importantly, given the emphasis this afternoon of members opposite on the response of business to the carbon price, I will also focus on the realities of what is happening in business and businesses' responses to the carbon price and to the amendments that have been made in recent times to enable us to link our carbon pricing scheme to the EU ETS and to facilitate that connection in international markets.
Firstly, I should commend the member for Wannon for bringing an MPI on the topic of the carbon price in any form. While we know that around half of all Liberal MPs have spoken favourably on the record in support of putting a price on carbon in the past, there are not many who will come forward now and admit to that. I will certainly reflect on a few of those remarks later in my contribution today. The member for Wannon is one of a very few who these days, it seems, have not publicly commented on their support for a price on carbon or an ETS. We have had the Leader of the Opposition, the former Prime Minister John Howard and leaders coming thick and fast from the opposition to be on the record in support of an ETS. We have had most of the frontbench support an ETS at some point in their parliamentary careers or beforehand and quite a deal from the backbench.

The important thing to reflect on this afternoon in terms of the linkage of Australia's carbon price mechanisms with the ETS is that this government has consistently put the view that it supports the linking of our carbon pricing scheme with international markets. It has consistently said that because it is seeking to use a market mechanism, and ultimately a global market mechanism, to ensure that business has the most efficient and least costly way of reducing its carbon emissions. That has always been our endeavour; that has always been our view. For many members of the Liberal and National parties it has been a shared sentiment, although today it seems that many of those people have departed from that. We know that the benefits of linking our carbon pricing scheme to the largest ETS in the world—namely, the EU's ETS—are many. We know that the link would mean a wider range of abatement opportunities available to entities that are liable to pay a carbon price. Of course, we are not the only ones to know this, it is also the various industry representatives and other experts who have commented favourably on the linking of the schemes.

Martijn Wilder, of Baker & McKenzie, in his comments to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics on 27 September, said:

… international linking creates a range of choices for you as a participant. You can dip into different markets and work out the cheapest place to buy abatement.

We also know that, by linking our emissions-trading scheme to the EU scheme, we stand to increase liquidity in carbon markets. Once again, it is not only the government's view that that is the case; it is the view of industry. TRUenergy's Executive Manager of Policy, Strategy and Sustainability, Claire Savage, said:

Linking with Europe will also provide access to a deeper and more liquid carbon market.

As a result of this government's efforts, we will seek to link Australia's emissions trading to the European Union's ETS from 1 July 2015. The EU's ETS is a scheme which operates across all 27 EU member states. It is the world's largest ETS, covering around 11,000 facilities.

The member for Wannon said, 'Why would you want to link something like this to the EU's ETS when they have done such a good job with their economy?' The world's largest ETS is operated in the EU. This scheme, as the government has long remarked and as many industry and other experts who appeared before the recent review of the economics committee into these arrangements have found, is supported by many industry participants and many experts in the field.

Let me mention a few other people who have spoken in favour of linking our ETS with that of the EU. The opposition would
most certainly have you believe this afternoon that this is a unilateral decision of the government which is unsupported by business and unsupported by experts, so let me disabuse the opposition of that view. The Australian Financial Markets Association's submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics stated:

Linking of the Clean Energy Scheme with sound international schemes has been consistently requested by AFMA as a mechanism to increase market depth, achieve least cost abatement and reduce overall risks for participants.

AFMA was not the only one to comment before the committee. The Chief Executive of the Energy Supply Association of Australia, Matthew Warren, said:

This is an important reform, and demonstrates that the Gillard government is willing to listen to genuine concerns of industry and act decisively to address them.

Andrew Grant, the Chief Executive of CO2 Australia, said it was 'very intelligent policy development'.

The Clean Energy Council's submission to the committee states:

International linking allows Australian businesses to access emissions reductions opportunities at least cost.

This afternoon, opposition members, in particular the member for Wannon, have raised the apparent concerns of business, of industry and of commentators in the market. I can go through page upon page of comments from those who have, in an informed way, reflected on the changes that the government has made to link our system to the EU's ETS as a first move to, hopefully, being able to link to other international emissions trading systems. They have referred to them very favourably indeed.

As the parliamentary secretary suggested earlier, the linking of our arrangements with the EU does strengthen the prospects of further international linkages. Indeed, it stands to promote and improve international cooperation on climate change.

Mr Seb Henbest, the Manager and Head of Clean Energy and Carbon Markets Research Australia, also made mention of this in recent evidence before the economics committee when he said:

… we see a link to the European trading scheme as potentially a very important first step towards establishing a broad coalition of capped markets around the world …

Indeed, on the point of linkage I should mention that John Howard wanted Australia to become what he called a 'carbon trading hub in the Asia-Pacific region'. How things have regressed on the opposition benches since the days when John Howard was proposing not only that an ETS be adopted by his side of politics, not only that this country be forward-looking in its approach to climate change, but that we use it to our advantage by becoming what he called a 'carbon trading hub in the Asia-Pacific region'. I think Mr Howard would reflect somewhat less than favourably on the approach that those opposite are now taking of using a market mechanism to respond to a significant global problem of climate change.

In the time that is left to me I would like to refer to some of the laudable projects that have been entered into by business in Australia following the introduction of a carbon price. We have heard for many months now that, in the opposition's view, the world would end following the implementation of a carbon price and that it would be the death of industry. Yet we find a significant number of industry participants responding and adapting to a carbon price, which is what all of us might have hoped. Mackay Sugar Limited, for instance, is investing over $120 million to reduce carbon emissions across its operations by 70 per cent for every unit of production. This
includes the installation of a cogeneration plant at its Racecourse Mill to supply clean energy year round to the mill as well as supplying a third of the city's energy consumption, generating additional income for the company. One would have thought that those opposite would have applauded a measure like that, which would not have come about but for the implementation of our clean energy future package. This government is supporting Mackay's embrace of clean energy, with over $9 million in funding from the Clean Technology Food and Foundries Investment Program, which is funded through the clean energy future package. The reality of the carbon price for a business is that industry is responding and responding favourably.

Mr CRAIG KELLY (Hughes) (17:28): I am pleased to rise this evening to add my contribution to today's MPI: the adverse impact of the government's changes to the carbon tax on the Australian economy. It is now just over 100 days since the introduction of the carbon tax. In those 100 days the evidence has become clear: this is a tax that is hurting families and businesses right across Australia. Less than eight weeks into this tax—this broken promise of a tax—we have seen chaos and confusion reign. We have already seen eight changes, including changing the floor price arrangement—another backflip on the broken promise. Changing the floor price contradicts what the Labor government and almost every member on that side have been saying for the past year.

I would like to give a few practical examples of what this Labor government is doing to our country and the effect this carbon tax is having on average Australians. A few weeks ago an 80-year-old lady called Rose phoned in to a Sydney radio station. Being 80 years of age, she would have been born in the middle of the Great Depression. She would have lived through the deprivations and hardships of the Second World War. She would have worked hard all her life and, in her old age, you would think she would be entitled to some dignity. These are the words of an 80-year-old woman. This shows what the effects of a carbon tax are doing to Australian citizens. She said: 'I just got an electricity bill for $645. The last one was $435; what's happened?' She then broke down into tears and said: 'I can't pay it. I've got congestive heart failure and I can't take any more stress. Now that I am old—I am nearly 80—all I am doing is going to bed at 5 pm at night with two hot water bottles.' That is what this carbon tax is doing to Australians out there. Throughout Western Sydney, 80 per cent of the increase in electricity prices is all the responsibility of the carbon tax. Here we have an 80-year-old lady breaking down in tears because of the effect the carbon tax is having on her electricity bills. That is the effect.

There is another example I would like to give in the time allocated to me today. A few doors down from the electorate office in Hughes there is a small bread shop. It is run by a husband-and-wife team. They get up every morning and start work at 4 am. They keep their little shop opposite Sutherland Railway Station open until 8 pm each night, hoping to catch a few extra sales from people coming home from work off the train at Sutherland. They get a few hours sleep and then they get up at 4 am the next day and do it all over again. For all this, and the risks associated with running a small business, they earn less than $10 an hour. It is these small business people who are the backbone on which our economy is built, and it is these small business people who are bearing the brunt of this carbon tax.

Last week I went into their shop and they were both almost in tears. They had just received their latest electricity bill, which
had increased from $1,650 a month to over $2,200 a month—an increase of $550 a month and over $6,500 each year. So here we have someone out there in our country today earning less than $10 an hour who, because of this carbon tax, has to do come up with another $6,600 every year. They asked me what the future is for them. I said to them, 'If you want a vision of the future under this Labor government, imagine electricity bills that go up and up forever.' Remember, to start with, the carbon tax is $23 a tonne. Then it will increase to $29 a tonne by 2015-16, according to the government's own figures. By 2020, this government says, it will go up again to $37 a tonne. By 2050, it will be no less than $350 a tonne. Yet we have this Labor government in complete denial about the adverse effects this is having on the most vulnerable people in our society.

What concerns me the most is the dangerous commercial naivety we have seen from this government. They are simply deluded that small businesses can pass these increased costs from the carbon tax onto their prices and onto the consumers. The Prime Minister, in her own words about what small businesses can do, said:

... you would be in a position to pass that onto the people who buy services from your business and we have expected that those costs would be passed on ...

This small bread shop works in a competitive environment. In Sutherland, there are three other small bread shops and two supermarkets all in competition with each other. They do not have a substantial degree of market power. They cannot raise their prices without losing business to their competitors. That is what this government simply fails to understand—that every business is in competition.

They are also in competition, in some way or other, with imports. You might ask: how would a small bread shop be in competition with imports? That is a question I first asked myself. But if you go into our major supermarket chains today you will find that they have started to import bread from overseas. They bring the imported bread in and just reheat it. That puts someone who is making bread here at a competitive disadvantage because they are paying the world's highest carbon tax. When bread is made overseas, the carbon tax is not paid. So it will simply mean more imports and less work and fewer jobs here in Australia.

One of our nation's greatest competitive advantages that underwrites our national prosperity is the seam of black and brown coal that runs down our eastern seaboard. It is one of our biggest sources of export income. We are one of the largest exporters of coal in the world, and it is this coal which in the past has enabled Australian industry and Australian families to enjoy the lowest electricity prices in the world. But today we have the highest electricity prices in the world. According to the Australian energy association, we have here in Australia an economically demonstrated reserves-to-production ratio of brown coal to last us no less than 539 years. We have 539 years worth of brown coal and 111 years worth of black coal. But simply by introducing this carbon tax and other so-called green schemes Labor is actually sabotaging and destroying one of our nation's greatest competitive advantages. Now we see that it is Australian families that are being punished, paying the highest electricity prices in the world.

Labor like to pretend that, as the member for La Trobe came in here and said, all countries are moving to the carbon tax and everybody is paying it. This is simply false. Our overseas competitors are not paying the carbon tax. The Productivity Commission have made that clear. They said:
... no country currently imposes an economy-wide tax on greenhouse gas emissions or has in place an economy-wide ETS.

Last year when President Obama was here he explicitly ruled out the US introducing a carbon tax. Canada's foreign minister did the same. He said his country would never have a carbon tax. China has no plans to introduce an economy wide carbon tax. In fact, last year China increased its emissions by 800 million tonnes of CO₂. That increase in one year alone is more than 1½ times Australia's total annual emissions. India has no such plans. Nor does Indonesia. Nor do a raft of other countries which we need to compete against to survive have any plans to introduce a carbon tax. If we look at New Zealand, the Australian carbon tax is 15 times higher than its New Zealand equivalent. According to Scientific American, India alone has 455 coal fired power stations planned or under construction and worldwide there are 1,231.

There is one simple way to fix this carbon tax, and that is to scrap it lock, stock and barrel. Only a coalition government will do that. On day one we will repeal the carbon tax. To those who come in here and say we will not or we cannot, I say: you guys keep talking it up because, when we do, it will show the true difference between us on this side of the chamber and you who sit over there. We will repeal this carbon tax.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Murphy): Order! The time for this discussion has expired.

PRIVILEGE

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (17:38): I rise to present an oral statement to the House regarding a possible matter of privilege, namely the unauthorised disclosure of committee material. On Monday, 17 September the Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs tabled its report Our land: our languages. The committee had agreed that embargoed copies of the report could be released to selected media outlets on the Friday preceding. Prior to the tabling of the report on the Monday, the Australian released on its website and in print a newspaper article revealing findings of the report that was still under embargo.

The committee discussed the matter and determined in this instance it does not constitute substantial interference in the operation of the committee and it has not diminished the capacity of the committee to undertake its business. While technically an unauthorised disclosure, it was the disclosure of material not authorised for publication at that time. The matter was noted by other media outlets, who raised the issue and were concerned that they had quite rightly waited until tabling to publish news of the report.

The committee has drawn this matter to the attention of the House to affirm the seriousness of any media publishing report findings in advance of tabling and to affirm the importance of the good relationship that parliamentary committees generally enjoy with the media and the necessity of ensuring that this relationship continues. The committee is of the view that this was a regrettable but isolated incident and does not consider that there were substantial consequences from the early disclosure of the report findings. In this instance, the committee does not consider additional action is warranted.

DOCUMENTS

Instrument of Designation of Papua New Guinea as a Regional Processing Country

Presentation

Mr BOWEN (McMahon—Minister for Immigration and Citizenship) (17:40): I
present the instrument of designation of the independent state of Papua New Guinea as a regional processing country under subsection 198AB(1) of the Migration Act 1958, together with five related documents in accordance with subsection 198AC of the Migration Act 1958. I ask leave of the House to move a motion relating to the approval of the instrument.

Leave granted.

Mr BOWEN: I move:

That, in accordance with subsection 198AB of the Migration Act 1958, the House approve the instrument of designation of the Independent State of Papua New Guinea as a regional processing country.

Today, acting under section 198AB of the Migration Act, I designate by legislative instrument the independent state of Papua New Guinea as a regional processing country.

In accordance with the legislative amendments to permit regional processing which came into effect on 18 August 2012, I am required to present to the House the following documents: a copy of the designation; a statement outlining why I think it is in the national interest to designate Papua New Guinea as a regional processing country; a copy of the memorandum of understanding with Papua New Guinea signed on 8 September 2012; a statement about my consultations with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in relation to the designation; and a statement about the arrangements that are in place or are to be put in place in Papua New Guinea for the treatment of persons taken there.

I now seek approval of this designation and present the necessary supporting documents to the parliament. I call on colleagues in both houses of parliament to approve this designation to enable the first transfers of offshore entry persons to Papua New Guinea for processing in accordance with the regional processing arrangements. Approving this designation will reinforce regional processing arrangements already underway in Nauru and illustrate the government's resolve to discourage dangerous boat journeys to Australia.

The government has endorsed in principle all recommendations contained in the report of the Expert Panel on Asylum Seekers presented on 13 August 2012 and has already taken significant steps to implement these recommendations. I have previously spoken about the government's decision to increase Australia's humanitarian program to 20,000 places a year, with 12,000 of those places being for refugees offshore. This is the biggest increase to Australia's refugee intake in 30 years and clearly demonstrates Australia's commitment to assisting those most in need.

In further support of this, the government has already allocated $10 million for regional capacity building projects, with a special emphasis on the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. This funding will assist the UNHCR and non-government organisations in the region to build safer and more orderly migration pathways, which is part of the strategic and integrated approach recommended by the expert panel and a demonstration of Australia's ongoing commitment to building protection in the region through the Bali process regional cooperation framework.

The panel's advice highlights the task which this government is undertaking: balancing effective border control with the need to deal humanely with asylum seekers arriving irregularly by boat in Australia and the underlying need to prevent the loss of life occurring as a result of irregular movement. These important issues are at the heart of Australia's national interest. Today's
designation of Papua New Guinea is a further step in the government's task of implementing the panel's recommendations. It builds on the progress already made, particularly in relation to regional processing on Nauru. Regular transfers of asylum seekers to Nauru from Australia commenced on 14 September 2012 following the designation of Nauru as a regional processing centre by this parliament on 10 September 2012.

Following the commencement of transfers to Nauru, we have already seen a number of asylum seekers choose to return home voluntarily. This is evidence of the false stories that people smugglers are selling about what awaits asylum seekers in Australia. These returns represent a powerful message which undermines the viability of the people-smuggling model. The parliament's approval of my designation of Papua New Guinea as a regional processing country will further reinforce this message to asylum seekers considering a boat voyage to Australia and demonstrate that there is no advantage in doing so.

As this parliament is acutely aware, a substantial number of lives have been lost at sea as a result of the activities of people smugglers. The government is gaining important momentum to stop this tragic trade. This designation is a key and urgent part of the action required to prevent this tragic loss of lives at sea from occurring in the future.

The only condition for the exercise of my power to designate a country as a regional processing country is that I think it is in the national interest to do so. I think that it is in the national interest to designate Papua New Guinea as such, as Papua New Guinea has provided Australia with certain assurances, which include specified assurances required by legislation. I also think that it is in the national interest to designate Papua New Guinea as a regional-processing country because it will discourage irregular and dangerous maritime voyages, thereby reducing the risk of loss of life at sea; it will promote a fair and orderly refugee and humanitarian program that retains the confidence of the Australian people; and it will promote regional cooperation in relation to irregular migration and addressing people smuggling.

It is important for Papua New Guinea, as a sovereign state, to have input into the development of any arrangements, and it has been keen to do so. We are dealing with people seeking protection, and there is a need for fully considered arrangements to be put in place. By presenting the designation and accompanying documents, in accordance with the legislation, I provide the parliament with the opportunity to be satisfied that what is in place, and will be put in place, is appropriate.

Again, I call on both houses of parliament to approve this designation to enable the first transfers of offshore entry persons to Papua New Guinea and to provide the circuit-breaker to irregular maritime arrivals called for by the expert panel's report.

Mr MORRISON (Cook) (17:46): Naturally, the coalition will support the designation of the independent state of Papua New Guinea under the act to enable offshore processing to occur on Manus Island or another place within that territory. It is not surprising we would, because it has always been our policy to have offshore processing in places such as Manus Island, and particularly on Nauru. It is not surprising, because that is exactly the commitment we gave eight weeks ago when the overarching legislative changes that give effect to what we are dealing with today were put in place. On that day we were prepared to support the designation of both Nauru and Manus Island. We subsequently dealt with Nauru, several
weeks ago. Now, eight weeks after we gave that commitment, the matter has been brought to this place by the minister and we are in a position to support the designation of the independent state of Papua New Guinea. We do it today, as we would have been prepared to do it eight weeks ago, or at any time.

I particularly note that in the documents provided by the minister today—not only in the instrument but in the explanatory memorandum and, in particular, in the memorandum of understanding—the guiding principle, on page 3, says:

Clearly, all activities undertaken in relation to this MOU will be conducted in accordance with international law and the international obligations of the respective participants.

The independent state of Papua New Guinea is a signatory to the refugee convention. As a result they have willingly brought upon themselves legally binding protections. This has always been the coalition's key requirement in relation to supporting these matters. The government does not believe that binding legal protections are necessary to ensure the designation of these countries. I note in these documents that in making this designation the government once again, as the minister did in the case of Nauru, is not considering or taking into account whether or not legally binding protections are in place. I do not think it reflects well on the government that they do not believe legally binding protections are important in making these decisions. It just so happens, thankfully, that in the case of Papua New Guinea, as was the case with Nauru, those binding legal protections are in place. It was the opinion of the High Court, which struck down the government's deal in relation to Malaysia, that legally binding protections are necessary. We agree with that view and that is why we are happy to stand today as a coalition and support the designation of the independent state of Papua New Guinea.

This day has been a long time coming. Like Nauru, the designation of Papua New Guinea has come too late and it restores too little of what the coalition successfully had in place with the strong border protection regime that was first instituted under the stewardship of the minister for immigration at the time, the now 'father of the House', the member for Berowra, who is in the chamber with us today. This day has been a long time coming. In 2010 the governor of Manus Island wrote to the Prime Minister—and Papua New Guinea—and said that he was very happy, and that that state was very happy, to have Papua New Guinea, and particularly Manus Island, host the reopening of an offshore processing facility. That was more than 20,000 arrivals ago. The governor of Manus Island made it very clear that they were happy to restore this facility.

If we go back 15,430 arrivals ago, it was in May 2011 that officials from the department of the minister's predecessor were in Papua New Guinea investigating and inspecting the site at Manus Island with a view to having that facility reopened. That was in May 2011. And they did not just do that but also provided $811 million in the 2011-12 budget to do it. But that money was never spent for that purpose and 15,430 people have turned up in Australia on boats, illegally, since the time the first investigation of that site was undertaken by the government. But there is still no centre, despite the fact that the governor had said, 'Yes, we are happy to do it,' and despite the fact that the government and the department had actively initiated an investigation, visited the site, were happy to do it, and had budgeted the money to do it. But there was still no centre or offshore processing. Since then 15,430 people have turned up.
Instead, the government went down a different path. It seems that every time this government is faced with a fork in the road on border protection, they always make the wrong choice. On this occasion, when they had the opportunity to go forward and reopen offshore processing on Manus Island, they said, 'No, we are going to go down the Malaysian route,' and we all know where that ended. It ended in the High Court with a thumping thud. Since that time, the government has been able to remedy that measure and has been dragged kicking and screaming to introduce these measures that are before us. Also, it was in December of 2011 and in January of 2012 when the minister himself said, again: 'We believe there is a place for an offshore processing centre. We pursued and gained the agreement of Papua New Guinea to that centre.' But, again, there is still no centre. And that was 11,700 people ago—before they had arrived in Australia by boat.

At the end of the day—even though we have this matter now before us—in the eight weeks since the decision was taken to reopen these facilities, some 3,830 people have turned up. Some 6,436 people have turned up since the government's own self-imposed impasse at the end of June. Equally, they could have brought matters into this House to see the offshore processing centre established at Papua New Guinea, on Manus Island. The opportunity extended all the way through this period of time, and the decision still was not taken to put it in place. Well, here we are, thousands of people later—as is set out in the minister's own statement, in the record of arrivals that have occurred while we have waited and waited and waited—and, finally, the day has arrived. But, as we know, the government did not always feel this way about the reopening of Manus Island.

The now Prime Minister, in another capacity in 2002, said, 'We know that the Pacific solution is unsustainable from the point of view of our agreements with Papua New Guinea and Nauru, with both of them stating substantial reservations about the continuance of the so-called Pacific solution, and we know that delivers absolutely no outcomes.' This is what the now government, then in opposition, described the Pacific solution as at that point. We all know the record of the six years, including that one in which the now Prime Minister made that statement: 272 people turned up on fewer than three boats a year over the six-year period. Now, that is not an outcome? I would happily have the government compare their outcome over a similar period, when we have had almost 26½ thousand people turn up over a space of less than five years.

So, I am happy with the outcome the Howard government was able to achieve with its successful measures. Even though the Prime Minister had also said that Labor would end the so-called Pacific solution when they were in opposition, as well as the processing centre and the detaining of asylum seekers on Pacific islands, because it is 'costly, unsustainable and wrong as a matter of principle'—these are things the Prime Minister once said—here we are today with a complete capitulation on all those years of demonising, once again.

This government, when it was in opposition, opposed these measures. They abolished them in government, and now we are at a position where they are seeking to reinstitute them. They said they would get rid of it on day one—and they did. They did get rid of the Pacific solution on day one. Now, on day 1,803, they have to put it back in place, and that is what they are doing. But they will still not go far enough. As a result, they cannot expect the outcomes of the Howard government if they are not prepared to put in place the policies of the Howard government. They simply cannot have that
expectation—and that expectation certainly is not being realised by what we have seen in recent months.

Now, why won't they go far enough? It is because, as we all know, at the end of the day they just do not believe it. They have been forced to this position by politics, not by a belief in the policies. I think this is the real difference between those who sit on that side of the House and those who sit on this side of the House when it comes to the issues of border protection. They have been driven to it by politics, not conviction. And I think the lack of conviction, the lack of genuine belief and the lack of genuine commitment to this policy—and equally to the policies that are also required to ensure that we have an effective set of measures in place with temporary protection visas, with turning boats back where it is safe to do so, and with a raft of other measures the coalition has outlined on many occasions—has become the pull factor. And that is what the problem is. If you look at the core of the problem the government faces, it is the government themselves; they are the pull factor. Their lack of conviction, lack of credibility and lack of belief when it comes to these issues is the reason that those seeking to come here know that this government is a soft touch—and that has not changed.

They may change their rhetoric, they may backflip on everything they ever say they believe in—but who knows? At the end of the day, there is not a track record of conviction, there is not a track record of belief, there is not a track record of performance—but the crisis does roll on. The crisis rolls on because of this lack of conviction. We see it in the record of arrivals, now at over 2,000 per month, that continue under this government. We have seen it since the decision to reopen Nauru, with 1,585 people turning up—and over 3,800 since the decisions were taken some months ago. These decisions of restoring offshore processing in the vacuum of other, necessary policies cannot be considered to be going far enough, in our view. As a result, the government cannot expect to see a change in the outcomes.

With record arrivals, with a record detention population, it is now true that at the end of August there are more people in immigration detention centres. I am not just talking about the alternative places of detention; that is on top of this figure. There were 5,216 people at the end of August who were actually in detention centres. That is more than were in detention centres at the time of the Christmas Island and Villawood riots. There are more people in detention today, with community release and community detention taking place—and the government trumpeted their credentials on that side—because there are more people coming. This government cannot get them out the door and into the community fast enough, and our detention centres continue to fill up. And that comes at a significant cost. Last year the cost, on average, per boat turning up—when you look at the costs across managing asylum seekers—was $12 million. That is what it cost: $12 million a boat, under this government, last year. That is what the taxpayer had to pay every time one of those boats turned up: $12 million in costs. This financial year alone, we have had this government exceed the estimated number of arrivals by more than 1,000. They anticipated 5,400 over the entire financial year. In 100 days, they have blown that by more than 1,000.

That is going to have a consequence in this budget. This budget already puts aside $1.1 billion, more than 10 times what was spent in 2007-08 in the last budget of the Howard government, to deal with these matters, and that budget will blow. This Treasurer has still not yet come into this
place and said what the bill will be for the continued failure. We will have to wait for that, it would seem, in MYEFO. We look forward to hearing that number because the Australian taxpayer at least has the right to know, if this government is going to continue to fail, what the bill will be. And they will find out what that bill is ultimately, just as we have found out at every single MYEFO and every single budget, where the accumulated blow-outs under this government, because of their inability to have the conviction needed, backed up by the policies that worked to deal with this problem, has led to blow-outs of $4.9 billion and counting. That does not include the extra $50,000-plus per person they are going to add to the annual refugee and humanitarian intake. It does not include the costs that are now going to be incurred as a result of the measures that we are discussing here as a result of this designation. It does not deal with the extra costs that are going to happen this year because of the record arrivals I have pointed out.

This government's record of cost blow-outs, of arrival blow-outs and of detention centre blow-outs is unparalleled. This government, this Prime Minister, simply needed to do one thing when they introduced this measure today, to say: 'We got it wrong; we should never have abolished these measures. We are now going to restore them and all the others that need to be restored that the Howard government had in place'—but they will not do it. The only way that will happen is with a change of government at the next election.

Mr CLARE (Blaxland—Minister for Home Affairs, Minister for Justice and Minister for Defence Materiel) (18:01): In August the expert panel on asylum seekers, headed up by Angus Houston, made 22 recommendations to prevent asylum seekers risking their lives on dangerous boat journeys to Australia. This is one of those recommendations—to establish a capacity on Papua New Guinea to process the claims of asylum seekers.

The Houston report recommended that a capacity be established in Papua New Guinea as soon as possible to process the claims of irregular maritime arrivals transferred from Australia in ways consistent with the responsibilities of Australia and Papua New Guinea under international law. The Houston report made it clear that, in addition to Nauru, similar arrangements needed to be put in place elsewhere in the region to address the rising number of irregular maritime arrivals to Australia. The Papua New Guinea government has facilitated these arrangements in the past and entered into a memorandum of understanding with Australia on 19 August 2011 for the processing of asylum claims of irregular maritime arrivals at an assessment centre on Manus Island.

The Houston report suggested that if a processing centre for asylum claims were to be re-established in PNG, similar arrangements to those proposed in the report in relation to Nauru should be negotiated with the PNG government—and that is what has occurred. These negotiations have taken place and the declaration now before the parliament gives effect to the recommendation of the Houston report. This means that offshore processing can occur at both Nauru and Manus Island.

But this is just the beginning of our work. The Houston report made 22 recommendations, not two. They also made it clear that they must all be implemented—we cannot just implement some of them. This includes offshore processing in Nauru and Manus Island. It also includes regional processing in Malaysia. The Houston report recommended that the Malaysia agreement
be built on and not be discarded. At page 51 of the Houston report it says:

The Malaysia arrangement is an important initiative in bilateral cooperation between Australia and Malaysia on the issue of great significance for both countries and for the broader region. It is also a potential building block for a stronger framework of regional cooperation on protection and asylum claims.

It goes on and says at page 52:

… the arrangement would be able to play a vital and necessary role in supplementing the processing facilities in Nauru and PNG.

In the subsequent media interviews that members of the expert panel gave, they commented about how important in their view the Malaysia agreement would be. The chair of the panel, Angus Houston, said, in relation to Malaysia:

This is absolutely 100 per cent what we have to do if we want to stop boats in the long term.

He also said that Malaysia was the best plan for the future. Paris Aristotle, a member of the panel, was interviewed by Sabra Lane on the ABC on 14 August, and he concurred with the views of the former Chief of the Defence Force. He said: 'I think Malaysia is absolutely vital to this'. When asked by Sabra Lane, 'Can this work without Malaysia?' Paris Aristotle said, 'I think in the long run, no—I think Malaysia is absolutely vital to this.' In the same interview he also said, 'Malaysia is an important plank in building a regional arrangement.' Michael L'Estrange, the third member of the expert panel, was interviewed by Samantha Hawley on the ABC on 13 August and was also asked about the Malaysia agreement. He said, amongst other things, that 'the Malaysia agreement is an important undertaking'. He said:

We think that this negotiation with Malaysia needs to be built on, not discarded. We think, actually, in the future it is going to be very important to have this kind of arrangement with regional countries that are not signatories to the refugee convention, and most countries in our region are not signatories.

The government agrees with the comments, the thoughts and the recommendations of those three men. We strongly support the Malaysia agreement. The Liberal Party strongly supports offshore processing in Nauru and Manus Island. In December last year, when I was five days into the job, when 200 people died when their vessel capsized off the coast of Indonesia, the government put a compromise proposal to the opposition and said: 'The government believes in Malaysia; the opposition strongly believes in Nauru and Manus Island for offshore processing. Well, let's simply do both—let's do all of that.' It was a compromise, but it was rejected—so, through the course of the debates that we have had in this place and elsewhere over the course of this year, the government have agreed to a further compromise: to commence offshore processing first in Nauru and now in Manus Island.

We did that because it is the only thing that could get through this parliament. The alternative to passing legislation to allow offshore processing in Nauru and in Manus Island is that we do not do it at all—we do nothing. If we nothing, as we have seen too much of over the course of the past 12 months, people will die.

Ultimately, we need to do Nauru, Manus Island and Malaysia. Doing Nauru and Manus Island is a good start; Nauru, Manus Island and Malaysia would be better. That is what Angus Houston has said, that is what all members of the expert panel have said, but that is what the Liberal Party and the Greens party have refused to do. The Houston report looked at all three, and it accepted one, Nauru, and rejected the other two—TPVs and turn backs. The Houston report makes 22 recommendations. A
number of them are relevant to my portfolio, so let me use this opportunity to talk a little bit about those recommendations and where things are currently at.

Recommendation 20 and part of recommendation 4 concern bilateral cooperation on asylum seeker issues with regional countries, including Indonesia, to address search and rescue issues. Australia and Indonesia have a very strong interest in effective search and rescue for people travelling by sea in our region. Too often, as I have said, we have seen the tragic consequences of people risking their lives by getting on unseaworthy vessels. Last month I travelled to Indonesia with the Minister for Defence and the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport to have discussions with our Indonesian counterparts about ways to improve search and rescue efforts between Australia and Indonesia. We agreed to expand the $38 million Indonesia Transport Safety Assistance Package, which began in 2007, to provide for additional bilateral coordination on search and rescue activities.

Our search rescue agencies, BASARNAS and the Australian Maritime Safety Authority, have been working together very closely over a period of years to improve their capability and coordination. Activities undertaken to date include search and rescue exercises, short-term officer secondment, and training in aeronautical search and rescue operations. Under the agreement we reached in Indonesia last month, the Australian government will make an additional $4½ million available to enhance coordination between the two search and rescue agencies.

We agreed to six key measures. The first is the exchange of officers between BASARNAS and AMSA. This will involve embedding officers in their counterpart agencies, starting this financial year. That will be very important in assisting in actual search and rescue operations, but it will also play an important role in training and mentoring, and allowing officers to gain exposure to their counterpart agency’s operating environment. The second measure is the enhancement of ship-tracking information. This capability will provide BASARNAS with an accurate near real-time picture of ships that are operating in or transiting through the Indonesian search and rescue region.

As I mentioned when we had this debate a couple of weeks ago, we learned in Indonesia that there are approximately 1,000 merchant vessels travelling through the Indonesian search and rescue zone on any given day—an enormous number of vessels. The key to harnessing the availability of those vessels when needed, when there is a search and rescue operation, is having that information in a near real-time environment and being able to communicate with that vessel. Therefore, the third thing we agreed on was enhancing the maritime satellite communications ability of the Indonesian search and rescue authority. This will allow BASARNAS to rapidly communicate via satellite communications with merchant vessels identified from the vessel picture and make them available to do search and rescue operations.

The fourth measure is additional search and rescue exercises between BASARNAS and AMSA. This will provide more advanced and challenging search and rescue exercises to build on the capabilities developed over the last few years. The exercises will allow for deployment of search and rescue assets and coordination of assets from multiple agencies. The fifth is regular search and rescue discussions. It is planned that a regular series of meetings and workshops between AMSA and BASARNAS to share technical information
and promote mutual understanding are to commence. These meetings will be held alternatively in Australia and Indonesia and promote best search and rescue practice.

The sixth and final part of the package was aircraft access. We have agreed to explore further rapid clearance for Australian aircraft to operate in Indonesian territorial airspace and to land to refuel at suitable airfields when engaged in search and rescue activities in cooperation with Indonesia. These are all important reforms that help to implement the recommendations embedded in the Houston report.

Another recommendation which is very important and often underappreciated is the recommendation that has to do with the disruption of people-smuggling activities in the countries of our region. The report recommends that disruption strategies be continued as part of any comprehensive approach to the challenges posed by people-smuggling and that relevant Australian agencies be resourced with appropriate funding on a continuing basis for this purpose. This is a very important recommendation.

The work law enforcement agencies do to disrupt people-smuggling vessels, as I said, is often not properly appreciated and certainly not widely reported, but it is very important. The Australian Federal Police work closely and successfully with other law enforcement agencies across our region. Since 2008, there have been 498 disruptions involving more than 15,000 potential asylum seekers. So far this year there have been 178 disruptions involving 6,572 people. That includes 108 disruptions in Indonesia, five disruptions in Malaysia, 60 disruptions in Sri Lanka, four disruptions in India and one disruption in Vietnam. This is very important work and it must continue.

Obviously there is still a lot more work to do in implementing the recommendations of the Houston report and beyond. It is also important that we communicate the changes that we are making here in this place. The Department of Immigration and Citizenship as well as my agency, Customs and Border Protection, have jointly developed a communications strategy to discourage people from taking the dangerous boat journey to Australia. The government has committed $1½ million for an overseas communications campaign and a further $915,000 in administered funding this year to Customs and Border Protection.

This includes work being undertaken by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship as part of its 'no advantage' campaign. The campaign involves distributing messages in multiple languages, both locally and via the internet. The messages are targeted at asylum seekers in places such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and the Middle East.

Information has also been shared with the International Organization for Migration, which is working in Indonesia to inform people of the recent policy changes and discourage people from getting onto boats.

In many of these countries, there is no recognised media landscape in which to 'advertise'. Instead, Customs and Border Protection works with local communities to get the message out. This includes activities such as liaising with local media outlets, including radio, television and newspapers and online media, and conducting grass roots community activities. The message is: do not get on a boat to Australia; you will get no advantage and no special treatment by getting onto a boat and, what is worse, you will risk losing your life at sea.

The information we get from people who have sought asylum in Australia, and have
been intercepted by boat and arrived at Christmas Island, indicates to us that people smugglers are still telling lies—telling people that they will only be in Nauru for a short period of time. We have to counter those lies with the truth and get that information out.

This motion is important because it is about saving lives. More than 400 people have died in the last 10 months. They have died while we have fought over this issue. As I have said many times, we need to put down our swords and agree to implement all the recommendations in the Houston report. That is what the people of Australia expect of us, and that is what they deserve.

Mr RUDDOCK (Berowra) (18:16): Let me just say that I welcome the designation of Papua New Guinea as a regional processing country, but I do so with a degree of disappointment. The minister's speech still had in it the sort of language that I think leaves us dangerously exposed. I think the most compelling figure that I have heard in this debate thus far from the shadow minister was the number of arrivals since 14 August, when the government agreed to reopen Nauru without restoring TPVs and turning boats back. The figure is, in that time, 60 boats with 3,800 people. What is remarkable about that figure is that it exceeds the total number of places for offshore processing by about three times. That is an extraordinary situation to be in, and I do not like to come into the House and to have to say that the ways in which these issues are being dealt with are highly unlikely to resolve the problem. They are highly unlikely to put to an end the tragic loss of life which the government tells us persuaded it to change its approach.

