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SITTING DAYS—2015

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FORTY-FOURTH PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION—FIFTH PERIOD

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

House of Representatives Office holders
Speaker—Hon. Bronwyn Kathleen Bishop MP
Deputy Speaker—Hon. Bruce Craig Scott MP
Second Deputy Speaker—Mr Robert George Mitchell MP
Members of the Speaker's Panel—Mr Russell Evan Broadbent MP,
Mr Alexander George Hawke MP, Mr Ian Reginald Goodenough MP,
Mrs Natasha Louise Griggs MP, Ms Sarah Moya Henderson MP,
Mr Stephen James Irons MP, Mr Ewen Thomas Jones MP, Mr Craig Kelly MP,
Ms Michelle Leanne Landry MP, Mrs Jane Prentice MP, Mr Donald James Randall MP,
Mr Ross Xavier Vasta MP, Mr Brett David Whiteley MP, Mrs Lucy Elizabeth Wicks MP

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

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

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

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

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<td>van Manen, Mr Albertus Johannes</td>
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<td>Varvaris, Mr Nickolas</td>
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<td>Vasta, Mr Ross Xavier</td>
<td>Gellibrand, VIC</td>
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<td>Watts, Mr Timothy Graham</td>
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<td>Whiteley, Mr Brett David</td>
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<td>Wilson, Mr Richard James</td>
<td>O'Connor, WA</td>
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<td>Wood, Mr Jason Peter</td>
<td>La Trobe, VIC</td>
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<td>Wyatt, Mr Kenneth George AM</td>
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<td>Makin, SA</td>
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**PARTY ABBREVIATIONS**

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

**Heads of Parliamentary Departments**

Clerk of the Senate—R Laing
Clerk of the House of Representatives—D Elder
Secretary, Department of Parliamentary Services—C Mills
Parliamentary Budget Officer—P Bowen
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Employment</strong></td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Attorney-General</strong></td>
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<td>Senator the Hon. George Brandis QC</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Treasurer</strong></td>
<td>The Hon. Joe Hockey MP</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Defence and Care</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>The Hon. Michaelia Cash</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Finance</strong></td>
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<tr>
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<td>Senator the Hon. Mathias Cormann</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Health</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Sport</strong></td>
<td>The Hon. Sussan Ley MP</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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Each box represents a portfolio. **Cabinet Ministers are shown in bold type.** As a general rule, there is one department in each portfolio. However, there is a Department of Human Services in the Social Services portfolio and a Department of Veterans' Affairs in the Defence portfolio. The title of a department does not necessarily reflect the title of a minister in all cases.
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Cabinet Secretary</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for the Centenary of ANZAC</td>
<td>Hon David Feeney MP</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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The SPEAKER (Hon. Bronwyn Bishop) took the chair at 09:00, made an acknowledgement of country and read prayers.

**BILLS**

**Limitation of Liability for Maritime Claims Amendment Bill 2015**

**First Reading**

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Truss.

Bill read a first time.

**Second Reading**

Mr TRUSS (Wide Bay—Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development) (09:01): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

**Introduction**

To ensure international shipping continues to be an economically viable proposition, shipowners are generally entitled to limit their liability in respect of claims arising from damage caused by their ships. This means that if a ship is involved in an incident which causes damage to persons, property or the environment, there is a limit on the maximum amount of compensation that a court can order the shipowner to pay.

The maximum liability of a shipowner is usually calculated based on the size of the ship involved in the incident and has no relationship to the amount of damage caused by the incident.

The rationale for allowing shipowners to limit their liability in respect of ship-sourced damage is to encourage shipping and trade. This involves balancing the competing objectives of compensating anybody who suffers loss or damage caused by shipowners or their representatives, while ensuring that ship operators are able to access commercially available insurance to cover their liability for that damage.

Australia is a party to the 1996 Protocol to the Convention on Limitation of Liability for Maritime Claims, which allows a shipowner (including the charterer, manager and operator of the ship) or salvor to limit the total amount they can be required to pay for damage caused by the ship, the shipowner or the salvor. Limits are specified for two types of claims: those for loss of life or personal injury; and those for other claims, such as damage to ships, property or harbour works. The limits are based on the gross tonnage of the ship, with larger ships having higher limits. It is administered by the International Maritime Organization, a specialised agency of the United Nations.

Other international maritime conventions adopt the limits of liability in the 1996 LLMC Protocol and apply them to shipowners for the purpose of limiting their liability under those conventions, including the International Convention on Civil Liability for Bunker Oil Pollution Damage which limits the liability of shipowners for pollution damage caused by bunker oil spills and requires shipowners to maintain liability insurance in respect of such damage up to the limit of their liability.
Purpose of the bill

The purpose of the bill is to implement amendments to the 1996 LLMC Protocol which will come into force on the later of either the day this act receives the royal assent and 8 June 2015. The bill will increase the liability limits for shipowners and salvors for maritime claims relating to ship-sourced damage to more adequately reflect the costs of such incidents.

Australia was the leading advocate of increasing the liability limits under the 1996 LLMC Protocol. A proposal to increase the limits was brought forward at the IMO by Australia following the Pacific Adventurer incident off the Queensland coast on 11 March 2009, which involved a bunker oil spill. The costs for cleaning up the spill were estimated at $34 million. However, under the 1996 LLMC Protocol (and therefore under the LLMC Act) the shipowner was legally entitled to limit its liability to approximately $17.5 million. The 1996 LLMC Protocol uses 'special drawing rights' to quantify the liability limits. Based on conversion rates as at 5 February 2015, the financial liability for a medium sized vessel of 50,000 gross tonnes 'in respect of claims for loss of life or personal injury' amounts to an increase of approximately A$33,600,000. A claim for the same sized vessel made 'in regard to any other claims' amounts to an increase of approximately A$16,800,000.

Conclusion

Ensuring the LLMC liability limits are raised in Australia as soon as they enter into force will reduce the risk of having to seek an increase to the Protection of the Sea Levy in the event that the shipowner's liability and/or insurance for an incident is insufficient or absent.

I commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned.

Customs Amendment (Anti-dumping Measures) Bill (No. 1) 2015

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Macfarlane.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr IAN MACFARLANE (Groom—Minister for Industry and Science) (09:07): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I am pleased to present the Customs Amendment (Anti-Dumping Measures) Bill (No. 1) 2015, representing part of the government’s reforms to strengthen and improve Australia’s anti-dumping system.

This is a government that strongly supports genuine free and fair trade and an open and dynamic market economy. However the importation of dumped and subsidised goods, which injure Australian manufacturers and producers, undermines the viability of efficient, innovative and hard-working Australian businesses.

This is why we support Australia having an effective trade remedies regime. It represents an integral part of a robust international trading system and we want to ensure that Australian industries are competing on a level playing field. It is also critical to our broader plan to boost the competitiveness of Australian manufacturing.
Australia's current regime for combatting injurious dumping and subsidisation is transparent and complies with our obligations under World Trade Organization agreements. But there is clearly room to strengthen and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the system—and that is what we plan to do.

Our reforms included in this bill introduce a number of measures to strengthen Australia's anti-dumping system. The improvements included in this bill will:

- improve the current merits review arrangements;
- improve the flexibility of stakeholder consultations;
- modernise the way information about anti-dumping investigations and other inquiries is published; and
- simplify, clarify and better align our anti-dumping legislation with international law and practice.

The improvements that I am introducing today are designed to address stakeholder concerns about the effectiveness of Australia's anti-dumping system, in a manner that is consistent with our trade obligations, including those under World Trade Organization Agreements.

We are introducing more stringent deadlines for submissions to investigations in order to assist businesses to get more timely access to remedies. This amendment aligns our legislation with the quickest time frames permissible and sends a message to businesses intending to export dumped and subsidised goods at injurious prices to Australia that we are serious about taking a tougher approach to combatting unfair trade.

We are also modernising the provisions which govern how key information about anti-dumping investigations, and other inquiries, is made public. Under current arrangements, many types of key notices are required to be published physically in newspapers. This arrangement is outdated and does not fully recognise the high level of transparency of Australia's anti-dumping system or the excellent electronic public record managed by the Anti-Dumping Commission. By standardising electronic publication throughout the anti-dumping system, we will be providing stakeholders with the certainty that they can access all notices in one place, free of charge, and at the same time.