When I spoke after the government made its first announcement in this place I coined a number of phrases. I said that the measures that you might want to implement ought not to be seen as a menu from which you can pick and choose. I think the situation is so diabolical that you need every measure—every weapon in your armoury—to be brought to bear if you are going to deal with the size and the dimension of the problem that this government, through its own policy approaches, has brought about.

I suspect that the government members are still in denial. The minister spoke about the need for compromise on these matters. That is the menu argument: 'We'll give you this and you give us that; we'll have a compromise and maybe that will work.' This is not a matter in which you can, in my judgement, compromise. I think the work of the expert panel was admirable. But, as with panels, the sort of language that they use suggests that they know that there are sides that people have taken; they know there are certain constituencies and that you have to try and address them. But I think they showed in that report that they recognise that all of the measures that the Howard government had used were absolutely necessary. They certainly did not recommend the reintroduction of TPVs. But what did TPVs do? Temporary protection visas essentially denied those who were found to be deserving of protection the opportunity for a permanent visa, which carried with it family reunion entitlements. That became, essentially, the anchor on which a lot of other people would then travel.

The government said: 'We don't think you should use TPVs because if you use TPVs people will get onto boats as children, essentially on the basis that they will be unable to be sponsored by a parent if they had previously accessed Australia. More women and children will be on boats; you can't do that.' But the fact of the matter is that the government's own expert panel has
said that they ought to restrict the availability of family reunion to those people who obtain permanent residency.

The problem is that the methodology that they are using involves family reunion for some and not the extended family reunion that you might have got if you were using the special humanitarian program. That means to me that the panel was at least cognisant of the important role that TPVs would play, and I think the government ought to be honest enough to say, 'We're going to use all the weapons in our armoury.' And that needs to be made clear to people offshore as well.

With respect to the turn-back of boats, when you read what the expert panel was saying, you find that they were saying that the turn-back of boats is highly desirable and you ought to be working on achieving cooperation to put that in place. And this government is rejecting it. It does not even recognise that it might be open.

I was somewhat troubled by the minister's comments because we have had some important negotiations with Indonesia on how search and rescue can be more effective in Indonesia's search and rescue areas—not ours, theirs. We are going to give them planes and we are going to enhance their ability to be able to supervise search and rescue. The one thing that is clear is that when people are rescued in somebody's search and rescue zone, the people who are rescued ought to go to the country whose zone they have been found in. What is the message that is coming out of this? The message, it seems to me, is that if you get on a boat and you get on a phone and you can convince people in Australia that they should get in touch with the Indonesians and activate all the search and rescue then all you have to do is stand over the captain and say 'I want to go to Christmas Island' and everybody acquiesces. Journeys will be less dangerous and there is no suggestion that those who are found in Indonesia's search and rescue zone are going to go to Indonesia. In my view, when you make decisions like that—I recognise the negotiations and discussions you have to have to deal with are sometimes difficult—there is nevertheless a message that is going through to all of those people who are desirous of accessing Australia that Australia is still open, open for business.

I said when I commenced my remarks that this trafficking and loss of life that has tragically occurred is a result of people coming to a view that if they get onto a vessel and access Australia, they will have a permanent residency outcome and they will have a new life in one form or another. It has very tragic consequences: some people tragically lose their lives at sea. What is more tragic to me is that people who are more deserving of an asylum place in Australia's refugee resettlement program miss out. The people whose claims are far more deserving, not just because they are a refugee but because of the very circumstances in which they are in—the immediate threat to their safety—miss out because the places are taken by those who meet the lowest common denominator threshold test, a test which a lot of well-meaning advocates who have never been to a refugee camp in their life and who listen to the people who happen to get here take the view that they have to be helped more than those who are in these other circumstances. So we see the development of a legal system that makes it even more likely that if a person's claims are considered here, they will get through the gate.

My problem is that I hear nothing from the government that suggests that they understand these issues or that they want to seriously deal with these issues. It is a question of give us Malaysia and she will be
right. You want offshore processing? We will give you that. You are saying that will work. I am not saying that. I am saying all of the measures were necessary. I never argued when I was there that particular measures would work. I could not tell you which ones were going to work. What I know is that when we implemented all of the measures, it changed the total psychology of the issue.

It is a lot more reassuring when you have few people seeking to access Australia via these dangerous journeys. It is much more reassuring even though you have to wear a bit of odium, even from the other side, when you know that people's lives have been saved. When you go to places like Kakuma in Africa as I did, various parts of the Middle East as I did, the Balkans as I did and see the people in those sorts of circumstances and you are able to talk to them then you understand that some of them can be helped. It does make a huge difference. I am very troubled about this issue because I believe the way in which it has been dealt with was quite clearly going to leave Australia exposed.

I debated the former minister for immigration who spent most of his time suggesting that the TPVs would not work, for instance. They were introduced and they did not stop people getting on boats. That is the argument I heard. Well, I do not know if that same minister would say—I do not know whether the government uses him in the Senate when these matters are debated—whether the announcement on 14 August, 60 boats and 3,830 people arriving was a failure of the measure or just that there was a lag in implementing it. But he never acknowledged that there might have been a lag effect with TPVs. I would suggest, as I did before, I cannot tell you if it was TPVs. I cannot tell you if it was turning boats back. I cannot tell you that it was offshore processing. But what I can tell you is when you use all the weapons in your armoury, it does have an impact.

I am very pleased to hear of the minister's support for the continuing work to disrupt trafficking. I have no doubt that the various agencies working on that, including the Australian Federal Police, are using their very best endeavours, and they are achieving some successes. But that disruption is nothing new. Disruption was being undertaken when I was there and it has been continued, and yet, notwithstanding the disruption activities which have been undertaken on a continuing basis, the number of arrivals since polling day is 18,000 and the number since the change of government is 26,000. The enormity of the movement of people to Australia unlawfully by boat needs to be understood, and the need for all the weapons in our armoury to be used needs to be understood by the government. Our support for this measure is forthcoming but we do not believe it is going to do the job.

Mr BANDT (Melbourne) (18:30): I will not be supporting this motion on the designation of Papua New Guinea as a regional processing country. I think everyone in Australia had the same reaction when they witnessed the horrific sight of boats going down and people losing their lives in terrible circumstances. That was especially the case with Christmas Island, but it also relates to many events over the years when we have lost lives as people have tried to make their way to this country.

The Greens have said for a significant time that if the concern is protecting people, stopping people from taking those high-level risks that could potentially result in the loss of their life, we need to provide safer pathways and a more orderly system. What might that mean? It would mean, for a start, lifting Australia's humanitarian intake, because at the moment it is the lowest that it
has been for 30 years. It would mean a comprehensive regional plan of action that also includes taking more people directly from places like Indonesia and Malaysia. We know that in those countries there are thousands of people waiting in camps, many of whom are genuine refugees and have already been found to be so, but they have no light at the end of the tunnel. Some of the 8,000 people who have been waiting in camps in Indonesia, for example, have been waiting for many years. That is not surprising, given that the UNHCR up until a while ago had only two people processing their claims and their budget is slated to decline over coming years.

The experts working in and supporting people in those camps tell us that, if you provide people who are in those camps with an orderly pathway out, they are much more likely to stay there and wait for genuine resettlement. We hear a lot about the people smugglers' business model, and the people smugglers' business model is based on desperation. It is based on people waiting in those camps for years at a time, often already having been found to be genuine refugees, with no clear exit. If I were in that situation and I had waited in a camp for several years and someone came to me and said that if I gave them a bit of money they would get me and my family out, I would probably take that opportunity as well. I think most people in that situation would do the same. Until we take more people directly out of the camps in Indonesia and Malaysia and send a clear message to all those people who are in there that if they wait then they will be resettled, potentially in Australia, people are still going to come to this country.

Unless we make this country as unattractive as the place from which they are fleeing, people are always going to come. Harsh deterrence does not stop the boats and does not stop the drownings. We saw 353 people die when the SIEVX met its tragic fate, and that was when the Pacific solution and the John Howard government arrangements were in full swing. Unless we make Australia as bad as the Taliban has made Afghanistan, people are going to continue to come here because we are a better bet, and we are a democracy. This is why, when we had the opportunity to debate this matter recently in this place, I and many others came away with a heavy heart. We had a real opportunity not to pander to the worst in us in this country but to talk to the best in us. We could have taken the opportunity to have a national debate about how to deal with this complex and global problem. Anyone who thinks there is a simple solution to this is not paying attention. It involves actions here, it involves actions in countries where there are camps, it involves actions in the transit countries and it involves taking actions in the source countries.

What we could have done was have a debate free from the hysteria about the small number of people, comparatively speaking, who are coming to this country by boat, and we could have asked what would be a genuine regional solution that does not involve us contracting ourselves out of the obligations in the refugee convention. This is the convention that we signed up to voluntarily, and the High Court said that what the government was trying to do was not consistent with those obligations we signed up to, so we were at a fork in the road. We could have then come up with a set of solutions that was consistent, or we could have tried to contract out and change the law. That is ultimately what happened. Instead, we could have come out of it with a new comprehensive regional plan of action, along the lines that I have just outlined and along the lines that almost all of the experts recommended to the Houston committee.
But, instead of going back to Fraser, Labor has taken us back to Howard—and we in this country have missed a real opportunity to repeat the successes of the years after the Vietnam War.

It is instructive to remember what we did then. Yes, it was a different geopolitical situation and, yes, it was a different point in history, but in the decade after the Vietnam War we took in between 90,000 and 100,000 refugees and their families. We said, 'We see these people are fleeing and coming here by boat—let's not have that situation; let's have a comprehensive regional plan of action.' We should not gild the lily and pretend that that plan was some kind of ideal solution—it wasn't. It was harsh and there were debates about it at the time. But what we said was that we, as a developed country in this region, had the capacity to bear a bigger share of this regional and global burden—and so we took people in. I think that, if you asked anyone in this country now, they would say that approach was a success. If we had spoken to that—if we had spoken to the fact that everyone in this country has someone in their family, in their street or in their workplace who came here as a refugee, or whose parents came here as a refugee, and who they think is a good person—we could have gone down that road again. But we have not done so. Instead, we have gone back to the Howard era.

The Howard era involved mandatory indefinite detention. As a reminder of what that entails, it is worth referring to an Amnesty International report in which they tell us what happened the last time we had offshore processing on Manus. The report says:

The ongoing suffering of asylum seekers is illustrated by the case of an Iraqi Christian who was detained on Manus Island between October 2001 and July 2003 under the “Pacific Solution”.

In May 2002, after suffering from depression, he was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder. After another 10 months on Manus, he was transferred to Baxter detention centre in South Australia for medical review. His condition worsened, and in November 2003, still in detention in Baxter, he attempted to commit suicide by ingesting glass fragments from a broken fluorescent tube and by attempting to electrocute himself.

After six months in Australia, this man would have been able to appeal his asylum application through the Refugee Review Tribunal (RRT). But on 21 January 2004, just eight days short of the six month deadline, he was handcuffed, forcibly removed from Baxter and sent to Nauru.

Eventually, the detainee was recognised as a refugee and was resettled in Sweden.

But that resettlement came only after he had first attempted to take his own life. That is what indefinite mandatory detention does to people. The tragedy is: we do not need to do it but we are about to do it again.

As I have made clear, I do not support this motion. But it is also clear that it is going to get up because the government and the coalition will vote together. Given that it is going to get up and given everything we know about mandatory detention, there needs to be a time limit on how long someone will spend on Manus. The experts have told us that, if you keep someone longer than a year, you are almost certain to do harm to their mental health and to their wellbeing. For that reason, I have what I consider a very reasonable amendment to propose. It is one that anyone who is interested in making sure we preserve the mental health of refugees—even if you are in favour of the government's proposed solution—should support.

I move:

That the following words be added to the motion: "and calls on the government to put in place a 12 month time limit on immigration detention in Papua New Guinea."
There can be no basis for opposing this amendment if what we are concerned about is the protection of life and the protection of refugees. As I said, we were told at the start that that is the reason we need these laws—that we are concerned about people's lives. If that is right, we should be just as concerned about someone who takes their own life in a detention centre as we are about someone who drowns at sea. That means taking all reasonable steps to protect the mental health of refugees and that means putting a 12-month time limit on their detention.

If this amendment is not supported, it demonstrates that the so-called no-advantage principle is really about indefinite detention and detention for longer than a year. That is something a spotlight needs to be shone upon. I was talking earlier about camps where you can wait five or six years. If you were to take the mathematical average of how long people spend in Malaysian camps—given that a lot of people spend their whole lives there—you would, on one calculation, get 76 years. So, if the government is not going to support this amendment, a question that has to be answered is: just how long can someone stay on Manus Island or Nauru? If the limit is not 12 months, what is it? Is it two years? Is it three years? Is it five years? Is it 10 years? Are we being asked to again sign off on indefinite mandatory detention? Are we saying to people, 'You are now going to go to Nauru or PNG to spend an indefinite amount of time in detention'? We know what that will do to people.

We need to remember that the UNHCR has refused to be involved in offshore processing on PNG, just as it has refused to be involved with offshore processing on Nauru. PNG is not even a full signatory to the refugee convention. The government of Papua New Guinea acceded to the 1951 refugee convention and its 1967 protocol back in 1986—but with reservations relating to refugees' rights in the areas of employment, housing, education, freedom of movement, non-penalisation of refugees unlawfully present, expulsion and access to naturalisation. All seven reservations are still applicable.

We know that in PNG there are no facilities that can house people safely. We know that they were still importing asbestos as a building material up until July 2010, that it is in a dengue fever and malaria zone and that prominent PNG politicians say they are going to take legal action against this detention centre because it contravenes PNG law.

For all of those reasons, I do hope that this very reasonable amendment will find support. If it does not, I would invite members from the government side to tell us in what is left of this debate, before the motion is passed by this House, for just how long it is okay to keep someone in mandatory detention.

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

Ms GAMBARO (Brisbane): The coalition endorse the designation of PNG—specifically, Manus Island—as a regional processing country. Since 2007, 26,347 people have arrived on 446 boats. This government's immigration policy has more twists and turns than a track at the grand prix, and the coalition's position has been consistent for over a decade. We support the reopening of Manus because PNG signed the refugee convention, so there are legally binding protections in place for people who are being sent there.

It was the coalition who made sure that human rights were protected in the Migration Act under section 198A for those who are
and content. The deal with PNG, according to the documentation the government have provided, is open-ended and does not require a five-for-one people swap as in the ridiculous deal in their failed Malaysian agreement. The deal also provides support for a whole number of age cohorts and for families, and makes sure that educational opportunities are provided. But, as usual, the government have been dragged kicking and screaming every step of the way.

And what did they do when they again faced the situation of a huge number of boats arriving? There was a boat arriving almost every day, under the circumstances. They had to be dragged kicking and screaming to reopen Nauru, and even then they outsourced their decision to the Houston panel. They could not make a decision themselves; they had to give it to the Expert Panel on Asylum Seekers. While the panel did the very best that they could, Australia is becoming known as a country that is turning its Navy into a taxi service. We are picking them up from Indonesian search and rescue.

People smugglers have thrived under this government. They have made more money than they have ever made in their entire history under this government's swapping and changing of policies. Hundreds of people have died at sea, including women and children, but the government have steadfastly refused to introduce the full range of measures we advocated, including temporary protection visas and turning the boats back. You cannot just pick and choose; you have to introduce the whole suite of measures or it will not work. We have seen the result in the number of boats that keep arriving.

This has been a very costly exercise for the government. Their immigration expenditure has blown out to $4.9 billion as a result of the Houston report. Settlement
will cost about $1.9 billion, because every time there is a boat arrival it costs another $50,000 to settle people. And it is not just the financial costs that are absolutely exorbitant; there is also the terrible humanitarian cost in the loss of lives at sea.

There are at least 8,100 people who have been waiting offshore in camps, in desperate circumstances. I have been to those camps. I have been to the Thai-Burma border with Chin and Karen people. I have seen them waiting patiently in camps. There are 140,000 people on the Thai-Burma border all being interviewed by the UNHCR and all wanting to come to Australia as genuine refugees. It is heartbreaking to see the people in these camps who genuinely want to come to this country and are doing all that they can. They simply do not have the money to pay people smugglers.

We have one of the best humanitarian immigration programs in the world. The number of humanitarian program places is capped at 13,750. Every boatload of people coming in illegally deprives the people in those offshore camps of the opportunity to come to Australia through acceptance under our refugee and humanitarian program.

I had the wonderful privilege of attending Access Community Services’ 10 years of settlement celebration. Access have been resettling refugee and humanitarian entrants for 10 years and doing it very well. I heard some heartrending stories about people who had been in camps for 20 years. I heard stories of African women who had been in camps for several years finally being allowed to come to Australia. I heard of one woman’s exaltation when she was accepted, with her two children, being greeted at the airport by the caseworker, being taken to her home, being given essential equipment—saucepans, bedding—all of the things to help them start life in Australia. That is how we should be welcoming people to this country through the United Nations refugee program. Instead, we are depriving genuine refugees an opportunity to come to Australia—the ones who cannot afford to pay people smugglers, the ones who are in camps, the ones who have been in camps and had to raise families in camps. It is heartbreaking to hear their stories.

We do things very well in this country—settlement under the humanitarian program. We have been doing it a very long time and we should be able to accept many more people under the humanitarian program from offshore. As people are languishing in camps in many places around the world, we are facing a situation where illegal boats arrive and the only people who are benefiting are people smugglers. The coalition has always had a strong border protection policy, and an orderly immigration system is essential to safeguard the integrity of the humanitarian refugee program. Per capita, we run the most generous settlement program in the world. It is not just me saying this. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was here last year and commended Australia on the great work we do. Less than one per cent of the world’s 10 million refugees will be resettled in any one year. We believe you have to steadfastly protect the integrity of the program. We should be in a position to decide who will get the rare chance of resettlement.

If elected to govern, the coalition will restore the full suite of proven policies, including offshore processing in Nauru, temporary protection visas and turning boats back where the circumstances permit. We have to restore the integrity of our immigration program. We have to make sure that we accept wonderful refugees like Godfrey who has gone through the Access program. Godfrey has a Bachelor of Arts in Business Accounting and is studying for his
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MBA. He and his partner, Julie, have a 20-month old girl. James Ladu, who is studying theology at the Australian Catholic University in Brisbane, is going to be ordained to be a priest in June next year. John, married with four children, has a Bachelor of Information Technology, is working in the disability sector and lives in Toowoomba. Daniel Zingifauboro's is the most amazing story I heard at Access the other day. Daniel trained to be a lawyer in this country and has chosen to be a politician. I know not many people choose to be a politician. He also studied to be a lawyer. He has gone back to South Sudan where he is going to take up the role as Minister of Local Government and Law Enforcement. So here are some great success stories of people who have come through the refugee and humanitarian program. Not only are they making a huge difference to Australia but some of them have gone back to their own country to restore law and order and to restore democracy.

The number of boats will keep coming unless the full suite of measures is restored. Last week, six times the number of people turned up on boats than those who were sent by Labor to Nauru. Overwhelmingly the government's attempt at offshore processing is getting worse. We have a huge number of boats continuing to arrive. Many countries are represented at the moment among the offshore arrivals—Sri Lanka, Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan—and the number of people who have already been sent to Nauru totals 211. Boats will keep arriving unless something is done to restore the suite of measures from when we were in government and the member for Berowra was immigration minister. We support the designation today to make Manus Island a processing centre.

Mr RANDALL (Canning) (18:57): I rise to speak on the motion to approve the instrument of designation of the Independent State of Papua New Guinea to be a regional processing centre. As our previous speakers have said, we agree with the assignment which this motion deals with in terms of Manus Island. This is part of the select committee report and it is only sensible, because it was our policy, that we agree. I want to bring to the attention of this House one of the issues which Minister Clare, who was previously at the table, raised in his speech, which was that the full suite of measures are not needed. He talked about not being able to turn boats back. This government continually talks about not being able to turn boats back.

Recently I have been fortunate enough to have spent some time on my study leave in Sri Lanka examining some of these issues. A report on the Sri Lankan website states:

Australian MP visits SLN Dockyard.
Australian Member of Parliament, Hon. Don Randall visited the SLN Naval Dockyard in Trincomalee on 30th September 2012. He was warmly welcomed by the Deputy Commander Eastern Naval Area, Commodore PH de Silva. The Deputy Eastern Naval Area Commander briefed the visiting Australian MP on the current situation and the port facilities available at Trincomalee Harbour. The MP took the opportunity to look into the matters of persons who are illegally bound for Australia and to obtain first hand information regarding the preventive measures the Navy is implementing.

Also along with Commodore de Silva was Captain Sujeewa Seneviratne and Captain Rohan Lelwala. They accompanied me on my visit to Trincomalee Harbour. Trincomalee is interesting and necessary to this debate because Trincomalee is one of the best natural deepwater harbours in the world and from there many people leave by boat bound for Australia. Trincomalee Harbour services the economic zone of Sri Lanka, an area of some 118,000 square kilometres, so it is not an insignificant amount of land.
The briefing that I received from the navy is quite comprehensive and took a considerable amount of time to prepare. I will not go into the full detail of it, but I will mention some of the issues. They have given me details of boats engaged in human smuggling that were arrested by the navy in the financial year from July 2012 till now. The number of boats is 52 and the number of people involved is 2,279. Why this is so crucial to the debate is that the Sri Lankan navy are not only doing something about stopping people leaving but turning them back when they get to sea. They are not allowing them to go to Australia if they can detect them. The boats are very hard to detect. They are generally wooden and they go out to sea for some miles, pretending they are going fishing. They have the nets and the fishing hooks on board. I went over these boats and saw how they leave out of the sight of radar and the navy. They are then fed by smaller boats with their tragic human cargo.

This briefing is so comprehensive that it gives a huge amount of detail about each boat. Here are some of the details about human-smuggling activities from 10 July 2012 to 30 September in this area. I know I will not be allowed to table this, so I will just show it to you, Mr Deputy Speaker Adams. This is the sort of information that was given to me. This is a picture of a boat and the people that were taken back from the boat after it was turned around. The information is broken down into the date and the area where the boats were turned around, the details of the trawler and the details of the emigrants, as they call them, and their ethnic origin. For example, the first boat, on 10 July 2012, was called the Sinhale 07. It carried 37 male Tamils, two female Tamils, one of whom was pregnant, two children and two Muslims. Despite what a lot of people think, it is not just Tamils who are leaving Sri Lanka; there are Muslims and there are Sinhalese. The area of Trincomalee actually has a 41 per cent population of Muslims.

I will not go through the details of all these boats. I would love to table this document, but it would not be permitted, I suspect. I will just pull out the details and pictures of a few boats as we go through. For example, on the Kavindi, on 20 August this year, off Pigeon Island, there were eight Sinhalese, along with 26 male Tamils, one female Tamil and four children. There were a total of 39 on that boat. On the Prasansanee Duwa, there were six Sinhalese, 34 male Tamils, one female Tamil and three Muslims. I could go through the details of all these boats, but I have not got time. I want to go to the most recent, the ABI, which was intercepted on 29 September, the night before I arrived. There were 36 people on that boat—seven Sinhalese, 25 male Tamils, four female Tamils, seven children and one Muslim male.

I was taken over these boats, and the tragedy is that most of them are unseaworthy. They are coastal shipping boats. They are not designed to go the massive distance to Cocos Island or Christmas Island. While I was in the harbour, the boat in this picture was severely listing. The navy told me that after two days at sea, in any sort of seas, that boat would have sunk and the entire tragic cargo would have been lost. This is the tragedy of this whole situation.

These boats are leaving regularly but the Sri Lankan navy is finding them and bringing them back. Out of the whole cohort, there were 2,135 males, 66 females and 78 children. There were 1,846 Tamils, 124 Muslims, 307 Sinhalese and two Indians. They came from all over Sri Lanka. There were 27 boats in the harbour which had been apprehended by the Sri Lankan navy. As I
said, I was taken over the boats and the conditions were inhumane—one toilet for all the people on board. I can show you the picture, Mr Deputy Speaker. This toilet is a bit of plywood perched over the edge of the boat—for males, females and children. It is just unbelievable, if you want to talk about humanitarian considerations.

The navy identified the people smugglers in the briefing they gave me and described how they have brought them back and dealt with them. What the people smugglers do is organise a point of assembly, a point of departure to the final destination, and organise the logistics and financial transactions. The navy, once they arrest them and bring them back, provide the people with food and water. They escort the craft to shore, give the people medical check-ups, look after the children, provide separate washing facilities for the women and interview the personnel. They hand the personnel to the CID. The CID forward the people who are caught to the courts, and they keep the boats in safe anchorage until there is a court ruling. The personnel are handed over to the CID and not to the police because there is a separate maritime unit available to the CID on that base to conduct inquiries into these activities. This unit maintains databases on these activities. The unit has direct links with the Australian Federal Police.

Let us find out what they do when they are caught. Crew members or facilitators receive a jail term of one year or less. Organisers get the same—one year or less. The passengers, as they are called, are fined between 5,000 and 10,000 rupee, which is something like $10. Why would you only fine them that amount? It is because they are very poor people generally.

Why do they undertake this journey? The financial prospects—they are economic migrants—are a pull factor to Australia; they want to join the rest of their family; or they have had a briefing from personnel already in Australia about why they should undertake the journey and misinformation by interested parties for their advantage—in other words, the Tamil diaspora organisations in Australia. They are going now because they are trying to miss the monsoon. They believe that, if they can get to Australia, the long legal procedures involved in processing asylum seeker claims in Australia are to their advantage, and they know about the success rate once you get to Australia: if you can get to Australia, you get to stay there.

In the last few minutes of my speech I want to talk about the fact that I was able to go and meet those last 36 people in the gym on the navy base. There was a young Tamil gentleman there who spoke perfect English, so he was able to interpret for me to the whole range of people on that base who were being detained from the night before. Interestingly, when I spoke to all of them with the interpreter, they all had a different story to tell. One had been a public servant and had resigned from his job. One had been a local fisherman. He was Sinhalese, a young man with a young wife and a five-week-old baby being breastfed as we were talking. There were a whole range of people.

I want to make this point: when I was speaking to them, not one of them said to me that they were going for humanitarian reasons. I want to repeat that: not one of them said that they were taking this journey for humanitarian reasons; they all said that they were going because their job prospects in Australia were better. The fisherman said that the job prospects in Australia were better. The public servant said that his job prospects in Australia were better. I said to them, ‘Why are you doing this, because you will not get a visa?’ Several of them had
disabilities like withered arms and dwarfism. I said, 'You won't get a visa.' The fisherman broke down and cried because he suddenly realised that he had been lied to by the people smugglers. They had sold their houses to take this journey. It is a US$2,000 deposit and the balance when you get to Australia.

The Sri Lanka navy are doing their job. They are turning the boats back at sea, and they are making sure that when the people get back they are rehabilitated. How do I know this? I went to Kilinochchi and met with the IOM, the International Organization for Migration. They said that they receive these people and they help resettle them, and there are no threats of torture or abuse, as is claimed in Australia by those who want to make mischief in this area. I spoke to the UNHCR in Kilinochchi, and they said the same thing. They are helping resettle the people who come back by boat, and they are helped by the Sri Lankan government. There are no humanitarian issues on the part of those people leaving and there are no human rights issues for the people who return to Sri Lanka by boat.

This is a tragic trade by, in many cases, the rump of the LTTE, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, essentially, trying to re-establish a power base here in Australia. This is a cruel trade in vulnerable people who do not know any better, and they are being totally misled. As I went further through the north of Sri Lanka to Jaffna, I had people saying to me: 'Oh, you're Australian. I'm going to Australia.' I said, 'Why are you going to Australia?' 'Well, I can get a job there,' said the waiter in the restaurant in Jaffna. 'What would make you think that you would get a visa when you got to Australia because you're a waiter?' 'Oh, I'm told that once you get to Australia you can get a visa and you can earn so much money.' That is the situation, and that is why they are coming. So many people were telling me wherever I went in the north, particularly amongst the Tamil population, that they intended to come to Australia by boat because they could get jobs. But I repeat: not one told me that they were coming for humanitarian reasons.

So, when we talk about this evil trade in human smuggling, we are not talking about the fact that—

Honourable members interjecting—

Mr RANDALL: The minister missed out Sri Lanka? He mentioned it three times. Yes, Indonesia could do more. Unlike Sri Lanka, Indonesia does not try and turn back boats in its economic zone. Sri Lanka does, and Australia could do the same. We are setting a terrible precedent in acquiescing to a country like Indonesia which is not very interested in helping us to turn around and stop this evil trade in humanity. I congratulate the Sri Lankan government on the great work that they are doing. We should be putting more resources into helping them stop people coming in this way to Australia, which will cost many of them their lives.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. DGH Adams): The question was that the motion be agreed to. To that motion an amendment was moved by the member for Melbourne. I will put the amendment question first. There being more than one voice calling for a division, in accordance with standing order 133(b) the division is deferred until 8 pm. Debate adjourned.

BUSINESS
Rearrangement

Ms PLIBERSEK (Sydney—Minister for Health) (19:14): by leave—I move:

That so much of the standing and sessional orders be suspended as would prevent the order of the day, private Members’ business, relating to the disallowance of the Health Insurance (Dental
services) Amendment Determination 2012 (No. 1), dated third of September 2012, made under subsection 3C (1) of the Health Insurance Act 1973, being called on immediately.

Question agreed to.

MOTIONS

Health Insurance (Dental services) Amendment Determination 2012 (No. 1) Disallowance

Debate resumed on the motion:

That the Health Insurance (Dental services) Amendment Determination 2012 (No. 1), dated third of September 2012, made under subsection 3C(1) of the Health Insurance Act 1973, be disallowed.

Mr OAKESHOTT (Lyne) (19:15): I rise to put on record my view on the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme and to acknowledge the large amount of correspondence I have received about it. The CDDS funds private oral health treatments for those with a chronic, non-dental medical condition. The reasons given for the closure of the CDDS are that the scheme is not means tested and that costs have blown out. Yet many people in need of dental treatment remain on long public dental waiting lists. The government is instead proposing a new, Medicare style scheme which includes $2.7 billion for about 3.4 million eligible children, through private dentists; $1.3 billion for pensioners and concession card holders and those with special needs, through the public dental system; and $225 million to expand the dental workforce and dental chairs in areas of need, including regional, rural and remote areas.

Public dentistry is a state-run service available to pensioners, concession card holders and special needs groups. In New South Wales, this includes a voucher scheme allowing for treatment of particular needs and priorities, including chronic medical conditions, by private dentists. A national partnership agreement exists between the Commonwealth and the state to reduce public dental waiting lists. My main concerns to date on the changes being proposed are that the state-run public dental service, particularly in my state of New South Wales, has pressures that need to be relieved rather than added to by any changes and that pensioners, concession card holders and special needs groups receiving treatment under the current scheme be given a clear transition path to public or private dental treatment.

I continue to encourage governments—state and federal—to address the very long waiting lists in dental health, particularly in poorer communities such as those on the mid-north coast of New South Wales. My decision to support the replacement of the CDDS with this new Medicare style scheme is based on a judgement about what serves the most people in the quickest time in the most efficient way. I recognise that organisations such as the Australian Dental Association NSW and the Council of Social Service of New South Wales support these changes and that that is important. In my deliberations I have had several discussions with the Minister for Health and have received several important assurances. The most important of these is that there will be no gap between the closure of the CDDS and the flow of funds from the government reforms. That is important because, in a lot of the correspondence I have received, there is a myth that there will in some cases be a gap of over 18 months.

The $345 million for the blitz on public dental waiting lists announced in the May budget must be made available to state and territory public dental systems as soon as they sign up to the new arrangement, and the relevant national partnership agreement must have a strong focus on improving access to
public dental services for Indigenous patients, patients with major problems and patients from rural areas. The states must be able to use the funds to bring in private dentists to expand their workforce capacity in areas where they do not have a dentist, and this has been discussed with the minister. It is also necessary to recognise the role of Aboriginal health services, at least one of which is in my electorate, in providing direct dental services to the community. They need to be part of the ongoing delivery of subsidised dental services.

Debate adjourned.

PARLIAMENTARY OFFICE HOLDERS

Speaker

Mr SLIPPER (Fisher—Speaker) (19:19): I would like to take this opportunity to thank the House this afternoon for its continued support and for the great privilege of serving as the 27th Speaker of the House of Representatives. I thank particularly those honourable members who spoke in support of me. I appreciated the references to the friendships I have enjoyed with members across the spectrum over many years. It is indeed a great privilege to serve in this place, particularly as Speaker.

Despite the vote of the House in support of my continuation in office, I wish to advise that with great sadness I have decided that I should not continue as your Speaker. Accordingly, I am having arrangements made to tender my resignation to Her Excellency the Governor-General.

As honourable members know, I was very honoured to have been chosen unanimously by the House as its Speaker. I have believed deeply in the importance of the House and our constitutional, political and wider national life. Believing so strongly in the role of the House, I was determined to do my part to improve its operation, and I suspect that the Leader of the House and the Manager of Opposition Business would concede my endeavours in that area. I am most grateful for the support of honourable members from all sides for my endeavours in this regard. I refer, for example, to the changes in relation to both questions and answers; to the efforts to introduce greater civility into the House; and, of course, to the long-awaited renaming of the Federation Chamber. I wanted to expand the role of supplementary questions. I also wanted to turn our House into being like the House of Commons, where we had more interactivity and more spontaneity and where the government of the day—whoever was in government—was in fact held accountable to the people of Australia.

I regret that recent proceedings have prevented me from continuing to pursue these reforms. I believe so strongly in the importance and the role of the House of Representatives in Australia that it is far more important than my own future or my own continuation as Speaker. Nevertheless, I am confident that, because so many members want the House to continue to improve, the cause of reform will be continued.

In particular I would like to thank Madam Deputy Speaker, the honourable member for Chisholm—I am searching for her in the chamber because I suspect that the moment of greatness is about to descend upon her shoulders—who has worked so diligently as Deputy Speaker in the recent difficult circumstances. She has been loyal. She has not sought to have her own position advanced. She has done everything that a Deputy Speaker should do; in fact, she has done more. I want to thank her for her personal friendship and personal support over the last six months. No-one would have expected, Madam Deputy Speaker, that you would have had thrust upon you the
responsibilities that have been thrust upon you in your capacity. I think we should all publicly thank you for the role that you have played.

Honourable members: Hear, hear!

The SPEAKER: I would also like to thank Mr Second Deputy Speaker, the honourable member for Maranoa—I am sure he is here somewhere—who is a long-time friend. I am sure all of us, particularly those on my right, would join me in congratulating him on staring down the challenge from Senator Barnaby Joyce.

I would like to express my appreciation to all members of the Speaker's panel for the additional work they have done in recent months. I think it is regrettable that it was necessary to draw the entire panel from the government party, particularly when, following the agreement after the last election, it was obvious that the Speaker, the Deputy Speaker or the Second Deputy Speaker would take the chair for divisions. I think that is unfortunate. I hope, following my departure from the speakership, that the opposition will take up the longstanding invitation to participate in being part of the Speaker's panel. Having said that, I do not want any of my Speaker's panel to be dismissed, because I think they have done a great job. I personally want to publicly thank them for the role they have played and for the additional work they have carried out because of the difficult circumstances of the recent six months.

I would also like to thank the staff of my office, who have worked so hard, particularly in recent months. I want to express publicly my thanks to the staff of the parliamentary departments—in particular, to the Clerk, who is here, the Deputy Clerk and the Serjeant-at-Arms. I really have enjoyed working with them and serving as their political head and representative. I would also like to thank my colleague Mr President, of the Senate, for our good working relationship.

I do believe that it is important for parliament to engage with the diplomatic community and, as Speaker, I have endeavoured to interact with representatives of other countries to the best of my ability. In fact, I have tried to adopt the practice of former Deputy Prime Minister Tim Fischer. Tim used to go to diplomatic events; he would drop in for two minutes. They called him 'two minutes Tim'. I spoke to Stephen Brady, who is the Official Secretary to the Governor-General, and said, 'I'm sure the ambassadors of the home countries wrote back to their government saying that the Deputy Prime Minister dropped in for two minutes.' He said, 'No, Mr Speaker, they would have written back to their home countries saying that the Deputy Prime Minister attended a function,' which of course was a substantial difference. As Speaker I have endeavoured to follow Tim Fischer's example.

I also want to say what a great privilege it has been to serve as the Speaker of this place. As part of that role, given the paradigm—I hate that word; in fact, I abolished it 12 months ago, so I do not know why I used it now; maybe I am a bit overcome with emotion—of the new parliament, I want to say how great it has been to have chaired the Selection Committee. The Selection Committee in this hung parliament has helped to make sure that parliament works as it should, where the government is accountable to private members. We have more votes now on the issues put forward by private members. I think that is the way the people of Australia want this parliament to operate.

Madam Prime Minister, I just want to say to you that being chairman of the House of
Representatives Standing Committee on Appropriations and Administration at a very important time has been a great honour to me. And I want to thank you for the fact that you have exempted the parliament from some of the unrealistic cuts that some people suggested should be imposed on this parliament. Our parliament is the reservoir of Australian democracy. Thank you, Prime Minister, for agreeing that, as a parliament, we ought to at least have reasonable funds to be able to operate to represent the people of this nation.

Despite my belief that the reforms I had initiated were gaining support, and my hope that those reforms would extend beyond the term of this hung parliament, I had hoped that much more would be done. When I discovered that a certain course of action was underway towards the end of April this year, which was a huge shock to me, what really upset me was the fact that it meant that what I wanted to achieve, the greater amount I wanted to achieve, was under threat.

Having said that, putting all that aside, I do discern from both sides of the House that people are listening to the Australian people and people liked the changes that were happening in the House. I hope that, despite the controversy which has arisen, we will see those changes continue to be made. It is, however, in the interests of the parliament that I choose voluntarily to stand down at this time. I do thank the House for its support this afternoon. I listened very carefully to the debate. I thank those who supported me. I do understand the arguments of those who argued against me. The Leader of the Opposition has been a friend of mine for a very long time. He came to my wedding. When he was overlooked, we sat and talked through the difficulties. I do not hold anything against the Leader of the Opposition, who I think is a person of fine character, and. I think we are singularly privileged to have as Prime Minister a lady of amazing stamina. I leave this position without rancour, with a great deal of sadness and, more importantly, with a great deal of regret, because I believe that, given the controversy which has occurred in recent times, it is in the interests of the parliament that I should take the course of action that I have personally chosen to take.

I expected this to be a two-minute speech, and I do apologise if I have taken more time than was expected, but I think that, across the political spectrum, the reality is that it is not sufficient that I should reject completely the claims that have been made against me. What is really scary is that those sorts of complaints can be made against any of us, and all of us would be in the same position. However, one has to deal with reality and what is not necessarily ideal. The circumstances make it clear to me that I should put the interests of the House before my own personal interests as Speaker. Whilst others have put partisan political interests before the standing of this parliament, I respect this parliament. I have been a member since 1984, with a gap between 1987 and 1993—owing to the lack of gratitude of my then constituents!—when I returned to legal practice. Having said that, it is a wonderful privilege to serve in the parliament, and of course the interests of the parliament are seriously more important than the interests of any of us. I respect this parliament too much not to put aside my personal interests. I do look forward to being vindicated of the false claims made against me.

Finally, like so many other honourable members I value the support of my family and friends. The recent circumstances have created incredible difficulty for them. In particular, I express my heartfelt thanks for the loyalty and support from my wife Inge; my children, Nick and Alex; my parents,
who are now 87 and 85; my former wife, Lyn, who is the mother of my son and daughter; and also my brothers and my extended family. I suppose at this stage of my career I am a bit beyond trying to make a good impression in a speech, so I am talking from the heart—as I think all of us do most of the time.

It has been a wonderful experience and a wonderful privilege to serve as Speaker. I thank my colleagues on both sides, even those who did not want me to accept this position, for their friendship, either present or in the past. I can look at some people who are possibly past friends. I hold no rancour. Perhaps once I have left the often solitary office of Speaker I will get to know them even better as the independent member for Fisher. I do thank honourable members for their indulgence and I invite Madam Deputy Speaker to retake the chair.

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (19:34): I think all of us in this parliament could see the emotional cost and emotional toll that the member for Fisher has obviously been through in coming to the decision that he has announced tonight. Whatever else people may want to say about the member for Fisher, I think at a human level each of us would wish the best for him and his family at what is clearly a distressing and very pressurised time. I think the words he spoke about his family members—his wife, his children, his former wife, his extended family—will stay with us for a long time and we would all recognise that there is a group of human beings well beyond this place who are feeling some pain and distress tonight.

Having said that, appropriate procedural arrangements will clearly now be made for the election of a new Speaker, and the member for Fisher will resume his role of representing his constituents in the House of Representatives.

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (19:36): While it is obvious from the events of earlier today that members on this side of the House and at least one crossbencher did not want the Speaker to continue in his role, tonight I have to say that we all feel for him as a human being. He has obviously been through a very difficult period. So we do feel for him as a human being, while we think that he has done the right and honourable thing by resigning from his high office tonight. The member for Fisher has shown that, in this important respect, he has good judgement.

MOTIONS

Health Insurance (Dental services) Amendment Determination 2012 (No. 1) Disallowance

Debate resumed.

Mr DUTTON (Dickson) (19:37): In summation I want to thank all of those who have contributed to what is an incredibly important debate on the Health Insurance (Dental services) Amendment Determination 2012. There has been a lot of heartfelt contribution, particularly from those members on this side of the House, for Australians who, over the next 14 months, will miss out on important dental care because this government, for its own political purposes, has sought to close down what has been a very successful dental scheme.

The reality is that 80 per cent of those people who accessed the Medicare Chronic Disease Dental Scheme were recipients of some sort of benefit that enabled them to be a concession cardholder. So, far from the government’s claims that the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme was somehow the playground of the rich, it really has come to pass—and the evidence supports this—that
this scheme has been incredibly successful, particularly for people on low incomes. The most vulnerable in our society, those who are disabled or suffering from a chronic disease, will be those who feel the harshest blow from this government's cruel act of disposing of the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme without having in its place anything until, in some cases, July 2014. I think that, when most Australians look at the evidence that is before them, they will realise that this is a government that has yet again mucked up another area of public policy.

This government is well known for the waste and hypocrisy regarding the school halls program, for the way in which it was not able to implement the computers in schools program and for the way in which it plundered billions of taxpayers' dollars on schemes that just could not be properly implemented. This is the latest example of the government's incompetence.

It needs to be pointed out to the Australian public that this is a government that does not know its own way, a government that has hung people out to dry. Some people who have contacted us during this debate are part way through a chemotherapy program. They have received part of their dental plan treatment, yet this government has cut those people off at the knees. This is the most cruel blow that a government could apply. This Minister for Health will be remembered as the minister who ripped a billion dollars out of dental health and left people with chronic diseases, some of whom will not have any relief for their dental pain over the next 14 months, to languish on waiting lists. This government has abandoned those people, with no good reason.

The only reason that the government have moved on the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme is that Tony Abbott was the author of the scheme. They did not move because it was an unsuccessful scheme, they did not move because this was a scheme that did not help a million people; they moved because Tony Abbott was the author and creator of what has been an incredibly successful scheme. They also moved because they want to achieve a surplus over the period 2012-13. Why haven't they got money in the bank? They have run the government and this country into billions of dollars worth of debt because of the money they have squandered over the last five years. That has put them in a position which, surely, the Minister for Health herself cannot even accept—that is, abandoning, at their hour of need, those people with chronic diseases.

The people of Tasmania, for argument's sake—and I see the member for Braddon is here in the chamber—are missing out on dental services because of this cruel cut. The people of Tasmania, just like others around the country, will miss out on this scheme which has been of incredible benefit to people who are suffering in pain. When they were able to get a referral from their GP to their dentist, they were able to get some relief in a way that they had not been able to get in the past. And, when it is all distilled, that is the cruellest, harshest outcome in this matter.

Sure, this is a government that has good intent when it comes to health policy, but it cannot deliver on the most basic of promises. Even in the design of its new scheme, which does not start until July 2014 in its entirety, it will not provide relief to all of those who received assistance and access under the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme. That is an important fact to remember: people are not going to receive the sort of assistance and access that they received under the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme. There will not be the access or the choice that those people have had since 2007, when Tony Abbott
decided to make this massive investment in dental health.

At the next election I think that those people, their voices not having been heard by the government in this debate, need to cast their judgement on whether closing down the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme was the right decision. I say to those parents with ill or sick children, those parents who have children part way through a dental treatment plan: consider how you vote at the next election, because that is the only message that this government and these Independents will hear. I know that we have had some crocodile tears from, in particular, the member for Lyne on this issue, but today he showed his true colours in part of this debate when he said that he would support the dreadful decision of this hopeless government. If anybody in the electorate of Lyne needed reminding that the member for Lyne is simply a patsy of the Labor government, then they need to look no further than his contribution to this debate. It was an appalling position to take. He offered some hope, some promise, to those people who promised the member for Lyne that they would send their details through—and they did—yet their voices were not heard. The member for Lyne should stand condemned, as I think members on the other side of this parliament should stand condemned, for abandoning those constituents who contacted them over the last couple of weeks. Those constituents know that they have been hung out to dry by a bad government and by Independents who are happy to prop up a bad government. This is a bad government not just in other areas but, importantly, in the area of health.

One of the first responsibilities of the Minister for Health is to try to provide support to sick patients in this country, and yet this minister has walked away from those patients. Those patients on concession cards who have accessed great support under the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme, and those similar to them, will not receive any support whatsoever over the next 14 months. Those patients who thought there was some light at the end of their pain tunnel are now in a position where they will not receive that support. This minister will have a lot to answer for when she travels around the country and people ask her the question, 'Why is it, Minister, that you closed down this scheme which has been of such assistance to so many Australians?'

When you look at the scheme that the government are proposing—the people who have trumpeted this new scheme in particular are the Greens, who have been co-architects of it—and you drill down into what this scheme means, the government are not going to be able to provide the services that are being promised at the moment. That is abundantly clear to all of the independent minds that look to this space. Those people who have been able to objectively assess what it is the government are proposing know that the government either will not be in power in 2014, which is why it has been so poorly designed presumably, or clearly have just provided a political fix to a promise that they made to the Greens at the time of the last election that they would devise some scheme, however corrupt and however inefficient that scheme might be. They are now delivering on that promise to the Australian Greens with scant regard for dental patients around the country.

I think the design of the scheme that the government is proposing to replace the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme is so deficient and negligent in its first charge that people will look back on it as one of the government's worst decisions. Yes, of course we support extra investment in dental. Of course we want to see more services conducted. That is why Tony Abbott created
the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme in the first place. It was because he saw patients who were desperately in need of dental work and he championed what has been a very, very successful program.

Another point that needs to be made in the summation of this debate is that the coalition has been willing to discuss and negotiate over the last four years with this government ways in which changes could be made to make the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme more sustainable or more applicable to a wider audience who are deserving of support. Yet this government entered no such negotiation or debate in good faith. This government was determined not to modify or correct a program that it thought had some faults.

They were determined for their own crass political purposes to close the scheme down not because they had in mind the benefits that were being delivered to patients but because they wanted to try to embarrass Tony Abbott or to close down his scheme so that in time they could claim to be the architects of this new scheme that they proposed in its place. I think that the government stand condemned for that very reason. The reality is that the government did not have good intent in their negotiations. As I suspected, some of the Independents had no good intent either. I think that the hour of reckoning is coming for some of those Independents when we move to the vote on this very important matter.

The space of dental, which is a very emotive one, is not the only one in health where this government has walked away from patients. This government has presided over a massive expansion of the health bureaucracy over the last five years. It has replicated to a tee exactly what the Labor Party did at a state level. Why is that relevant to this debate? It is because it deprives our doctors and nurses of the dollars and resources that they require to provide the interventions on a daily basis to those people they have served in their professional lives who are now left abandoned because this government has diverted much-needed funds into great big new health bureaucracies. I go to speak to doctors and nurses around the country at hospitals in public and private settings and they know that this is a government that has redirected front-line money into bureaucracies which has deprived them of the capacity to deliver proper health outcomes.

This is a prime example of why this government struggles to deliver the sorts of basic services that we deserve in this country. It is not just in public hospitals. It is not just in dental. It is across primary care as well. On balance, people will look at this time of government and know not just with the benefit of hindsight but from their own bitter experience that this government has really taken away the capacity to help people most in need. That is the cruellest outcome of this debate.

The Independents have had the opportunity over the last couple of weeks to turn around that misery for those patients, to provide some hope for those patients that there would be some interim measure provided. I am bitterly disappointed, given some of those discussions, that this government has not facilitated the request of the Independents, assuming that they were genuinely made. I think that all Australians will look to this debate and recognise that the Minister for Health has failed on many levels. There has been a fundamental test that has been failed. Is this health minister willing to provide support to dental patients, in particular those with a chronic disease? The answer, in short, is no. Did this minister take the opportunity to modify the existing Chronic Disease Dental Scheme even in
some narrow form over the next 14 months so that people in some way would be able to receive at least a partial benefit to help them limp towards the introduction of the 2014 scheme? The answer is no. The fact is that she had the opportunity to put in place some interim measure which would relieve that pain, and she failed in that basic measure.

To people who are following this debate and people who have contacted us and pleaded their case not just to members of this side of parliament but also to Labor members, I say that there is some hope beyond the next election. There is some hope, if there is a change of government, of restoring some decency to health services in this country. What I know about this minister is that she has ripped $1 billion out of dental health. This is a minister who has stared chronically diseased patients in the eye and said, 'You are not deserving of the most basic support.'

In all of the current debate about the way in which Tony Abbott conducts himself or the person that Tony Abbott is, I want the Australian public to know that Tony Abbott was the compassionate health minister who presided over the creation of this scheme and Minister Plibersek is the one who ripped $1 billion out of dental health. This is a minister who has stared chronically diseased patients in the eye and said, 'You are not deserving of the most basic support.'

In all of the current debate about the way in which Tony Abbott conducts himself or the person that Tony Abbott is, I want the Australian public to know that Tony Abbott was the compassionate health minister who presided over the creation of this scheme and Minister Plibersek is the one who ripped $1 billion out of dental health. This is a minister who has stared chronically diseased patients in the eye and said, 'You are not deserving of the most basic support.'

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Owens): The question is that the motion be agreed to. There being more than one voice calling for a division, in accordance with standing order 133 the division is deferred until after 8 pm.

Debate adjourned.

COMMITTEES

Electoral Matters Committee Report

Mr MELHAM (Banks) (19:53): On behalf of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters I present the committee's report, incorporating dissenting reports, entitled Review of the AEC analysis of the FWA report on the HSU, together with the minutes of proceedings.

In accordance with standing order 39(f) the report was made a parliamentary paper.

Mr MELHAM: by leave—In this report the committee makes 13 recommendations to improve Australia's disclosure arrangements and enhance the transparency of the flow of money through our political system.

During this inquiry the committee reviewed the Australian Electoral Commission's (AEC) analysis of the Fair Work Australia (FWA) report on the Health Services Union National Office. It also considered a list of matters provided by the AEC as possible measures to improve the operation of the Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918 (Electoral Act).

The committee's focus was on disclosure obligations under the Electoral Act. It was not the committee's role to forensically examine internal HSU authorisation processes, or to adjudicate on alleged contraventions against the Fair Work (Registered Organisations) Act or other alleged fraudulent behaviour. This was outside the committee's terms of reference. A number of other processes are underway to address those matters.

The committee acted responsibly in only releasing publicly available information that was relevant to its terms of reference. The committee did not support using this inquiry as a fishing expedition for matters in the
FWA report and investigation that are outside the terms of reference.

As with the Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee, the electoral matters committee carefully considered what should be released into the public domain. It would have been irresponsible for this committee to authorise a blanket release of all documents pertaining to the FWA investigation, when those matters are still under consideration by other agencies.

The committee was mindful that other investigations are underway that do not directly relate to whether Mr Thomson, the HSU or a political party met their obligations under the Electoral Act. In fact, the committee provided the BDO Kendalls report, annexure J to the FWA report and transcripts of interviews undertaken by the FWA delegate to the AEC. It confirmed that the additional information did not change its analysis of the report or the 17 possible measures provided to the Special Minister of State.

In its inquiry, the committee examined the relevant sections of the FWA report and relevant material against the AEC’s analysis. It did not find any grounds to challenge the analysis.

The committee then moved on to consider what problems or gaps in the current arrangements this situation had served to highlight, and how these matters could be addressed in the future.

The committee considered 17 possible measures provided by the AEC for consideration and supported most of these measures. A number of the recommendations made in this report have been made in previous reports, including to:

- reduce the disclosure threshold from more than $12,100 for the 2012-13 financial year to $1,000 and remove CPI indexation; and
- increase the frequency of disclosure reporting from annually to six monthly.

Changes to the penalties for breaches of the Electoral Act are also needed. The committee has recommended introducing administrative penalties for straightforward breaches, such as a failure to lodge a return by the due date. This will enable the AEC to deal more effectively with these types of offences. The committee has also recommended strengthening the penalties for the more serious offences, including those involving fraud.

In this inquiry it was clear that the category of ‘associated entities’—which requires disclosure by certain organisations with close links to political parties—is confusing and is not operating as effectively as it should. To address this, the committee recommends clarifying the definition of an ‘associated entity’.

A significant reform the committee is proposing is to deem registered parties as bodies corporate for the purposes of the Electoral Act, to better focus the responsibility for breaches on the parties. It is intended that this will encourage political parties to ensure that the person tasked with lodging its returns is suitably qualified to perform the role, and that effective systems are in place to ensure a complete and accurate return is lodged.

Another gap in the current arrangements is in the current disclosure period for new candidates, which only commences from their pre-selection or nomination. The committee has recommended introducing a requirement for new candidates to disclose relevant donations and gifts received and money spent in the 12 months prior to their pre-selection or nomination.
There were certain measures that the committee did not support, which were:

- to require that all returns are audited before they are lodged;
- to abolish the category of associated entities; and
- to require that political donations and spending must move through dedicated campaign accounts.

In developing its recommendations, the committee aimed to strike the right balance between the goals of transparency and accountability, and the administrative realities for the parties, organisations and individuals with reporting obligations. The committee believes that these recommendations strike the right balance.

On behalf of the committee I thank the organisations and individuals who assisted the committee during the inquiry through submissions or participating at the public hearings in Canberra and Melbourne. I also thank my colleagues on the committee for their work and contribution to this report, and the secretariat for their work on this inquiry. I commend the report to the House.

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP (Mackellar) (19:59): In the remarks the Chairman of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters made in tabling this report on the Australian Electoral Commission analysis of the Fair Work Australia report on the HSU, he has merely compounded the problems with one of the most disgraceful hearings I have ever been associated with in all my time in the parliament. The chairman of the committee, the member for Banks, used his powers, with the Labor Party and the Greens together, to censor the Fair Work Australia report, which we were supposed to be looking at in terms of the AEC having done an appraisal of it.

It was in the course of our listening to the general manager of Fair Work Australia that we found out that annexure J, which is the annexure from Slater & Gordon-BDO Kendalls, forensic accountants, had not been given to the AEC or to anybody else in the committee. I asked for that document, which we were given and which has been censored by the Labor Party and Greens numbers on that committee. It was censored for the very simple reason that much of it covered the activity of Mr Thomson. Indeed, the report itself had said it should have been given to the AEC but in fact it was not given to the AEC because it was thought it might prejudice Mr Thomson. The bottom line is this: that forensic accountants' report, censored by the chairman and his ilk, says very straightforwardly:

The ACTU Circular recommended that YR@W activities, whilst political expenditure would not be characterised as a gift or donation to a political party or candidate. We again concur. This is of course to be contrasted with:

(a) Expenditure directly contributed to an electoral campaign or to a political party; and

(b) Union staff working directly (during working hours) on the campaign of a particular candidate for election or political party.

Both would be gifts warranting disclosure under s305A and/or 305B.

None of those disclosures have been made.

At no time did we ever take evidence on any of these issues which the chairman has thought were so important, like lowering the threshold to $1,000, down from over $10,000. The fact of the matter is that the amount of money was not the thing that was at issue; it was the fact that no disclosure was made in respect of the gift of money from the HSU to Mr Thomson, spent on his campaign during the relevant disclosure period from the time of his endorsement as the candidate to the time of the election. During that period, for instance, he continued his
practice of withdrawing money from the HSU, around $500 every three or four days. During that period he withdrew something in excess of $13,000. During the whole period of his tenure he had withdrawn over $101,000 from HSU accounts, and none of those payments had been authorised by the HSU under the rules under which they operate. That testimony was given by Mr Williamson, who has just been arrested for his behaviour with regard to cover-ups in the HSU—and there are more things to be discerned. Yet we have Mr Thomson, the member for Dobell, crowing that the AEC's appraisal of the Fair Work Australia report—they admitted they had not seen all of it—cleared him and made it absolutely fine for him. Well, it did not.

Finally we got hold of the rest of the annexures to that Fair Work Australia report, which constituted something like three boxes of thousands of pages of evidence. But the chairman refused to have another hearing to consider this material. Indeed, he would not have another hearing with the AEC to put questions to them once we had received the Slater & Gordon-BDO Kendalls forensic accounting report. The chairman up there slaps his hand. Goodness gracious me—it requires more than a hand slap, sir. You were a disgrace in this hearing. As I listened to you stand and wail this afternoon in defence of the Speaker, you were simply adding to your disgrace. The member for Banks, the chairman of this committee, said in his speech that he had sent that annexure of the Slater & Gordon-BDO Kendalls forensic accounting report to the AEC. Yes, he did—after we received it, on his own recognisance and without allowing there to be a further hearing, which we on this side of the House required. It was after the event, and when you read our dissenting report you will find once again this process was a whitewash full of perhapses and maybes and ifs and buts.

The bottom line is that the AEC has refused to do its work. It has had the power under the Electoral Act, under section 316(2A) to go in and do compliance audits. In the 256 compliance audits or compliance investigations it has done—'reviews', it chooses to call them—it has investigated things relating to all the political parties, including the Blue and White Committee of the Liberal Party, with expenditure of $3,000 and an income of $120, or the Lady Wilson Bequest Fund. But did the auditor go in and review any trade union? No, not one in the five years it has been operating. Do you know what sort of pathetic response we got? Unions are looked after by Fair Work Australia—but we cannot see all the findings of Fair Work Australia because that would not be relevant to the Electoral Act. As I said, it was the most appalling performance I have ever seen.

Let us look at what Mr Thomson has failed to do and let us look precisely at the act. We had evidence from Mr Pirani, the chief legal officer, who tells us he seeks his legal advice from the DPP when we all know that their job is to receive a brief of evidence from an agency and then determine whether a prosecution should lie. It is no good seeking advice from them—they do not give it. Nonetheless, this was always his excuse. He told us with regard to Mr Thomson that they would not use their coercive powers under a different section of the act which would allow them to go in and investigate a trade union activity—that is, the national office of the HSU. Latterly, months after the scandal of the member for Dobell arose, we found that suddenly Mr Pirani was writing to Ms Kathy Jackson as, 'Dear Kathy, please would you send in the returns because I might be asked questions in estimates'—not because it was the right thing to do, and these returns were now two years late. Was there any penalty applied? No. Is there a
penalty in the act that can be applied? Yes. Did the AEC do its job? No. Does the AEC simply act as a lickspittle for the Labor Party? Yes. Hence those pathetic recommendations put in as an annexure to its appraisal—and it was not a report but a mere appraisal.

Let us ask the question. Mr Thomson received, by way of a credit card, thousands and thousands of dollars that were never disclosed. The report put forward by this chairman and his supporters is simply a blueprint for how to avoid disclosure under the Commonwealth Electoral Act. Just give them a credit card; they can charge up what they like and there is no disclosure—because the Electoral Commission said it was not interested in whether or not any of the money was authorised by the national council of the HSU.

‘That is not our concern,’ they said. They were not concerned that, during the election period, Mr Thomson took out money which was clearly disclosable in a donor report. These gifts should in fact have been disclosed in Mr Thomson's own report, which was filed by his agent. They should have been disclosed together with, as the Slater & Gordon-BDO report makes quite clear, the salaries and activities of Ms Criselee Stevens and Mr Burke, both of whom worked for the member for Dobell prior to the election and during the election campaign. Ms Criselee Stevens was clearly being paid by the HSU but was hired only by Mr Thomson himself—not authorised by the HSU. Yet none of this was disclosed because the AEC was simply not interested.

Then we get to the question of Mr Burke—he was an interesting one—who was again engaged by Mr Thomson. He ceased to work for Mr Thomson but then went to work for the duty ALP senator. The duty ALP senator, however, then lent Mr Burke back to Mr Thomson to work for him during business hours every day, whilst Mr Burke remained on the payroll of the Commonwealth—as well as remaining in possession of the HSU credit card and spending money for the benefit of Mr Thompson.

The AEC puts out guidelines for the disclosure of gifts and donations. Those guidelines say:

Gifts are broadly defined to include any transfer or disposition of property or services for which no payment, or an inadequate payment, is received. Political donations come within the scope of this definition.

Donations may be in cash, credit card transactions, cheque, or ‘gifts-in-kind’. They may be received directly by the candidate, Senate group or agent, or received by some third party acting on their behalf, or with their authority.

…… …
Wages or salaries (including on-costs) incurred by an employer whose employee works for a candidate during normal working hours while continuing to receive salary or wages from the employer—

that fits the bill, particularly for Ms Stevens and the credit card activities of Mr Burke—

…… Free or discounted use of a motor vehicle, or provision of free fuel or servicing of a motor vehicle …

That was all charged up to the HSU credit cards. This is a blueprint for how to make a laughing-stock of all the disclosure laws. Yet all we hear is the Labor Party bleating, ‘We'd better have a lower threshold because that way we will see more donations as they are made.’ Really? Not if they are done using a trade union credit card.

On this side of the House we get small donations, such as that from the Blue and White Committee, which, with its $3,240 in donations, has been audited by the AEC. But then we get the failure of the HSU East to
file its returns. Initially it filed returns showing $22,000 in relevant expenditure for the 2010 election year. But it later made three amendments to that return, ending up showing total expenditure of $24 million in support of the Labor Party. That is a big jump—from $22,000 to $24 million—and it was also then late. Did the AEC take any action to impose a penalty? No. Are there penalties available under the act? Yes. Yet the AEC has the hide, the audacity, to ask for more powers when it does not use what it has. The bottom line is that the AEC has been in lockstep with this government, helping them to bring about the outcomes they want, and it does not do the job it has been set up by legislation to do.

In fact the AEC virtually gave evidence that it totally ignored the amendments passed prior to the last election—because, it said, 'We did not get enough resourcing.' So it went on auditing people such as, as I said, the Blue and White Committee and the Lady Wilson trust. But it did not touch a trade union until that thrice amended return forced it to look at HSU East. The AEC had the ability to go in and look at the national office of the Health Services Union up until the time it accepted a letter from Kathy Jackson saying that they were not an associated entity within the meaning of the act. If that is the case, it means there is poor drafting in the act. Did the AEC choose to test that argument? No, it simply accepted it.

The bottom line is that the AEC should, in its review or its analysis, have said that the provisions in the act relating to associated entities needed to be changed. The AEC said it did not need a lot of Mr Thomson's expenditure to be declared because a political expenditure return—and this was not done.

At every turn, this report is an absolute damnation of the cynical way this parliament is manipulated. Today we had a debate in which we saw the Prime Minister defending the impossible behaviour of the man who was the Speaker and who has just resigned. We heard the chairman of this committee—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Owens): Order! The member for Mackellar was given leave to speak on this report. I suggest she keep her comments to this report.

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP: This report is based on a so-called analysis of the Fair Work Australia report into the Thomson affair, a report the Special Minister of State asked the committee to examine. Neither the AEC nor the committee was given the full report at the beginning of the inquiry. It was only because I asked the general manager of Fair Work Australia at the hearing that we received one of the annexures. When I asked Mr Nassio for his draft report, he said, 'Oh, I thought you would have it.' That is annexure M, and the annexures to M are, as I said, three boxes filled with thousands of pages of material—which the AEC has not had to this day. It pretended that it could analyse the Slater & Gordon-BDO Kendalls forensic report in 48 hours. Mr Nassios took just under three years to produce his report on the Thomson affair. The AEC took eight days to do a so-called analysis of the incomplete report. The committee chair, in his tabling speech, tried to mislead the House by saying that he had given that annexure to the AEC. It was after the event. We had no ability to ask questions of the AEC because he refused to call for a further hearing with the AEC.

This report, with the exception of the dissenting report, is not worth the paper it is written on. And, if the government pretends that this is somehow a justification for
introducing anything that is in the annexed suggestions, as the AEC commissioner called them, it would be an absolute disgrace, because at no stage did the committee take evidence on any of those issues—none of them. It was all about trying to get to the bottom of what Fair Work Australia said.

Now, the KPMG report that came in, which the government put around and touted, said that this somehow diminishes the report of Mr Nassios from Fair Work Australia. If what that report said is applied to the AEC, then you see just how deficient the work of the AEC is at the present time. So this government should get off the back of the AEC and insist that it do its work properly—and, if it has political points to wage, it should do so on its own and not try to bring in a government agency which itself has an act that it should probably administer.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Owens):** I inform members that I took the view that the deferred division should not be proceeded with until the member speaking at 8 pm had completed her speech and so I did not interrupt the member for Mackellar.

**DOCUMENTS**

**Instrument of Designation of the Independent Republic of Papua New Guinea as a Regional Processing Country**

**Consideration**

Debate resumed on the motion:

That, in accordance with subsection 198AB of the Migration Act 1958, the House approve the instrument of designation of the Independent State of Papua New Guinea as a regional processing country.

to which the following amendment was moved:

That the following words be added to the motion:

“and calls on the government to put in place a 12 month time limit on immigration detention in Papua New Guinea.”

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Owens) (20:17):** In accordance with standing order 133(b), I shall now proceed to put the question on the motion moved earlier by the honourable member for Melbourne on which a division was called for and deferred in accordance with standing orders. No further debate is allowed.

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

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Burke) (20:22):** The original question is that the motion be agreed to. To this the honourable member for Melbourne has moved an amendment. The immediate question is that the amendment be agreed to.

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

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Burke) (20:22):** As there are fewer than five members on the side for the ayes, I declare the question negated in accordance with standing order 127. The names of those members who are in the minority will be recorded in the Votes and Proceedings.

Question negatived, Mr Bandt and Mr Wilkie voting aye.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (20:22):** The question now is that the motion be agreed to.

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

**The ACTING SPEAKER (20:23):** As there are fewer than five members on the side for the noes in this division, I declare the question resolved in the affirmative in accordance with standing order 127. The names of those members who are in the minority will be recorded in the Votes and Proceedings.
Question agreed to, Mr Bandt and Mr Wilkie voting no.

MOTIONS

Health Insurance (Dental services) Amendment Determination 2012 (No. 1)

Disallowance

Debate resumed on the motion:

That the Health Insurance (Dental services) Amendment Determination 2012 (No. 1), dated third of September 2012, made under subsection 3C (1) of the Health Insurance Act 1973, be disallowed.

The House divided. [20:29]

(The Acting Speaker—Ms AE Burke)

AYES

Alexander, JG
Andrews, KL
Billson, BF
Bishop, JI
Broadbent, RE
Chester, D
Ciobo, SM
Coulton, M (teller)
Dutton, PC
Fletcher, PW
Frydenberg, JA
Gash, J
Hartsuyker, L
Hockey, JB
Irons, SJ
Jones, ET
Kelly, C
Ley, SP
Marino, NB
Matheson, RG
Mirabella, S
Moylan, JE
O’Dowd, KD
Prentice, J
Ramsey, RE
Robb, AJ
Roy, WB
Schultz, AJ
Secker, PD (teller)
Smith, ADH

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

ADAMS, DGH
Bandt, AP
Bowen, CE
Brodmann, G
Butler, MC
Champion, ND
Clare, JD
Combet, Gl
Danby, M
Dreyfus, MA
Ellis, KM
Ferguson, MJ
Georganas, S
Gray, G
Griffin, AP
Hayes, CP
Jenkins, HA
Kelly, MJ
Leigh, AK
Lyons, GR
Marles, RD
Melham, D
Murphy, JP
Oakeshott, RJM
O’Neill, DM
Parke, M
Piibersek, TJ
Rishworth, AL
Roxon, NL
Saffin, JA
Sidebottom, PS
Snowdon, WE
Symon, MS
Thomson, KJ
Wilkie, AD
Zappia, A

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

NOES

Adams, DGH
Bandt, AP
Bowen, CE
Brodmann, G
Butler, MC
Champion, ND
Clare, JD
Combet, Gl
Danby, M
Dreyfus, MA
Ellis, KM
Ferguson, MJ
Georganas, S
Gray, G
Griffin, AP
Hayes, CP
Jenkins, HA
Kelly, MJ
Leigh, AK
Lyons, GR
Marles, RD
Melham, D
Murphy, JP
Oakeshott, RJM
O’Neill, DM
Parke, M
Piibersek, TJ
Rishworth, AL
Roxon, NL
Saffin, JA
Sidebottom, PS
Snowdon, WE
Symon, MS
Thomson, KJ
Wilkie, AD
Zappia, A

Albanese, AN
Bird, SL
Bradbury, DJ
Burke, AS
Byrne, AM
Cheeseman, DL
Collins, JM
Creean, SF
D’Ath, YM
Elliot, MJ
Emerson, CA
Fitzgibbon, JA
Gibbons, SW
Grierson, SJ
Hall, LG (teller)
Husic, EN (teller)
Jones, SP
King, CJ
Livermore, KF
Macklin, JL
McClelland, RB
Mitchell, RG
Neumann, SK
O’Connor, BPJ
Owens, J
Perrett, GD
Ripoll, BF
Rowland, MA
Rudd, KM
Shorten, WR
Smyth, L
Swan, WM
Thomson, CR
Vamvakinou, M
Windsor, AHC

PAIRS

Abbott, AJ
Haase, BW
Hare, WE
Ferguson, LDT
Keenan, M
Somlyay, AM

Gillard, JE
Ferguson, LDT
Smith, SF
Garrett, PR

Question negatived.
Tuesday, 9 October 2012

BUSINESS

Days and Hours of Meeting

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House and Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) (20:34): I move:

That the sitting of the House be suspended until the ringing of the bells.

The House will suspend. For people's information, I have received advice from the Clerk that this is the appropriate process to occur. We will then return and elect a new Speaker of the House of Representatives. The bells will ring approximately half an hour after the sitting suspends.

Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House and Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) (20:35): I also move:

That standing order 31 (automatic adjournment of the House) be suspended for this sitting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): The question is that the motion be agreed to.

The House divided. [20:40]

(The Acting Speaker—Ms AE Burke)

AYES

Hayes, CP
Jenkins, HA
Kelly, MJ
Leigh, AK
Lyons, GR
Marles, RD
Melham, D
Murphy, JP
Oakeshott, RJM
O’Neill, DM
Parke, M
Plibersek, TJ
Rishworth, AL
Roxon, NL
Saffin, JA
Sidebottom, PS
Snowdon, WE
Symon, MS
Thomson, KJ
Wilkie, AD

AYES

Hayes, CP
Jenkins, HA
Kelly, MJ
Leigh, AK
Lyons, GR
Marles, RD
Melham, D
Murphy, JP
Oakeshott, RJM
O’Neill, DM
Parke, M
Plibersek, TJ
Rishworth, AL
Roxon, NL
Saffin, JA
Sidebottom, PS
Snowdon, WE
Symon, MS
Thomson, KJ
Wilkie, AD

NOES

Alexander, JG
Andrews, KL
Billson, BF
Bishop, JI
Broadbent, RE
Chester, D
Ciobo, SM
Coulton, M (teller)
Dutton, PC
Fletcher, PW
Frydenberg, JA
Gash, J
Hartsuyker, L
Hockey, JB
Irons, SJ
Jones, ET
Laming, A
Macfarlane, IE
Markus, LE
McCormack, MF
Morrison, SJ
Neville, PC
Prentice, J
Raymond, RE
Robb, AJ
Roy, WB
Schultz, AJ
Secker, PD (teller)
Smith, ADH
Southcott, AJ

NOES

Alexander, JG
Andrews, KL
Billson, BF
Bishop, JI
Broadbent, RE
Chester, D
Ciobo, SM
Coulton, M (teller)
Dutton, PC
Fletcher, PW
Frydenberg, JA
Gash, J
Hartsuyker, L
Hockey, JB
Irons, SJ
Jones, ET
Laming, A
Macfarlane, IE
Markus, LE
McCormack, MF
Morrison, SJ
Neville, PC
Prentice, J
Raymond, RE
Robb, AJ
Roy, WB
Schultz, AJ
Secker, PD (teller)
Smith, ADH
Southcott, AJ
Question agreed to.

Sitting suspended from 20:44 to 21:16

PARLIAMENTARY OFFICE HOLDERS

Speaker

The Clerk: Honourable members, I have received the following communication from Her Excellency the Governor-General:

I desire to inform the House of Representatives that I have received a letter dated 9 October 2012 from Mr Peter Slipper MP tendering his resignation as Speaker of the House of Representatives, and that I have accepted his resignation.

Accordingly, I invite the House to elect a new Speaker.

Honourable members, the next business is the election of a Speaker. Is there a nomination?

Ms LIVERMORE (Capricornia) (21:16):

I move:

That the honourable member for Chisholm do take the chair of this House as Speaker.

The member for Chisholm has done me the great honour of asking me to move a nomination for her to be the Speaker of this place. It is a great pleasure and indeed a great honour to do that for her and to do it on behalf of my colleagues here in the Labor Party and, I am sure, across the chamber as well. Together, the member for Chisholm and I were elected to this parliament in 1998. In that time she has been a very loyal friend and a greatly respected colleague. All of us who have been on this journey together since 1998, including the Prime Minister, have come to appreciate and to know Anna's great qualities—those qualities that we have seen in action as both the Deputy Speaker and, in effect, standing in as the Speaker of this parliament for the last few months.

There are no doubts in anyone's mind about the member for Chisholm's ability to do this job. Indeed, there are no doubts in anyone's mind about her claim to this job. It is a terrific thing to see this come about this evening. In saying that, it is correct to acknowledge that this is probably not the way that she might have chosen for it to come about. There is no argument from any of us that this has been a difficult and unusual day in what has been a very difficult and unusual term of this parliament. But that is not to take anything away from the member for Chisholm as she steps up to accept this the highest role in the Parliament of Australia.

As I said, we came into this place together in 1998, and one of the things that really gives the member for Chisholm such great standing to take on the position of Speaker is her experience as the member for Chisholm. There is no better local member in this place than the member for Chisholm. She is hardworking. She is one of her electorate. She is there for issues and events in her electorate big and small. The people of Chisholm have recognised that and, I believe, consider themselves very fortunate to have her as their member of parliament. As a parliament we are now very fortunate to have her as the Speaker.

As we honour the member for Chisholm and celebrate her elevation to the very high office of Speaker, when I say that this is not exactly the way that might have wanted or
imagined that she would come into this position I think it is right to also acknowledge that there are some people sitting in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne sharing that feeling very strongly as well. I am sure the member for Chisholm’s loving family—her husband Steve and two beautiful children, Madeleine and John—would be wishing very much that they were here in the chamber with her. But they will be very, very proud of you, Anna, as we all are, as you take on this position.