This bill will also increase business certainty in anti-dumping decisions by improving the current merits review process, which is administered by the Anti-Dumping Review Panel. Specifically, the Anti-Dumping Commission will be able to participate in reviews, either by attending a conference called by the review panel or making submissions during the review. This complements the ability of the review panel to request reinvestigations by the commission and provides the review panel even greater access to the commission's expertise. These improvements ensure the review panel members have access to the information necessary to make informed judgements, whilst maintaining their independence from our anti-dumping investigators.

In addition, this bill will also raise the legal and procedural threshold for applying for a review and allow the charging of a fee for lodging an application. Although these measures may deter some parties from seeking a review, this will allow the review panel to focus on only the most serious and review-worthy issues that businesses truly believe need to be
We have also considered the impact of the fee on smaller businesses, with small and medium-sized businesses applicable for a reduced fee when seeking review.

We want to ensure that businesses have greater certainty in decisions made during anti-dumping and countervailing investigations and that these matters are resolved in a timely, robust and efficient manner. This bill will not affect stakeholder rights to also seek judicial review of anti-dumping decisions.

Finally, this bill also reduces red tape by removing the legislative establishment of the International Trade Remedies Forum, which is the government's anti-dumping advisory body. The forum, as it is currently legislated, binds the government to a rigid and restricted method for consulting stakeholders. This government believes that a more flexible arrangement will allow a wider range of stakeholders to be consulted on the operation and reform of Australia's anti-dumping system.

Instead, the government is committed to ensuring a broad range of stakeholders are able to bring their views on the administration and reform of the anti-dumping system to the government. Flexible consultation ensures important issues can be raised in a timely manner and stakeholders are afforded the opportunity to be heard by the government.

The reforms in this bill will be complemented by the improvements contained in the Customs Tariff (Anti-Dumping) Amendment Bill 2015. In addition to the improvements included in these bills, we are introducing a range of further reforms that improve access to the anti-dumping system, particularly for small and medium-sized businesses, and strengthen the incentives for businesses to cooperate with anti-dumping investigations.

Although these reforms address concerns raised by stakeholders, I will continue to monitor the efficiency and effectiveness of Australia's anti-dumping system and consider whether further improvements are required.

We are committed to ensuring that Australian industry is able to compete on a level playing field. Our reforms will ensure that Australian industries have access to a strong anti-dumping system that delivers efficient and effective remedies for Australian businesses injured by dumping and subsidisation.

I commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned.

Customs Tariff (Anti-Dumping) Amendment Bill 2015
First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Macfarlane.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr IAN MACFARLANE (Groom—Minister for Industry and Science) (09:10): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I am pleased to present the Customs Tariff (Anti-Dumping) Amendment Bill 2015, representing part of the government's reforms to strengthen and improve Australia's anti-dumping system.
This is a government that strongly supports genuine free and fair trade and an open and dynamic market economy. However the importation of dumped and subsidised goods, which injure Australian manufacturers and producers, undermines support for trade by reducing the fairness of the playing field for Australian businesses.

This is why we support Australia having an effective trade remedies regime. It represents an integral part of a robust international trading system and we want to ensure that Australian industries are competing on a level playing field. It is also critical to our broader plan to boost the competitiveness of Australian manufacturing.

Australia's current regime for combatting injurious dumping and subsidisation is transparent and complies with our obligations under World Trade Organization agreements. But there is clearly room to strengthen, and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the system—and that is what we plan to do.

Our reforms included in this bill introduce a number of measures to strengthen Australia's anti-dumping system. The improvements will:

• clarify the ability to grant exemptions retrospectively to the date of the application for exemption;
• modernise the way information about anti-dumping investigations and other inquiries is published; and
• clarify our anti-dumping legislation.

The improvements that I am introducing in this bill today are designed to provide certainty for stakeholders. These reforms will complement the improvements contained in the Customs Amendment (Anti-Dumping Measures) Bill (No.1) 2015.

We are committed to ensuring that Australian industry is able to compete on a level playing field. Our reforms will ensure that Australian industries have access to a strong anti-dumping system that delivers efficient and effective remedies for Australian businesses injured by dumping and subsidisation.

I commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned.

Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Amendment (Miscellaneous Matters) Bill 2015

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Macfarlane.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr IAN MACFARLANE (Groom—Minister for Industry and Science) (09:18): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

This bill contains three important measures making amendments to the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2006, the OPGGS Act:
1. To ensure certainty and security of titleholders' tenure in Commonwealth waters in circumstances where the boundary between Commonwealth and state and territory coastal waters changes;

2. To clarify arrangements whereby the National Offshore Petroleum Safety and Environmental Management Authority is able to effectively perform regulatory functions as conferred under state or Northern Territory legislation; and

3. To make minor technical amendments to clarify and improve the operation of the act.

The first and most significant measure is a response to recently identified coastal water boundary changes around Australia's coastline.

Australia's exploration and mining success is underpinned by its highly prospective geology, up-to-date geoscience data, and comprehensive information systems. The custodian of Australia's geographic and geological data is the national geoscience agency, Geoscience Australia.

As part of its core functions, Geoscience Australia has an ongoing responsibility to define the limits of Australia's maritime jurisdiction. Last year, this work resulted in a change to the boundary separating Commonwealth waters from the coastal waters of Western Australia. These changes, centred on the North Scott and Seringapatam Reefs, took effect from May 2014.

The revised boundaries around these reefs intersect three existing Commonwealth titles: one retention lease operated by Woodside Petroleum on behalf of the Browse joint venture, and two exploration permits operated by ConocoPhillips on behalf of the Poseidon joint venture. The maritime boundary changes mean that certain blocks previously falling within the jurisdiction of the Commonwealth now fall within the jurisdiction of Western Australia.

My department has been working and continues to work closely with the Western Australian government to ensure the stable progression of the Browse and Poseidon joint ventures, and to ensure the seamless and efficient transition of affected blocks from Commonwealth to Western Australian waters.

This work has uncovered a gap within the Commonwealth offshore petroleum regime administered under the OPGGS Act. This gap will be of particular concern should a change to maritime boundaries in future cause an area presently within the jurisdiction of a state or the Northern Territory to fall within Commonwealth waters.

At present, there is no legislative mechanism enabling titles over affected blocks to transfer, with continuity of tenure, from the jurisdiction of the states or the Northern Territory to that of the Commonwealth following a coastal water boundary change. Instead, affected blocks become vacant acreage in Commonwealth waters, and existing titleholders will lose title over those blocks. It is acknowledged that titleholders may have already spent considerable sums of money and effort undertaking exploration activities under their title, and therefore the Commonwealth government believes that it is critical that titleholders should have continuity of tenure in the event of a boundary change.

While this will not impact current efforts in Western Australia where there is a movement of blocks out of Commonwealth waters into those of Western Australia, it is necessary to amend the OPGGS Act to anticipate and account for those circumstances in which a future boundary change results in a gain of Commonwealth jurisdiction over blocks. Given the
ongoing nature of Geoscience Australia's effort to define Australia's maritime border, future changes of this type are a realistic prospect.

The proposed amendments will therefore provide for the automatic grant of an equivalent Commonwealth title over affected blocks to the existing holder(s) of a state or Northern Territory title at the time at which the state or Northern Territory title ceases to be in force.

This set of amendments is generic in nature, and it is intended that it will provide a comprehensive model for other jurisdictions to adopt in their own coastal waters petroleum legislation. Such a mirroring exercise will allow for consistency across Australia's offshore petroleum legislative framework, eliminate the sovereign risk created by future boundary changes, and ensure equitable treatment and continuity of tenure for all titleholders, whether located in Commonwealth or state and territory waters.

Turning to the other measures in this bill, it goes without saying that Australia's success in the offshore petroleum investment market is underpinned by its comprehensive and well-established regulatory framework.