In closing, I really do applaud the way that you have conducted yourself in the last few years. Being the Deputy Speaker was something that you took on and applied yourself to in the same way that you did being the member for Chisholm. You got stuck in. You were such a team player. You were really there looking out for all of us in this parliament and really fulfilling your role exceptionally well to make sure the parliament functioned to the highest possible standards. We have seen you do that in the most difficult circumstances in the last few months. Member for Chisholm, I wish you all the best in your new role as the Speaker and we look forward to serving under you and to serving the people of Australia as you bring the parliament to even higher standards in the way that we know you can do so well.

The Clerk: Is the motion seconded?

Mr KELVIN THOMSON (Wills) (21:21): I second the motion. Anna Burke became the member for Chisholm upon the retirement of Michael Wooldridge. She has proven to be a very diligent and conscientious local representative who is well liked by her electorate and who has steered Chisholm quite some distance away from its former status as a swinging or marginal seat.

She became Deputy Speaker after the 2007 election and served as deputy to Harry Jenkins during the life of the previous parliament, a task that she performed with considerable flair and distinction. The 2010 election and the unusual circumstances of the hung parliament led to her taking a break from Deputy Speaker duties. She sat next to me in the chamber during question time and would occasionally offer her observations about question time and the characters who inhabit it, but to the best of my knowledge she never sent any text messages or emails containing her thoughts, which was both prudent and prescient of her.

Late last year she was restored to the Deputy Speaker position and earlier this year she found herself in the very unusual position of being asked to carry out the duties of the Speaker, particularly at question time, while remaining Deputy Speaker. For some of us who believe in the concept of higher duties, this was a little bit unusual, but Anna carried out this role with good humour and with great dignity.

Given this background of service to the parliament, she is the obvious person to succeed the member for Fisher as Speaker and I think that no-one in the House, having heard the member for Chisholm or seen the member for Chisholm in action, will be surprised that government members are nominating her for this position. I hope that she will have the support of the opposition and of the whole House, both in the election process and in carrying out her duties as Speaker for the remainder of this parliament. She has demonstrated beyond all doubt that she has the knowledge, the experience, the sense of fairness and even-handedness and the temperament to carry out this important role.

Like the member for Capricornia, I note the role that her husband, Steve, and her children have played in her life. I know this will be a very proud moment for them and
that, like other families in this place, they have experienced considerable sacrifices in supporting Anna's political career. I wish her family all the best in regard to this as well. Finally, after what we have been through in the last few months this House could use a little healing and I think we all have an obligation to make that happen and that Anna is just the right person to lead us in accomplishing that.

The Clerk: Does the member accept the nomination?

Ms Burke: I accept the nomination.

The Clerk: Is there any further proposal? There being no further proposal, the time for proposals has expired. I declare that the honourable member proposed, the member for Chisholm, has been elected as Speaker.

Honourable members: Hear, hear!

The SPEAKER (21:24): I wish to express my grateful thanks for the high honour the House has pleased to confer upon me. I am truly speechless at this time, and those of you who know me well will find that passing strange. I am deeply honoured and moved by this incredible honour that the House has bestowed upon me. At the outset, can I thank the members for Capricornia and Wills for their gracious and kind words. They almost moved me to tears. It is difficult to hear yourself praised. We do not accept it easily or lightly, so I accept those absolutely delightful remarks.

I do look forward to this great honour and indeed this difficult challenge. I hope I will serve the House with distinction and pride as only the second female Speaker in this chamber. I will draw upon the great legacy of Joan Child, who was the first female Speaker in this House. Joan is, as many would suspect, getting on in years and not in great health. I am looking to her for the inspiration she showed in the way she led this House, also in some difficult circumstances.

I also have the legacy of Harry Jenkins, the member for Scullin, to follow and to live up to. Harry taught me many, many things and I am incredibly grateful and appreciative for his kindness and his guidance—sometimes not his wit or his dancing ability. But I do express to him my gratitude for his assistance in this role.

To the member for Fisher, I also want to extend my thanks for his delightful remarks about me today but also for the gracious way he stood aside this afternoon in very difficult circumstances. The member for Fisher has done the role of speakership a great honour. He undertook the role in a very dignified, effective and impartial manner, as many in this House have commented on. I praise and thank him for the role he undertook in that light. I want to record my many thanks to him for how he conducted himself in this chamber and for how he always treated me and my staff with the utmost respect.

I am a bit saddened that my delightful husband and children and my mum are not here tonight to share this, but I know they are glued to channel 24. So I hope you are broadcasting or they will be greatly disappointed! None of us can do these roles without our family support. None of us are here on our own. Without our staff, without our electorates and without our families we do not do this job. It has been 14 years for me in this parliament. I have had both my children since being here, so obviously my husband has been an enormous support over those many years and I really do need to thank him for that. Also, he is in the middle of his studies and all the rest that is going on in his life, so I apologise now for the further impost I am about to place on it.

So I do need to thank Steve at the outset, but also my mum and my brothers and
sisters. Many of you on the government side of the House know my extended family, who have also been an enormous support to me over the many years. Sadly, Dad is no longer here to see this. I know, in his inimitable fashion, he would have been very proud but would have rung me up afterwards to tell me what I had done wrong.

Often your greatest fans are your greatest critics. I know he will be somewhere looking down upon me, delighted at how I am doing, as he is delighted with how all his children are doing.

Thank you very much for this honour. I look forward to serving the House well and with distinction. I ask you all to remember that we serve this parliament and the people of Australia, and to uphold the dignity they deserve.

The speaker having seated herself in the chair—

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (21:30): I rise to congratulate you, Madam Speaker, on your election. You and I know each other well—we have known each other for if not a whole lifetime at least half a lifetime, coming into this parliament after the same election and knowing each other for a large number of years before that. You have always been a very hardworking, very focused and very diligent member of this parliament—someone who could teach a large number of others about what it means to be a servant of your constituency. You have always been a very feisty advocate of your part of the world, and I have had the pleasure of visiting your electorate with you on a number of occasions and seeing how appreciated your efforts there are.

You are also someone who made a deliberate decision to specialise in the work of this parliament. Some come to this parliament with their eye set on the executive; some come to this parliament fully appreciating the roles and opportunities that parliament can give. You came to this parliament with capacities to address many of the opportunities that being in parliament, being in opposition and being in government can bring, but you did make a deliberate decision during your career to focus on what it is to be a parliamentarian and what it is to be a servant of this parliament. So, with some twists and turns along the way, that has led you to tonight and to your election. I congratulate you on your election. I know your family, glued to ABC News 24, will be absolutely delighted. I have had the opportunity to meet with your family on more than one occasion and their pride in you is palpable. I am sure that pride is absolutely running over tonight.

As recently as this morning I spoke at a women's breakfast about women's roles in parliament and women's roles in leadership. I spoke about the trailblazing role of Joan Child in this parliament, being the first woman to serve as Speaker. It is fitting indeed that 26 years later we are here welcoming another woman as Speaker of this parliament. For other women and girls who may be looking at this place and thinking about what could potentially be their role within it, your election to the speakership today provides another role model for them. My personal congratulations go to you—my congratulations as Prime Minister and my congratulations as federal Labor leader. We will do everything we can to work with you. I cannot quite make that a guarantee of the best of behaviour on all occasions but I promise you we will be trying and respecting your office and your rulings and your efforts as Speaker.

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (21:33): This has been a remarkable parliament in so many ways, and it is particularly remarkable in this sense: it is the first time in the history of the
Commonwealth that we have had three speakers in the life of a single parliament. I hope, Madam Speaker, that you will learn from the example of the first Speaker of this parliament, the member for Scullin. I honour your words of respect earlier this evening for the first Speaker of this parliament, and I also honour your words of sympathy and appreciation for the second Speaker of this parliament. Whatever we think of the second Speaker of this parliament, this is a tragic night for him and for his family.

Madam Speaker, I regret the fact that you were unable to be the Deputy Speaker earlier in this parliament because the politics of this parliament meant that your own party did not see fit to nominate you as Deputy Speaker. I regret the fact that you were unable to accept our nomination as Speaker back in November of last year—I think you would have done an outstanding job in the chair after the member for Scullin was for one reason or another unable to continue. I do regret the fact that you have come late to this chair; nevertheless, let me say that you have served very competently in the time you have acted as Speaker in this chamber, and I am confident that you will discharge your duties faithfully and honourably for the duration of this parliament.

Mr TRUSS (Wide Bay—Leader of The Nationals) (21:35): I congratulate you, Madam Speaker, on your unanimous election by the House tonight to the position of Speaker. This has been an extraordinary day in Australian politics—another chaotic and extraordinary day in the 43rd Parliament. I congratulate you on becoming the new Speaker of the House and, as you point out, on becoming the second woman to fill that role. I do congratulate you, Madam Speaker, on your unanimous election by the House tonight to the position of Speaker. This has been an extraordinary day in Australian politics—another chaotic and extraordinary day in the 43rd Parliament. I congratulate you on becoming the new Speaker of the House and, as you point out, on becoming the second woman to fill that role. I congratulate you on rising to this very high office. In doing so, I pay tribute to the member for Fisher, the previous Speaker, who showed the good judgement tonight to resign—judgement the Prime Minister failed to show today in the House. I will leave it at that, Madam Speaker, because I do not want to cast a pall over your election. But the fact
remains that the member for Fisher showed the judgement tonight to resign, judgement which the Prime Minister, yet again, did not show today in this House.

Your election, Madam Speaker, is the culmination of my own nomination of you 11 months ago. The tumult which has gripped the House for the last 11 months—particularly the last six months—could all have been avoided if the Labor Party had accepted my nomination of you as Speaker 11 months ago. It is 11 months late but not too late, Madam Speaker, for you to make an indelible imprint on the parliament.

This is another unprecedented day—to have had three Speakers over the course of the 43rd Parliament. That is something I promise the clerks we will not have in the 44th Parliament. I am sure the Australian public will look forward to the 44th Parliament, whoever wins the coming election—whether it is the Labor Party or the coalition. I am absolutely certain the Australian public will never again invest in a hung parliament, given the chaos and scandal which has beset this parliament. I hope, Madam Speaker—that is a nice thing to say—I congratulate you. This is indeed an honour I know your husband and dear Madeleine and John will be very pleased with. I think your election to this position is a credit to you and the way you have conducted yourself. As the Leader of the House of Representatives, I look forward to working with you.

Mr BANDT (Melbourne) (21:42): On behalf of the Australian Greens, I congratulate you on your election to the role of Speaker. I know, from my experience of having worked with you on the selection committee, as well as having seen you in the parliament, that you take very seriously the competing obligations this unique parliament imposes on the Speaker. I have absolutely no doubt that, in the coming months, you will continue to exercise that very high standard of integrity. Once again, and on behalf of other members on the crossbenches, I congratulate you on your election.

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (21:42): I understand, Madam Speaker, that the Governor-General will advise when she will be pleased to receive you as Speaker.
Deputy Speaker

Mr STEPHEN JONES (Throsby) (21:43): Madam Speaker, I start by congratulating you unconditionally and without qualification on your elevation. The most august role you have been elected to deserves no less. With great pleasure, I move:

That the honourable member for Hindmarsh be elected Deputy Speaker.

He has informed me tonight that this is the eighth anniversary of his becoming a member of this place. In the time I have been here, considerably less than eight years, I have known him to be a man of great integrity and a fine parliamentarian. I know that he has served well on the Speaker's panel, that he has been an active member of this place and that he is well respected across the aisle. He has served his constituency with vigour and pride and, when he has come to this place, he has served as a parliamentarian with principle, diligence and honour. I have recently had the great privilege of witnessing the work he has done as a parliamentarian on the important issue of prostate cancer. I am also aware of the great work and energy that he puts into advancing the cause and interests of the Special Broadcasting Service.

One of the things that I have witnessed that I think shows the member for Hindmarsh would do well in the role of Deputy Speaker is the enormous amount of work he put into seeking to achieve a bipartisan solution to probably the issue that has most troubled this parliament: how we discharge our humanitarian obligations to asylum seekers. It was the member for Hindmarsh who reached out across the aisle and to members of the crossbenches to attempt to forge a bipartisan solution which would meet our humanitarian obligations as well as the political interests of this place. Regrettably, we were unable to achieve that, but that is in no way due to any lack of vigour, effort or principle on the part of the member for Hindmarsh.

I am sure he would be a great assistant to you, Madam Speaker, if it is the will of the parliament to accept him as Deputy Speaker. I move:

That the honourable member for Hindmarsh be elected Deputy Speaker.

The SPEAKER: Is the motion seconded?

Ms RISHWORTH (Kingston) (21:45): Madam Speaker, I congratulate you on your elevation to the role of Speaker, and it gives me great pleasure to second the motion nominating the member for Hindmarsh as Deputy Speaker. I have known Steve for a long, long time. He is a man who has always behaved with great honour, has always had a lot of integrity and has always been known as a good Labor man. Steve was elected to this parliament eight years ago today, so I would just like to say: happy anniversary, Steve! Since then he has been a champion of his electorate of Hindmarsh and every elector within it. I often get to meet some of Steve's electors as I am out and about in Adelaide, and nobody has ever said a bad word about him. They know that he is standing up for them in this place with all the guts and fight he has in him. I just wanted to reflect on all the great work he does in his electorate.

The member for Hindmarsh has served on the Speaker's panel for five years, and during that time I think he has shown that he has the skills to perform the role of Deputy Speaker. He has shown that he is a very inclusive member of parliament and a very compassionate and very fair person, and I think those values will serve him well in the Deputy Speaker role.

I have had the pleasure of not only knowing Steve for a long time but also
serving with him on committees. In the 41st Parliament, he was Deputy Chair of the Standing Committee on Health and Ageing and, in the 42nd Parliament, he became chair of the committee, a role he continues to fill in this 43rd Parliament. I served under Steve's chairmanship during the 42nd Parliament, and I have to say he commanded a great deal of respect from members from all sides of the House as we undertook a number of different important inquiries, which he steered incredibly well.

The member for Hindmarsh would make a great Deputy Speaker. I know that he is very much supported by his beautiful wife, Wendy, and his sons, Alex and George. I think he is an excellent candidate for the role of Deputy Speaker and I second his nomination for that position.

The SPEAKER: Are there any further proposals?

Mr PYNE (Sturt—Manager of Opposition Business) (21:48): Madam Speaker, I have great pleasure in nominating the member for Maranoa. I have nominated the member for Maranoa on numerous occasions for the position of Deputy Speaker and I hope on this occasion that he might be successful. Without detracting from the member for Hindmarsh, who has been here for eight years, I note the member for Maranoa has in fact been here since 1990. He has served the parliament with great distinction. He served the parliament as a minister for six years in the Howard government—as Minister for Veterans' Affairs and as Minister Assisting the Minister for Defence. He has also served as a chairman of significant committees in this place over a long time and as the Second Deputy Speaker for this parliament and the previous parliament. In fact, there is no better-qualified member of parliament to serve as Deputy Speaker than the member for Maranoa.

I am absolutely delighted that he has been re-preselected to serve as the member for Maranoa in, hopefully, the 44th Parliament, should he be elected. I think they weigh the vote in Maranoa as opposed to counting it, so I assume he will be elected and be back here! It gives me great pleasure to move, particularly after the tumult of the last two years:

That the honourable member for Maranoa be elected Deputy Speaker.

The SPEAKER: Is the motion seconded?

Mr WINDSOR (New England) (21:50): Madam Speaker, I congratulate you on your election as Speaker and I second the motion nominating the member for Maranoa as Deputy Speaker. It is a great pleasure to join with the member for Sturt in this motion. There was an occasion only two years ago when we were very close to one another, and I am delighted to be able to support you in nominating the member for Maranoa.

The member for Maranoa has had an outstanding career in this parliament. He knows the job extraordinarily well in terms of the deputy speakership, and I am sure he will be of great assistance to you, Madam Speaker. It is a great privilege and a pleasure to second the motion to elect the member for Maranoa to this position.

The SPEAKER: The time for proposals has expired. In accordance with the standing orders, the bells will be rung and a ballot will be taken. Ballot papers will now be distributed. I remind honourable members that this ballot is for the election of Deputy Speaker. Only one name should be written on the ballot paper. The candidate who has the greater number of votes shall be the Deputy Speaker. The candidates are the member for Maranoa and the member for
Hindmarsh. Will honourable members please write on the ballot paper the name of the candidate for whom they wish to vote. The individual's name can be written on the ballot paper—Bruce Scott or Steve Georganas.

Mr Pyne: Madam Speaker, you said members should be in their usual seats. The Leader of the House is in the crossbenches and seems to be filling out another ballot paper.

The SPEAKER: Could the Leader of the House please resume his seat during the ballot.

The bells having been rung and a ballot having been taken—

The SPEAKER: Order! The result of the ballot is: Mr Scott, 74 votes; Mr Georganas, 70 votes. Mr Scott, the member for Maranoa, is elected Deputy Speaker. Congratulations!

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (22:13): I rise to congratulate the member for Maranoa on his election. Obviously we do not see eye to eye on a range of political issues, but I have always found him one of the gentlemen in this parliament. I have had the opportunity to speak to him about a range of issues. He has always shown a great deal of courtesy when he has raised issues that are dear to his heart, including some representations he made to me about distance education, which I remember in particular—and the government amended its policy because of the representations by him and a number of others in this parliament—so I am sure that he will serve in this role with great distinction. He is someone for whom there have been some twists and turns in the journey as well, but we welcome his election. On behalf of the government and the federal Labor Party, I can certainly say that we will look forward to working with him. The same caveat applies as I said to Madam Speaker: I cannot always promise you perfection in behaviour, but we will do our very best to work with you in a spirit of goodwill and decency.

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (22:14): I congratulate the member for Maranoa. It is obviously a tremendous honour for an opposition member of parliament to win a ballot in this chamber, and the fact that the member for Maranoa has won the ballot for the deputy speakership testifies to his qualities as a man, as a member of this parliament and as a Deputy Speaker. Yet again we are in unusual circumstances with a member of the opposition is elected as Deputy Speaker. I presume that the standing orders will now operate in the ordinary way and we will have to have another ballot, but I congratulate the member for Maranoa on his election to this high office.

Mr TRUSS (Wide Bay—Leader of The Nationals) (22:15): I am delighted to congratulate my friend, colleague, neighbour and partner in the parliament from the class of 1990 on his election as Deputy Speaker. Bruce has spent a lot of time in the chair. He is therefore well experienced and well able to undertake the task. He is a great champion of rural and regional Queensland—and, indeed, of rural Australia generally—and it is appropriate that his service be recognised in this special way.

He moves up one place, and you, Madam Speaker Burke, move up one place. We therefore now have a very experienced Speaker and Deputy Speaker. I am sure that you both will provide great leadership to this House. Congratulations, Bruce, and best wishes in your new position.

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House and Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) (22:16): I rise to join the congratulation of the member for Maranoa. It has always been a pleasure to visit the member for Maranoa's electorate, which
comprises a vast part of south-western and western Queensland and which is big enough to fit a few hundred—if not a few thousand—electorates the size of mine.

The member for Maranoa has the respect of everyone in this House. As Minister for Infrastructure and Transport, I regularly received representations from the member for Maranoa. They were always genuinely put, in a way which was not political but which had him representing his constituents very honourably. I had the great pleasure of being at the Birdsville races with the member for Maranoa and can attest to the high esteem in which he is held by his constituents.

A government member: Is he a good tipster?

Mr ALBANESE: He's not a bad tipster, although I think everyone in our party did okay that day! But the Birdsville races are not just about the racing; they are a great, iconic, Australian event. I also got to open the Birdsville community centre that day and visited other centres in his electorate on a number of occasions. I congratulate the member for Maranoa on his election as Deputy Speaker, and I welcome the opportunity to continue to work with Mr Scott. He has been a very good Deputy Speaker, and I am sure that he will continue to be so.

Mr PYNE (Sturt—Manager of Opposition Business) (22:18): I have nominated the member for Maranoa on numerous occasions to be the Deputy Speaker. It is nice to have a win. Congratulations to the member for Maranoa on his election. He will fulfil the role of Deputy Speaker of this parliament perfectly, and I look forward to working with him in the chair.

Mr BANDT (Melbourne) (22:19): I also congratulate the member for Maranoa on his elevation. I hear a lot of heckling coming from that part of the chamber, but I must say that when the member has been in the chair I have never known anything but impartiality, and I presume that it will continue. I congratulate him.

Mr SCHULTZ (Hume) (22:19): I do not want to put a motza on the member for Maranoa, but I have to say that Bruce Scott was one of the best ministers of the portfolio that he held in the Howard government. I have known him to be a very honourable and honest individual and, believe it or not, I very much admire Bruce Scott. The fact that he is a member of the National Party—in fact, now he is a member of the LNP—does not really matter to me. He is a special individual, as is his wife, and I know that he will do a 100 per cent job as the Deputy Speaker in the House of Representatives for all members.

Mr BRUCE SCOTT (Maranoa—Second Deputy Speaker) (22:20): I congratulate you, Madam Speaker Burke, on being the second female elected to the Speaker's role in this place. You certainly deserve it. I have worked with you for a number of years now, and you have always brought dignity and a spirit of cooperation to the role. Meeting every morning, as we have in the past, we run through the blue to see what is coming up in case some 'blues' occur in the House, and we have been able to discuss them in the role of Speaker and Deputy Speaker as we should do.

I thank my nominators, the member for Sturt and the member for New England, for their confidence in me. I also thank the House for showing confidence in me and my ability to take over the role of Deputy Speaker. I am one of those lucky people here tonight whose wife is up there in the gallery. I am not sure that she recognises the person you are speaking about! It is quite by chance
that my wife is here to experience this tonight; and I know, Madam Speaker, that your family could not be with you.

Madam Speaker, I have worked as deputy to you, but I think we all learnt a great deal from Harry Jenkins. He was in many ways a mentor to many people in this place, including those on the Speaker's panel. I think we were able to bring the quiet confidence and the quiet respect that Harry instilled in us as his two deputies at the start of this parliament, and we can certainly bring those things in this role that we both have now.

I thank the former Speaker, the member for Fisher, for his very kind words about me today. Unfortunately, I was not in the chamber at the time. I was at the Telstra function here tonight, lobbying Telstra to get more mobile phone coverage in western Queensland—in a quiet and dignified way. They did listen to me. I do thank the member for Fisher for his comments in very kindly speaking about me tonight.

I want to assure the House that in my role as the Deputy Speaker I will be, as I have always been, impartial and will make sure that you are all heard in silence, though that is not always possible. There are standing orders that govern the role that we take in this place, as you know, Madam Speaker, and it is the one that I believe gives this chamber the great power that it has. I respect the standing orders. Those standing orders that have been amended a little in this parliament have only made this a better place.

I certainly look forward to working with all of you in this chamber. Thank you for the confidence you have shown in me tonight. I can assure you I will not be letting you down. To the Leader of the House, all I can say is that I have taken former Speaker Jenkins to Birdsville, I have taken the Leader of the Opposition to the Birdsville races, but we still have your shirt, which has hamburger juice all down the front, to auction one day. I hope it will be worth enough money to enable us to seal a few kilometres of road out in western Queensland. I thank the House.

The SPEAKER: I also congratulate the member for Maranoa. We have worked for many years together. He is an honourable Deputy Speaker and I know he will do the position proud. I congratulate him.

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House and Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) (22:24): I say to the Deputy Speaker: what goes on tour should stay on tour!

House adjourned at 22:25

NOTICES

The following notices were given:

MR ALBANESE to move: That I will move at the next sitting that standing order 13 be amended by omitting paragraph (c).

MS ROXON to present a bill for an act to amend various Acts relating to criminal law and law enforcement, and for other purposes.

MS ROXON to present a bill for an act to amend the Freedom of Information Act 1982, and for related purposes.

MS ROXON to present a Bill for an Act in relation to monitoring, investigation and enforcement by regulatory agencies, and for related purposes.

MS COLLINS to present a bill for an act to establish the Social and Community Services Pay Equity Special Account, and for related purposes.

MS COLLINS to present a bill for an act to deal with consequential matters in connection with the Social and Community Services Pay Equity Special Account.
Services Pay Equity Special Account Act 2012, and for related purposes.

MS PLIBERSEK to move:
That, in accordance with section 10B of the Health Insurance Act 1973, the House approve the Health Insurance (Extended Medicare Safety Net) Amendment Determination 2012 (No. 1) made on 28 September 2012, and presented to the House on 9 October 2012.

MR S. P. JONES to move:
That this House:
(1) notes that:
(a) Charcot-Marie-Tooth disease (CMT) is the most common form of inherited motor and sensory neuropathy;
(b) there is no cure for CMT and while most sufferers live a normal lifespan, many do so with severe disabilities;
(c) estimates are that around one in every 2,500 Australians is affected by CMT;
(d) while CMT is more common than diseases such as Muscular Dystrophy, there is a low level of community awareness of CMT, particularly amongst Indigenous Australians;
(e) genetic counselling and pre-implantation genetic diagnosis means that those carrying the CMT gene can now conceive without the 50 per cent risk of passing CMT to their offspring; and
(f) despite the advances, detection and genetic counselling, low awareness and detection of CMT means that this disease is still spreading to future generations, when it could be stopped; and
(2) notes the need for more investment for research into the cause, care and cure of CMT; and
(3) as a first step, calls on the Government to provide funding for projects which will lead to the eradication of CMT.

MR WILKIE to present a bill for an act to deal with consequential matters in connection with the Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Act 2012, and for related purposes.

MR HUSIC to move:
That this House:
(1) notes the tremendous contributions of Australia’s Bangladeshi community;
(2) shows concern at reports of human rights violations in Bangladesh, and claims that political activists and journalists are being targeted for persecution, abuse and physical violence; and
(3) encourages the Australian Government to engage with the Bangladeshi Government to progress democratic reform within that country.

MS LIVERMORE to move:
That this House:
(1) opposes the Queensland Government’s gutting of Sunfish and major recreational fishing programs;
(2) notes the continued efforts by the Liberal National Party (LNP) in Queensland and nationally to undermine recreational fishing by redefining, then cutting frontline services;
(3) notes that:
(a) before the Queensland election, Premier Newman said the public service had ‘nothing to fear’ from a new LNP government; and
(b) Federal Minister Ludwig has written on behalf of Sunfish Queensland to his counterpart, requesting urgent advice on the destructive cuts;
(4) strongly supports recreational fishers;
(5) calls on the Queensland Government to restore funding as a matter of urgency; and
(6) notes the Federal Coalition’s failure to act despite the Leader of the Opposition being fully briefed on the Queensland Government’s budget cuts before they were announced.

MS HALL to move:
That this House:
(1) notes that:
(a) October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month, and that Monday 22 October 2012 is Pink Ribbon Day;

(b) breast cancer is the most common cancer in Australian women (excluding melanoma) and the second leading cause of cancer-related death in Australia; and

(c) the incidence of breast cancer in Australia is increasing; and

(2) encourages women to have a mammogram every two years.

**MS GAMBARO** to move:

That this House:

(1) notes that:

(a) 28 July is World Hepatitis Day;

(b) the event is one of only four official world disease awareness days endorsed by the World Health Organization;

(c) chronic hepatitis C is a large and growing health problem in Australia with more than 200,000 people living with the disease;

(d) left untreated, hepatitis C can possibly lead to liver damage, cancer and death;

(e) hepatitis C has now eclipsed HIV/AIDS as the number one viral killer in Australia;

(f) hepatitis C can be cured with the appropriate treatment;

(g) needle and syringe programs have proven effective in relation to preventing transmission of hepatitis B and hepatitis C as well as HIV; and

(h) hepatitis C disproportionately impacts the Indigenous community with Indigenous people representing less than 3 per cent of the total Australian population but more than 8 per cent of the Australian population infected with hepatitis C; and

(2) welcomes scientific and treatment advances that greatly increase the chance of curing patients with the most common and hardest to treat strain of hepatitis C.

**MRS GRIGGS** to move:

That this House notes:

(1) that the 12 October 2012 marks the tenth anniversary of the horrific Bali Bombings, which killed 202 people, including 88 Australians, and injured a further 240 people, the majority suffering burn injuries;

(2) the significant contribution made by the Darwin and Perth hospitals in assisting Bali’s Sanglah Hospital deal with the scale of the disaster, as many of the injured required specialist burn treatment which was not available in Bali;

(3) the establishment of the National Critical Care and Trauma Centre funded by the Australian Government which ensures Australia’s capability to respond to disasters and major medical incidents in our region;

(4) the benefits to the Northern Territory community through the great work that the National Critical Care and Trauma Centre performs, including the ability to provide specialist trauma and disaster training to all Australian clinicians, particularly those who provide services to the Northern Territory;

(5) the ability of the National Critical Care and Trauma Centre to rapidly deploy highly skilled personnel to respond to incidents in the region, notably the involvement and provision of specialist expertise in the following international incidents, the:

(a) second Bali Bombing;

(b) East Timor unrest;

(c) East Timor presidential assassination attempt;

(d) Ashmore Reef Siev 36 incident; and

(e) Pakistan floods; and

(6) the bipartisan acknowledgment of the outstanding clinical and academic leadership the National Critical Care and Trauma Centre has in disaster and trauma care, and the importance for ongoing support and funding of this essential facility.
Tuesday, 9 October 2012

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr S Georganas) took the chair at 16:20.

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

Queensland Centre for Advanced Technology

Mrs PRENTICE (Ryan) (16:20): I was delighted to be invited to visit the Queensland Centre for Advanced Technology last week for a guided tour of CSIRO's state-of-the-art research facilities at Pinjarra Hills. I do thank Michael McWilliams, Chief of Earth Science and Resource Engineering, for his time and hospitality during my visit.

The centre commenced operations in 1992 and today houses eight areas of CSIRO's research and flagship program out of 10 total research divisions and 10 National Research Flagships. There are also five commercial occupants at QCAT, including BHP Billiton's Carbon Steel Technical Marketing Group. These commercial occupants are a testament to QCAT's very strong reputation as a collaborative research and development facility. In particular at QCAT, many of the research programs are dedicated to energy and resource issues, through their Minerals Down Under National Research Flagship, including coal seam gas, carbon dioxide storage and geothermal energy.

I would like to thank Jonas Good, the specialist technical team leader with BHP Billiton's Metallurgical Coal Marketing Team. At their facility they are researching ways to improve our understanding of iron ore products and how to optimise their use in steel mill iron-making processes. They are developing technology that will be able to speed up the characterisation of new ore resources, which can assess new and existing ore blends without the need to physically extract ore. Similarly, the automation of optical image analysis has largely been completed and will minimise expensive laboratory and pilot-scale research on ores that do not show promise. This is particularly important as global demand grows while reserve quality declines. Researchers are using the $30 million research coking ovens to devise new methods of environmentally friendly, low-emission coking.

In the area of information and communications, scientists at QCAT are developing field robotics and sensor networks. For example, they have built a prototype robot which could allow airport staff to remotely operate exit doors. In mining, they have developed world-class technology and high-precision 3D imaging and mapping and online monitoring of mining processes. They are also contributing to research which will enable automatic localisation and mapping, which have uses in many areas. For example, in a smelting factory, you can attach one of the 360-degree cameras and technology which would allow a smelter to automatically stop should it identify movement. This would make the factories much safer for all involved. So at every stage of the mining process—from identifying and analysing the quality of a possible mine, using optical imaging to identify the mining processes as they happen, to the melting down of metal—CSIRO has relevant research generating products of the highest values to our mineral and energy resources.

I would also like to congratulate CSIRO for their official opening of the $140 million Australian Square Kilometre Array Pathfinder in Western Australia. The precursor infrastructure at the site was originally designed and developed by CSIRO.
I commend the more than 350 staff on site at QCAT, who every year are having a real impact on our community, with a significant flow of innovative, leading edge technologies and high-value products and processes. *(Time expired)*

**National Broadband Network**

Dr LEIGH (Fraser) (16:23): Last week Senator Kate Lundy and I attended the laying of the distribution fibre cable in Palmerston, in my electorate of Fraser. NBN Co. forecast that construction should be complete in the central business district of Gungahlin and nearby suburbs by the end of the year. Homes and businesses in Gungahlin are now one step closer to connecting to the National Broadband Network and being able to access faster, more affordable and more reliable broadband. This will not only boost internet speeds but also strengthen the local community.

One example of where the NBN is strengthening community is in the lives of those suffering from a chronic health condition. In New South Wales, Hunter Nursing is using the National Broadband Network to remotely monitor the health of patients suffering from one or more chronic diseases. A trial of 50 high-risk patients using an in-patient home device with an online interface enabled them to have their health monitored in their own home by health professionals. Through high-speed broadband, patients and carers were able to use their device to access monitoring equipment and communicate with health professionals via video-conferencing and email. The benefit of this was that patients enjoyed one-to-one care in the comfort of their own homes. They could monitor their own health status and they could maintain their independence.

Ann Maree Battersby, one of the nurses who participated in the trial, commented:

It gives [patients] increased security; they feel they have access to the nurse without having the nurse physically visit them in their home.

Sally Bradley, granddaughter and carer for one of the patients in the trial, said:

The main benefit for us is in letting my grandmother still live at home and maintain her independence. This kind of innovative application of technology assists those living with chronic illness in the Fraser electorate.

The Gillard government has provided over $1 million to the ACT Gallagher government to ensure that NBN services are available in the Gungahlin community as soon as the rollout is complete. In July this year I was pleased to announce the Gillard government had already provided $360,000 to the ACT government for NBN services that would put people in touch with local government. When the project comes online Gungahlin residents will be able to engage with ACT Legislative Assembly members and government officials via interactive video platforms. The project will also provide the necessary infrastructure for new online services and forums as the NBN is rolled out.

Personally I am also excited about the opportunities the NBN opens up in education. Superfast broadband will enable students to video link with schools overseas, share classroom experiences and learn other languages in real time. For students using facilities in the Gungahlin library the NBN will mean the quality is similar to watching a DVD. I am an optimist who believes in the power of innovation and technology to meet today's challenges and to seize tomorrow's opportunities.
Mental Health

Ms MARINO (Forrest—Opposition Whip) (16:26): This Wednesday, 10 October, is United Nations World Mental Health Day and this week is also Western Australia's Mental Health Week. These present us with an opportunity to raise awareness of mental health issues in our community. The World Health Organization encourages us all to have an open discussion of mental disorders and invest in prevention, promotion and treatment services. This is because of the awful truth that mental illness is a major contributor to suicide. Research shows us that people with mental illness like depression, bipolar or schizophrenia are seven times more likely to end their life than people who do not suffer from mental illness.

Depression is the most common disorder which affects four per cent of the general population. More tragic, however, is that about 160,000 young people aged between 16 and 24 live with depression each year, which is why I welcome headspace in my electorate. It is something I campaigned strongly for in the run to the election and have ever since. From 1 January next year young people aged from 20 to 25 years living in the greater Bunbury area will have access to pathways to help them through headspace.

Young people who suffer depression are also usually suffering from other problems in their lives such as drugs, alcohol and family problems. Headspace will allow young people to face any range of these challenges and receive help by just walking in the door and telling their story just once. By offering early intervention and professional help the centre will make a real difference to the lives of young people and the people who know and love them.

Everyone is impacted when suicide occurs—family, friends and the wider community, particularly in small regional communities. Just starting a conversation, getting people to talk and open up about their problems, can play a major role in preventing a tragedy from occurring. It has been shown that with support and treatment many who have attempted or contemplated ending their life go on to live a normal life. Joshua Cuniniffe, a 19-year-old man in my electorate, wrote a book about his own depression called *Behind the Smile: a Story of Hope*. It is a great book and Joshua is a fantastic young man.

I urge everyone in my electorate of Forrest who knows of a friend, colleague or family member who may be suffering from depression or any form of mental illness to get them help through a local GP or a local organisation such as Lifeline. I commend the Piacentini company in my electorate. RU OK? Day was held recently. They got their workers to watch a video. All the staff had a chat about whether they were okay. It is a great question to ask friends and family: are you okay? If they are not, you can offer them the help and support that they might need throughout their lives. So we should ask the question: are you okay?

**Ipswich Regional Advocacy Service**

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (16:29): Last week I had the great privilege of delivering some very good news to some hardworking, dedicated community workers in Ipswich. Arlene Lewis, Sally Spencer, Jacqui Clarke, Lyn Guilfoyle and Rachel Stokman work for the Ipswich Regional Advocacy Service Inc., known as IRASI, funded under the Queensland Tenant Advice and Advocacy Service. IRASI is a service that helps 600 tenants a month in the Ipswich and West Moreton region. In the last year it has supported 150 people in court. It is a service that was cruelly scrapped by the Queensland LNP government in what can only be
described as a heartless funding grab. On 24 July IRASI was one of 23 services which help 80,000 Queenslanders a year. It was funded under TAAS, which was sent notices of withdrawal of funding by the Newman LNP government effective 31 October. The majority of funding for this service did not come from public coffers but from the interest on tenant's own bonds. The Queensland LNP government chose to neglect those tenants who need additional support dealing with landlords with leases and with the courts. The LNP state government chose to keep the interest on those tenancy bonds.

When IRASI approached Mr Ian Berry, the state member for Ipswich—an LNP member—he said, in the Queensland Times that it would be nice to continue to fund this service. He told IRASI that tenants already had enough protection, that if tenants had issues they could talk to their neighbours—a disgraceful comment and one that shows just how disgustingly short-sighted he is, and how poor is his knowledge, in respect of tenancy issues—despite the fact that he is a lawyer. Without IRASI, people who are disabled and people with education and life challenges will not be taken care of. Advocacy and advice services like IRASI help keep people in Ipswich, the Somerset region and the Lockyer Valley in their homes. They are critical to preventing homelessness.

The axing of this important service is just another example of the state LNP government's slashing of jobs and services at every opportunity with no thought for the long-term implications for those affected. However, I thank the Prime Minister and also the Minister for Homelessness and Minister for Housing, the Hon. Brendan O'Connor, for some good news for those women I mentioned, who provide these services through IRASI, and to the clients they support. While the state LNP government in Queensland is ripping funds away, this federal Labor government has provided $3.3 million in emergency funding for the Queensland Tenant Advice and Advocacy Service. We will make it a term and condition on any future national partnership funding on homelessness or national affordable housing agreement that state governments must foot the bill. It is not a problem in Victoria, Western Australia and New South Wales—all of which have LNP or coalition governments. It is a problem in Queensland. The Campbell Newman government in Queensland is short-sighted, heartless, brutal and callous and should reverse its decision in relation to this issue. I thank the minister for housing and homelessness in Canberra for the work he has done. (Time expired)

Hasluck Electorate: Childcare

Mr WYATT (Hasluck) (16:32): I rise today to highlight an increasingly important sector in the community—one that needs more attention from government—the childcare sector. People in this sector across Hasluck and wider Australia do a fantastic job. Our economy would experience tremendous difficulty if hundreds of thousands of working mothers across Australia had to step away from the workplace to care for their child or children at home full time. I cannot think of a more important job than being a part of our future and of Australia’s early learning and wellbeing. However, there are significant improvements and modifications that can be made to the sector to help improve its productivity, profitability and standard of care.

A major issue is the high turnover of staff, which creates instability for employers and, more importantly, for the children in care. There are also added expectations from families for out-of-hours care, for school-aged holiday care and for before and after school care that require extra staff and resources. These challenges are complex. They require more than just
words. This area is one that a coalition government will look immediately to improve should we win the next election. It is also to cut down on the amount of red tape and regulation placed on childcare operators.

Times are changing and we, as legislators and parliamentarians, must change with them. There is no room for trite attacks around class warfare from those opposite. In the 21st century not everybody works nine to five. We need a childcare system that caters for these people. In-house nannies and in-home arrangements are also on the rise in Australia, including in my electorate of Hasluck. Supporting the increase in the number of nannies is not about looking after the wealthy, which is a lazy argument from this tired government. It is about flexibility in supplying an area of demand with a service. It is about supporting those without a family network or people in rural communities. A stronger, more flexible childcare regime will encourage and support more women to become included in the workforce.

To help have the voices of my electorate heard I invited the shadow minister for childcare and early childhood learning, the Hon. Sussan Ley MP, to Hasluck to meet with workers and those in management at childcare facilities. One of the places we went to was Buggles Childcare in Forrestfield, and Sussan and I were both very impressed with the level of advocacy given by its CEO, senior management and staff. People who have been in the industry for decades deserve to have their voices heard. They deserve to have their issues raised federally. I thank Sussan for visiting this and other businesses in Hasluck, and finish by saying that a stronger, more productive childcare system is only possible in this country if the coalition is returned to power. Let me also say that there are members in our chamber who access services and who have need of them, and I certainly recommend that the member for Blair exercise those opportunities in the future. (Time expired)

Duff, Mrs Margaret Anne

Mr GRAY (Brand—Special Minister of State and Minister for the Public Service and Integrity) (16:35): Margaret Anne Duff made a community contribution far beyond her role as an electorate officer before her death on 25 August 2012. She was an inspiration, activist and advocate for people in the south-west metropolitan region of Perth, in towns like Pinjarra, Mandurah, Rockingham, Kwinana and Warnbro. Her strong belief in fairness and equality and her sense of justice were ignited in the 1970s when the Tresillian Centre for disabled children in Nedlands was closed. Margaret the activist was born in her campaign to keep the centre open and in her fight to ensure people with disabilities were treated humanely and with dignity.

Over 40 years, her unstinting efforts to improve the lot of others resulted in Margaret being awarded life membership of the Australian Labor Party in May this year. Margaret worked as an electorate officer for South West Region MLC Beryl Jones, who set up an office in Pinjarra in 1986. Often it was just Margaret in that office and she quickly distinguished herself because of her capacity to independently form an outstanding relationship with the local community. She became well respected by the local Indigenous community for her assistance with housing, financial and social concerns. Local elders like the late Theo Kearing, the late Frank Nannup and the late Joe Walley called Margaret a friend, and they knew she was an ally.

Beryl Jones was replaced as MLC by John Cowdell, who set up his office in Mandurah Terrace, Mandurah, which became the local drop-in centre for every disadvantaged group or
individual. Margaret was Mr Cowdell's electorate officer for 12 years, retiring briefly from the state scene to work for then MHR and Labor leader Kim Beazley. In late December 2006, Margaret Duff was drafted into the Peel by-election campaign and was instrumental in ensuring Paul Papalia's campaign to win Peel was successful in 2007.

On his retirement as President of the Legislative Council John Cowdell said of Margaret Duff:

I recognise Margaret Duff, my electorate officer. Ours has been a genuine partnership for 12 years in the electorate. She has been a member for a lot of the time, but without the pay and the prestige. With Margaret I got the whole family, and I am deeply indebted for everything that Max and Rachel have done for me.

Margaret was not a blind foot soldier of the Labor Party. She took a passionate interest in making sure that the party remained true to its core values and that it maintained high standards. She contributed in a voluntary capacity to disability support organisations, Indigenous committees, conservation and environmental groups and in dispensing emergency relief. She was instrumental in influencing for the better politicians, local councillors, community leaders and all those around her, leaving a legacy far beyond her role as electorate officer.

Margaret is survived by her husband, Max; son, Allan; daughter, Rachael, and their families. At her funeral Kim Beazley wrote:

She was a genuine community servant, caring for her neighbour, broadly defined with cheerfulness, generosity and great intelligence. There are few of equivalent capacity and sentiment. Her passing is a loss for us all. Margaret was a magnificent servant of our community, a contributor to our party, a mother, and a wife to Max, a person whom we all respected. She deserves the honour and respect of our parliament by having her obituary recorded here in our Hansard.

Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia 27th National Rally

Mr BUCHHOLZ (Wright) (16:38): I rise to speak in support of the Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia 27th National Rally 2012, which will officially open next Tuesday, 16 October. The rally will be held in Boonah at the Boonah Showground & Coronation Park, and it will run from Monday 15 to Sunday 21 October.

As of this morning there were over 1,108 motorhomes registered and booked in at Boonah for the rally, which will provide fantastic economic and social promotion for our tourism sector. The Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia is the largest of its kind in the nation, with more than 60,000 members and 97 different chapters. I am extremely pleased to be involved with such an event and I am certain that many of the local businesses in the region will benefit from this event.

I applaud the Scenic Rim Regional Council and particularly Mayor John Brent for their work, support and sponsorship of the Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia, which has in turn generated much positive awareness in representing the Scenic Rim. Attendees will be in the perfect position to witness and experience the hospitality of the Scenic Rim firsthand, and I am looking forward to seeing the tremendous spirit of the region in action.

I also congratulate outgoing Boonah District Chamber of Commerce President Adrian Stephan for the energy and the time that he has put into talking to local businesses about the
opportunities presented by the rally and the economic boost this rally will bring to the region. I also take the opportunity to acknowledge Julian Creighton, the new incoming chamber of commerce president who, I know, will do a fantastic job.

I commend CMCA rally managers Edna and Leo Huyghebaert and the numerous volunteers who have worked together to ensure that the rally is a success. I would encourage all the participants who will travel from right around this great nation, from across all of the states, to Boonah, to be part of and participate in the week, to ensure that they travel safely.

I also encourage them, as baby boomers travelling to Boonah, to see that, if they are looking to spend their kids' inheritance, the Scenic Rim is a great place to invest the kids' inheritance! The Scenic Rim is a beautiful place to holiday, and we encourage all to come and see the specials that will be on display with reference to the sale of motorhomes and, in particular, the different types of entertainment there will be and the friendships that will be brought about through the week put together by the CMCA.

Boonah is a quaint little country town situated about an hour and 20 minutes south-west of Brisbane. You will be able to experience the quaint country hospitality, along with the vineyards and wineries and many scenic bushwalks. I would also like to acknowledge Bob Baldwin for coming to attend and assisting me in opening it in a formal capacity.

Petition: Easter Sunday
Brunswick Sinhala Language School

Ms VAMVAKINOU (Calwell) (16:41): I rise to present a petition to the House requesting the amendment of the employment standards in the Fair Work Act to recognise the Monday and/or the Tuesday following Christmas, Boxing Day, New Year's Day and Easter Sunday as additional public holidays. The principal petitioner is Michael Donovan of the SDA Union, and he has submitted this petition, signed by residents in my electorate, to draw the attention of the House to this matter. The petition was considered at a recent meeting of the Standing Committee on Petitions and certified as being in accordance with standing orders. I therefore wish to present this petition to the House for tabling.

The petition read as follows—

To the Honourable The Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives

This petition of certain citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the House that:

- Weekend and shift workers are disadvantaged whenever Christmas Day, Boxing Day or New Year's Day falls on a weekend and the public holiday substitutes (is moved) to the following Monday or Tuesday.
- When substitution occurs workers rostered to work on the actual special day falling on the weekend don't receive a public holiday whilst workers rostered to work on the substitute day do.
- This is unfair to weekend and shift workers.
- Some States have legislated for Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year's Day to be public holidays when they fall on a weekend plus provide an additional public holiday on the following Monday or Tuesday.
- Weekend and shift workers are also disadvantaged because Good Friday, Easter Saturday (in most states) and Easter Monday are public holidays but Easter Sunday (except in NSW) is not. (The NSW Parliament unanimously legislated for Easter Sunday to be a public holiday.)
• This is unfair to weekend and shift workers.
• Parliament should legislate a uniform standard across Australia.

We therefore ask the House to:

Amend the National Employment Standards in the Fair Work Act to include:

1. An additional public holiday (not a substitute day) on the following Monday and/or Tuesday whenever Christmas Day, Boxing Day or New Year's Day fall on a weekend.
2. Easter Sunday as a public holiday.

from 39 citizens

Petition received.

Ms VAMVAKINOU: Further, I would like to talk about an event that I attended in my electorate a couple of weeks ago. It was an event that I am an annual attendee at, and I look forward to receiving every year the invitation from the Brunswick Sinhala Language School, which conducts Saturday morning classes in the Sinhalese language in my electorate. This particular event is conducted annually but, on this occasion, we were celebrating the 20th anniversary of the Brunswick Sinhala Language School. It is a significant milestone in the history of this remarkable Saturday morning school, which now boasts a growing enrolment of up to 550 students this year, which is tremendous; it is the size of a medium-sized school. This school is a testament to the success of teaching children a language other than English, and it showcases the benefits that can be obtained for the broader community but, in particular, for those children who go on to study, often, the languages of their parents.

Mr Deputy Speaker Georganas, I am sure you would agree that in Australia multiculturalism is one of our greatest resources, and with multiculturalism comes a great wealth of multilingual capacity. It is absolutely important to encourage young Australians to learn languages other than English. We live in a global community. We have amongst us the very linguistic capacity, the resources, that we and this country need in order to help our younger generations move with greater ease in the global community. So I want to congratulate the Sinhalese community in my electorate, who do such a wonderful job—because most of this, of course, is done on a voluntary basis: getting the school together and actually running it. They do a wonderful job in teaching the children of Sinhalese background the Sinhalese language. (Time expired)

Mallee Electorate: Wine Industry

Mr FORREST (Mallee) (16:44): I rise to draw the public's attention to a very sad state of affairs occurring in my electorate. The liquidators of a failed wine business, which collapsed three years ago in June 2009, are pursuing 20 of my wine grape growers for door payments which were paid well prior to the collapse of nectar. I think this is an undesirable thing for the liquidator to be trying to do to my wine grape growers, who are hard pressed. Neqtar was the successor to Normans Wines, which went bust owing the same growers enormous amounts of money for crop delivered.

If the liquidator argues that his legal justification to pursue my growers is because the directors of Neqtar at the time were trading insolvently, then his problem is with the directors, not with my growers, who still await a payment for the total tonnage of wine crop they delivered to this winery. I think it is unreasonable by this liquidator. He may, as he argues, have the law onside, but if his problem is with the directors beforehand then he must pursue
More than likely, although I am not aware, $1 would get me $100 that they have declared themselves bankrupt. This is commonly occurring in many sectors across Australia. I am urging the growers—there are 20 of them; they live around the districts of Robinvale and Mildura—to stare down this liquidator as they did when a similar liquidator tried to do the same thing to them with Normans Wines nearly three years ago. The liquidator has redeemed an enormous amount of capital out of Neqtar. He has sold all of the equipment there to a local consortium, Qualia Wine, who at last vintage crushed 40,000 tonnes of grapes successfully.

This parliament needs to recognise that its mandatory code of conduct must apply across all of the states. This parliament can use its corporate capacity through the Constitution to give these struggling growers—and it is not just wine grape growers; it is across any sector for any commodity—some protection so that when they are paid a door payment and then are still whisking and waiting for the payment for the total tonnage delivered, they do not find themselves, if a corporation goes bust, with a liquidator pursuing them years later.

(Time expired)

Lindsay Electorate: Education

Mr BRADBURY (Lindsay—Assistant Treasurer and Minister Assisting for Deregulation) (16:47): I rise to express my condemnation of the New South Wales government for the cuts they have inflicted upon the New South Wales community, and my community in particular, with their $1.7 billion worth of cuts to school education and education funding more generally, and also for their $3 billion worth of cuts in health care. I have been running a campaign locally—a petition—and I am pleased to advise that I now have over 1,000 signatories to the petition. I am calling upon the New South Wales government to reverse the cuts they have announced. The $1.7 billion worth of cuts will impact upon every student in every school right across New South Wales. Government schools, Catholic schools and independent schools will all be affected. Not only was it not mentioned to people before the last election but these announcements were made without any consultation at all with the school education community.

Some of the local principals in my community have already expressed their outrage. For example, Mr Andrew Mullins, whom I know well, at Wollemi College made the observation that he has been teaching for 33 years and said, 'I have never seen a government—Liberal or Labor—do this. There is simply no precedent.' He went on to talk about how school fees are likely to rise by an estimated 10 per cent as a result of these cuts. Bruce Nevill from Penrith Christian School said, 'It is disgraceful.' Marina Haines from Montgrove College said that many parents are going to be financially disadvantaged: 'We are a low socioeconomic school in the first place and many families are already making big sacrifices.'

I am particularly disappointed with the lack of advocacy from the local state Liberal members on this issue. There are three of them: the member for Mulgoa, Tanya Davies; the member for Penrith, Stuart Ayres; and the member for Londonderry, Bart Bassett. On day one of these cuts we had Tanya Davies come out and indicate that she supported these changes. She said they were tough decisions but they were fair decisions. But then, on day two, she came out and said that she actually objected to these decisions and these cuts but only insofar as they impacted on non-government schools. Stuart Ayres, on the other hand, basically said that these cuts are fair and then went on to blame the GST. He said the federal government had cut the GST. What a load of rubbish! We do not determine the GST. Sure, it was a
Liberal government that introduced it, but the Commonwealth collects the GST and there is an independent formula that determines how it is distributed. If it has declined in real terms into the future, that is only because consumption is down. But I can tell the House that GST revenues are set to increase by 19.5 per cent. *(Time expired)*

**The Deputy Speaker (Mr S Geoghegan):** In accordance with standing order 193, the time for members' constituency statements has concluded.

**BILLS**

**Higher Education Support Amendment (Streamlining and Other Measures) Bill 2012**  
Second Reading

Debate resumed on the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

**Ms Ley** (Farrer) (16:50): I am pleased to speak on the Higher Education Support Amendment (Streamlining and Other Measures) Bill 2012. By the debate on the bill in the Federation Chamber today, we obviously flag that we in the coalition are not opposing the bill. I would like to make some remarks about the background, the implementation and some future steps.

This bill came about because of a post-implementation review on VET FEE-HELP which was undertaken in 2011, and this bill is the first stage of introducing some of these recommendations. The bill will amend the Higher Education Support Act to achieve the following: strengthen the quality of the Higher Education Loan Program schemes; improve information-sharing and transparency with the national education regulators; improve arrangements for the early identification of low-quality providers; and position the government to better manage risk to students and public moneys.

Schedule 1 of the bill aims to remove barriers to participation, boosting the take-up of VET FEE-HELP by quality registered training organisations. Schedule 2 will ensure that revocations of approval are undertaken in a timelier manner, ensuring that an organisation that has had its approval to offer VET FEE-HELP revoked cannot continue to offer VET FEE-HELP to students in the lag time between a minister revoking its approval and the actual revocation. Schedule 3 will see the consolidation of the four sets of VET—vocational education and training—guidelines into one, to be known as the VET Guidelines. This is purely a streamlining measure. Schedule 4 of the bill will adjust the specific date requirement for census dates, moving this to the guidelines. This will enable approved providers to have greater flexibility in offering courses and will minimise the administrative burden associated with this.

The government has in the case of this bill completed a regulation impact statement which I believe gives good background and context to the bill, and I wish to draw from that statement now:

Australia’s vocational education and training (VET) sector brings together students, registered training organisations (RTOs) governments, employers and industry bodies. There are approximately 5,000 RTOs ranging from public Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutes, to private sector RTOs of varying size and scope. Large, broad-based TAFEs deliver the bulk of VET in the sector and in 2010 operating revenue for the public VET system was $7 billion. In the private sector small, specialised...
RTOs co-exist with large, multi-disciplinary colleges. There were approximately 1.8 million students enrolled in publicly funded VET courses in 2010, accounting for 74 per cent of VET students.

The Government works with state and territory governments to set national policy priorities, strategic directions and funding in VET. The Australian Skills Quality Authority is responsible for registering and regulating the majority of RTOs and accrediting courses in VET. The Government provided $1.7 billion to state and territory governments in 2010-11 to support skills and workforce development-related services. In 2011-12, this funding was increased by a further $1.75 billion over five years.

While not discounting the importance of the federal government adding to what is essentially state based funding agreements, what the coalition has been very critical of is the Australian Skills Quality Authority—ASQA—given that it is seriously under resourced. To make statements, as the government does, that ASQA is responsible for registering and regulating the majority of RTOs and accrediting courses in VET, and having just given the chamber a sense of the size of the VET sector, unfortunately shows that ASQA, which we have been told only has six active investigators on the case at any one time, has an enormous task. Not only that but also the states of WA and Victoria have not signed up to that regulator and therefore are continuing to do their own regulation whereby courses offered in those states do not have national delivery.

So, it is a confusing sector. It is characterised by this mix of federal and state funding. At times this government has been quite unfriendly towards private RTOs—certainly in the context of a cost-recovery model for ASQA—since every private RTO has to move through, registering, being monitored et cetera. That will place a large and sometimes impossible cost burden on small RTOs given the flexibility of the sector—and that is its great strength; they do need to be fit for purpose. So you have a small RTO in a niche area, the provision of that particular training and the need for that particular training to be turned on and off. We in the coalition believe that is something that we value. We therefore have to be very careful about anything that inhibits that flexibility and nimbleness. That was a little bit of an aside on ASQA but it is certainly central to the role of the VET sector.

I will take a couple of moments to talk about VET FEE-HELP. It is still not a term that is particularly well understood and I wonder if that is because not that many students access it, although people understand the old HELP scheme that applies to tertiary education. People of our generation certainly understand HECS, which is the old name for that scheme. VET FEE-HELP is quite complicated, both for the student and the RTO, but the principle is sound and it is obviously well supported by all parliamentarians.

To be approved of a VET FEE-HELP for students, RTOs must apply to the Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education—the department—and satisfy a range of eligibility requirements under the act. RTOs must be a body corporate, must be listed on the national register, be financially viable and likely to remain so, carry on business in Australia with central management and control in Australia, offer VET-accredited diploma and advanced diploma courses, be a member of an approved tuition insurance scheme and have administrative procedures and the capacity to meet reporting requirements.

VET FEE-HELP does not regulate the setting of the tuition fees and it is available only for diplomas, advanced diplomas, graduate certificates and graduate diplomas. These qualifications are commonly referred to as higher level VET qualifications. To be eligible, a student must be studying an approved higher level VET qualification and be either an
Australian citizen or a permanent humanitarian visa holder who is resident in Australia for the duration of the unit of study. It is not available to international students. Full-fee-paying VET students and some state subsidised students are eligible for a VET FEE-HELP loan. A full-fee-paying student is not funded by a state or territory government or the federal government.

Eligible students can take out a VET FEE-HELP loan to cover all or part of their tuition fees. When students take out such a loan the government pays the loan directly to the RTO and students repay the loan gradually through the Australian tax system once their income is above the compulsory repayment threshold set by the Taxation Office. For the current financial year, the repayment threshold is $49,095. Students can make voluntary repayments of their VET FEE-HELP at any time.

Students are not charged an administration fee as such for their loans but all students and fee-paying places under VET FEE-HELP are required to pay a loan fee equivalent to 20 per cent of the value of the VET FEE-HELP loan. That fee has been determined by the Australian Government Actuary to adequately take account of public debt interest expense above consumer price index and fair value impairment of loans. So students who access these loans to pay the tuition fees associated with the state government subsidised place in VET do not pay a loan fee; instead, they pay the costs associated with the impairment value of the subsidised loans and the public debt interest is shared equally between the government and relevant state or territory jurisdictions. That is how the system works. That gives some idea of the VET sector as a whole and also the perspective of the student.

As I said, the current legislation comes from a post-implementation review of VET FEE-HELP which was commissioned in 2009. The report found that VET FEE-HELP was administratively complex. It made 10 recommendations to improve participation by both RTOs and students. I will run through those recommendations in brief. They are:

- Remove the requirement for RTOs to have credit transfer arrangements … in place with higher education providers to become an approved provider.
- Continue to extend the offer to waive the 20 per cent student loan fee to state and territory government subsidised students as part of the VET reform package.
- Investigate the cost, feasibility and desirability of expanding VET FEE-HELP to include certificate IV level qualifications …
- Seek to simplify and streamline HELP legislation to better achieve VET FEE-HELP objectives …
- Continue to consider the synergies between HELP requirements and the national and non-referring jurisdiction regulators to further simplify and streamline requirements and minimise duplication.
- Continue to prioritise improvements to simplify and streamline administrative compliance requirements to support a responsive VET sector …
- Develop an engagement strategy to address participation issues for RTOs, students, peak bodies—et cetera.
- Continue to improve information provision, education and promotion of VET FEE-HELP and its benefits to students and the VET sector …
- Monitor and undertake further research into funding and tuition fees, approved courses, completion rates, pathways, student experience and employment outcomes …
- Continue to monitor and review VET FEE-HELP against its objectives and expected outcomes and undertake a subsequent formal evaluation when five years of information is available.
Those were the 10 recommendations from the post-implementation review.

The sense that one gets from those recommendations is: here is a system set up to support students in vocational education and training. Often, as we know, the courses are expensive, depending on the qualifications sought and the length of time it takes. Often the participants in the courses have been out of the workforce for some time. They may be young and not well-resourced. They may come from family backgrounds where financial support is hard to get. If cost is a barrier, then it is really important that we attract as many as possible to the option of VET FEE-HELP, and that is clearly not happening. So, to the extent that this will move the sector towards that, it is well supported by the coalition.

The coalition are always well and truly supportive of endeavours to reduce red tape. The consolidation, for example, of the four guidelines into one set is a practical measure that will assist providers. Streamlining of the approvals process for low-risk providers should increase the number of VET FEE-HELP eligible providers, ensuring there is greater access to income-contingent loans for students. I think that is a very sensible approach. I would love to see how it actually works in practice. I do not see it anywhere else in the government's administration of any of its employment services or other contracts under the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. We have so often seen the one-size-fits-all approach, which places an impossibly high regulatory burden, I think, on organisations and sometimes individuals who, by any common sense assessment, would be considered low-risk. So, if there is going to be scope within this for the government to identify low-risk RTOs and say, 'You don't need the heavy-handed treatment. You don't need the compliance that costs your organisation so much that it perhaps cannot even operate,' then that is a good thing. But I am cautious because there is no evidence on the ground that that is the approach the government or its departments take in practice.

We in this place are all, I know, firm believers in the need for accessible and affordable education. The fact that VET FEE-HELP has the ability to bring vocational education opportunities to all Australians is very important indeed. But, again, far too many are being denied these opportunities, with only 39,124 students accessing VET FEE-HELP assistance in 2011. Only 112 registered training organisations offer VET FEE-HELP, of the more than 2,000 that could do so. In Tasmania and the Northern Territory there are no RTOs offering VET FEE-HELP. Not only do we need to ensure that students can both access and afford their education but we also need to do more to raise quality and remove poor performers and poor providers from this space.

I touched on the impossible task of ASQA earlier in my remarks. I continue to be alarmed at reports of students qualifying with certificate III level qualifications in as little as two weeks. While these students, being under the qualification limit, will not be eligible for VET FEE-HELP, the issue of quality is not just confined to those lower courses. We absolutely need a first-class world training system, and we on this side of the House recognise that we need graduates with transferable skills and graduates that can meet the skills of the future and embrace them. Vocational education is critical to this end. It must provide students with a comprehensive education which meets the needs of industry both now and into the future.

I might just touch on an initiative of the former coalition government, the Australian Technical Colleges. These worked in conjunction with industry to deliver world-class vocational education. These were centres of excellence, providing skills in demand. The
current government chose to abolish these centres—instead offering a trade training centre to every school. Regrettably, this has not eventuated, and those that have been built are paltry in comparison to what could have been achieved had the Australian Technical College model been persisted with.

We all should be concerned when government policy simply results in bricks and mortar. As I travel the country in my shadow ministerial role in this portfolio I am confronted by a lot of facilities—whether they be trade training centres; Australian Technical Colleges in mothballs, sadly; TAFEs, where training could, for example, be happening over the summer break for maybe nine to 12 weeks but everything is closed up; schools that are offering a course that those students do not happen to want; or remote facilities a long way from any town but presenting options that the local community is not responsive to. It is not a question of capital assets and infrastructure. It is not a question of more buildings. It is a question of a better bringing together of the assets that are on the ground and better streamlining of the process by which we move the ideal candidates from school into vocational education qualifications and to a real job in the real economy.

This bill is part of a series of measures resulting from the post-implementation review. The government in its regulation impact statement—which I congratulate the authors of, because it was well done and it was sound—received a clear and absolutely unanimous message from the sector that:

… in order to improve participation in VET FEE-HELP, the Government must implement simpler and more streamlined policies and processes … During consultations, stakeholders strongly supported the changes proposed in the redesign. In particular, there was wide ranging support for the modifications to streamline administration and enhance the quality and accountability framework.

But many stakeholders were concerned that they would not actually have time to implement the changes. So what was recommended to government—and what they are beginning to bring forward with this legislation—was a staged approach, with the initial priority being to:

… implement legislation amendments necessary to strengthen the HELP scheme’s quality and accountability framework. During the passage of legislation, both approved VET FEE-HELP providers and applicants would be kept abreast of their obligations and responsibilities under the proposed amendments and given sufficient time to make any operational changes necessary to meet these requirements.

Stakeholder implementation concerns would be addressed and sufficient time for further stakeholder suggestions and feedback would be considered. That is not the government's statement; that is the statement that I have drawn from the regulation impact statement.

We will be watching closely to make sure that that actually happens in the real world. For that reason, primarily, I flag that we will refer this to a Senate committee. I do not think it needs a long and tedious deliberation, but I would like small RTOs, which I think feel a bit battered and bruised by this government's approach to what they do, to have the chance to have their voices heard. I am not confident that they have already had that. Stakeholder consultation, as we in this place know, can involve talking to peak bodies. Talking to a couple of big representatives does not always drill down to the many different local outlets working on the ground in the small towns and how the real world works for them. In the real world, for them as private providers the overwhelming issue is the cost of compliance and the amount of money that the government is going to ask from you so it can make sure that you fulfil the
government's requirements. That is not necessarily a bad thing, but it is terrible if it gets out of hand. I think that the examples I have given before show how in many instances it has got out of hand.

The regulation impact statement acknowledges that the redesign of VET FEE-HELP will result in costs to stakeholders for staff training, the updating of promotional material and the aligning of administrative systems. However, these costs are expected to be directly offset by the benefits that will accrue from more streamlined administrative and reporting policies and processes. I do not think that is a short, direct cause and effect relationship. Costs are going up: staff training is expensive, promotional material has to be new and aligning administrative systems can be a huge expense when you are fiddling with your existing IT. The government says that costs will be directly offset by the benefits. Yes, costs may be partly offset by the benefits, but it may well take time for those benefits to come through the system, because those benefits presumably will be higher enrolments of students. RTOs are not going to change the way they do business and move into this slightly different world only to have the same number of students; the effect on them would be quite severe. This will only work if participation increases. There may be a lot of factors impacting on that. We need to see what they will be and we need to take this carefully. For that reason, as I said, we will be referring this legislation to a Senate committee.

The intent of this legislation is sound. The reasons given by the government and by the parliamentary secretary in her second reading speech make sense to the coalition. As always, the devil will be in the detail and the implementation. But at this stage I commend my remarks to the Federation Chamber.

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (17:12): I speak in support of the Higher Education Support Amendment (Streamlining and Other Measures) Bill 2012. I will deal with what is contained in the bill, then deal with the government's response in relation to higher education needs in this country, whether they be the needs of universities, TAFEs or RTOs, and then with some of the remarks of the member for Farrer in relation to our record on this issue.

This legislation includes a number of measures that will improve the Higher Education Support Act. It will amend the act to provide better administration of the Higher Education Loan Program, commonly known as HELP, particularly VET FEE-HELP. It comes, as the member for Farrer said, as a result of recommendations that were made in the Post implementation review of the VET FEE-HELP Assistance Scheme: final report in 2011 and through a COAG process, the National Partnership Agreement on Skills Reform, that took place in April 2012, particularly the redesign of VET FEE-HELP.

I mention the April 2012 process because of what has happened in Queensland, my home state, in relation to employment and training. I wonder why the current Queensland government actually went to those COAG meetings, because the Queensland LNP government has gutted and destroyed the training employment that was taking place, including getting rid of the very successful Skilling Queenslanders for Work program. It did that subsequent to the COAG meetings that were a prelude to this legislation. That program was $248 million of money well spent that the Queensland government got rid of on 16 July 2012. A report by Deloitte Access Economics on 23 July—a report commissioned by the Queensland government—said that a program that was supposed to create 26,000 jobs every year actually created 57,000 jobs, including 8½ thousand people who would not otherwise
have got employment and would bring in the Queensland economy by 2020, $6.5 billion in revenue, including about $1.2 billion in state government taxes.

So it is interesting that the prelude for this legislation in April was attended by the Queensland government. At the same time as they were going through the process of saying, 'We'll sign up for this particular arrangement with the federal government,' they were determining to get rid of jobs training, which impacted my electorate, particularly in the Ipswich region, to the tune of about $5.4 million worth of funding under Skilling Queenslanders for Work, the Ipswich City Council, Harvest Rain, Riverview Neighbourhood House, the Salvation Army and any number of other local organisations that were skilling people and training people through registered training organisations and the like.

This was a meeting that the states turned up to. There was a COAG national partnership agreement in April 2012 which was geared towards making changes to the VET FEE-HELP. There are a number of amendments in this legislation that improve quality accountability of the whole framework and governance in relation to this, including implementing a risk management approach to approvals and administrative compliance. There is also an improvement to the government's capacity, in the event that any provider is not doing the right thing and public moneys are at risk, to step in on behalf of not just taxpayers but also the students who are using that service. The bill provides for a decision to revoke or suspend the approved provider to take effect from the day that the notice is registered on the Federal Register of Legislative Instruments.

There are some improvements in terms of streamlining and alterations to the HELP schemes through reducing administrative requirements on applicants and providers. There are some further amendments which meet the commitments that were made under the COAG agreement I referred to, particularly in relation to certificate IV-level qualifications and particularly among categories of VET courses that are eligible for VET FEE-HELP.

It is interesting. We had a recent meeting at the University of Queensland Ipswich campus, where I recall evidence coming from DEEWR that students who do certificates III and IV are just as likely to obtain good quality jobs as those students who have bachelor degrees. That was interesting evidence, particularly as there have been efforts by this government to get more students involved in the health sector and the social and community sector in the Ipswich region, as it is growing at a very fast pace.

The background to this particular legislation is, as many people would know, that FEE-HELP and VET FEE-HELP are available for approved higher education and VET FEE providers to enable students to meet their tuition fees so that they do not have to pay up-front. We provide loans for them, which assist them so that there are no financial obstacles or barriers in their way. Those loans enable students, particularly those from low socioeconomic backgrounds, to access higher education at institutions such as Bremer TAFE, located in Bundamba in Ipswich, in the same way as the assistance we provide through HECS and arrangements to universities, such as the University of Queensland Ipswich campus and the University of Southern Queensland at Springfield—both located in the electorate of Blair.

We on this side of the chamber strongly believe that every Australian, whether they live in the electorate of Blair or they live in Sydney, Melbourne or Brisbane, should get access to good quality education at university or TAFE so that their skills, talents and abilities can be improved and they can improve their financial security, their productivity and their capacity

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to meet challenges—not just nationally but in terms of their family's future. I am pleased to see that, with respect to higher education in my electorate—and this legislation is improving it dramatically—the census data shows that an extra 996 students have access to higher education in the Blair electorate. That is because we have some tremendous universities, TAFE colleges and other registered training organisations in the electorate of Blair.

Skills Australia acknowledges that by 2025 a third of all jobs will require a minimum of a bachelors degree qualification. To meet the demand of the high-skill, high-wage workforce in the future, we want to make sure that everyone can get access to those types of training organisations. More young people from regional and rural areas, people from migrant backgrounds, Indigenous people and those from suburbs such as Brassall, Raceview and Springfield in my electorate should get access to the kinds of opportunities that kids who live in Toorak or Vaucluse have for higher education.

I am pleased to see that this government has provided a massive increase in not just funding in the tertiary sector; there are also an additional 150,000 or more students attending university under this government. We have committed $4.454 billion through the Education Investment Fund and we have provided significant funding in not just the university sector but also the TAFE sector. I think the setting up of the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency was a good thing to streamline and strengthen higher education regulation. We have provided $38.8 billion in higher education investment over the next four years, including $8.4 billion for the Higher Education Loan Program, and there is about a billion dollars worth of federal government funding for what I would describe as equity in access measures. We have seen $765 million of funding for infrastructure in my electorate. We saw about $2 million for the Bremer Institute of TAFE—the first time any significant federal government funding was provided since the election of this government. Certainly, the previous government had a blind eye when it came to TAFE.

I recently had the opportunity to meet with the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Southern Queensland, Professor Jan Thomas, whose university received $49 million from the federal government to expand and enrich their student participation program in collaboration with a number of regional and metropolitan TAFEs in Queensland. That expansion will mean that there is a considerable flow-through effect to TAFE courses and TAFE colleges throughout Queensland. It is a massive injection of funds that this federal government has put in. In contrast, the LNP government in Queensland is proposing, through a recommendation of their task force, to cull TAFE colleges and campuses around Queensland from about 82 to 44. Bremer TAFE in Ipswich, in my electorate, is certainly in the sights of the LNP government.

One of the things that the University of Southern Queensland is doing through establishing the Queensland Tertiary Education Participation Network is partnering with TAFE colleges all around Queensland to cater for local workforce demands. The funding that is being provided by this government and the construction of what they call the Education Gateways—EDGY—Building at the university's Springfield campus is a significant capital investment from this federal Labor government in partnership with the University of Southern Queensland. The University of Southern Queensland's brand promise is: fulfilling lives. I think that is a terrific motto and a catchy motto, but it is what this parliament should be all about: fulfilling the lives, educationally, of young and old people, whether that is at university...
or TAFE. We have seen a student-demand driven funding system. The cap on student places was removed at universities and there was the opening of opportunities for many young people, as well as older people, to participate in higher education.

I had the opportunity recently to attend the University of Queensland college, a preparatory college at the University of Queensland Ipswich campus, to address the students and be at their awards night. I thank local organisations such as the RSL, the Ipswich City Council and the Edwards family for their contributions, scholarships, bursaries and awards that were given to students in order for them to go through college and university to do the kinds of courses they would like to do, particularly in the areas of nursing and the allied health profession, which are run so well at the University of Queensland. A TAFE qualification or a university qualification is a ticket to greater career choice and highly skilled and highly paid jobs. We are transforming and modernising the focus of government on skills and training.

The member for Farrer was quite critical in her comments of what we are doing with trade training. She took the opportunity in her speech to criticise the federal Labor government's commitment to trade training. This is a critical aspect; it is not just registered training organisations, universities or TAFEs but trade training as well. We have made a commitment. I see that on the ground in my electorate—the $2.5 billion program for trade training centres to help students and, particularly, schools to upgrade their trade training facilities—where there is a partnership between St Edmund's College in Ipswich, Ipswich Girls Grammar School and Ipswich Grammar School for a $3 million trade training centre. You can see it there, built by Hutchinson Builders, doing remarkable trade training in Ipswich. I suggest the member for Farrer has a look and sees what a good trade training centre will do.

However, I forget that those opposite opposed the $2.5 billion program tooth and nail and had the temerity to describe the centres as 'glorified sheds with lathes'. If they went to see the trade training centre at Ipswich they would see that it is far from that—it is fantastic. I was there with the then minister responsible, Simon Crean, on the occasion when he opened it. But trade training centres are not just located for private schools. We will see $5 million for the Ipswich Region Trade Training Centre which will be established at Ipswich State High School in Brassall. That is a partnership with Rosewood State High, Lowood Grammar and Bundamba State Secondary College. We will see another $2.99 million for the Riverview Springfield Trade Training Centre, established primarily at St Peter Claver College in Riverview.