In February 2014, the Commonwealth government announced a new streamlined approach for environmental approvals for offshore petroleum activities, completing a bipartisan initiative commenced under the former government to reduce the regulatory overlap for the offshore petroleum sector. This made the National Offshore Petroleum Safety and Environmental Management Authority the sole environmental regulator for these activities in Commonwealth waters.

Streamlining has significantly increased regulatory efficiency in respect of petroleum activities in Commonwealth waters, as well as delivering clarity and certainty for industry participants.

Recognising these significant gains, the Commonwealth government is seeking to further streamline regulatory arrangements in respect of all offshore petroleum activities. To this end, the states and the Northern Territory are being encouraged to confer occupational health and safety, structural integrity and environmental management functions and powers upon the National Offshore Petroleum Safety and Environmental Management Authority under their respective legislation in respect of those waters of the sea within their jurisdictional reach.

A conferral of these powers and functions on the National Offshore Petroleum Safety and Environmental Management Authority would permit the states and the Northern Territory to benefit from the expertise and experience of an established national regulator, as well as reducing regulatory burden by both providing a consistent regulatory framework across both Commonwealth and state and territory waters, as well as minimising the number of regulatory agencies with which offshore petroleum industry participants must engage.

In December last year I introduced a bill to this House which contains amendments to permit conferral across as wide a geographic area as possible. The current bill further clarifies conditions associated with a conferral, including distinguishing between petroleum and greenhouse gas storage regulatory oversight and underpinning effective cost-recovery arrangements for the National Offshore Petroleum Safety and Environmental Management Authority.

Finally, the bill makes a number of technical amendments to the administrative framework to clarify and improve the operation of the OPGGS Act in relation to suspension of a
condition and associated extension of the term of a title, and the consistent treatment of locations leading to the progression through types of title to underpin timely development of Australia's resources.

This collection of measures underscores this government's ongoing commitment to the maintenance and improvement of a strong and effective regulatory framework, and to a cooperative approach to the regulation of offshore petroleum activities.

I commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned.

Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage (Regulatory Levies) Amendment (Miscellaneous Matters) Bill 2015

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Macfarlane.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr IAN MACFARLANE (Groom—Minister for Industry and Science) (09:27): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

This bill makes a consequential amendment to the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage (Regulatory Levies) Act 2003 (Levies Act) that is made necessary by amendments contained in the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Amendment (Miscellaneous Matters) Bill 2015. That bill implements new arrangements in the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2006 to provide for the automatic grant of an equivalent Commonwealth title over affected blocks to the existing holder(s) of a state or Northern Territory title at the time at which the state or Northern Territory title ceases to be in force as the result of a coastal water boundary change. This automatic grant of title is provided with a specific name when it is an exploration permit to both reflect how it is brought into existence in Commonwealth waters and to distinguish it from other types of existing exploration permits.

The National Offshore Petroleum Titles Administrator (NOPTA) operates on a fully cost recovered basis through levies payable by the offshore petroleum industry. The levies act at present facilitates NOPTA's cost recovery by imposing annual titles administration levies in relation to Commonwealth titles. To this end, the cross-boundary exploration permit title must be added to the definition of Commonwealth title in order to ensure NOPTA is able to cost recover for its oversight of these titles.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned.

Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Legislation Amendment (Exit Arrangements) Bill 2015

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Hartsuyker.

Bill read a first time.
Mr HARTSUYKER (Cowper—Deputy Leader of the House and Assistant Minister for Employment) (09:30): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Comcare scheme provides all scheme employers with an integrated safety, rehabilitation and compensation system, no matter what Australian state or territory an employer operates in or where its employees are located.

Comcare works in partnership with employers and their employees to prevent workplace injuries and appropriately uses regulatory sanctions if there has been any demonstrable failure of the employer's duty of care. Over the five years to 30 June 2013, the Comcare scheme experienced a 23 per cent reduction in the incidence of accepted claims.

The scheme empowers premium payers to work with their employees to maintain an injured employee at work to achieve an early, safe and long lasting return to work. Injured employees covered by the Comcare scheme benefit from a high standard of income support as well as medical and other assistance where necessary.

The Comcare workers' compensation scheme's outstanding claims liabilities exceed the funds available to meet these liabilities. Since 2013-14, Comcare has been progressively restoring the funding position of the scheme. The bill will support current measures that Comcare has put in place to restore funds to adequate levels.

The purpose of this bill is to provide a framework to manage the exit of Commonwealth authorities and to ensure that Comcare's liabilities under the scheme are fully funded by premiums. The proposed framework also enables Comcare to determine and collect ongoing regulatory contributions from exited employers or successor bodies.

This bill ensures that employers exiting the scheme cover the costs of the claims liability for their employees and former employees who have work-related injuries or illnesses. Where this liability exceeds the amount of scheme available funds that are attributable to the premium payer, Comcare will be able to recover the shortfall from the employer up to a period of seven years after the employer has exited the scheme.

Comcare applies regulatory contribution charges on all entities in the scheme to cover the costs of regulating the entities' obligations under the SRC Act. When an employer exits the Comcare scheme, some regulatory costs may remain and are ongoing. The bill will enable Comcare to determine and collect these ongoing regulatory contributions from premium payers exiting the scheme.

Through these amendments the bill will ensure that employers remaining in the scheme are not penalised with higher costs to meet the liabilities attributed to exited employers and that the scheme can offer employers sustainable premium rates.

The SRC Act provides for the rehabilitation of injured employees by providing for rehabilitation programs, alteration of residences or workplaces, and a duty to provide suitable employment.

There are currently no provisions in the SRC Act requiring exiting premium payers to meet rehabilitation responsibilities to their injured employees.
While the majority of former Commonwealth employers which have ceased to exist have been absorbed into other agencies, there have been cases of injured former employees where there is lack of clarity about the rehabilitation authority, thereby resulting in minimal rehabilitation activities.

The bill provides that premium payers that exit the Comcare scheme would continue to perform the role of rehabilitation authority for employees whose work-related injury or illness occurred while the premium payer was in the Comcare scheme. Having the current employer as the rehabilitation authority leads to better return to work outcomes for injured workers because employers are well placed to rehabilitate them to work readiness and providing suitable work.

This bill includes minor amendments to the appointment process and composition of the Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission.

**Conclusion**

In summary, this bill will ensure that unfunded liabilities and ongoing regulatory contribution charges of a premium payer exiting the Comcare scheme are met by that premium payer; it will ensure that Comcare is able to set sustainable premiums, and that injured employees of exiting premium-payer entities will continue to receive appropriate rehabilitation treatment facilitating their early return to work.

I commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned.

**Seafarers Rehabilitation and Compensation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2015**

**First Reading**

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Hartsuyker.

Bill read a first time.

**Second Reading**

Mr HARTSUYKER (Cowper—Deputy Leader of the House and Assistant Minister for Employment) (09:36): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

This bill will amend the Seafarers Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1992 and the Occupational Health and Safety (Maritime Industry) Act 1993 to restore certainty to maritime industry employers, employees, regulators and insurers by clarifying the coverage of those acts.

The amendments are made in response to the Full Federal Court decision in Samson Maritime Pty Ltd v Aucote and the original Administrative Appeals Tribunal decision of Aucote and Samson Maritime Pty Ltd. The decisions interpreted the coverage of the seafarers act as being beyond what it had widely been understood to be by including within its scope intrastate trade or commerce. The decisions also have potential implications for the OHS(MI) act, since it has near identical coverage provisions to the seafarers act.
To be clear, this bill will simply be clarifying the coverage of the seafarers and OHS (MI) acts to ensure that it represents what has been widely understood to be the case since those acts commenced.

The Commonwealth government has provided a workers' compensation scheme to protect Australian seafarers and their families against the financial impacts of death, injury or illness resulting from the often dangerous conditions of working on the sea since the Seamen's Compensation Act 1911. That act applied broadly to Australian seafarers who were engaged in interstate or international trade or commerce, or engaged in trade or commerce within or between the territories. This reflected the understanding of the limits of the Commonwealth government's constitutional powers at the time.

The seafarers act commenced in 1993. It provides workers' compensation and rehabilitation arrangements for seafarers in a defined part of the Australian maritime industry. The seafarers act also establishes the Seafarers Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Authority (the Seacare Authority), which oversees the Seacare scheme. The OHS (MI) act commenced in 1994. It provides work health and safety regulation for a defined part of the Australian maritime industry. The two acts together form the legislative basis of the current Seacare scheme.

Since the seafarers act and OHS (MI) act commenced, successive governments and maritime industry employers, unions and regulators have operated on the basis that the Seacare scheme generally covers the employment of employees on prescribed ships engaged in interstate or international trade or commerce. Seafarers employed on ships engaged in trade or commerce within a single state were considered to be covered by the workers' compensation and work health and safety laws of the state in which they work.

The full court's decision has in effect produced uncertainty by moving a large number of maritime industry employers and employees out of the coverage by state and territory workers' compensation and work health and safety schemes into the coverage of the Commonwealth government's Seacare scheme.

This bill amends the coverage provisions of both the seafarers act and the OHS (MI) act to ensure that coverage aligns with how the Seacare scheme had been understood to apply. The amendments will clearly provide that the seafarers act and the OHS (MI) act do not apply to ships engaged in purely intra-state trade or commerce. This will provide ongoing clarity and certainty for maritime regulators, employers and employees on the coverage of the Seacare scheme.

The amendments will apply retrospectively to any injury, loss or damage suffered by any employee on or after the commencement of the seafarers act in 1993 in order to return the operation of the Seacare scheme to what it was always understood to be.

The approach ensures that past claims are not disturbed and that there is certainty as to what a seafarer's appropriate workers' compensation coverage is and has been. The key aim is to restore the 'status quo' regarding workers' compensation and work health and safety coverage of the maritime industry.

The bill also amends the coverage provisions to ensure that the Seacare scheme applies to the employment of employees on a prescribed ship, or unit in the case of the OHS (MI) act, that is 'directly and substantially' engaged in trade or commerce. This amendment is intended
to make clear that the activity of the ship must be more than merely incidental or preparatory to interstate or international trade or commerce for a ship to be covered by the Seacare scheme. To be covered, there must be a direct and substantial connection.

This bill also makes amendments to the seafarers act to ensure that when the Seacare Authority grants an exemption from the act in relation to an employee's employment, the relevant employer is also exempt from paying a levy under the Seafarers Rehabilitation and Compensation Levy Collection Act 1992. This amendment addresses a longstanding anomaly where employers have been required to pay a Seacare levy on behalf of a group of employees who, by virtue of being granted an exemption from coverage by the seafarers act, are not covered by the Seacare scheme.

This bill does not change the workers' compensation entitlements and work health and safety protections of seafarers. The bill restores the balance of Commonwealth and state coverage of workers' compensation and work health and safety for seafarers that existed since the Seamen's Compensation Act 1911.

With passage of this bill, seafarers will have the workers' compensation rights and work health and safety protections that they were widely understood to have had prior to the handing down of the full court's decision.

I commend the bill to the House.
Debate adjourned.

Australian River Co. Limited Bill 2015

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr McCormack.
Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr McCormack (Riverina—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance) (09:42): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

This bill provides for the transfer of the assets and any outstanding liabilities of the Australian River Co. Limited to the Commonwealth in preparation for its voluntary deregistration under the Corporations Act 2001.

The Australian River Co. Limited was created in 1997 to hold the residual assets and liabilities of the government owned Australian National Line group following its partial sale in 1998. The Australian River Co. Limited has been in the process of winding up since 2002, selling the last of its vessels in 2012.

Today the company exists only to administer legacy liabilities from former employees relating mainly to workers' compensation, dating back to employment arrangements that typically existed decades ago.

The government announced as part of the 2014-15 budget that it would be delivering smaller, more rational government involving the abolition or merger of government bodies where possible to reduce the cost of government administration for taxpayers. The reforms are expected to deliver net savings over the forward estimates period.
As part of the second phase of the smaller government agenda, the government decided that the Australian River Co. Limited would be wound-up by 1 July 2015.

The bill allows for the orderly transfer of assets and liabilities to the Commonwealth, and provides for the Commonwealth to be the company's successor-at-law, prior to bringing to a close the operations of the Australian River Co. Limited. The date on which the transfer to the Commonwealth takes effect will be set by proclamation.

I commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned.

Defence Trade Controls Amendment Bill 2015

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Andrews.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr ANDREWS (Menzies—Minister for Defence) (09:45): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The purpose of this bill is to amend the Defence Trade Controls Act 2012 to address concerns about its impact on Australian industry and research institutions.

This bill will strengthen national security by enabling Defence to focus its regulatory attention on higher-risk activities with respect to the non-physical supply and transfer of Defence controlled goods while dealing more efficiently with lower-risk activities.

The original act established a two-year transition period during which offence provisions did not apply. This gave stakeholders an opportunity to work with Defence to address concerns with the act through the Strengthened Export Controls Steering Group.

Chaired by Australia's Chief Scientist, Professor Ian Chubb AC, the steering group has tested the legislation and advised government over the last two years on these legislative amendments.

The steering group established a pilot program to test the regulatory impact of the act across different types of organisations, including universities, defence industry, government research agencies, small to medium enterprises, cooperative research centres, and medical research institutes.

The results of the pilot program and wider stakeholder engagement provided a strong evidence base to inform the amendments that are contained in this bill.

These amendments will:

- better target persons who are supplying sensitive technology commensurate with international practice;
- adopt a more balanced approach by only requiring approvals for sensitive military publications and removing controls on dual-use publications (that is, technology with both civilian and potential military applications);
- only require permits for brokering of sensitive military items and remove controls on most dual-use brokering, subject to international obligations and national security interests;
• introduce obligations to regularly review the operation of the legislation to ensure it maintains an appropriate balance between the regulatory impact on stakeholders and the need to protect Australia's national security; and
• delay the commencement of the offence provisions by 12 months to ensure that stakeholders have sufficient time to implement appropriate compliance and licensing measures.

The work of the steering group has been invaluable, and I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to Professor Chubb and the steering group members for their work and leadership. Their reports have provided the government with critical stakeholder perspectives.

I would also like to acknowledge the significant investments from the pilot organisations and the broader stakeholder community that have led to the development of these amendments.

Subject to the passage of this bill, my department will work with stakeholders to help them prepare for the commencement of the offence provisions in 12 months' time. During this period, assistance will be provided by Defence through a number of aids to be developed in collaboration with the steering group and stakeholders.

It is important that this bill is passed before the offence provisions of the act come into force on 16 May 2015. This will enable industry and research organisations to implement sensible, balanced approaches to export controls within a better balanced regulatory system that protects our national security interests.

I commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Recognition (Sunset Extension) Bill 2015

Second Reading

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

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (09:49): I say at the beginning of this debate on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Recognition (Sunset Extension) Bill 2015 that the Labor Party supports the government, and commends them for bringing this legislation before the chamber today.

This bill amends the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Recognition Act, a piece of legislation that was passed unanimously in the last parliament and that was initiated, of course, by the then Minister for Indigenous Affairs, the Hon. Jenny Macklin, the member for Jagajaga. It was passed unanimously in the last parliament and the preamble to that particular legislation foreshadowed that there would be a constitutional recognition referendum that would be put to the Australian people, proposing a change to the Constitution. That would build on the work that was done after the 1967 referendum, the moral case that was put for change and the impetus that led to reconciliation in this country. The preamble to that piece of legislation talked about the fact that there would be further engagement with Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander peoples and the need to build a national consensus to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in our Constitution.

There is an incompleteness—if I can put it that way—in the Australian Constitution: a void or a hole in the heart of the Constitution. It fails to recognise and acknowledge the long occupation of the continent by Australia's first peoples. This particular piece of legislation that was passed in 2013 created the idea of a review panel. That was established by this government, and I commend them for it, with three very eminent Australian people: the Hon. John Andersen AO, a former Deputy Prime Minister; Tanya Hosch, campaign director of RECOGNISE; and Mr Richard Eccles, the Deputy Secretary, Indigenous Affairs, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.