We now see the fruits on the ground across the country. The member for Farrer must be politically blind and naïve to think that trade training centres are not making an impact on the lives of young people at schools. She must be politically blind to say nothing about what is happening in Queensland with the gutting of trade training and funding for skilling Queenslanders for work. She must be politically blind to oppose so much of what we are doing. I am pleased though that they support this particular bill. It really is a novelty to see those opposite say yes for a change because, when it comes to skills and training and higher education, their attitude is often to just say no. Or, indeed, when they were in power they tried to impose Work Choices on the higher education sector. I am pleased to commend the legislation to the House.
bill to introduce what it terms 'timely improvements to its Higher Education Loan Program—HELP—and VET FEE-HELP in particular'. According to the explanatory memorandum, it is acting:

… on the recommendations arising from the Post Implementation Review of the VET FEE-HELP Scheme Final Report September 2011 and its commitments under the April 2012 COAG National Partnership Agreement on Skills Reform …

The bill is set out in three parts. Firstly, it amends the Higher Education Support Act by applying indexation to the maximum levels of expenditure for the grants and other scholarships that are available from the Commonwealth. In order to avoid regular amendments to the act, the bill will enable the minister to index these maximum level expenditures by legislative instrument. Secondly, it seeks to amend the Australian Research Council Act 2001—ARCA—by indexing the appropriated levels of expenditure under this act and add the final year of the budget forward estimates. And, lastly, the final part repeals the existing division 180 of the Higher Education Support Act, which allows for the departmental Secretary to disclose non-personal information to the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency—TEQSA—and the National VET Regulator for the performance of their duties or exercise of their powers.

In its place will be a new division that expands the distribution of non-personal information to state and territory agencies, higher and vocational education providers or groups and other bodies as determined by the minister through legislative instrument. The reason given for this expansion is that there are currently a large number of requests from these bodies for information to enable them to accurately assess and monitor the effects of funding.

The coalition recognises that the number of registered training organisations—RTOs—in Australia's vocational education and training—VET—sector has mushroomed. There are now around 5,000 of them, ranging from public technical and further education institutes to private-sector RTOs of varying size and scope. We are sympathetic to the need to simplify administrative arrangements. In order to improve access to vocational education and training the government provides support through the VET FEE-HELP Assistance Scheme, as part of a wider Higher Education Loan Program, to ensure that students are not put off from enrolling in courses by the financial barriers associated with upfront costs.

The problem with the current VET FEE-HELP Assistance Scheme, however, has been limited the extent to which it has improved access to vocational education and training participation. That has led to the supply of graduates with high-level VET qualifications not keeping up with growth in demand from industry and businesses, which is why Australia has noticeable skill shortages in some industries. What concerns me is that it is students from regional and remote areas, including my electorate of Paterson, who are disproportionately missing out on these opportunities. Students in my electorate know that individuals who achieve high-level vocational and education training qualifications are more likely to be employed in full-time permanent jobs and enjoy higher weekly wages.

A major reason for this failure has been the complex administrative policies and processes that training organisations face in becoming registered. Despite being the largest state there are only 28 registered training organisations that are eligible to offer VET FEE-HELP in New South Wales. The bill therefore faces the challenge of finding the right balance on two different issues. The first is on the issue of privacy. The second regards the issue of
maintaining the standards of programs that registered training organisations offer while ensuring that there are the proper and effective safeguards for students and public moneys with the administrative burden that registered training organisations face. Clearly, the need for this bill has shown that compliance with current administration is too burdensome and needs to be adjusted.

On the issue of privacy the coalition believes that a greater ability to monitor and assess the effectiveness of higher and vocational spending is worthwhile. However, the challenges that privacy presents should not be taken lightly. It is important that the proposed greater access to this information is not abused. The balance between effectiveness and protecting privacy is a difficult one at the best times. However, the coalition notes that the legislation has amendments that include new sections which create offences where information is disclosed other than for permitted purposes.

The government states that the proposed amendments are 'reasonable, necessary and proportionate to achieve the legitimate objectives'. We on this side of the House also recognise that there are protections in place against the misuse of disclosed information. With the government conducting a consultation process which revealed that most stakeholders are not seeking to oppose this bill, and because the bill is administrative rather than one of major legislative challenge, we are not inclined to oppose it. However, we will reserve our final position for when the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Employment, to which this bill has been sent for further inquiry, reports back. The coalition will be looking closely at what the committee says regarding not only the implications for privacy in this bill but also the financial implications, which are estimated to be an additional spending of $828.59 million over the forward estimates, as well as the potential for reduction in red tape. Higher education, including vocational education and training, is vital if Australia is going to remain competitive in the global economy.

I take the opportunity at this point to congratulate WesTrac for the establishment of a new facility in Tomago. WesTrac knows how vital it is to have highly skilled workforces. WesTrac not only has 5,500 customers in NSW and the ACT, and over 14,500 in Australia, but it also employs 4,220 people, including 624 apprentices and an additional 893 contractors, across Australia. The WesTrac Institute was established with the Caterpillar Institute in Western Australia in 2000. Their stand-alone WA institute was established in 2008 and their stand-alone New South Wales institute at Tomago in the Hunter Valley was established in 2008 as well. These institutes are testament to WesTrac’s commitment to high-quality training that the industry needs. They offer specialised training in the mining, construction and transport sectors, all at an investment of a $12 million build cost.

In 2005 I visited the original WesTrac Institute in Perth. I was so impressed with the quality of training and the opportunities provided I was determined to have an institute in the Hunter to address the skill shortage that we face. I worked with the then minister for training, the member for Goldstein, Andrew Robb, and WesTrac's Jim Walker in 2007 to achieve a federal grant of $9 million, of which $3 million went to the Western Australian institute and $6 million to the new New South Wales institute at Tomago. The institute employs 35 training and administrative staff in 14 classrooms, two workshops consisting of nine bays and two computer labs running programs from 40 days to three years in duration.
The institute offers courses in certificate I Automotive; certificate II Automotive Mechanical; certificate III Automotive Mechanical Technology; certificate III in Engineering-Mechanical Trade; certificate I in Transport and Logistics, Warehousing and Storage; certificate I in Warehousing Operations; certificate II in Transport and Logistics, Warehousing and Storage; certificate II in Warehousing Operations; certificate III in Warehousing Operations; certificate IV in Transport and Logistics,Warehousing and Storage; and certificate IV in Warehousing Operations.

WesTrac Tomago now has 75 first-year apprentices, 55 second-year apprentices, 59 third-year apprentices and 50 fourth-year apprentices—totalling 239 apprentices at the Tomago institute. They also have eight school-based trainees. These figures include the 39 2012 first-year apprentices currently being institute trained, with predicted figures for the 2013 intake of 84 apprentices and a growth of school-based trainees, automotive, to commence in 2013 with an intake of 16.

Apprentices that will be institute trained predicted for 2013 are: 45 first-years—and that figure includes apprentices to be institute trained out of the 2013 intake of 45, of which 39 will be on plant and six will be on road transport; 45 second-year apprentices; 49 third-year apprentices; and 12 school-based trainees. At the WesTrac Western Australian institute, they have 146 first-year apprentices, 112 second-year apprentices, 72 third-year apprentices, seven fourth-year apprentices and 73 have just graduated in 2012 in their fourth year. I look forward to watching this facility grow and help reduce our skills shortages, particularly in the Hunter. It is producing tradesmen who will be job steady and job ready, satisfying the needs of our local market.

I will now turn to higher education. In my region of the Hunter, we have one of Australia's finest institutions in the University of Newcastle, which has campuses in Callaghan, on the Central Coast, in Port Macquarie, in Sydney, in the Newcastle City precinct and even overseas in Singapore. According to the Times Higher Education World University Rankings, it was ranked in the top three per cent of world universities this year and is one of Australia's top 10 universities for research and funding. As it will for other Australian universities, this bill will have an impact on Newcastle's future in terms of funding. For example, a record $14 million is granted by the Australian Research Council for 38 of the university projects across health, science, engineering and education departments.

The year 2015 will be an important year for the university, as that is when it will celebrate its 50th anniversary. It will be a year when people in the Hunter will remember the determined campaign by their forebears to create a local university. According to the university's website, just five full-time students were enrolled when classes began, and study concentrated on science, mathematics and engineering. Now there are over 30,000 undergraduate and postgraduate students taking courses in five different faculties of the university.

Universities are not only learning centres; they can also act as drivers to rejuvenate local economies. My region has before it an opportunity to rejuvenate its major centre, Newcastle, by greatly expanding the university's footprint there by creating a downtown campus. The member for Newcastle, Sharon Grierson, said that she would secure federal funding for it, but...
there was no mention of the higher education infrastructure program that Newcastle University had hoped to take advantage of in this year's 2012 budget.

Prior to that we were told the proposed university CBD campus had progressed to the second phase of approval under pre-existing funding, with final announcements to be made in July. However, despite this, July came and went and still the member for Newcastle, Sharon Grierson, is waiting for the federal funds. But we should not be surprised—for neither has the member for Newcastle received anything towards the infrastructure grant for the Federal Court that she has repeatedly asked for. It is a great example of the ineffectiveness of local ALP members in the face of the federal ALP, which takes for granted what have been 'safe seats' in the Hunter. For while a conga line of trains brings the coal to Kooragang Island to be shipped from the world's largest coal export port of Newcastle, the profits, rather than being invested in our region, are being fast-tracked out of the Hunter and into other states.

According to the *Newcastle Herald*, after three years of waiting, Newcastle City Council has drawn up contingency plans for its surplus buildings in the civic centre in case the University of Newcastle's proposal to expand its inner city operations does not attract any federal funding. This will provide an opportunity for the Newcastle university to go it alone on the expansion; however, I point out that this development should not be reliant on just one institution. I would like to see greater competition between universities and vocational education and training providers within the Hunter. The city centre of Newcastle should be transformed and the first step should be the removal of the rail line to the foreshore. This would set the scene for the city centre to come alive again by including thousands of students living and learning downtown while attending a variety of learning and training institutions to be located there.

One of the proudest achievements of the Howard government was the establishment of the Higher Education Endowment Fund as a perpetual fund for the Australian university sector. It had an initial contribution of $6 billion. This was something that the Hunter institutions could have taken advantage of but, unfortunately, this government saw fit to discontinue it in December 2008 and wasted the proceeds. This was an example of the coalition's commitment to higher education, not for just one year but for year on year. It gave certainty to universities—certainty that this government has chosen to take away. With the winds of economic uncertainty seemingly approaching and the government struggling to fund other priorities as it sorts out its debts and deficits, it will be a decision that our universities will come to rue.

Newcastle has a new Lord Mayor, Jeff McCloy, who is determined to pursue educational growth opportunities for Newcastle and indeed the whole of the Hunter. He is determined and has a mandate to revitalise and grow the city of Newcastle. This is but a part of that revitalisation. Hopefully, this year after the next election he will be joined by Jaimie Abbott, the Liberal candidate for Newcastle, who shares not only his passion and vision for Newcastle but also a determination not to take the area for granted, as Labor members have done since Federation.

I reflect on Newcastle even though it is outside my seat because it is where the young people from my electorate of Paterson largely go for their higher education. A vibrant Newcastle means a vibrant Hunter, and that makes good sense in every way.
Mr MITCHELL (McEwen) (17:42): Madam Deputy Speaker, I am glad we were both able to stay awake during that contribution by the member for Paterson. By crikey, that was absolutely amazing! It was written and paid for by the Liberal Party but actually mentioned nothing about the Higher Education Support Amendment (Streamlining and Other Measures) Bill 2012—not a thing.

Mr Baldwin interjecting—

Mr MITCHELL: I was here the whole time.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Owens): Order! The member for Paterson will leave the chamber quietly.

Mr MITCHELL: The member for Paterson once again just waffled away and forgot the many things that happened during his time in the former Howard government. They want to forget the dark years when education and training were almost made horrible words. They did not want to talk about it and they did not want to do anything about it. We saw the cuts in education.

The member for Paterson said we have a skill shortage in certain areas. When they were last in government we had skill shortages across every area because they never invested any money at any time in education to support that. As we said when we came to government, it is going to take time—and it is taking time—to address the widespread skill shortage that is a hallmark of the Howard government. As the member for Paterson said, it is only in certain areas now as we are still working to support people who want to take on higher education.

I am very pleased to support the Higher Education Support Amendment (Streamlining and Other Measures) Bill 2012 because education is one of the Gillard government's priorities. We have been taking action to ensure Australians have every opportunity to fulfil their potential and succeed in life. This bill will result in measures to deliver improvements to the HELP schemes, schemes like FEE-HELP and VET FEE-HELP, and make them more accessible by creating a more transparent and responsive administration of the Australian government's Higher Education Loan Program.

The bill acts on the recommendations from the VET FEE-HELP Assistance Scheme final report 2011 and on the arrangements from the April 2012 COAG meeting, which led to the National Partnership Agreement on Skills Reform. The higher education support amendment will allow the government to strengthen its ability to better protect public funding by managing risk and to better protect students by strengthening the suspension and revocation provisions for approved providers. It will make sure that decisions to revoke or suspend low-quality providers, made under the provisions of the act, can take effect on the day notice is registered on the Federal Register of Legislative Instruments, offering increased protection to students.

The legislation will allow for enhancing the quality and accountability framework. These new requirements will assist the minister by allowing the minister to consider investigation reports from the national non-referral jurisdiction education regulators when making a decision to approve, revoke, suspend or suspend approvals under HELP schemes.

Other measures of the bill will improve the responsiveness and flexibility of the tertiary sector's ability to deliver education and training by moving census date requirements into the legislative guidelines. This will allow the industry to be more responsive to students and the
sector's needs by offering rolling enrolments without arduous administrative requirements. The bill will see a managed trial of the VET FEE-HELP specified certificate IV level qualification by amending the definitions of a VET course of study. The Higher Education Support Amendment (Streamlining and Other Measures) Bill will assist with the streamlining and strengthening of administrative procedures, ensuring a more effective and efficient system resulting in reduced complexity and duplication, by consolidating three sets of legislative guidelines into a single set. That will reduce red tape, which we know the education sector fully supports. This will make it a lot easier for providers to understand and clarify their obligations and responsibilities by further streamlining information. The improved deregulation powers will permit the minister and the secretary to delegate powers to an Australian Public Service employee. So regardless of which department has responsibility, the schemes, programs and funding requirements under the act will be able to be continued uninterrupted.

This bill intends to reduce more of the administrative burden placed on providers, and encourage the uptake of the scheme by more quality providers, by streamlining the approach to approvals and administrative compliance for low-risk applicants and providers already approved under the schemes. The amendments will allow the minister to determine a category of providers and financial reporting requirements for low-risk VET FEE-HELP applicants and approved providers.

Only Labor, and a Labor government, will continue to build confidence and fairness into the education system. We already know that the Liberal Party's attitude to higher education is that it is a privilege and that students should not complain about fee increases. It is no secret that the Leader of the Opposition wants to charge students more for university degrees and to introduce a cap on places. But, as with so many areas of the opposition policies, he has failed to release their higher education policies for scrutiny and costings, probably because he knows it is going to contribute to the $70 billion black hole in their costings at present. What we know from leaked reports over the last couple of months, from multiple sources in the coalition, is that they are looking for a 25 per cent increase in university HECS fees, pushing higher education beyond the reach of students from poor backgrounds, and particularly those from regional Australia. Other details of the opposition's plans suggest that HECS fees will jump 10 per cent in the first year of price deregulation, should Australia be forced to suffer under a coalition government. This should not be a surprise at all, because the Leader of the Opposition was the chief draftsman of the coalition's 1993 Fightback! policy—a policy which sought to wind back HECS and return to a system under which only the rich could afford full fees and would be able to attend university. When the coalition came to power in 1996, they almost doubled HECS directly.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr MITCHELL: You would not want to talk, given your history on education in regional areas. The evidence is already available to see what an Abbott government would do with education. Just have a look at what they have done in Victoria. I am sure, Madam Deputy Speaker Owens, that in your home state there are a lot of people reeling from the attacks that they get from Liberal-National governments on education. What we see in the state is a glimpse of what we will see should we be forced to have an Abbott-led coalition government. In Victoria alone, $481 million has been cut from education. That is stripping
schools of the opportunity to pay for things like excursions, pencils for children from low-income families and uniforms. Taking their pencils is just appalling, but that is what happens when you get an LNP or Liberal-National government. Every TAFE across Victoria is suffering because of the $300 million that has been ripped out and the sacking of staff.

Mr Tehan interjecting—

Mr MITCHELL: Have a look: the member for Wannon sits there, smiles and laughs. He must be really proud to go to TAFEs in his electorate and see the damage that has been done. GOTAFE, or Goulburn Ovens TAFE, over in my electorate, is a great TAFE that has been building and building and building. There is a bloke there who shares the same last name as the member for Wannon. There is only one difference: he cares about education and this clown does not. He wants to grow the TAFE, bring in more courses—

Mr Tehan: Madam Deputy Speaker, on a point of order: I just want the member for McEwen to refer to me by my proper title. His uncouth way of referring to me, I find, is against the standing orders, and I would like him to—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Wannon is entirely correct in what he is saying, and I ask the member for McEwen to be more careful with his language, please.

Mr MITCHELL: I certainly will. The member for Wannon, who comes in here and carries on, just sits there shyly. I remember we had the debate—

Mr Tehan interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Wannon will have his chance to speak in the debate shortly. I ask the member for McEwen to continue his remarks but not in a way that invites interjections from the member for Wannon.

Mr MITCHELL: Yes, I understand the embarrassment that they face opposite because of what they are doing with education. They have scrapped the school start bonus in Victoria. These are Liberal-National governments. The bonus was designed to help parents out to meet the cost of uniforms and the expenses of taking kids to school. The National Party, of course, do not resist their senior partner. They are the little lap-dogs there, because it is directly in regional areas that these offences on TAFE are happening. I think it was the Minister for Higher Education and Skills in Victoria, Peter Hall, who said that TAFEs were a little empire-building program—an empire-building program that is cutting the skills shortages and delivering education in regional areas where people live.

In 2003 the Victorian government did a parliamentary inquiry into how to keep kids in regional areas, because they are the future of the communities. It found strongly that educational opportunities in local communities were the key to that. That is why we have been doubling the investment in education infrastructure. That is why we have the Building the Education Revolution program, which has delivered in every single school. In my area we have an $11½ million trade training centre. That is delivering right across the bushfire-affected areas and surroundings to keep those kids in their communities and stop them having to travel to Melbourne.

But the Liberal-National government in Victoria see fit to cut that, and in fact they have even cut the school bus routes between rural communities. It is an absolute joke that they can sit there and talk about education while at the same time they have cut $481 million out of education and stopped the schools rebuilding program. In fact, Minister Hall has been to a
school in my electorate, Sunbury College, three times to do an emergency audit on school facilities. I said before and I will say again that you can go 100 times but just going and visiting is not going to fix the problem. You actually have to inject the funds to fix the maintenance issues that are regarded as urgent. Woodend Primary School is another one that was listed to be rebuilt under the former Victorian government. The LNP got into power and cut it. The school has no proper disability access. In fact, the pole for the basketball ring fell down—fortunately, during the school holidays—because it had rusted through and because the Liberal and National parties have stopped school maintenance and investment in infrastructure. Again we see the big smile there from the member opposite. I will not name him, because we know how precious he is. They think it is funny. It is not funny.

Mr Tehan interjecting—

Mr MITCHELL: I would refer you to what most people do, but it would be unparliamentary to swear.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member for McEwen will not answer the interjections. Please continue.

Mr MITCHELL: Certainly, Deputy Speaker. We also have Gisborne Secondary College, another school which was promised to be rebuilt. That has been scrapped because those opposite have absolutely no interest in or care for education. They are quite happy to take the idea that you have to be rich to afford to go to university. This government sets out its agenda, and it has been delivering on that agenda, for how we will make sure that every kid gets every opportunity to take those opportunities and reach their maximum potential. Those on the other side consider that the only way you can have potential is to have deep pockets. I wish this bill a speedy passage.

Mr CHEESEMAN (Corangamite) (17:55): I too rise to speak on the Higher Education Support Amendment (Streamlining and Other Measures) Bill 2012. This bill will introduce a number of measures to help streamline the Higher Education Support Act 2003. The bill reflects the federal government's important initiative to extend the FEE-HELP system to VET and TAFE training for the first time. This will enable students to defer their vocational training costs until they earn sufficient income. This will enable more students to study at local TAFEs and VET providers throughout the country. That is important because, with the record low unemployment rates we currently have in a very strong economy, we know that vocational training is critical to meeting that skills gap, and building on FEE-HELP will drive that.

I am saddened at the devastating budget cuts announced by the Baillieu government back in May. They have decided to rip some $300 million out of our vocational training system, which will principally hurt our TAFE colleges and our community not-for-profit organisations that provide opportunities for people wishing to gain access to vocational training.

On Thursday of last week I was particularly concerned to have word passed to me that the Otway Community College, located in the Colac Otway Shire in the heart of Colac itself, was about to place itself into voluntary administration because the cuts that the Baillieu government was proposing were leading to that institution running out of the critical cash it
requires to be able to maintain its presence. The Otway Community College has been providing vocational training and resettlement opportunities in the Colac Otway Shire for more than 30 years. This is an organisation that provides training to the most disadvantaged, often to people who otherwise would not be able to access vocational training. The nearest training provider to the township of Colac is the Gordon Institute of TAFE, which is an hour to the west.

If you are a single mum—perhaps a teenage mum—a refugee or someone who has been unemployed for a long period of time, finding the capacity to drive to Geelong, some 100 kilometres away, is impossible. The township of Colac and many other townships like Colac throughout Victoria are simply too small for TAFE providers, so we require community colleges, such as the Otway college, to provide vocational training to people in these communities. In talking to a number of key stakeholders, it is absolutely clear that the Baillieu government's cuts to vocational training have driven this decision that the board had to make under our corporations law. An organisation that has been providing vocational training in Colac for more than 30 years to some very disadvantaged people has had to close the doors as of five o'clock last Thursday night. This organisation employed some 80-odd people, equating to about 40 effective full-time employees. This organisation provided training opportunities to some of the most disadvantaged.

Having said that, there is in my view one person who can address this issue, and that is Ted Baillieu. The Premier of Victoria must fess up, man up and acknowledge that the $300 million vocational education cuts that he is imposing on the sector have placed the sector in an insecure financial position. It is leading to TAFEs having to close campuses. It is leading to private sector providers having to close their doors. It is leading to community colleges, like the Otway Community College, becoming financially insecure and unstable and having no choice but to place themselves into voluntary administration.

I want to go through some of the cuts that the Liberal government of Victoria is imposing on the sector. Firstly, if you look at certificate II in business administration or customer services, the fee that will be given to training providers has been slashed from $6.45 per student hour down to $1.50. Such types of cuts are unsustainable and are designed to ensure that we see what is happening before us today, which is TAFE campuses closing and cuts in the number of courses provided across Victoria.

In my community there is also a TAFE college, the Gordon college, which has been educating people in the Geelong district for 130-odd years. It is a very proud organisation. It has provided training opportunities for people in Geelong and across the western district for a very long time. The callous TAFE cuts that Ted Baillieu is imposing on this organisation are likely to see some 43 courses cut—that is what will happen under Ted Baillieu's funding model; that is what it will mean to this organisation. I suspect that when we do a headcount of that organisation in terms of the number of people that that organisation will employ when these budget cuts have been fully implemented, we will see 130 to 150 fewer people employed in the Gordon college and providing training opportunities to the Geelong community.

Coming back to the Otway Community College and the cuts that the Baillieu is imposing on this sector, previously the way that providers were funded to provide training opportunities for people was quite simple. You did a census of the number of people that each course was
going to train. Then there was a weighting system. Then a number of dollars were provided per person per contact hour. Normally, depending on the nature of the course, that would be somewhere between $6 and $11 per training hour per student. As I said earlier, that is being cut down to $1.50. And instead of providing that money upfront on the number of enrolments, they have changed their policy settings so that that money will be provided at the conclusion of the course.

Otway Community College and some other TAFEs service low-socioeconomic communities in particular. They train people who have been out of the workplace for a very long time or people who are not suited to remaining in school, because they are a single mother or whatever, and who may well be dipping their toes back into the water of vocational training for the first time in a long time. It may well be that they do not have the wherewithal to remain at that institution and complete that qualification at their first attempt. It may well be that they take a number of attempts to complete their qualification.

Changing the funding policy in a very simple way from upfront funding to funding on completion is going to savage the budgets of institutions that are working hard to service those demographics, which will be more challenging. It may well be that for a course to be viable 12 or perhaps 15 students are needed. That is what might be needed to get enough money in the door to be able to employ a trainer or a teacher—one who can work with that cohort. If at the completion of the course those 12 or 15 students who are needed to make it sustainable for that organisation to train them has become four or five there will be a massive consequence for the budget of those training organisations. That is the particular concern that has been raised with me by people from the Otway Community College. That is the change that has been raised with me by people from the Otway Community College. That is the change that has had the biggest impact. The reduction in the hourly rate will have an impact in the not-too-distant future. All organisations in the training space in Victoria will have to address that.

It is no wonder that we are seeing massive community reaction to the Baillieu government decision. People are angry about this. Regional and rural Victoria will suffer the most as a consequence of these budget cuts. I remind those who might be listening that Jeff Kennett, when he was the Premier of Victoria, described regional and rural Victoria as the toenails of the state—those were his words. He was reported at the time to have made that comment. Ted Baillieu was then the President of the Liberal Party in Victoria. It seems to me that his great mentor, Jeff Kennett, has had a quiet word to him and suggested that the TAFE sector is worth going after and that it is worth imposing these budget cuts on that sector. Ted Baillieu is following his master down the same track that he himself went down in the early nineties. Vocational training is very important to our economy. I call on Jeff Kennett to talk to Ted Baillieu and make the point that he has gone too far, that Mr Kennett's comments when he was Premier that the regions were the toenail to the state were inappropriate, that he should not follow him down that path and should reverse these budget cuts, restore the funding and give regional and rural Victoria and the suburbs the opportunity to access vocational training. It is too important for our economy.

Mr TEHAN (Wannon) (18:10): I rise to speak on the Higher Education Support Amendment (Streamlining and Other Measures) Bill 2012 but, if you had been listening to events in this chamber over the last half-hour, you would think that we are not debating a Commonwealth bill. You would think what we have been listening to is the member for

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Corangamite and the member for McEwen reading from the script of the opposition Labor Party in Victoria. They have hardly touched or mentioned the bill before us. All they have been doing is getting the talking points from the Labor opposition in Victoria and reading them verbatim.

I say to the member for McEwen and the member for Corangamite: if you feel so strongly about what is happening in Victoria go to the Prime Minister and say to her, 'Stop cutting the GST receipts for Victoria. Stop cutting the federal government money that should be supplied to Victoria so that they can afford some of these services.' It is all very fine for them to get up here and to read out the talking points from the state Labor opposition but, if they are serious about it, they should do something about it. Victoria is being dealt with unfairly by this federal Labor government. It has had its GST receipts cut, and they will continue to be cut. I have not heard a mention, a peep, a squeak, from the member for McEwen or the member for Corangamite on this. It is about time they stood up for their state if they are serious about having this issue addressed. Stand up for your state, say to the Prime Minister, 'The state you call home—although you call South Australia home as well when it is convenient—needs you to do something to make sure that it is not treated badly when it comes to how GST receipts are issued to the various states.'

If you are going to come in here and talk from the talking points of a state opposition, at least have the decency to say that you are going to try to do something about it. There are some facts that I did not hear from these members. I did not hear that over the next four years the Baillieu government is going to put an extra $1 billion into the TAFE sector in Victoria. That is right, the Baillieu government is going to put $1 billion of extra funding into the TAFE sector over the next four years. I did not hear them mention that fact at all.

I did not hear the member for McEwen 'fessing up that he was a member of the Bracks-Brumby governments—an upper house member—and he was a part of the process which has led to Victoria being on an unstable budgetary projection. I have not heard the member for McEwen 'fess up to this. I have not heard the member for McEwen 'fess up to the fact that they have completed a desal plant, the contract of which was signed by the Bracks and Brumby governments, which means that the Victorian taxpayer has to pay for water even though it is not needed from that desal plant.

The economic mismanagement which occurred under the Brumby and Bracks governments, sadly, is now being felt in Victoria. The member for McEwen was a part of that. He should at least have had the decency to fess up and own that. He also talked about the BER and about how successful it has been. I would not have addressed these issues—I would have been quite happy to stay on the record just how misleading what he said was.

Let us look at the BER. I have a wonderful example of it in my electorate at a school just outside Hamilton which had a BER project. I will give you just one example of the type of waste that occurred. It is a small example but it shows you the utter, utter disrespect the Gillard government has for taxpayers' money. The school wanted a new water tank and they wanted the water tank to coincide with the colour scheming of their BER project. One Friday afternoon the water tank was dropped off in front of the school when the school was closed and there was no-one there. The colour coding that they wanted for the tank, which fitted with the school and its wonderful natural environmental background, was green. Instead, they got a
bright orange one. So they rang up and said that they would like a green one, and a green one was delivered.

But I will give you an example of the contempt. When the orange one was dropped off, it was dropped off on a Friday afternoon when there was no-one there. There was a strong wind blowing that day. The tank was not put upright, it was put on its side and it started blowing down the road. So, one of the neighbours near the school had to ring up the school council president and say, 'Do you realise that the tank that has been dropped off as part of your BER project is blowing down the road?' So, the school committee had to push the tank back out to the front of the school.

Then, when the green tank—the one that had been requested—arrived the following week, they said to the people who dropped it off, 'Do you want the orange one back? Because we don't want it.' They said, 'No, we don't care what you do with it.' A $9,000 or $10,000 tank and they said, 'No, we don't care what you do with it.' So the school got their green tank, which fitted and was what they had ordered, and were left with a bright orange tank, which they did not want, and the contempt to the taxpayers' money was, 'We don't care what you do with it.' That is the BER. The way it was implemented is a gross waste of taxpayers' money. I hope that puts at rest the member for McEwen and the member for Corangamite for the moment—although I would be happy to engage with them further on this debate if they want.

Now, I turn to the bill before us, the Higher Education Support Amendment (Streamlining and Other Measures) Bill 2012. The bill contains amendments to the Higher Education Support Act 2003 that will position the government to deliver timely improvements to Higher Education Loan Program, HELP, schemes, particularly VET FEE-HELP. The amendments will enable the government to act on the recommendations arising from the post implementation review of the VET FEE-HELP scheme final report of September 2011 and its commitments under the April 2012 COAG National Partnership Agreement on Skills Reform, particularly the redesign of the VET FEE-HELP. That is from the introduction to the explanatory memorandum from the government.

In principle, the opposition has no difficulties with the bill, although what we have said is that we would like a Senate committee to look at it and to give us further advice on the bill. The type of advice we would like is on where the bill could potentially create some red tape issues.

I will go to two points in the regulation impact statement which need to be looked at. The regulatory impact statement says:

There was very limited support for the introduction of a reporting requirement for contact hours, as stakeholders identified that a range of variables can result in the same course having different contact hours depending on student choice.

The government has said that it 'will consult further with stakeholders on the reporting of contact hours'. We would like to know what this consultation will be and what it will actually lead to. It says under 'Future directions':

Stakeholders identified additional areas for improvement, including the introduction of a mentoring program for prospective VET FEE-HELP applicants undertaken by current VET FEE HELP providers. It goes on to say:
While the Government has taken these suggestions for future directions on board, it has no plans to implement these in the immediate future.

I think we need a decent explanation as to why.

They are the types of issues that we need to look at, because we have to make sure when we are implementing legislation that the legislation is actually going to do what it sets out to do. Sadly, as we have seen from this government time and time again, so often when it comes to implementing legislation it gets it wrong and so often there is a need for amendment after amendment and sometimes there is a need to actually get rid of the legislation—full stop. Sadly, though, the government often fails to recognise that need.

When it comes to this sector I would like to place on the record the sad, sad state of affairs with the abolition of Australian technical colleges. In 2006-07 we had the introduction of the best vocational training institutions that you could see. Two of these were in my electorate—one in Hamilton and one in Warrnambool. Local industry were behind them. When you went and visited the apprentices who were part of the programs that were being run by these Australian technical colleges, you saw that they could not have been happier with the courses and the facilities in which they were undertaking their training. They felt proud to be doing what they were doing in those institutions. They felt a worth, which meant that what they were doing was equal to what other students who were going down the tertiary path were doing.

What happened to those Australian technical colleges? They had the funding ripped out from underneath them. So it is all very well for the member for Corangamite to come in here and talk about having funding ripped from the sector; he had funding ripped from an Australian technical college in his electorate—and, once again, we did not hear boo from him on that issue.

So what now is at stake for the former Australian technical colleges in Warrnambool and Hamilton? The one in Warrnambool, sadly, looks like it will disappear because it has now been subsumed by the local TAFE there. We have to ensure that we can get that technical college back to where it was. The Hamilton ATC has continued to operate, although it does not have any ongoing funding from this government. At the moment it is scraping by in the hope that a coalition government will get back into power and be able to address this area of ongoing need so that we have technical training which is of a standard which means that those people taking part in it feel a real pride in the path that they have taken.

It is my wont and my hope—and something that I will be strongly arguing for—that if we form the next government as a coalition we will look over time, as the budget allows us, to reinstitute those Australian technical colleges. I witnessed what they were doing in Hamilton and Warrnambool, and that is the type of approach we should be taking with this sector.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on this bill today. The coalition supports this bill in principle, but obviously the Senate committee needs to look at the detail to make sure that in implementation it will do what it sets out to do. Also, the coalition will not stand by and listen to speaker after speaker attack the state governments when those opposite are responsible in many instances for the lack of funding they have currently.

Ms HALL (Shortland—Government Whip) (18:25): I start my contribution to this debate on the Higher Education Support Amendment (Streamlining and Other Measures) Bill 2012
by sharing with the House the experiences that we have had in the Shortland electorate with the Australian technical colleges. I know that the member for Wannon is a new member. In the Shortland electorate there were to be two Australian technical colleges. There was the Hunter or Newcastle ATC and one for the Central Coast. Negotiations took place for many years about getting that one happening. The one in the Hunter, far from having the support of industry and business, could not organise, as part of their work training, one job for the people who were enrolled. They had great difficulty. I had parents coming to see me. The tools that were being used were donated and, believe it or not, the parents went along on the weekend and built the workbenches. Is that a successful system delivering to young people who need to train and get qualifications to go out into the workforce? Or is it just a system that is duplicating the TAFE system which in New South Wales has worked brilliantly and provided brilliant vocational education to young people and not so young people for many years? I know that the parliamentary secretary who is sitting in the chamber with us tonight was a former TAFE teacher and gave many years to ensuring that young people had opportunities in life.

The Rudd and Gillard governments have ensured that we have an ATC on the Central Coast which is working effectively. We have devolved the responsibilities to the high schools. I am on the northern part of the Central Coast. Each of the schools has those services. The other ATC would have been situated at the other end of the Central Coast if an agreement could ever have been reached. It is now operating in areas where young people can actually access it as opposed to having to travel a couple of hours to get to the ATC. It has been combined with the trade training centres, and we have centres of excellence. Three high schools on the Central Coast are really delivering quality vocational education to young people rather than a mickey mouse ATC which was seeking to duplicate the state system because the then minister did not like the state governments.

The member for Wannon would have been very interested to learn that the ATCs did not work at all effectively in my electorate and in the regions I represent. They were fraught with problems: getting employers to offer the training, having the equipment they needed to deliver the services and finding somewhere to situate the ATC on the Central Coast. That is hardly something to boast about as a great achievement of the former, coalition government.

I also heard the member for Wannon complain about the BER program. It seems to me as though he would have been happy if none of the schools in his electorate received funding through the BER program. Once again, I have had a totally different experience within my electorate. Principals of schools have said to me that it is a once-in-a-generation program and that it has transformed the face of the schools in my electorate, and I know that is the case in the electorates of many of my colleagues. I see my colleagues over there agreeing with me. Now there are students in very state-of-the-art classrooms as opposed to being in demountables with mould and mildew on the walls and the carpets. It really has made a big difference. Anyone who knows anything about education knows how important the learning environment is. When students are in very poor and sometimes unhealthy learning environments, their ability to access quality education is impinged on the poor quality of their surroundings. Far from being critical of the BER, I would have thought that the member for Wannon would have consulted with his schools and discovered that they are very appreciative of all those new classrooms and other facilities that they received.
I just needed to deal with those issues that were raised by the member for Wannon in his contribution to the debate before I touched on the legislation. I note that he has agreed to support it in principle and says that the opposition will support it in principle, but there is a big 'but' there. There is always a 'but'. There is never opposition that is constructive; there is never a situation where the opposition will say, 'This is actually good legislation.' They always look to find a reason to say no. This is the most negative opposition that I have ever encountered. I have been an opposition member and I know that you quite often can find fault with legislation, but you must also accept that some legislation deserves the support of the opposition. I have been in the situation where I have supported government legislation and recognised the fact that there is value in the legislation before the parliament.

This bill would introduce a number of measures to strengthen and streamline the Higher Education Support Act and it will result in more effective and efficient administration of the Australian government's Higher Education Loan Program, particularly VET FEE-HELP.

While I am talking about VET FEE-HELP, I would like to quickly transgress and talk a little bit about TAFE. TAFE is a provider of quality vocational education. In New South Wales it has been the source of establishing a strong trade base within the state. It has provided vocational education to tens of thousands of young people over the years. I have been devastated in recent times to learn that the TAFE system in my state of New South Wales has come under attack. TAFE in New South Wales is such a valuable asset. When I hear of course after course closing, I think of the implications for Australia as a nation. If we do not provide adequate and proper training to those people who want to be involved in vocational education, then as a nation we will suffer, and there is no better provider of vocational education than TAFE.

Within New South Wales $116,000 is being slashed from TAFE, as well as 1,800 jobs. TAFE fees will increase by 9.5 per cent. Overall, if you look at education as a whole in New South Wales, there is going to be a three per cent cut in education funding. This is a four-year freeze by the state government, and the impact this will have will be irreversible. All those young people will be denied the opportunity to train, and for us as a nation it will lead to a further shortage in trades. I might add that a large part of these cuts are impacting on apprenticeships.

Members of this House will be aware that we have a skill shortage in Australia. That skill shortage needs to be addressed, but you do not address a skill shortage by slashing, burning and cutting, by not providing education and by not supporting a system that has worked so very well for us as a nation over the years. It is not only in New South Wales that this is happening. I am very aware of New South Wales—it is my own home state, and I have been closely connected with TAFE throughout the region. It is also happening in Victoria and Queensland.

This really needed to be put on the paper, and I could not let the opportunity pass me by whilst talking to this bill, which introduces a number of measures that will strengthen and streamline the Higher Education Support Act. The bill implements recommendations arising from the Post Implementation Review of the VET FEE-HELP Assistance Scheme—Final Report, 30 September 2011. The bill also enhances the quality and accountability framework underpinning the scheme through strengthening suspension and revocation provisions—
decisions to revoke or suspend an approved provider will now be taken back to the day the notice is registered.

These are all very important aspects of the legislation: accountability, integrity and transparency of the HELP scheme. We really need to ensure these are in place. The bill will provide a risk management approach to approvals and compliance, and the approach will reduce the administrative burden. The prescribed 20 per cent rule for census data will also be moved to the legislative guidelines. The bill will strengthen a number of definitions and it will further streamline the administration to produce, duplicate and increase efficiencies. These are all very important aspects of this legislation, and they are all aspects that members of this House should support. They should not just support them in principle; they should support the fact that we need to have transparency, accountability and integrity. I have great pleasure in supporting the legislation before us tonight.

Ms BIRD (Cunningham—Parliamentary Secretary for Higher Education and Skills) (18:39): I thank everybody for their contributions to the debate on the Higher Education Support Amendment (Streamlining and Other Measures) Bill 2012. The Higher Education Support Act 2003 provides the legislative authority for the Australian government's Higher Education Loan Program—HELP as people have referred to it—namely, FEE-HELP and VET FEE-HELP. These schemes assist individuals to access higher education and higher level vocational education and training by removing the upfront financial burden associated with studying by allowing students to defer payment of upfront tuition fees.

This bill will enable the government to act on recommendations made in the Post-implementation review of the VET FEE-HELP Assistance Scheme: final report of September 2011 and on its commitments made under the April 2012 COAG National Partnership Agreement on Skills Reform. The amendments in the bill position the government to deliver timely improvements to the scheme and in doing so create a more accessible, transparent, responsive and robust tertiary sector. The amendments enhance the quality and accountability framework underpinning the scheme through new provisions. These allow the minister to consider information from the national and non-referring jurisdiction education regulators when making a decision to approve, revoke or suspend an education provider under the HELP schemes. The amendments also strengthen the government's ability to protect the integrity of the schemes and minimise risk to student and public moneys. Specifically, the amendments enhance the existing provider suspension and revocation provisions for approved providers. Further, the amendments enable the tertiary sector to deliver education and training in a more responsive and flexible manner by moving census date requirements to the legislative guidelines. This will allow the sector to be more responsive to student and industry needs without onerous administration. The bill also allows for the managed trial of VET FEE-HELP for certificate IV-level qualifications. Finally, the amendments strengthen a number of provisions to better support access to and administration of the schemes. The amendments reduce complexity and duplication by consolidating three sets of legislative guidelines into a single set of guidelines. Importantly, the amendments will also allow the minister to determine a category of providers and financial reporting requirements for applicants and approved providers that represent a low risk to the government.

Improving access to tertiary education, including vocational education and training, is a hallmark of this Labor government. Streamlining and improving access to VET FEE-HELP is
just one of a range of reforms the Labor government is driving to help more people get the skills they need to improve their job prospects and get better pay, a more rewarding career and a better future.

Obviously, as some of the speakers have indicated in this wide-ranging debate on this bill, this approach is in stark contrast to the efforts of some of the Liberal state governments, which are intent on cutting funding to public vocational training providers, cutting staff and closing facilities that are for many communities, particularly regional and rural communities, the only places local people can get a vocational education or learn a trade.

While the Liberals in Victoria damage their public provider, the federal Labor government has invested $224 million in Victorian TAFEs over the last four years to upgrade facilities and equipment in 19 institutions across 37 campuses. This is on top of the $360 million in funding provided on average each year. As we now know, the Baillieu government's cuts to TAFE in Victoria reflect the approach the Liberal government is taking in New South Wales and potentially in Queensland—we are seeing a similar attack in those states on education services.

As another example of this government's desire to help rather than hinder Australians get the skills they need I commend the bill to the House.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Message from the Governor-General recommending appropriation announced.

Ordered that this bill be reported to the House without amendment.

**Federal Circuit Court of Australia Legislation Amendment Bill 2012**

**Second Reading**

Debate resumed on the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

**Mr ROBERT** (Fadden) (18:44): I rise to speak on the Federal Circuit Court of Australia Legislation Amendment Bill 2012. The purpose of this weighty bill of great substance and noble cause is to change the name of the Federal Magistrates Court to the Federal Circuit Court of Australia, and I have 30 minutes in which to outline the impact of this judicious change of name to the judicious court.

By way of history, which is always instructive in these matters, the Federal Magistrates Court was established by the Howard government 12 years ago, in 2000, in order to provide for timely, efficient and less formal adjudication of disputes in the federal jurisdiction. One should always question, when one changes the name, whether, indeed, the court has been effective, and, looking at its history, its throughput and its efficiency, it can be said that it has been very successful. In fact, in the 2010-11 financial year, it finalised over 90,000 matters, which included family law, migration, bankruptcy and consumer protection. In fact, the court now deals with 86 per cent of all family law matters, up from 60 per cent in 2004. Eighty-four per cent of all applications filed are completed within six months—a staggering testimony to the efficiency of the court.

But here is where the debate gets a little interesting, because in 2008 the Rudd-Gillard government sought to abolish the court—to abolish a court that is moving through 84 per cent
of matters within six months and that has dealt with 90,000 matters in a calendar year. Clearly a court so effective, so inefficient, could not possibly be allowed to stand within the halls of the government's sheer incompetence with everything else! The Federal Magistrates Court strongly opposed, of course, the government's move, and the government's move was also successfully resisted by the coalition. The federal court stands today.

Earlier this year, the Attorney-General conceded defeat, to her credit, and, instead, proposed that the court be maintained under a new name to reflect its expanded workload and jurisdiction. Hilarious! The Attorney-General was happy to recognise the expanded workload—only because she realised that she did not have the numbers in the House and therefore could not move to demolish it. In so doing, the Attorney-General accepted the recommendation of the federal judiciary which itself adopted the policy announced by the coalition in 2010 election, including our own nomenclature. Well, flattery of course is a marvellous indication of that which is right and good. It is simply a shame that the government's maladministration of the courts has now resulted in the new circuit court having to curtail its circuit sittings.

It should be noted that the bill will, in effect, continue the Federal Magistrates Court in existence. It will simply change the name to reflect the wider work that the court is now doing as a great workhorse within the judicial system in our country. The bill will not alter the jurisdiction or the status of the Federal Magistrates Court and the arrangements under which it operates. It is fabulous to see the government not touching something that works. It would be great if the government could take that degree of thoughtfulness across the rest of the areas of public policy where its current 'Midas touch' is turning everything into a complete disaster.

Changing the name of the court of course is not intended to create a new, separate federal court or change existing arrangements. It is as it is—a bill to change the name of the court. For these reasons, I commend the bill to the House. I do not believe the coalition wishes to address the matter in any more depth, looking at my senior colleagues, and I simply pass it across to the minister at the desk to sum up and conclude this weighty debate on this issue.

Ms KING (Ballarat—Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure and Transport and Parliamentary Secretary for Health and Ageing) (18:49): I thank the member for Fadden for his lengthy and weighty contribution to this debate! On behalf of the Attorney-General, I would like to thank the member for his contribution. From its rather humble beginnings and from being underfunded some 12 years ago, the Federal Magistrates Court has grown to become the first port of call for the majority of family law, bankruptcy and migration matters in Australia. Its caseload totalled some 83,000 separate matters in the 2010-2011 year alone, and over the past 12 years the court has delivered on its goal of affordable, efficient and quick justice services. It has achieved this in major capital cities and, as a regional member, I am pleased to say it has regular circuits. It has been through Alice Springs, Broken Hill, Launceston, Rockhampton and many, many other places. Last financial year it visited some 33 important rural and regional cities. Now is the time to properly recognise the court's role and reach within the federal judicial system through appropriate titles for both the court and its judicial officers.

The Federal Circuit Court of Australia Legislation Amendment Bill 2012 achieves this recognition, and the bill amends the Federal Magistrates Act 1999 and other legislation to rename the court as the Federal Circuit Court of Australia and changes the title of Chief
Federal Magistrate to Chief Judge and of a federal magistrate to Judge. The consequential amendments also ensure that existing arrangements for the court and its judicial officers, including their entitlements, continue to operate exactly as before.

A name is a very public statement of identity and it tells us a great deal about the character and the purpose of the organisation. The title of the Federal Magistrates Court may have been appropriate back in 2000 but it is no longer a good fit for the unique character and broad reach of this court. Retitling the court as the Federal Circuit Court of Australia clearly signals the prominence of the circuit aspect of the court's work and the federal nature of its jurisdiction. It is a name worthy of the court's vision and is reflective of its place in the federal justice system. Similarly, titles for the Chief Federal Magistrate as Chief Judge and of a federal magistrate as Judge are also consistent with the court's identity and status as a Federal Court created under chapter III of the Constitution.

The bill also forms part of this government's wider court reforms which will ensure that the federal judicial system provides accessible, equitable and understandable justice for the community. To that end the government has directed an additional $38 million to the Federal Court system to ensure levels of service for the community are maintained as well as introducing a strong judicial complaints framework and actively encouraging greater diversity within judicial appointments.

The court deals with a multitude of complex and very difficult matters every single day. Of all of the federal courts it is one that the community is most likely to have contact with, and it is important that the public can clearly identify this court as an appropriate forum in which to resolve their dispute. Court users have the right to be able to readily and easily distinguish between courts and to feel confident that they will be treated fairly with matters dealt with quickly and cost effectively by choosing the appropriate court in the first instance. The new titles of Chief Judge and Judge will also assist the community to better understand the role of the court's judicial officers and their place within the judicial system.

This bill represents an important change to how the Federal Magistrates Court and its judicial officers will be addressed in future. On the surface a name change may appear a fairly easy endeavour, however, a name change involves close consideration of the court's evolving identity and its role. The bill has been developed in consultation with the court itself, other federal courts and key legal stakeholders to ensure that the new name and titles appropriately reflect the expectations of the court, its judicial officers and court users. Through this bill the Federal Circuit Court and its judges will continue to provide affordable, accessible and streamlined pathways for people across the country to resolve their disputes but only now its name and title will serve to better recognise the important service this court provides. I commend the bill to the House.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Ordered that this bill be reported to the House without amendment.

National Health Security Amendment Bill 2012

Second Reading

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

Mr DUTTON (Dickson) (18:54): I rise to speak on the National Health Security Amendment Bill 2012. The bill amends the National Health Security Act 2007 with respect to the regulatory arrangements for security sensitive biological agents. Firstly, the bill intends to streamline reporting requirements for entities that handle SSBAs on a temporary basis—that is, less than seven days. Secondly, it provides a secretary with discretion to remove certain handling requirements or impose certain conditions on registered facilities undertaking emergency maintenance. Thirdly, it provides the secretary with powers to impose conditions on an entity's SSBA handling during the time period allowed for an entity to take corrective action to become compliant. Fourthly, it is designed to ensure consistent reporting requirements for confirmatory tests. And, finally, it provides consistency for exempt entities in relation to reporting and handling requirements for SSBAs and suspected SSBAs.

In April 2007 COAG agreed to recommendations from the report on the regulation and control of biological agents. Primarily, this involved the implementation of a national legislative regulatory regime to minimise security and public health risks posed by SSBAs. The Department of Health and Ageing states that the aim of the regulatory scheme is to limit the opportunities for acts of bioterrorism or biocrime using harmful biological agents and to provide a legislative framework for managing the security of SSBAs. The scheme was developed to provide appropriate security and management protocols while ensuring access to these agents for those with a legitimate need. The establishment of a two-tiered regulatory arrangement, as recommended by the review, commenced on 31 January 2009 for tier 1 agents and on January 2010 for tier 2.

Tier 1 includes those of the greatest risk to our country, such as Ebola virus, SARS, smallpox and the plague. Tier 2 agents, which are considered of lesser threat, include the likes of typhoid, cholera and yellow fever. The House considered two bills in the last parliament that amended the act with respect to handling and reporting requirements for identified and suspected SSBAs and to provide for background checks for individuals handling and disposing of such agents. The coalition supports appropriate regulatory arrangements in the interests of biosecurity and safeguarding public health.

A recent media report indicates that 1,400 people have been prohibited from working in areas that handle potentially dangerous substances, such as biological agents. According to the report in the Adelaide Advertiser, 334,317 workers have had background checks over the past three years through the AusCheck system. Those banned from access to these materials included 447 people on the basis that they have a conviction for aggravated assault; 462 for violence; 389 for drug dealing; 203 for weapons, firearm or explosive offences; 25 for hostage taking; 16 for arson or sabotage; and 42 for armed robbery. Quite clearly it is not in the public interest for these people with these types of histories to have access to any of these items. It reinforces that this regulatory regime is very important to our country.

Schedule 1 amendments in this bill are said to reduce the regulatory burden on nonregistered facilities that only require up to seven working days in which to complete their handling. A nonregistered entity that presently handles a known SSBA would have to fill a registration process and then be subject to a lengthy administrative process, involving the instruction to dispose of the respective agent. As the minister mentioned in her second reading speech, this may affect hospitals or pathology diagnostic facilities.
Item 6 of schedule 1 of the bill allows an entity to provide the secretary with a temporary handling report if they intend to dispose of an agent within seven business days of handling it. They must also provide the secretary with a temporary handling disposal report at the expiry of the period of two business days after the disposal. This clause allows the secretary to impose conditions, in writing, on the handling of an SSBA by an entity that has provided a temporary handling report. It also allows for temporary handling standards, to be provided by a determination, and offence provisions for noncompliance. This in turn will exempt an entity from having to meet requirements for entities that handle security-sensitive biological agents as contained in the main act. A registered entity may provide the secretary with an emergency report if it needs to undertake unscheduled or unplanned repairs or maintenance. The secretary will then be able to issue a written instrument to exempt, modify or omit the requirements specified in division 5 of the act.

The Secretary can impose conditions in the declaration. The EM states this may relate to a direction to the entity not to handle the SSBA for any purpose other to store an SSBA or a requirement to move an SSBA to a registered facility if repairs are not completed within a specified time. An offence may apply to any conditions that are breached. Entities that are deemed noncompliant with relevant standards currently are subject to, as described in the EM, 'a lengthy administrative process' involving the issuing of notices, requirements to take corrective action and, if necessary, the issuing of a notice to dispose.

The bill allows the Secretary to impose conditions on an entity during this period of noncompliance. This may include but is not limited to the physical security of SSBAs, personnel security and information security. The Secretary may give written direction to an entity that does not comply with a condition to dispose of its entire holding of agents. Failure to comply with a direction to dispose of an agent is an offence.

The bill intends to remove an exemption for a registered entity to report a confirmatory testing it conducts as an initial tester. The minister has stated that this should ensure that all registered entities that undertake in-house confirmatory testing are required to provide full reporting of outcomes. I acknowledge the clarification the minister's office has provided by way of departmental advice in relation to this provision. There is also a proposed change so that exempt entities—those that handle agents for transportation purposes—are also exempt from the requirement in relation to suspected SSBAs. This ensures consistency with the act that currently provides exemptions from the requirements for known and listed agents.

The coalition supports the intent of this regulatory regime and acknowledges its importance for biosecurity. The government has stated the scheme itself and this bill have been subject to stakeholder consultation. While this is a very important bill it is obvious that the minister is not here to sum up so I welcome the Parliamentary Secretary. On the basis of that which I have contributed to the House, the coalition does not oppose this bill.

Ms HALL (Shortland—Government Whip) (19:02): This is extremely important legislation that we have before us tonight. While the National Health Security Amendment Bill 2012 is non-controversial in nature, I feel it is legislation that both sides of this House will support. It introduces greater flexibility to better manage the security risk of sensitive biological agents handled by a number of entities.

The controls currently imposed by the NHS act are quite inadequate to manage the security risks posed at facilities that handle SSBAs on a temporary basis, usually less than seven days
before disposal of the SSBA. As the previous speaker mentioned, the minister talked at some length about the situation in hospitals about SSBAAs and the need for reporting and disposal. The minister told how changes included in this legislation would improve the safety, efficiency and effectiveness of the way SSBAAs are handled. There are lots of facilities that perform emergency maintenance. Following inspection, facilities need to take effective action to fully comply with the standards. There are an increasing number of facilities handling on a temporary basis the post implementation phase of the scheme. The entities may be sent SSBAAs to perform specific tests, after which the SSBAAs are sent back to a registered facility or destroyed. It is quite important that they be returned or destroyed. It is a matter of being aware of where these SSBAAs are at all times.

Inspections have found that some registered facilities which are given time to implement corrective action need to have conditions imposed on them during this time to ensure secure handling of SSBAAs. But there has to be some flexibility in performing emergency maintenance.

Inadequate controls mean that there is no management of security risks in these facilities. I know that all members of this parliament are very concerned that security risks are managed at all times. Potentially, there will be increased risks of incidences of non-secured handling. That is the last thing that we would like to see happen. There may be unforeseen consequences of that and there may be effects on public health. For the record, the National Health Security Act has enhanced Australia's obligation to secure certain biological agents. These agents are very harmful, such as anthrax and the foot and mouth virus. SSBAAs are security sensitive biological agents. The House notes that the agents that I mentioned are definitely SSBAAs. The SSBA regulatory scheme imposes stringent requirements relating to the notification of the type and location of the SSBAAs along with standards that must be met by entities handling SSBAAs.

The government has worked closely with the entities that handle SSBAAs. A number of areas where improvements to the regulatory scheme can be made have been highlighted. The bill will make an impact in two important ways. The proposed amendments provide for streamlined reporting, particularly in relation to where SSBAAs are only temporarily handled. I mentioned that a little bit earlier. The second thing that the bill will do is to allow the secretary to better manage potential security risks for entities undertaking emergency facility maintenance, a very important part of this legislation. This is legislation that members on both sides of the House can get behind. It is about ensuring security and public health. I commend the legislation to the House.

Ms KING (Ballarat—Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure and Transport and Parliamentary Secretary for Health and Ageing) (19:07): I thank the members for Dickson and Shortland for their contributions to this debate. The National Health Security Amendment Bill 2012 amends the National Health Security Act 2007 to enhance the regulatory scheme for security sensitive biological agents, or SSBAAs. The bill enhances the regulatory scheme for SSBAAs in two ways. First, the proposed amendments provide a streamlined reporting scheme for entities such as hospital diagnostic facilities that are not registered under the SSBA regulatory scheme and that only need to handle the SSBAAs for less than seven consecutive days, which is known as a temporary handling. Specific SSBA standards will apply to the
entity during the handling period to ensure that the security of the agent is maintained during that temporary handling.

Second, the amendments will allow the Secretary of the Department of Health and Ageing to better manage potential security risks for entities undertaking emergency maintenance. The amending bill also makes some less significant but equally important amendments to improve the operation of the legislation and provide greater clarity for those working with SSBAs. These relate to imposing conditions to ensure the security of SSBAs is maintained in the facilities that are required to undertake corrective actions following an inspection, clarifying the reporting requirements for biological agents suspected to be SSBAs and ensuring that the application of exemptions for certain entities are consistent between known and suspected SSBAs.

I thank members for their contribution to the debate on this bill and also the departmental officers that we have here with us. I am confident that the bill addresses the issues identified during the operational period of the scheme as well as through stakeholder liaison and will ensure that we continue to deliver on our international commitments and the national imperative to actively improve our capacity to maintain adequate controls on biological agents. I commend the bill to the House.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Ordered that this bill be reported to the House without amendment.

Federation Chamber adjourned at 19:11
**QUESTIONS IN WRITING**

**Infrastructure and transport: Credit Cards**

*(Question No. 781)*

Mr Briggs asked the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport, in writing, on 24 November 2011:

In: (a) 2007-08, (b) 2008-09, (c) 2009-10, and (d) 2010-11, (i) how many corporate credit cards were issued to departmental staff, and (ii) what was the total cost of all transactions made on these corporate credit cards.

Mr Albanese: the answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

Credit cards are issued to eligible Departmental employees for official use.

**Finance and Deregulation: Departmental Vehicles**

*(Supplementary Question Nos 841 to 870)*

Mr Briggs asked the Minister representing the Minister for Finance and Deregulation, in writing, on 16 February 2012:

(1) How many motor vehicles does the Minister's department currently (a) own, and (b) lease.

(2) What is the breakdown of these vehicles by manufacturer and model.

(3) For (a) 2008-09, (b) 2009-10, and (c) 2010-11, what was the total cost to the Minister's department of all cars (i) owned, and (ii) leased, and what sum was spent on (iii) fuel, and (iv) maintenance.

Mr Swan: The Minister for Finance and Deregulation has supplied the following supplementary answer to the honourable member's question:

**Attachment A**

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### Attachment B

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**QUESTIONS IN WRITING**
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The Australian Government Fleet Identified by Manufacturer, Make and Model: For Departments Identified

- **TGM Series**: 4
- **Mazda**: 1
- **B-Series**: 1
- **Mercedes-Benz Commercial**: 127
  - 0500 RF coach: 17
  - Sprinter: 110
- **Mitsubishi**: 801
  - Canter: 14
  - Fighter: 58
  - Heavy Duty: 5
  - Lancer: 60
  - Pajero: 292
  - Rosa: 110
  - Triton: 262
- **Modern Trailers**: 76
  - 6N4: 76
- **Nissan**: 128
  - Patrol: 74
  - Tiida: 54
- **Trailers**: 26
  - 7x4 single-axle trailer: 1
  - 8x5x5 single-axle baggage trailer: 25
- **Southwest Trailers**: 3
  - Trailer: 3
- **Toyota**: 2,870
  - Aurion: 49
  - Camry: 468
  - Camry Hybrid: 10
  - Coaster: 46
  - Corolla: 2
  - Hilux: 455
  - Hilux 4x2: 1
  - Kluger: 732
  - LandCruiser 100: 140
  - LandCruiser 200: 208
  - LandCruiser 70: 55
  - LandCruiser 78: 26
  - LandCruiser Prado: 135
  - Tarago: 93
- **Volkswagen Commercial**: 2
  - Transporter: 2
- **Volvo**: 19
  - B Series Coach: 18
  - FL: 1
- **Defence—Leased Vehicle Fleet**: 369
- **Ford**: 74
- **Falcon**: 27
### Australian Government Fleet Identified by Manufacturer, Make and Model For

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Australian Government Fleet Identified by Manufacturer, Make and Model For Departments Identified | Count of Vehicle
---|---
RAV4 | 4
Tarago | 18
Volkswagen Commercial | 12
Caravelle | 12
Infrastructure and Transport | 32
**Ford** | 9
Falcon | 3
G Series | 4
Mondeo | 1
Territory | 1
**Holden** | 2
Calais | 1
Cruze | 1
Mitsubishi | 1
i-MiEV | 1
**Toyota** | 20
Aurion | 3
Camry | 13
Camry Hybrid | 3
Corolla | 1
Attorney-General | 48
Including Emergency Management
**Ford** | 20
Falcon | 2
Focus | 1
G Series | 5
Mondeo | 3
Territory | 8
Transit | 1
**Holden** | 21
Calais | 11
Calais Sportwagon | 1
Captiva | 1
Commodore | 1
Commodore Sportwagon | 6
Cruze | 1
**Toyota** | 6
Camry Hybrid | 3
Corolla | 1
Hiace | 1
RAV4 | 1
**Volkswagen Commercial** | 1
Transporter | 1
Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs | 225
Including Disability Reform, Housing and Homelessness
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Australian Government Fleet Identified by Manufacturer, Make and Model For Departments Identified

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Australian Government Fleet Identified by Manufacturer, Make and Model For Departments Identified

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<td><strong>GRAND TOTAL</strong></td>
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**Airservices Australia**

(Comment No. 965)

Dr Jensen asked the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport, in writing, on 8 May 2012:

In respect of aircraft noise in Perth, (a) how many noise complaints have been made to Airservices Australia since 1 November 2008, (b) what proportion (as a percentage) of these complaints were made by constituents in the electoral divisions of (i) Tangney, (ii) Perth, (iii) Brand, and (iv) Fremantle, (c) will he consider conducting a review of the flight path changes instituted as a consequence of the Western Australia Route Review Project (WARRP), and (d) what criteria are being used to define the success (or otherwise) of the WARRP.

Mr Albanese: The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

(a-d) 53,731 from 344 complainants. This includes 21,411 complaints that were from one person. Airservices Australia has already completed a post implementation review of WARRP.

The Western Australia Route Review Project resolved a safety issue identified in an audit of the Perth Terminal Control Unit by the Civil Aviation Safety Authority. Airservices has advised that their analysis since the changes were made indicate improved safety performance including fewer safety incidents.

**Road Infrastructure**

(Comment No. 1017)

Mr Fletcher asked the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport, in writing, on 28 May 2012:

In respect of a recent radio interview by Adam Spencer (ABC Radio, 9 May 2012) on the funding available for the F3 to M2 link in which he indicated that, $25 million had been provided in the Budget for a special purpose vehicle and $150 million had been provided in the Budget for a potential incentive, can he (a) confirm and elaborate on these commitments, and (b) indicate where the details appear in the 2012-2013 Budget papers or in other statements by the Government.

Mr Albanese: The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

(a) The Australian Government committed up to $25 million in 2012-13, contingent on a matching contribution by the NSW Government, for a Special Purpose Vehicle to develop the M5 East and F3 to M2 projects to allow them to be taken to market. $150 million remains committed in the 2015-16 financial year for planning of the F3 to M2 project.

(b) The Australian Government's commitment can be found in the Nation Building Program publications on the Department's website.
ADF Land and Maritime Platforms, and Reserve Funding
(Question No. 1059)

Mr Robert asked the Minister for Defence, in writing, on 18 June 2012:

(1) In (a) 2008, (b) 2009, (c) 2010, and (d) 2011, what were the planned and actual flying hours for (i) each Australian Defence Force (ADF) rotary wing platform, and (ii) each ADF fixed wing platform.

(2) For each year over the forward estimates, what are the planned flying hours for each (a) ADF rotary wing platform, and (b) ADF fixed wing platform.

(3) Does the 2012-13 budget result in any reduction in use of any (a) land platforms, or (b) maritime platforms; if so, which platforms and by what scale of reduction.

(4) Can he confirm whether the Army is reducing the allocation of Army Reserve training salaries by 10 percent, and if so, (a) over how many years, (b) what sum of money will be saved, (c) were all Army Reserve Commanders consulted prior to these cuts being announced, and (d) which Army Reserve units will be affected by these cuts.

(5) Can he confirm whether Reservists will be negatively impacted by the cuts to reserve training salaries.

Mr Stephen Smith: the answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

(a), (b), (c) and (d)

(i)

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(b) 

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<td>7900</td>
<td>7900</td>
<td>7900</td>
<td>7550</td>
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</table>
(3) The 2012-13 budget did not result in any reduction to maritime platforms; however, pre-budget assessments indicated that Army would place 15 M1A1 Abrams Tanks and 100 M113AS4 Armoured Vehicles into temporary storage. Post budget analysis has shown that it is more appropriate for Army to retain the full M1A1 Abrams Tank capability by placing an additional 22 M113AS4 Armoured Vehicles into storage, for a revised total of 122.

(4) (a) to (d) and (5)

The Army reserve training salaries budget provides funding for Army reservists, covering both salary and allowance payments.

The 2012-13 Army internal budget allocation process has not yet been finalised.

Functional commands have been allocated their budgets for FY12/13.

However, consistent with the process in previous years, the 2012-13 Army internal budget allocation process down to Division, Brigade and Unit level remains ongoing.

The budget is a dynamic process, which provides Army with sufficient flexibility to manage resources in an efficient manner to deliver capability to Government in accordance with national security priorities.

This process covers the full range of Army activities, including funding for Army Reserve Training Days.

Accordingly, the budget for Army Reserve Training Days for all Reserve Units remains under consideration and has not been finalised.

Unit commanders are being consulted as part of the current budget allocation process.

Prioritisation of Defence expenditure is designed to maximise the delivery of core Defence capabilities.

Reservists and their permanent colleagues are employed as a total force to deliver core capabilities to the Australian Defence Force.

Reservists will continue to make fundamental contributions to capability on operational deployments such as Operation Anode and Operation Astute.
They will also be resourced to enable them to maintain a level of individual readiness to undertake allocated tasks, such as those performed during OP Flood Assist/Op Fire Assist.

**Defence**

*(Question No. 1060)*

**Mr Robert** asked the Minister for Defence, in writing, on 18 June 2012:

Can he list all funding cuts that will impact Defence Reserve units and personnel that form part of the 2012-13 federal budget by (a) location, and (b) value.

On what date will the 2013 Defence White Paper be released.

On what date will the next Defence Capability Plan be released.

**Mr Stephen Smith:** the answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

1. (a) & (b) Army – Functional commands have been allocated their budgets for FY12/13. However, as with previous years, the 2012-13 Army internal budget allocation process down to Division, Brigade and Unit level remains ongoing.

   The budget is a dynamic process, which provides Army with sufficient flexibility to manage resources in an efficient manner to deliver capability to Government in accordance with national security priorities.

   Army is committed to fiscal responsibility and will therefore continuously review and adjust resource allocations against priorities. Accordingly, resource allocations and budgets for Reserve Units remain under consideration. Army will continue to ensure that Reservists deploying on exercises and operations are trained and equipped as required. Unit commanders continue to be consulted throughout the entirety of the budget cycle.

   Reservists and their permanent colleagues are employed as a total force to deliver core capabilities to the Australian Defence Force. Reservists will continue to make fundamental contributions to capability on operational deployments such as Operation Anode and Operation Astute. They will also be resourced to enable them to maintain a level of individual readiness to undertake allocated tasks, such as those performed during OP Flood Assist/Op Fire Assist.

   RAAF/Navy—Reserve personnel in the Navy and Royal Australian Air Force are integrated into regular units, as part of one total force to deliver required capabilities to the ADF and the Australian people. Therefore, RAAF and Navy Reservists will continue to contribute to the capability of that total force based on the necessity to meet national security requirements.

   As the Prime Minister and I stated on 3 May 2012, the 2013 Defence White Paper will be delivered in the first half of 2013.

   The Minister for Defence Materiel and I jointly released the 2012 Defence Capability Plan on 10 July 2012.

**Defence Force Personnel**

*(Question No. 1063)*

**Mr Robert** asked the Minister for Defence, in writing, on 18 June 2012:

How many Australian Defence Force personnel are (a) aged under 21 and single, and (b) aged over 21 and single.

**Mr Stephen Smith:** the answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

(a) As at 18 September 2012 there are 4,209 members without dependants undertaking full time service who are under 21 years of age (Navy 1,054, Army 2,659, and Air Force 496).
(b) As at 18 September 2012 there are 22,137 members without dependants undertaking full time service who are aged 21 years or older (Navy 6,231 Army 11,130 and Air Force 4,776).

Defence

(Question No. 1066)

Mr Robert asked the Minister for Defence, in writing, on 18 June 2012:

(1) In respect of the areas associated with the trial Australian Defence Force (ADF) Family Health Care program, (a) what are the exact geographic areas and boundaries, (b) how many ADF dependants are located in each area, and (c) what proportion of ADF dependants have registered for the program in each area.

(2) In respect of ADF dependants, (a) what is the total number, (b) how many are registered for the trial ADF Family Health Care program, and (c) how many currently reside in areas not covered by the trial ADF Family Health Care program.

(3) Has Defence surveyed families not living in areas covered by the trial ADF Family Health Care program on whether or not they would be interested in registering for the program; if so, how many ADF members have been surveyed.

(4) When will the full ADF Family Health Care program be implemented.

(5) For how many years will the full ADF Family Health Care program be funded.

(6) In respect of the areas associated with the full ADF Family Health Care program, (a) what are the exact geographic areas and boundaries, (b) how many ADF dependants are located in each area, and (c) what proportion of ADF dependants are covered by the full program.

(7) In respect of the ADF Family Health Care programs, what is the cost per annum, for the (a) trial program, and (b) full program.

(8) Was the $50 million saved from delaying the introduction of the full ADF Family Health Care program (a) reinvested in Defence; if so, where, or (b) returned to consolidated revenue.

Mr Stephen Smith: the answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

(1) (a) The ADF Family Health Trial is available to ADF Dependents who are posted to and reside in the following locations:

- Singleton (NSW);
- Pilbara Region, including Karratha, Port Hedland, Tom Price, Newman, Derby, Exmouth and Carnarvon (WA);
- Sale (VIC);
- Cairns, including Weipa, Mt Isa and Thursday Island (QLD);
- Katherine (NT);
- Townsville, including Tully (QLD);
- Darwin, including Alice Springs, Nhulunbuy (NT) and Kununurra and Broome (WA); and
- Puckapunyal (VIC).

(b) Based on 2007 Defence Census data there are approximately 16,000 dependants living in Trial regions as follows:

- Singleton = 297 Dependents;
- Pilbara Region = 55 Dependents;
- Sale = 551 Dependents;
- Cairns (including Weipa, Mt Isa and Thursday Island) = 719 Dependents;
(c) The estimated proportion of registered dependants in each region (as at 20 June 2012) based on the 2007 Defence census data is:

- Singleton = 47 per cent
- Pilbara Region = 73 per cent
- Sale = 74 per cent
- Cairns (including Weipa, Mt Isa and Thursday Island) = 61 per cent
- Katherine = 40 per cent
- Townsville = 34 per cent
- Darwin (including Alice Springs, Nhulunbuy, and Kununurra and Broome) = 31 per cent
- Puckapunyal = 29 per cent

(2) (a) Based on the 2007 Defence Census there are approximately 70,000 dependants of permanent ADF members.

As at 20 June 2012 there are currently 5,630 dependants registered for the Trial.

Based on the 2007 Defence Census there are an estimated 54,189 dependants residing in areas not covered by the Trial.

(3) Yes, the views of Defence families not residing in Trial regions have been represented in every Defence Attitude Survey since 2008 which contains specific questions relating to the ADF Family Health Trial. Additionally, feedback from families not residing in Trial regions has been sought and included in various Trial evaluation activities such as online surveys as well as anecdotal feedback collected throughout the Trial period.

(4) Subject to Government approval the rollout of a National ADF Family Health Program is planned for 1 July 2013.

(5) Ongoing funding for the program is in the Defence budget.

(6)(a) The National ADF Family Health Program will enable all ADF dependants throughout Australia to participate.

(b) Based on the 2007 Defence Census there are approximately 70,000 dependants of permanent ADF members that will be covered by the National ADF Family Health Program.

(c) 100% of ADF Dependents residing in Australia will be eligible to enrol in the National ADF Family Health Program.

(7)(a) The budget for ADF Family Health for Financial Year 2012-13 is $10m.

(b) The current estimate is approximately $60 million per year.

(8) The trial was evaluated at the end of 2011 in preparation for a national rollout of this access to healthcare Australia wide in 2012-13. Take up of the services on offer was assessed as only in the order of 30 per cent of eligible participants. The full rollout has been deferred to enable further assessment of the basis for the low take up rate. The resulting savings of $50 million form part of the overall Defence Budget savings for 2012-13.
Mr Hunt asked the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, in writing, on 18 June 2012:
Can he list all of the different subprograms within the Caring for our Country budget for which commitments have been made or allocated.

Mr Burke: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:
The table below shows the list of subprograms within the Caring for our Country budget. These details are also available publicly on the NRM website (www.nrm.gov.au) through the Caring for our Country business plans and annual report cards.

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<th>Budget items</th>
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<td>Indigenous Protected Areas</td>
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<td>National Reserve System</td>
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<tr>
<td>Biodiversity and natural icons</td>
<td>Natural Icons and World Heritage</td>
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<td>Biodiversity protection</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Eradication</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Environmental Stewardship</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tasmanian devil</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Cane toads</td>
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<td>Landcare</td>
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<td>Working on Country</td>
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<td>Core departmental activities and Administration of the EPBC Act</td>
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In respect of Finding 4.9 of the 2011-2012 Regional Telecommunications Review (23 May 2012) that there are areas which currently receive broadband over DSL, which face the prospect of lower speed broadband over wireless and satellite once the NBN is implemented, has the Government committed to providing an assurance that residents in such areas will be able to retain their current service.

**Mr Albanese:** The Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy has provided the following answer to the honourable member's question:

The next-generation fixed wireless and satellite networks to be delivered to those outside the fibre footprint are being engineered to deliver high-speed broadband to regional and remote communities. These services are expected to be the equivalent of, or better than, current ADSL services. NBN Co will continue to upgrade its fixed wireless and satellite networks, including deploying commercial grade services over the long term satellite service and through other technological improvements, delivering further services of importance to regional and remote Australia.