Their review panel did a very detailed report and recommended that the government continue this particular piece of legislation. Without this legislation being renewed there would be no legislative recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, their prior occupation of this continent and their culture, language and heritage, and we would lose momentum for the campaign for constitutional recognition.

The Joint Select Committee on Constitutional Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, chaired by the member for Hasluck, Ken Wyatt, and deputy chair, Senator Nova Peris—I am on that committee—recommended in a report on 27 October last year that the government do what they are doing today.

This week we celebrated the life of a great champion of the 1967 referendum Faith Bandler AC. I was pleased to be there along with member for Lingiari representing the Leader of the Opposition. Her funeral service was a wonderful occasion to celebrate a champion of the 1967 referendum. Collectively, as I talked with people outside, we remembered the great work that she along with others did in relation to the 1967 referendum.

The 1967 referendum was not only about including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Census but also about giving the Commonwealth government the power to pass laws with respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. For nearly six decades after Australia was formed as a country and as the Commonwealth of Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait island people lost the right to vote. That came back in the early sixties. The 1967 referendum built momentum in reconciliation in this country.

The apology led by former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd supported by opposition leader Brendan Nelson and this parliament back in 2008 continued the great work built on that wonderful speech by former Prime Minister Paul Keating, the High Court decision of Mabo and native title legislation. We have been on a national journey in this space. The Prime Minister, I know, is working with the Leader of the Opposition and we wish there to be a bipartisan approach to this. Labor stands ready, willing and able to support constitutional recognition. We believe that we should do nothing without the support of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This should be real and substantive change. They say that symbolic change is not good enough.

I think with goodwill we can get a referendum through. Only eight referenda have been passed in this country. The changes that are needed are important. I think it goes to an important development in this country. It completes a picture. It would also eradicate a shocking provision in our Constitution, section 25, which foreshadows the fact that laws can
be passed at a state level that would prohibit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from actually having the right to vote. Most Australians, if they were walking down Pitt Street or Collins Street or Queen Street, would be horrified that that provision remains in the constitution. I know both sides of parliament want to get rid of a provision like that.

There needs to be a recognition of the great contributions and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We celebrate Cathy Freeman winning gold. We celebrate great Indigenous champions like Greg Inglis, who I saw score a great try at the Indigenous All Stars victory on the Gold Coast just a couple of Friday nights ago. We purchase and celebrate Indigenous culture and art. It is time our Constitution recognised the wonderful contribution and prior occupation of this place that we call Australia by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

I commend the government for what they are doing here. If we were in government, we would be doing exactly the same thing and extend this out by a further three years. I want to let you know that Labor wishes to work closely with the government to make sure that we can bring this to pass to make sure that we complete our Constitution and do the right thing. In the 21st century I would like to look back and say that this parliament did this. It would go a long way on our journey of reconciliation in this country, and I thank the government for what they are doing.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I identify myself with the words just spoken by the member for Blair.

Debate adjourned.

Reference to Federation Chamber

Mr BUCHHOLZ (Wright—Chief Government Whip) (09:56): I declare that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Recognition (Sunset Extension) Bill 2015 is referred to the Federation Chamber for further consideration.

Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2014-2015

Second Reading

Debate resumed on the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

to which the following amendment was moved:

"whilst not declining to give the bill a second reading the House notes that:

(1) the 2014-15 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook showed a $44 billion blow-out in the budget deficit over the forward estimates from the 2014-15 Budget, which represents a $202 million blow-out in the Budget deficit by the Government each and every day;

(2) Government debt is higher now than it was when the Government took office;

(3) the Budget bottom line in the Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook incorporates a series of broken promises, including: the introduction of the GP tax, increasing the petrol tax, cuts to pension indexation, $6,000 cuts to a typical Australian family, plans for $100,000 university degrees, cuts to the ABC and SBS, and a $11.3 billion cut from foreign aid;

(4) the Government continues to undermine business and consumer confidence with its unfair Budget, which are now below the levels at the 2013 Federal Election; and"
(5) the Government's failure to have a clear plan for economic and jobs growth has led to the unemployment rate increasing to its highest level since August 2002, when the current Prime Minister was the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations."

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Broadbent): Before the debate is resumed on the bill, I remind the House that it has been agreed that a general debate be allowed covering these bills: the Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2014-2015, Appropriation Parliamentary Departments Bill (No. 1) 2014-15 and the Appropriation Parliamentary Departments Bill (No. 2) 2014-15. I have a feeling I am not going to enjoy the member for Throsby's contribution as much as I enjoyed the previous member's contribution.

Mr STEPHEN JONES (Throsby) (09:58): I encourage you to have an open mind on that matter. As parliamentarians, we have got to leave ourselves open to the possibility of persuasion.

Before the debate was adjourned, I had some passionate things to say about what I believed to be the absence of a plan for jobs, industry and employment in the government's program. I was passionate about that because I am watching around the area that I represent and immediately adjacent to that people are losing their jobs, industry, particularly the Australian paper mill is closing down and people that I know are losing their jobs. It is hitting those towns very hard.

I also want to repeat the observation that these appropriation bills are effectively a part of the budget making process. They are a requirement for the parliament to authorise the approval of additional funds for the purposes set out in the budget and for the government to reallocate funds where they think they have got something wrong, where unanticipated things have come up between the budget making process in May last year and where we are today. In that light, I have to say, they are a perfect opportunity for members of the government to revisit some of the harsh measures within the budget and attempt to persuade their cabinet colleagues of the wrongheadedness of those measures.

Nowhere is that requirement for persuasion of the members of the government and the cabinet more important than in the area of health, because, if there is a set of initiatives that have galvanised the opposition to what the government is proposing to do, it is in the area of health. The $55 billion worth of cuts to the health system is having a knock-on effect right around the country.

In my own state of New South Wales, we are seeing the situation brought to light by the Australian Medical Association this very week, where hospitals facing a shortfall of $17 billion are effectively having to become fundraisers just to provide the same sorts of services that they were providing five, six or seven years ago, because of the federal government funding cuts. Seventeen billion dollars is a lot of cake drives. That is a lot of sausage sizzles. It is simply going to be beyond the capacity of many communities, particularly communities such as mine, where they do not have the capacity for that private fundraising, to make up the shortfall from the federal government and the state government funding cuts.

So I am using this opportunity to call upon members of the government to put as much pressure as they can on their frontbench colleagues and say, 'These budget proposals must be axed.' They cannot continue. The cuts to the health and hospital system, coupled with the proposed changes to Medicare, are having a devastating impact upon communities such as mine, and they must be dumped. When it comes to the GP tax, we have had GP tax mark 1,
GP tax mark 2, GP tax mark 3—in fact, as I was preparing to come down to parliament this week, I counted no less than four health policies that have been adopted and then dumped by this government inside a 2½-month period. That is right: no less than four health policies adopted and then dumped by this government in a four-month period.

I am asking members opposite—in fact, I am asking the government—to rethink this. It is the wrong approach. The consideration of these appropriation bills is an opportunity for the government to say: 'We got it wrong. We've heard the Australian people, and we are going to dump these wrongheaded policies.'

Mr RANDALL (Canning) (10:03): Deputy Speaker Broadbent, I note how generous you were with the member for Throsby, as the clock indicated. It just shows what a generous spirit you are in allowing people to speak in this House! Well done.

I too rise to speak on the appropriation bills. I do so because standing order 76(c) basically outlines not only that we are talking about money bills but that reflection on some of the money bills that are required for this House allows us to also talk about issues in and around our electorates. This gives me an opportunity to focus on measures that are currently relevant to my electorate, and I bring to the attention of this House the issue of fires in my electorate.

We have had devastating fires both in and around my electorate and in Western Australia generally. I know this is often the case in your state of Victoria, Deputy Speaker, where you have had devastating fires. Given that many of our fires are in areas where the population is not as dense, we do not have the same devastating human effect, but we do have a massive effect on property and people and certainly infrastructure.

Recently we have felt the effect of these fires in the areas of my electorate called Waroona and Boddington. Boddington, for the knowledge of the House, is a town that is probably not well known to everyone, but it would be if they knew that it currently houses the most productive goldmine in Australia. Something like 700,000 ounces of gold a year come from the Boddington mine.