The government established the Telecommunications Universal Service Management Agency (TUSMA) on 1 July 2012 to ensure the ongoing provision of basic consumer safeguards in the transition to the NBN and beyond. Under agreements reached between Telstra and the Commonwealth, and administered by TUSMA, Telstra will have a contractual obligation to maintain the copper network and provide voice-only services to locations outside the fibre footprint for a period of 20 years from 1 July 2012 with a review into these arrangements scheduled to occur in 2018. NBN Co's 2012-15 Corporate Plan highlights that it will be providing 100 per cent of Australian premises with access to high-speed broadband by June 2021 while the fixed wireless and long term satellite service will be in place over 2015.

The Government's revised telecommunications arrangements and the rollout of the NBN fixed wireless and satellite services do not place any impediment on residents retaining their current copper-based services outside the footprint. The specific services offered will be a matter for retail service providers.

**Digital Switchover Household Assistance Scheme**

*(Question No. 1080)*

**Mr Briggs** asked the Minister representing the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, in writing, on 20 June 2012:

In respect of the Digital Switchover Household Assistance Scheme and set-top box installation, have there been any complaints of faulty set-top boxes; if so, (a) how many, (b) in how many cases was a new set top box issued, and (c) what was the total cost of the replacement set-top boxes.

**Mr Albanese:** The Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy has provided the following answer to the honourable member's question:

Yes there have been complaints of faulty set-top boxes.

(a) As at 30 June 2012, 76 complaints had been received by the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy (the department).

(b) At the time these 76 complaints were investigated, any set-top box that was deemed to be faulty, was replaced in accordance with the 12-month aftercare/warranty arrangement in the Deed.

(c) The cost of replacing set-top boxes is met by the service contractors under the 12-month aftercare/warranty provisions as set out in the Deeds of Agreement. There is no cost to the department.

**Climate Change and Energy Efficiency: Departmental Staff Overseas Travel**

*(Question No. 1104)*

**Mr Briggs** asked the Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency, in writing, on 20 June 2012:
For (a) 2008-09, (b) 2009-10, (c) 2010-11, and (d) 2011-12, what was the total cost of overseas travel for departmental staff.

Mr Combet: The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:
The total cost of overseas air travel for departmental staff over the past four financial years is as follows:

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<td>$2,231,020</td>
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Home Affairs
(Question No. 1116)

Mr Morrison asked the Minister for Home Affairs, in writing, on 21 June 2012:
(1) In respect of Ali Al Abbassi’s placement on the Passenger Analysis Clearance and Evaluation (PACE) system administered by the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service (ACBPS),
(a) when was Ali Al Abbassi placed on the system, (b) which agency or department requested that Ali Al Abbassi be placed on the system, and (c) for what reason was Ali Al Abbassi placed on the system.
(2) Which government agencies and departments have access to information on the PACE system managed by ACBPS.

Mr Clare: The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:
(1) (a) Mr Ali Al Abassi was placed on alert in the Customs and Border Protection PACE system in 2010.
(b) The Australian Federal Police (AFP) placed Mr Ali Al Abassi on alert in the Customs and Border Protection PACE system.
(c) Mr Ali Al Abassi was placed on alert in the Customs and Border Protection PACE system as a person of interest for possible involvement in people smuggling related offences.
(2) Alert information on the Customs and Border Protection PACE system is available to the AFP, the Australian Crime Commission (ACC), the Attorney-General’s Department (AGD) and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). It should be noted that these agencies can only access alert information that they have requested be placed on PACE.

British Pensions
(Question No. 1121)

Mr Oakeshott asked the Prime Minister, in writing, on 14 August 2012:
In respect of a recent media report in the United Kingdom "Canada salutes frozen pensions fighters" by Ava Hubble (The Telegraph, 5 June 2012), has she pressured the Government of the United Kingdom to index British pensions for the 550,000 United Kingdom expatriate pensioners living abroad; if not, why not?

Ms Gillard: I am advised that the answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:
The Australian Government considers the United Kingdom (UK) Government's policy of not indexing pensions in most Commonwealth countries including Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa, where the majority of its expatriate pensioners reside, to be unfair and discriminatory. The Government strongly supports the efforts of UK pensioners seeking equal treatment on the indexation

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issue. All UK pensioners paid their contributions under the same rules and should be paid their pensions under equal conditions.

Prior to the media report cited by the honourable member, the Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, the Hon Jenny Macklin MP, issued a statement on 21 May 2012 that also appeared in the online edition of the The Telegraph, reiterating that the Government considers the indexation policy to be unfair and discriminatory and urging her UK counterparts to look at options for resolving this longstanding issue.

Minister Macklin recently met with her UK counterpart, the Rt Hon Iain Duncan Smith MP and reiterated the Government's views on the indexation issue. In this context, the UK Government has agreed to an officials dialogue with Australia, including examination of options for indexation.

On previous occasions when Government Ministers have approached UK Government Ministers on the indexation issue, the consistent message is that the indexation issue is not open for negotiation due to concerns about the cost to the UK Government. I understand the Canadian Government has made similar approaches on this issue and has been given the same response.

I note that there have been requests that Canada and Australia work together on this issue. The Government will consider the possibility of joint action with other affected countries, such as Canada, if an opportunity arises. In the meantime, the Government will continue to press the UK Government on this issue, whenever appropriate.

National Broadband Network
(Question No. 1123)

Mr Fletcher asked the Minister representing the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, in writing, on 14 August 2012:

In respect of his department’s National Broadband Network (NBN) advertising, specifically endorsements by (a) Seren Trump – Small Home-Based Business Owner, and (b) Dave Paton-Helicopter Pilot, (i) where is the individual located, (ii) what type of NBN delivered service does this individual currently receive, (iii) what communications services did this individual previously receive, and (iv) was this individual previously eligible for the Australian Broadband Guarantee or similar subsidies.

Mr Albanese: The Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:

(a) (i) Ms Seren Trump is located in Armidale, NSW.

(ii) Seren Trump has an active NBN service with a commercial internet service provider.

(iii) The agency engaged to produce the advertisement has confirmed that Ms Seren Trump was receiving an NBN fibre service at the time the National Broadband Network (NBN) advertisements were filmed.

(iv) Ms Seren Trump would not have been eligible for the Australian Broadband Guarantee program as Armidale had access to commercial metro-comparable services such as ADSL and 3G in 2010-11.

(b) (i) Dave Paton is located in Kings Creek Station, Peterman Northern Territory.

(ii) Dave Paton of Kings Creek Helicopters currently receives a NBN Interim Satellite Service.

(iii) The agency engaged to produce the advertisement has confirmed that Dave Paton of Kings Creek Helicopters was receiving an NBN interim satellite service at the time the National Broadband Network advertisements were filmed.

(iv) The business premises was not registered under the Australian Broadband Guarantee (ABG) program, but based on being eligible for the Interim Satellite Service, it may have been eligible for the Australian Broadband Guarantee.
**Telstra**  
(Question No. 1124)

Ms Marino asked the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, in writing, on 12 August 2012:

In respect of faults reported to Telstra in landline services provided to the south-west region of Western Australia (as defined by the Shires of Capel, Dardanup, Harvey and Cities of Bunbury and Busselton) during the calendar years (a) 2008, (b) 2009, (c) 2010, (d) 2011, and (e) 2012 (to date), (i) how many were reported, (ii) for what average length of time were faults listed, (iii) what was the average length of time for repairing faults, (iv) how many faults were behind schedule or overdue for repair, and (v) what was the cost of repairs and maintenance.

Mr Albanese: The Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy has provided the following answer to the honourable member's question:

Telstra is a private company and therefore is under no obligation to disclose commercial information to the department about its performance unless it is required to do so by legislation or legislative instrument.

Telstra provided the department with the following response to this question:

"The extensive information sought is not readily available as Telstra does not track the performance of its fixed line network against the large number of municipal shires and individual cities in Australia. Telstra also considers its performance at such very low levels of disaggregation to be commercially sensitive information, as there is likely to be a variation in performance between the many regions within a state. This is due to the variation in the density of fixed line services (and the subsequent impact on the level of reported faults); the classification of Telstra exchange service areas within a region into urban, rural or remote; and the distances that Telstra technicians must travel to attend individual faults. Telstra also manages its performance on a state/national basis, as the impact of seasonal weather events (and the subsequent increase in fault levels) will require Telstra to temporarily relocate field staff from one state to another in order to manage the increased workload.

In terms of data that is readily available to address Ms Marino's questions, Telstra considers the information on its website regarding Network Reliability Framework (NRF) performance to be the most suitable data on which to base a response. The Shires of Capel, Dardanup and Harvey, and the cities of Bunbury and Busselton, fall within the NRF geographic area of Western Australia South Western Region."

According to Telstra's website, the percentage of Customer Service Guarantee (CSG) services with no faults for the South Western region of Western Australia for May 2012, the latest month for which Telstra provides data, was 98.54. This measure describes the percentage of CSG services that were fault free for this region. The CSG is a regulated performance standard that sets down maximum timeframes for the connection and rectification of fixed line services for residential and small business customers.

The Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) publication, Telecommunications (fixed-line) performance bulletin 2010-11: Data tables, provides NRF performance data on an annual basis for Western Australia South Western Region. According to the ACMA, the annual average percentage of CSG services without a fault for 2007-08 was 98.86, for 2008-09 it was 98.62, for 2009-10 it was 98.50 and for 2010-11 it was 98.79.

**Telstra**  
(Question No. 1125)

Ms Marino asked the Minister representing the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, in writing, on 12 August 2012:
(1) How many (a) copper cable bag joints, and (b) Customer Network Improvements (CNIs), in the south-west region of Western Australia (as defined by the Shires of Capel, Dardanup, Harvey and Cities of Bunbury and Busselton) (i) have existing service complaints, (ii) are due and overdue for repair or maintenance, and (iii) are affecting service delivery.

(2) Since 1 July 2011, how many (a) copper cable bag joints, and (b) CNIs, in the south-west region of Western Australia have had (i) multiple service complaints, and (ii) more than four service complaints.

(3) In the calendar years (a) 2008, (b) 2009, (c) 2010, (d) 2011, and (e) 2012 (to date), how many (i) copper cable bag joints, and (ii) CNIs, in the south-west region of Western Australia have been repaired.

(4) In the calendar years (a) 2008, (b) 2009, (c) 2010, (d) 2011, and (e) 2012 (to date), how many (i) copper cable bag joints, and (ii) CNIs, in the south-west region of Western Australia with multiple service complaints have been repaired but not replaced.

(5) How many (a) copper cable bag joints, and (b) CNIs, in the south-west region of Western Australia have not been replaced when the first service complaint was received in the calendar years (i) 2009, (ii) 2010, and (iii) 2011.

Mr Albanese: The Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy has provided the following answer to the honourable member's question:

See response to Question No. 1124.

Clean Energy Future Plan
(Question No. 1131)

Mr Oakeshott asked the Prime Minister, in writing, on 14 August 2012:
Can she confirm that the $1.7 billion land sector package under the Clean Energy Future plan (a) is permanent, and (b) does not replace any existing programs.

Ms Gillard: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:
(a) All measures within the land sector package are ongoing programs with the exception of the measure Regional Natural Resource Management Planning for climate change; and
(b) the package is a new measure designed to encourage the participation of the farming, forestry and land sectors in the Clean Energy Future Plan by creating opportunities to reduce carbon pollution and increase the amount of carbon stored on the land.

Electoral Donations
(Question No. 1132)

Mr Oakeshott asked the Treasurer, in writing, on 14 August 2012:
(1) Is it a fact that he made the following statement in The Monthly magazine (March 2012): 'I fear Australia's extraordinary success has never been in more jeopardy than right now because of the rising power of vested interests.'
(2) Is he aware that according to 2010-11 Australian Electoral Commission disclosure returns, the Labor, Liberal and National parties together received more than $200 million in direct corporate political donations.
(3) What measures is the Government taking to fulfil its election commitment to reform the rules governing political donations.

Mr Swan The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:
(1) Yes.
(2) The donor disclosure returns on the AEC website does not separately identify donations made by individuals and corporations. However, I am aware that the website shows that the total amount reported by all donors to the Labor, Liberal and National parties for the 2010-11 financial year is just over $26 million and that the amount you quoted of more than $200 million in direct corporate political donations is incorrect. The $200 million disclosed in the Labor, Liberal and National Party returns combined is the total of all receipts, and includes income from investments etc, not just donations.

(3) The government is still considering reforms in light of the report on the funding of political parties and election campaigns, and on 20 June 2012, the Special Minister of State, the Hon Gary Gray AO MP, tabled a statement in the House of Representatives setting out the status of the government response to the Joint Select Committee on Electoral Matters (JSCEM) report on political party funding and the current JSCEM inquiry on the AEC’s analysis of Fair Work Australia report on the Health Services Union.

Foreign Investment Review Board
(Question No. 1137)

Mr Fletcher asked the Treasurer, in writing, on 15 August 2012:
In 2006-07, 2007-08, 2008-09, 2009-10, and 2011-12, how many applications were:
(a) made to, and
(b) approved by, the Foreign Investment Review Board for the purchase of new dwellings (broken up by individual purchasers and off-the plan property developers) in:

Mr Swan: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:
The Foreign Investment Review Board's Annual Reports provide data on proposed investment into Australia for each financial year. Table 2.10 provides a state and territory distribution of proposed investment in the real estate sector broken down by the number and value of the approvals. The Annual Reports are available at: http://www.firb.gov.au/content/publications.asp?NavID=5. It is important to note that the data contained in the Annual Reports is based on investor intentions and not actual purchases.
Specific investment information disaggregated by suburb is not available, reflecting the need to protect the commercial interests and privacy of individual investors. It would also involve significant work to produce the information sought.

Climate Change and Energy Efficiency
(Question No. 1139)

Mr Fletcher asked the Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency, in writing, on 16 August 2012:

Further to the answers to question in writing Nos. 741 and 1012 (House Hansard, 14 April 2012, page 4202, and 14 August 2012, page P98, respectively) in which it was indicated that the National Broadband Networks (NBNs) Network Termination Device (NTD) will consume on average approximately 6.8 watts of power, compared with a standard corded telephone on the existing Telstra
network using 0.5 watt of power, does the Government have an estimate of the additional carbon
dioxide that is likely to be generated from the use of the NTD post NBN rollout; if so, how many
additional tonnes are estimated to be generated in the first year.

Mr Combet: The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

As emissions from generating electricity will fall under the cap of Australia’s emissions trading
scheme (ETS), there will be no net additional carbon dioxide (CO$_2$) emissions resulting from the use of
network termination devices once the National Broadband Network has been rolled out.

This demonstrates the value of an ETS as a mechanism that allows the Government to set a
quantitative emissions target for the entire economy and have certainty of delivering on that target.

Under Australia’s ETS, commencing in 2015-16, the Government will set a cap on greenhouse gas
emissions (including CO$_2$) from covered sectors of the Australian economy and issue permits up to that
cap. Covered entities will be required to surrender one permit for every tonne of CO$_2$ they emit.
Because the total number of permits cannot exceed the cap, any emissions increases in one sector of the
economy must be offset by emissions reductions elsewhere, or through the purchase of an offset unit.
This results in net emissions from covered sectors being limited to the level of the cap.

Army History Unit
(Question No. 1154)

Mr Robert asked the Minister for Defence, in writing, on 20 August 2012:

(1) What was and is the budget for the Army History Unit (AHU) in (a) 2011-12, and (b) 2012-13,
respectively?

(2) If the funding for 2012-13 is less than for 2011-12, (a) how will the reduction be achieved, (b) what
services will be affected, (c) will the AHU’s research and publication of several different series of
Australian military history continue in the same capacity, and (d) will serving members of the
Australian Defence Force continue to receive a complimentary copy of any requested title published by
the AHU?

Mr Stephen Smith: the answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

(1) (a) The budget for 2011-12 for the Australian Army History Unit (AAHU) was $2.7 million.
(b) The budget for 2012-13 for the AAHU is $1.3 million.

(2) (a) The decrease in funding has been achieved through some reduction in the publishing program,
introducing e-book technology and deferring this year’s Chief of Army History Conference. This will
now be a biennial conference and offset the biennial Land Warfare Conference.
(b) No services will be affected. AAHU is primarily tasked with producing military historical
analysis in support of Army's modernisation. This support will continue. In addition, the budget
allocation will enable the Army's substantial historical collection to be maintained and accessible to
visitors from within the Australian Defence Force and the wider public. The AAHU will also continue
providing support to the Capability and Technology Management College.
(c) (d) The military history publishing program has been reduced, but will continue to produce
quality Australian military history titles. The only publications that were supplied free to Defence
members were The Australian Army Campaign Series.

This will now be produced via e-books to improve distribution and access to all serving members
online via the Army's online learning portal, i-Army.
Australian Conservation Foundation
(Question Nos 1160 and 1183)

Mr Briggs asked the Treasurer, in writing, on 21 August 2012:
For (a) 2007-08, (b) 2008-09, (c) 2009-10, (d) 2010-11, and (e) 2011-12, what grants were provided to the Australian Conservation Foundation, including the amount, purpose, and program each was delivered under.

Mr Swan: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:
In regards to questions (a) to (e), the Treasury Portfolio has not provided grants to the Australian Conservation Foundation.

Australian Conservation Foundation
(Question No. 1161)

Mr Briggs asked the Minister representing the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Science and Research, in writing, on 21 August 2012:
For (a) 2007-08, (b) 2008-09, (c) 2009-10, (d) 2010-11, and (e) 2011-12, what grants were provided to the Australian Conservation Foundation, including the amount, purpose, and program each was delivered under.

Mr Combet: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:
No grants have been provided to the Australian Conservation Foundation during the financial years listed above.

Australian Conservation Foundation
(Question No. 1163)

Mr Briggs asked the Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government, in writing, on 21 August 2012:
For (a) 2007-08, (b) 2008-09, (c) 2009-10, (d) 2010-11, and (e) 2011-12, what grants were provided to the Australian Conservation Foundation, including the amount, purpose, and program each was delivered under.

Mr Crean: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:
Since the creation of the Department in September 2010, no grants have been provided to the Australian Conservation Foundation.

Australian Conservation Foundation
(Question No. 1164)

Mr Briggs asked the Minister for the Arts, in writing, on 21 August 2012:
For (a) 2007-08, (b) 2008-09, (c) 2009-10, (d) 2010-11, and (e) 2011-12, what grants were provided to the Australian Conservation Foundation, including the amount, purpose, and program each was delivered under.

Mr Crean: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:
(a) 2007-08

No grants were provided by the Australia Council to the Australian Conservation Foundation for this period. From July 2007 until December 2007, the Office for the Arts was part of the former Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts. From January 2008 the Office for the Arts was part of the former Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts. Data relating to
grants by Office for the Arts was collected by the Corporate area of these Departments and is not accessible by the Office for the Arts. To attempt to provide this information would involve an unreasonable diversion of departmental resources.

(b) 2008-09

No grants were provided by the Australia Council to the Australian Conservation Foundation for this period. The Office for the Arts was part of the former Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts at this time. Data relating to grants by Office for the Arts was collected by the Corporate area of this Department and is not accessible by the Office for the Arts. To attempt to provide this information would involve an unreasonable diversion of departmental resources.

(c) 2009-10

No grants were provided by the Australia Council to the Australian Conservation Foundation for this period. The Office for the Arts was part of the former Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts at this time. Data relating to grants by Office for the Arts was collected by the Corporate area of this Department and is not accessible by the Office for the Arts. To attempt to provide this information would involve an unreasonable diversion of departmental resources.

(d) 2010-11

No grants were provided by the Australia Council to the Australian Conservation Foundation for this period. From July 2010 until January 2011, the Office for the Arts was part of the former Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the. Data relating to grants by Office for the Arts for this period was collected by the Corporate area of this Department and is not accessible by the Office for the Arts. To attempt to provide this information would involve an unreasonable diversion of departmental resources. No grants were provided by Office for the Arts to the Australian Conservation Foundation since February 2011.

(e) 2011-12

No grants were provided by the Australia Council or the Office for the Arts to the Australian Conservation Foundation for this period.

**Australian Conservation Foundation**

(Question No. 1165)

*Mr Briggs* asked the Minister for Defence, in writing, on 21 August 2012:

For (a) 2007-08, (b)2008-09, (c) 2009-10, (d) 2010-11 and (e) 2011-12, what grants were provided to the Australian Conservation Foundation, including the amount, purpose and program each was delivered under?

*Mr Stephen Smith:* The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

The Department of Defence (including the Defence Materiel Organisation) has not provided any grants to the Australian Conservation Foundation in financial years 2007-08, 2009-10, 2010-11, and 2011-12.

**Immigration and Citizenship**

(Question No. 1166)

*Mr Briggs* asked the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, in writing, on 21 August 2012:

To ask the Ministers listed below (questions Nos. *1159 - *1189)—For (a) 2007-08, (b) 2008-09, (c) 2009-10, (d) 2010-11, and (e) 2011-12, what grants were provided to the Australian Conservation Foundation, including the amount, purpose, and program each was delivered under.

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**QUESTIONS IN WRITING**
Mr Bowen: The answer to the honourable member’s question is:
There were no grants paid to the Australian Conservation Foundation for the years (a) 2007-08, (b) 2008-09, (c) 2009-10, (d) 2010-11, and (e) 2011-12.

**Australian Conservation Foundation**  
(Question No. 1176)

Mr Briggs asked the Minister representing the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, in writing, on 21 August 2012:

For (a) 2007-08, (b) 2008-09, (c) 2009-10, (d) 2010-11, and (e) 2011-12, what grants were provided to the Australian Conservation Foundation, including the amount, purpose, and program each was delivered under.

Mr Burke: The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry has provided the following answer to the honourable member's question:
The Department provided no grants to the Australian Conservation Foundation during (a) 2007-08, (b) 2008-09, (c) 2009-10, (d) 2010-11 and (e) 2011-12.

**Australian Conservation Foundation**  
(Question Nos 1177 and 1178)

Mr Briggs asked the Minister for Resources & Energy and the Minister for Tourism, in writing, on 21 August 2012:

For (a) 2007-08, (b) 2008-09, (c) 2009-10, (d) 2010-11, and (e) 2011-12, what grants were provided to the Australian Conservation Foundation, including the amount, purpose, and program each was delivered under.

Mr Martin Ferguson: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:
I am advised that no grants have been made to the Australian Conservation Foundation by my department or portfolio agencies since the establishment of the portfolio.

**Australian Conservation Foundation**  
(Question No. 1180)

Mr Briggs asked the Minister for Industry and Innovation, in writing, on 21 August 2012:

For (a) 2007-08, (b) 2008-09, (c) 2009-10, (d) 2010-11, and (e) 2011-12, what grants were provided to the Australian Conservation Foundation, including the amount, purpose, and program each was delivered under.

Mr Combet: The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:
Please refer to the answer provided to House of Representatives Parliamentary Question on Notice 1161.

**Australian Conservation Foundation**  
(Question No. 1187)

Mr Briggs asked the Minister for Small Business, in writing, on 21 August 2012:

For (a) 2007-08, (b) 2008-09, (c) 2009-10, (d) 2010-11, and (e) 2011-12, what grants were provided to the Australian Conservation Foundation, including the amount, purpose, and program each was delivered under.
Mr Brendan O'Connor: The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows: Please refer to the answer provided to House of Representatives Parliamentary Question on Notice 1161.

Persons Suspected Missing Sailing to Australia
(Question No. 1190)

Mr Morrison asked the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, in writing, on 23 August 2012:

(1) What total number of reports have been filed on his department's 'Persons suspected missing while sailing to Australia—Online report' website, and what number of these were made (a) anonymously, and (b) from internet provider addresses registered to computers in Australia's detention network (listed by detention facility).

(2) What total number of people have been reported as (a) missing while sailing to Australia (not counting multiple reports for the same individual), and (b) travelling with accompanying family members.

(3) What locations have been listed as boat departure points, and how many reports are associated with each location.

(4) How many persons identified as suspected missing while sailing have subsequently been located.

(5) What action is taken by his department in pursuing these reports once they have been filed.

Mr Bowen The answer to the honourable member's question is:

(1) As of 23 August 2012, two reports have been filed on the Department of Immigration and Citizenship's 'Persons suspected missing while sailing to Australia – Online report' website

   (a) Both reports provided contact details, however indicated they wish to remain anonymous.

   (b) No departmental IT facilities were used to submit any of the identified online web forms.

(2) (a) One person has been reported as missing while sailing to Australia.

   (b) the reported person was not travelling with accompanying family members.

(3) One report listed Indonesia as a boat departure point.

(4) One person was identified as suspected missing while sailing to Australia and has not been located according to Department of Immigration and Citizenship databases.

(5) The action taken by the Department in pursuing these reports will depend on the situation. In all cases each report is assessed and some or all of the following actions will be taken:

   • Departmental database searches

   • Exchanging information with Australian government agencies

   • Where appropriate seeking information from relevant international organisations such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

Detainees Excursions
(Question No. 1191)

Mr Morrison asked the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, in writing, on 23 August 2012:

(1) What is his department's policy on outings to the homes of individuals for 'high risk' detainees?

(2) In (a) 2008-09, (b) 2009-10, (c) 2010-11, and (d) 2011-12, how many 'high risk' detainees were moved from detention centres for outings in the community?
Mr Bowen: The answer to the honourable member's question is:

(1) All persons in immigration detention are able to apply for, or be offered the opportunity to participate in, excursions. Principles underpinning this policy are that persons in immigration detention are treated fairly and reasonably within the law and that conditions of detention will ensure the inherent dignity of the human person.

An excursion cannot proceed without the express approval of the Regional Manager or their nominated delegate and the Department reserves the right to cancel or postpone excursions. Factors for the Regional Manager to consider include, but are not limited to, the following:
- availability of Detention Services Provider staff to escort the persons in immigration detention on the excursion;
- current security, site and flight risk assessments;
- advice from medical professionals who may be treating the person in immigration detention; and
- the individual's personal circumstances (for example, the requested visit may be to a close family member in hospital).

In determining whether a 'high risk' client will be able to attend a visit to a home, consideration is given to assessing risk in conformity with the Australian Risk Management Standard (ASNZ s4360:2004) and the Department's own risk management framework. This includes the departmental risk assessment matrix which helps departmental officers and detention service providers make decisions which are in line with the Department's obligations to protect the Australian community and staff and as part of its duty of care to the client and other detainees.

(2) The information requested is not held on the Department's electronic data management systems. Obtaining this information would be a resource intensive exercise involving manual extraction of data from hard copy files. As such the Department is not able to provide a response to this question.

Defence
(2012)

Mr Robert asked the Minister for Defence, in writing, on 10 September 2012:

What is the (a) daily, and (b) hourly, cost to Defence for the following Royal Australian Army platforms: (i) M777 155 millimetre Light Weight Towed Howitzer; (ii) ARH Tiger; (iii) MRH-90; (iv) S-70A9 Black Hawk; (v) CH-47 Chinook; (vi) Australian Light Armoured Vehicle; (vii) Bushmaster Protected Mobility Vehicle; (viii) G Wagon; (ix) M1A1 Abrams Tank; (x) M113AS4 Armoured Personnel Carrier; (xi) B-206 Kiowa; (xii) Scan Eagle UAV; (xiii) Shadow 200 UAV; and (xv) Heron UAV?

Mr Stephen Smith: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

(a) and (b) The method of costing Army platforms differs by capability. Army aviation platforms are costed by the hour. Army land platforms are costed by the kilometre. There is also a static cost for certain Army land platforms. This static cost is based on the cost to maintain the equipment without operating it.

In addition, the costs provided in this response are drawn from the Defence Financial Manual Volume 4, which is currently under review. It is assessed that these costs will change once reviewed, most notably the helicopter costs, as the data for capabilities such as ARH Tiger and MRH-90 matures.

Noting this, the current average cost of Army platforms is estimated as follows:

Land platform static capability costs (not including crew):
- (i) M777 155 millimetre Light Weight Towed Howitzer: $117.42 per day;
- (ii) Australian Light Armoured Vehicle: $1,138.25 per day;
(iii) Bushmaster Protected Mobility Vehicle: $398.68 per day;  
(iv) M1A1 Abrams Tank: $1,260.69 per day; and  
(v) M113AS4 Armoured Personnel Carrier: $201.78 per day.

Land platform operating costs (including crew):  
(i) Australian Light Armoured Vehicle: $52.05 per kilometre;  
(ii) Bushmaster Protected Mobility Vehicle: $2.66 per kilometre;  
(iii) G Wagon: $0.28 per kilometre;  
(iv) M1A1 Abrams Tank: $213.99 per kilometre; and  
(v) M113AS4 Armoured Personnel Carrier: $49.06 per kilometre.

Aviation platform operating costs (including aircrew for helicopters):  
(i) ARH Tiger: $17,451 per hour;  
(ii) MRH-90: $15,575 per hour;  
(iii) S-70A9 Black Hawk: $15,186 per hour;  
(iv) CH-47 Chinook: $15,992 per hour;  
(v) B-206 Kiowa: $2,063 per hour;  
(vi) Scan Eagle UAV: $3,549 per hour (based on 7000 hours per year);  
(vii) Shadow 200 UAV: $2,370 per hour (based on 7920 hours per year); and  
(viii) Heron UAV: $12,535 per hour.

Please note that the static cost for G Wagon and the operating cost for M777 are not available as they have both been recently introduced into service and the data to quantify these costs has not yet been captured.

The daily cost for land vehicle platforms is calculated from the kilometres driven in a single day. If a vehicle sits static for a day, then the static operating cost is used. If a vehicle is driven to a location and then left static for a period, of 24 hours or part thereof, the cost is calculated by adding the static capability cost and the operating cost.

The daily costs for aviation platforms are calculated by multiplying the hourly cost by the hours flown that day.

All costs detailed are the direct operating costs to Army. This includes petrol, oil, lubricants, forecasted maintenance and crew (where specified). These costs do not include procurement, overheads, depreciation and infrastructure costs.

The UAV costs are based on the hours flown in Financial Year 2011/12 for Scan Eagle (historical) and allocated in Financial Year 2012/13 for Shadow (allocated) as costs vary depending on hours flown. These years represent the greatest rate of effort for scan eagle and the predicted yearly rate of effort for Shadow. With UAVs, the more hours flown, the less expensive they are to operate per hour as there is a fixed component to the cost of flying UAVs.

**Defence**  
**(Question No. 1218)**

Mr Robert asked the Minister for Defence, in writing, on 10 September 2012:

What is the (a) daily, and (b) hourly, cost to Defence for the following Royal Australian Air Force platforms: (i) F/A-18F Super Hornet; (ii) F/A-18A/B Hornets; (iii) AP-3C Orion; (iv) C-17A Globemaster III; (v) AEW&C Wedgetail; (vi) C-130H Hercules; (vii) C-130J Hercules; (viii) PC-9/A
Mr Stephen Smith: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

(1) (a) and (b) The table below provides the cost to Defence for Royal Australian Air Force platforms.

- The basis is the cash cost (direct cost) incurred by Defence, including sustainment costs, fuel, and aircrew salary, allowances and superannuation.

- Unless otherwise stated, the hourly cost rates used are those published in *Finance Manual Volume 4* (FINMAN 4).

- The daily cost to Defence is calculated as the hourly cost rate multiplied by the total hours flown in the corresponding financial year (defined as the achieved "rate of effort"), divided by 365 days.

- The hourly cost to Defence is the specified hourly cost rate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Platform</th>
<th>Daily cost</th>
<th>Hourly cost</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(i)</td>
<td>F/A-18F Super Hornet</td>
<td>$276,041</td>
<td>$30,561</td>
<td>Based on new rate to be published in FINMAN 4 October 2012.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ii)</td>
<td>F/A-18A/B Hornet</td>
<td>$513,406</td>
<td>$15,620</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(iii)</td>
<td>AP-3C Orion</td>
<td>$328,401</td>
<td>$15,594</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(iv)</td>
<td>C-17A Globemaster III</td>
<td>$184,064</td>
<td>$19,865</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(v)</td>
<td>AEW&amp;C Wedgetail</td>
<td>$385,058</td>
<td>$88,824</td>
<td>Based on new rate to be published in FINMAN 4 October 2012.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(vi)</td>
<td>C130-H Hercules</td>
<td>$174,004</td>
<td>$21,393</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(vii)</td>
<td>C130-J Hercules</td>
<td>$293,303</td>
<td>$15,653</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(viii)</td>
<td>PC-9/A</td>
<td>$144,001</td>
<td>$2,813</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ix)</td>
<td>PC-9/A(F)</td>
<td>$144,001</td>
<td>$2,813</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(x)</td>
<td>Hawk 127 LIF</td>
<td>$222,003</td>
<td>$12,605</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(xi)</td>
<td>B300 King Air K350</td>
<td>$108,888</td>
<td>$6,192</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(xii)</td>
<td>KC-30A MRTT</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Not available as this platform is still in the initial operating capability phase. Based on the combined additional cost rate used in the Schedule of Special Purpose Flights tabled in Parliament every six months. Daily cost n/a as rate of effort for this platform is not published.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(xiii)</td>
<td>CL-604 Challenger</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>$3,450</td>
<td>Based on the combined additional cost rate used in the Schedule of Special Purpose Flights tabled in Parliament every six months. Daily cost n/a as rate of effort for this platform is not published.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(xiv)</td>
<td>B737 BBJ</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>$3,450</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

(Question No. 1226)

Mr Briggs asked the Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth, in writing, on 13 September 2012:
For (a) 2012-13, (b) 2013-14, (c) 2014-15, and (d) 2015-16, what is the breakdown of sub-programs, and their respective allocated funding and administrative costs, in respect of Outcome 3, programs (i) 3.1 Employment Services, (ii) 3.2 Indigenous Employment, (iii) 3.3 Disability Employment Services, (iv) 3.4 Remote Jobs and Communities Program, and (v) 3.5 Working Age Payments.

Mr Shorten: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:
Outcome 3 programs within the Education, Employment and Workplace Relations portfolio fall within my responsibilities as Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations.
The current and forward estimates (for the period 2012-13 to 2015-16) for each of the programs and sub-programs listed are published in the 2012-13 Portfolio Budget Statements for the Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Portfolio. The Outcome 3 information from this publication can be accessed at the following URL:

The relevant page references from the online version of the Outcome 3 Portfolio Budget Statements (as per the URL above) for the programs you require are found at:
(i) 3.1 Employment Services (Page 9)
(ii) 3.2 Indigenous Employment (Page 12)
(iii) 3.3 Disability Employment Services (Page 14)
(iv) 3.4 Remote Jobs and Communities Program (Page 17)
(v) 3.5 Working Age Payments (Page 20)

Resourcing for the management of programs, including ASL, administered on behalf of the Australian Government is not allocated, or recorded within financial management and human resource systems, on an administered program basis.

Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
(Question No. 1227)

Mr Briggs asked the Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth, in writing, on 13 September 2012:
For (a) 2012-13, (b) 2013-14, (c) 2014-15, and (d) 2015-16, what is the breakdown of sub-programs, and their respective allocated funding and administrative costs, in respect of Outcome 4, programs (i) 4.1 Employee Assistance, (ii) 4.2 Workplace Assistance, and (iii) 4.3 Workers Compensation Payments.

Mr Shorten: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:
Outcome 4 programs within the Education, Employment and Workplace Relations portfolio fall within my responsibilities as Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations.
The current and forward estimates (for the period 2012-13 to 2015-16) for each of the programs and sub-programs listed are published in the 2012-13 Portfolio Budget Statements for the Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Portfolio. The Outcome 4 information from this publication can be accessed at the following URL:

The relevant page references from the online version of the Outcome 4 Portfolio Budget Statements (as per the URL above) for the programs you require are found at:
(i) 4.1 Employee Assistance (Page 5)
(ii) 4.2 Workplace Assistance (Page 6)
(iii) 4.3 Workers Compensation Payments (Page 7)

Resourcing for the management of programs, including ASL, administered on behalf of the Australian Government is not allocated, or recorded within financial management and human resource systems, on an administered program basis.

**Defence: Commonwealth Grants**

*(Question No. 1244)*

Mr Briggs asked the Minister for Defence, in writing, on 18 September 2012:

(1) For (a) 2008-09, (b) 2009-10, (c) 2010-11, and (d) 2011-12, how many Commonwealth grants were approved by the Minister's department, and at what total cost?

(2) For 2012-13 (to date), how many Commonwealth grants were approved by the Minister's department and at what total cost, and of these, how many have (a) signed funding agreements, and at what total cost, and (b) been paid to the approved recipients, and at what total cost?

Mr Stephen Smith: the answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

(1) (a), (b), (c) and (d)

Department of Defence[1]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Financial Year</th>
<th>No. of Grants Approved</th>
<th>Total cost $m</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008-09</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>$11.895</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-10[2]</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>$57.323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-11</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>$56.592</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011-12</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>$67.677</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
2. In 2009, the Government agreed to provide an annual contribution of $59.3m (US$40m) for five years to the Afghan National Army (ANA) Trust Fund.

Defence Materiel Organisation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Financial Year</th>
<th>No. of Grants Approved</th>
<th>Total cost $m</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008-09</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>$13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-10</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>$16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-11</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>$8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011-12</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>$20.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(2)

Department of Defence (2012-13)[1]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No. of Grants Approved</th>
<th>Total cost $m</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012-13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>$0.344</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2a</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>$0.344</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2b</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>$0.112</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:
Defence Materiel Organisation (2012-13)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2012-13</th>
<th>No. of Grants Approved</th>
<th>Total cost $m</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>$8.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2a[1]</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>$10.683</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2b</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>$0.117</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:
1. 12 grants approved in previous FYs have a total of $2.72 million in outstanding commitment in FY2012-13.