Canning is no stranger to bushfires. In 2011, the Roleystone-Kelmscott bushfire caused mass devastation and resulted in large areas being evacuated for more than a week. Both career and volunteer firefighters played a role in assisting my electorate. These professional and volunteer bushfire fighters need to be recognised, and all levels of government need to be aware of the risks that are manifest to these people when they involve themselves in firefighting.

The town of Waroona, in the electorate, is 113 kilometres roughly south of Perth and is accessed from the South West Highway. It only has a population of something like 2½ thousand people. At the end of January they were faced with a very real prospect of losing homes as a result of the fire there after lightning strikes had started these fires. Over the course of a week, both volunteer and career firefighters worked tirelessly to save homes and livelihoods. The community worked together under the common goal of protecting the township.

I cannot commend the volunteers enough. Those who took leave from their day jobs, those who worked during their time off and those whose efforts continued through the night deserve endless amounts of gratitude from the local community and from the wider community. Their dedication is something I cannot speak highly enough of.
My sincerest condolences go to Mrs Sharon Wilson who lost everything, aside from a few items she was able to take in her car before she had to vacate the area. She lost her house in Waroona. This is not to underestimate the losses of those who had sheds, equipment and livestock perish in this fire on some of the outlying properties.

Boddington, another area within the Canning electorate, came under severe threat of bushfire within the town itself. West of Waroona and approximately 120 kilometres from Perth, the district of Boddington has only around 1,000 people within its precincts, although it is an area of over 2,000 square kilometres. Again, under threat of enormous loss, the community banded together in an effort to save the homes of those at risk. At its worst, the perimeter of the Boddington fire was 145 kilometres long. Just think of that: a fire front of 145 kilometres. You can imagine the resources it took for the bushfire brigades to try to bring that under control. Even though the firefighters fought courageously, not everything could be saved. I would like to convey my sincerest condolences to all those who have suffered loss but especially to Councillor Elizabeth Hoke, an elected official of the Shire of Boddington since 1998 and an active member of the community, and her husband, Ray. I have a press-clipping here which unfortunately shows Ray Hoke standing at the front of his house, which is totally burnt down. They not only lost their home but suffered extensive losses in and around the property. Another notable loss was that of Long Gully Bridge, a feature of significant historical value in the area often enjoyed and admired by those walking the Bibbulmun Track. The Bibbulmun Track is a track from Perth to Albany. It was used by Aboriginal people centuries ago to walk north-south in Western Australia. The Bibbulmun Track goes right over the Long Gully Bridge, which has now burnt down.

One of the best approaches to preventing mass devastation as a result of bushfires is prescribed burning. Vice President of the Association of Volunteer Bush Fire Brigades WA, Mr Dave Gossage, attended both of the fires in the zones of Waroona and Boddington, as well as the great fire that was happening further south near Albany in a place called Northcliffe. He noted that where prescribed burn-offs occur, the impact of a fire is significantly reduced. What Dave has said is nothing new; it is well recorded. Low levels of fuel result in low levels of risk. If all levels of government understood the need to create a consistent and audited approach to prescribe burn-offs, some of these fires would not have the same impact. I pause to add that one of our former long-serving members—who was, I might suggest, dearly loved by some of the members opposite—Wilson Tuckey, when he was forestry minister, made this very point: no fuel, no fire. It is the case in certain areas in the Perth Hills and surrounds where, because of the lack of prescribed burning, you can have significant amounts of leaf litter on the forest floor that builds up over the years and, when it eventually catches fire, you end up with a real wildfire with a lot of heat.

The action of prescribed burning is a responsibility of the state government but as a federal government we also need to encourage our state colleagues to be more active in this approach. This is taken directly from the DPAW website:

Scientific research shows that prescribed burning is very effective, especially when managing bushfires. We know from experience over a wide range of weather conditions and vegetation types that direct attack on bushfires with flame heights of more than three meters or where fires are moving faster than 200 metres per hour (in forest) is not likely to succeed. Fire behaviour is directly affected by the amount of available fuel. Therefore, direct attack on the flanks of a fire is likely to succeed where fires run into recently burnt areas of low fuel.
As I have previously mentioned, the 2011 Roleystone-Kelmscott bushfires were also located within the electorate. One hundred and four houses were affected: 72 homes were destroyed and another 32 were damaged. The special inquiry report into the event, titled Shared Responsibility, highlights an example of the effectiveness of prescribed burning. It goes on to say:

The reduced fire intensity and rate of spread observed when bushfires enter a reduced fuel area allows firefighters greater opportunity to effectively combat the fire and to limit its impact. In fact, the Special Inquiry heard evidence that the Roleystone-Kelmscott fire was extinguished on one front when it entered a section of the Banyowlia Regional Park that had been the subject of a prescribed burn by DEC—now the Department of Parks and Wildlife—four years ago, as discussed later in this chapter.

The Nyungar people, who are the Indigenous people of the south-west of Western Australia, would conduct a style of prescribed burn-offs called mosaic burning. This was not initially done to control the risk of fire but more as a technique to herd larger animals into specific areas for hunting. However, early European settlers noted the other impact of these burns, which was the regeneration of local fauna as well as the limiting of fuels available for regular fires caused by lightning to become out of control.

I pause to bring to the attention of the House somebody I have a great deal of admiration for, a gentleman called Mr David Ward. David Ward is an expert in this particular area. I refer to his article in News Weekly on 15 February 2014, titled 'Bushfires rage because of whitefella's ignorance'. He goes on to point out the prescribed burning methods undertaken by the Indigenous people before white men came. It is a fascinating study into the way the Indigenous people burnt the forest. In this article, and other articles David Ward has published, he tells how you can measure the frequency of burning by the rings on black boy trees, which some politically correct people now call grass trees.

He showed me in my office the rings of burning on these trees. Some of these trees are more than 200 years old and you can see the regular burns on them. As white man has come in and stopped the burning the marks on the stems of the black boys have gotten wider and wider, which shows the burning did not occur as frequently as it did under the Indigenous people. This is why we have ended up with these wildfires. I recommend any people interested in prescribed burning read David Ward. It has to be done more often and more effectively because we will suffer the consequences if we do not.

I admire greatly the volunteer bushfire brigades. I want to once again thank them. When I was going through Boddington the other day I saw signs along the main street saying, 'Thank you, fireys,' because they had saved their town.

I want to finish by talking about the Bannister-Marradong Road. The Bannister-Marradong Road links Albany Highway and Pinjarra-Williams Road for regional traffic. It provides intertown access to Boddington from Perth via Albany Highway and from Mandurah and Pinjarra via Pinjarra-Williams Road. The road also provides access for traffic servicing the gold mine at Boddington.

Bannister-Marradong Road is a Western Australian Main Roads operated thoroughfare and there are currently works being undertaken by them in an effort to widen the section of road.
near the main access point from Albany Highway. While this measure is certainly appreciated and needed by locals who utilise this road regularly, it falls far short of increasing the safety of those entering and exiting the town of Boddington and travelling beyond. Regular feedback received by my office from emergency service volunteers, such as ambulance drivers, reflects that the state of the road prevents emergency service vehicles from utilising this road in a safe manner. This was highlighted during the recent fires.

Despite the obvious wear and tear, which is a result of both increased traffic stemming from the gold mine operations and population increases, Main Roads have not seen fit to resurface the entirety of this road. A recent visit to Boddington allowed me to experience the state of the road and what caused me the greatest concern is that the section of the road with the most bends and a significant number of blind corners requires the most improvements but instead the area that is presently being resurfaced and widened is the straightest section of road, which offers the widest field of view for several hundred metres. I have been informed that that will be where the work will stop. This presents an unacceptable risk to locals and tourists alike.

There are no objections from my constituents of Boddington about the work being undertaken. They would just like to see it done properly. The local volunteers taking people injured in these fires had to take their ambulances many tens of kilometres on an alternate route to get to Perth. It is a safety issue and it should be addressed. I raise it in the House today because I will be following this up with Main Roads Western Australia when I return.

Ms BUTLER (Griffith) (10:18): I rise to speak in support of the second reading amendment to Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2014-15 because it is really clear from the events of this parliamentary sitting week and the first parliamentary sitting week of this year that what is occupying the minds of the frontbench of this government is their own jobs. Last time we were here, two weeks ago, we had the Taylor Swift example of 39 people voting for blank space and one person voting for Taylor Swift for the Hottest 100. This week it has been more like a blooper reel from X Factor. We have seen audition after audition from the frontbench for their own jobs and for other people’s jobs. We saw the Treasurer this week auditioning for his own job. I suspect it has been an interesting time for him as he stands up to fight off as yet unknown challengers for his position. But of course the person who was really auditioning for his own job this week is the Prime Minister.

All of the people sitting behind the Prime Minister have been hanging their heads and finding something to look at instead of listening to the Prime Minister in question time. You see them sitting over there looking at their phones and reading the paperwork they have got because they want to be anywhere else but backing this Prime Minister. Yesterday’s display in question time, for example, was completely unedifying, and that has certainly been a matter of some comment in the newspapers today. So we have seen everyone focusing on their own jobs.

What does it take to get this Prime Minister and this government to scrap the Paid Parental Leave scheme—the famous Paid Parental Leave scheme where the more you earn the more government support you get? You want to talk about middle-class welfare. What does it take to get this government and this Prime Minister to scrap a scheme where people on $100,000 or more would get $50,000 in support from this government when they have a child and the less you earn the less support you get? Does it take calls from business groups saying that
they do not support this Paid Parental Leave scheme policy of this Prime Minister? Does it take calls from the opposition saying that this policy is clearly heading in the wrong direction?

Labor's paid parental leave scheme was introduced after proper consideration and after a Productivity Commission report. The member for Jagajaga worked so hard on introducing the paid parental leave scheme—and we ought to paid tribute to her work on that. It was prudent, appropriate and fair, but this government want to replace that with a rolled gold Paid Parental Leave scheme at a massive cost to the taxpayer.

Those things were not enough to get the Prime Minister to retreat. The only thing that got this Prime Minister to retreat from his unpopular Paid Parental Leave scheme—from his unfair, unjust, inequitable Paid Parental Leave scheme that almost everyone in the country was united in opposing—was his desire to save his own job. You can see it now. You could see him waiting and wondering what the numbers would be, and when the numbers were not what he thought they should be he blamed the whip. He sacked the Father of the House when the numbers did not turn out to be what he thought they should be, as if for some reason it is the Father of the House's obligation to shore up support for this Prime Minister, who cannot look after himself.

The reason the Prime Minister has lost so much support is that he is so short-sighted, he is so out of touch with the community. It does not take community opposition to get him to move on this paid parental leave scheme, it takes his desire to save his own skin. What about the member for Wentworth? What would he do to take the Prime Minister's job? Would he for example scrap his deeply held conviction on climate change, his rock-solid support for an ETS, a few days before a spill motion was due to occur in the party room? Of course he would. The member for Wentworth will do anything to become Prime Minister.

Unfortunately for the current Prime Minister of Australia, there seems to be a growing view, perhaps an inevitable view, that the member for Wentworth will become Prime Minister. If he does, the Labor opposition will not let him forget that he sat around the cabinet table and supported every single unfair measure in last year's federal budget, which is yet to be passed in its entirety—the GP tax, the cuts to the indexation of pensions, the $100,000 degrees, the cuts to family support that will leave a family on $65,000 some $6,000 worse off. All of those were supported by the member for Wentworth and everyone around that table. The Foreign Minister supported those measures, the Minister for Social Security supported those measures and present ministers on the government side supported those measures.

It does not matter what pop culture reference you might want to talk about—whether it is Taylor Swift or *The X Factor*. Perhaps I need to go to something further back in time for the Prime Minister to understand this. Perhaps we need to go to *Leave it to Beaver*, *The Brady Bunch* or something a little less contemporaneous. When you think about analogies for this government, it is pretty clear that the government is in a world of pain. We are seeing that with the leaking, chaos and dysfunction that this government continues to produce. This week we have seen leaks on so many different issues—such as the lack of support in the cabinet for pension indexation cuts. That is a very serious leak and, of course, there have been many others. Why are there so many leaks? Why is there so much chaos? Why is there so much dysfunction? It is because backbenchers—and apparently seven frontbenchers—know that
this government, led by this Prime Minister, is so out of touch and is acting so wrongly that they are losing support all around the country for the things they have done.

One of the reasons I support the second reading amendment is that it is important, in the context of talking about these appropriation bills, to think about the events that have led to these appropriation bills. Of course, these appropriation bills come on the heels of the 2014-15 MYEFO, which showed a $44 billion blow-out in the budget deficit over the forward estimates compared to the government’s own 2014-15 budget. Since the coalition came to government the deficit for 2014-15 has been revised and has blown out by $16.4 billion—from $24 billion in the pre-election economic and fiscal outlook to $40.4 billion in the 2014-15 MYEFO. Debt is higher in the most recent MYEFO than it was in the government’s own 2014-15 budget, with gross debt over the forward estimates increasing by $100 billion and net debt increasing by $146.3 billion over the same period.

Looking to the broader economy, it is in very difficult shape at the moment, particularly when you think about what has happened with unemployment. Unemployment is at 6.4 per cent, a 13-year high unemployment rate unmatched in recent history since the current Prime Minister was the employment minister. What is this government doing about unemployment? Are they focusing on the 100,000 extra people on the unemployment lines? Are they worried about the fact that there are 795,000 Australians unemployed in this country at the moment? Or are their own jobs the only ones they really care about? The only jobs that this frontbench cares about are their own jobs. It is an absolute disgrace.

Since the 2014 budget we have seen a significant fall in confidence in this country. Consumer confidence is nine per cent lower now than it was at the time of the 2013 federal election and business confidence is still below the long-run averages. So we know the effect that the 2014 federal budget has had on our economy more broadly. We know that Australians are very concerned about their future. We know that, in an environment of high unemployment, people are very concerned about security. This is compounded by the fact that wages growth is at its lowest rate since the wage price index commenced being kept in the 1990s.

People are hurting and they are worried. Their concerns about the economy are feeding into the anxiety, stress and pressure on households. People are sitting around their kitchen table thinking about the bills they have got to pay. They are thinking about how they are going to fund the cost of their kids going to school. They are thinking about the cost of health care. They are thinking about the cost of utilities. People are worried about those real household pressures, the things people have to think about every single day. With these Liberal government led attacks on the federal budget and the consequential effects on our economy—the drop in confidence, the effect of which has been slower than expected GDP growth—people are anxious. They have real cost-of-living pressure. It is something that a lot of people on the frontbench of the Liberal government just do not understand. They do not get it because they are so out of touch with the real concerns facing people every day.

Despite the fact that before the 2014 budget the IMF warned this government against making too many cuts too deeply and too quickly, we are seeing yet more cuts. For example, we are seeing a further $3.7 billion cut in foreign aid in addition to the $7.6 billion cut in the 2014-15 budget. Aid is important not just as a matter of altruism but because Australians domestically have an interest in having less poverty in the world and having nations being...
able to stand on their own two feet. Similarly, a multinational tax evasion crackdown is important, not only for our domestic revenue situation but so that developing countries get their fair share of taxation as well. These are things that this government just does not seem to understand. But I digress.

Back to MYEFO: there is also a $250 million cut to the ABC and the SBS, despite the Prime Minister promising before the 2013 federal election that there would be no cuts to the ABC and the SBS. He said there would be no cuts to health, no cuts to education, no changes to the pension, no changes to the GST and no cuts to the ABC and the SBS. On the GST, watch this space, but every single one of those other promises has been broken. And of course we have seen this government continuing to push, just this week, with its higher education package—the $100,000 degree package—and the so-called reform of the GP tax.

The GP tax is a terrible policy. It is unsupported by evidence. It has been admitted by the department, during committee hearings, that no substantial research has gone into this policy measure. It was an ideologically driven policy measure that this government dreamed up before the 2014 federal budget on the back of the Commission of Audit report, which had heard from a submitter who, in his own submission about the proposal for a GP tax, admitted that research needed to be done to find out whether people were actually going to the doctor unnecessarily.

Of course, that is the point of the GP tax. It has been called several things. I hear they are now calling it a 'value signal', in a sort of Orwellian attempt to change the framing of what it is, but the fact is: it is a GP tax and its whole purpose is to dissuade people from going to the GP. What could be more reckless than trying to dissuade people from getting primary health care when they need it, not just for those individuals' health but for the pressure that it will inevitably put onto our public health system?

And let us not forget, on top of the higher education changes and the GP tax, the cuts to pension indexation, which are estimated to mean that pensioners face an $80 a week cut to their pension, and, as I said earlier, the family payment support changes that will leave a family on $65,000 a year $6,000 a year worse off. It is atrocious.

All of these things reveal the ideological nature of the government's first budget and of the government's recent MYEFO. The thing about these ideologically driven changes is that the coalition MPs are well aware of the problems with these policies and the fact that they are unsupported by evidence. For example, as I say, the department admitted, during a Senate Select Committee on Health hearing recently, that the GP tax is not backed by substantive research. The acting secretary said:

I am unaware of any authoritative research in Australia specifically about the impact of something like Medicare co-payments or a reduction in the rebate.

The AMA and the College of General Practitioners have both explained that they have not been consulted about these GP tax changes. There is so much research that demonstrates the utter ridiculousness of the claims of unsustainability when it comes to Medicare—like the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare research. If you look at the OECD comparators, if you look at the work that has been done to see what our spending is on health care, we are on the OECD average for spending on health care, as this government well knows. If there is to be real reform when it comes to Medicare, it ought to be considered based on an evidence and
not a thought bubble that someone dreamed up before the federal budget to satisfy their ideological urgings.

Mr CRAIG KELLY (Hughes) (10:33): It gives me great pleasure to rise to speak on Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2014-2015 and the other appropriation bills. During this time, I would like to set out a few concerns that I have—and I am sure many other Australians share—about the future of our nation. Firstly, I am concerned about what I call the debt and deficit deniers. We just saw a classic example of that in the speech of the member for Griffith—complete and utter denial about the debt and deficit problems that our nation faces. To stand up and complain, 'The government needs to cut this and needs to cut that', and whinge and whine like she did is a classic example of the problems that this nation faces and how we must face up to the challenges that we have with our debt and deficit.

Members from the other side of the chamber often like to say: 'We don't have a problem. We're not as bad as Greece. It's okay; we can keep spending forever and ever.' We are currently spending over $100 million more, every single day of the year, than we are raising in taxation revenue. What that means is that we simply borrow that money, leaving the job of repaying it to our children and our grandchildren. Every time any member of this government stands up and talks about how we can reduce that gap—which we should have down to zero—we hear the members of the opposition whingeing and whining and carping in the most disgraceful the way possible, which threatens our future and threatens the future of our children and our grandchildren. One of the ways they do it is by making international comparisons with what they say is Australia's debt-to-GDP ratio. They say: 'We're not as bad as Greece, Spain or Portugal. Aren't we doing wonderfully? Keep spending.'

Ms Butler: Third lowest in the OECD!

Mr CRAIG KELLY: That ideology is very flawed, and I hope that the member for Griffith will listen and learn as I speak. For what they fail to consider is, firstly, state government debt. The state government debt is currently about $250 billion and, on its current trajectory, in 15 years state government debt will actually be higher than Commonwealth government debt. If you include state government debt with Commonwealth government debt, our debt-to-GDP ratios do not look anywhere near as impressive as they otherwise would. What you also need to include is our current unfunded superannuation liabilities for public servants, which the previous Howard government set up the Future Fund to cover. Of course, since the Howard government left office in 2007, not one single cent has been put into that Future Fund from governments to pay for those growing unfunded superannuation liabilities. So we need to add that onto our debt to get an overall picture. Previously we did cover that in our debt, until that was changed by the Whitlam government in 1974.

The other thing we need to consider is our growing pension requirements as our population ages. We do not, as other countries do, put aside money and have pension funds. Our pensions are paid from concurrent revenue, so the pensions we pay to people this year are from the revenue that we raised this year. The problem we have is that, as we have an ageing population, our pension liabilities that we pay in future years will be greater and greater. When we weigh all these things up, we are facing a very difficult and dangerous future.

When we look at what the future will be it is important to consider not only the debt but also the interest rate that we pay on the debt. That is something that often gets forgotten about because, in Australia, our government pays one of the highest interest rates amongst all
OECD countries on the money that we borrow. Most of the debt that the previous Labor government ran up was financed at rates between about three and four per cent. So on that debt today, this year's interest bill to the Australian public is $13.5 billion. That works out to about $562 for every man, woman and child in the country. When the previous government came to office that amount was zero. In fact, it was better than zero. The Commonwealth Treasury was actually receiving a billion dollars in interest every year on the money that the Howard-Costello governments had saved. Now we have $13.5 billion going out.

The real question will be: if we do not pay back in 10 years time the debt that Labor governments ran up over the last six years and address the trajectory we are on, what interest rate will we face in 10 years time? Will we be able to refinance that debt at the low rates of around three or four per cent—or even 2.5 per cent, as it is now? That brings me to a few comments made by the Governor of the Reserve Bank Governor when he warned about this at recent hearings of the economics committee. He was talking about the bond rates, on which we pay no interest. He said:

Somehow, at some point, I cannot help but feel that these very long rates that are literally as low as they have ever been recorded, ever, must someday be higher.

He continued:

Someday they have to be higher, especially given the amount of public debt which is on issue in so many countries around the world. But I cannot predict for you quite how that will come to pass, or when. My five-year horizon: surely they have to be higher.

Members of the opposition want to play a game of Russian roulette with our children's future by saying we can continue to spend this money, continue to run up this debt, spending $100 million-plus every single day and borrowing money from overseas—only for our children to have to pay an unknown interest rate in a decade's time.

What happens if bond yields go back to where the historic averages are, around seven per cent, and we keep increasing the debt? It will not be a cost of $560 per person. In a decade's time it could be $2,000 or more for every man, woman and child in this country—just to pay the interest on the debt. This is why we have urgency in bringing the budget back to at least a balance. And then we have got to run surpluses to pay that deficit down; otherwise we are stealing money from our children's future. We are condemning future generations of this nation to a lower standard of living if we do not act. Sadly, that is what members of the opposition are doing at the moment. That is what the Senate is doing as they continue to block bill after bill as we go about cleaning up Labor's mess. This is perhaps one of the greatest threats to our nation's future.

In the time remaining to me, I would like to speak about the other threat to our nation's future: the threat of Islamic State and the Islamic extremists. We need to recognise and to admit the true nature of the enemy we face. This is a group that is committed to the destruction of our freedom. It is committed to the destruction of the opportunities and rights—that have been fought for and won over the last century—that we give to women, and it is committed to the destruction of our prosperity.

We have seen recently, over the last week or fortnight—in fact, in the last 24 hours—the mass kidnapping of perhaps over 100 Christians in Syria. We saw the burning alive of a Jordanian pilot—a fellow Muslim. We have seen the mass murder of 21 Coptic men on a beach in Libya. This is a monstrous evil that I do not think any of us thought that we would
see in our lifetime. Simply, we have a group of psychopaths that have declared war against the world. The question we need to ask ourselves as parliamentarians is: what should our response be to this growing threat? In considering what our response should be, we should perhaps reflect on a quote attributed to Martin Luther King, perhaps one of the greatest pacifists of all time. He is quoted as saying, 'If your enemy has a conscience, then follow Gandhi. But if your enemy has no conscience, like Hitler, then follow Bonhoeffer.' That is, of course, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German clergyman who participated in a plot to kill Hitler. We have today a group, in ISIS, just as evil and just as barbarous as the Nazis were.

We need to use every resource at our disposal to fight this group. We cannot think that we can win this war that we are in through passivism and debating skills and sitting down and trying to have some kind of appeasement. Our history has shown that that has never worked. In thinking about the approach that we should take, I would like to quote a passage from The Wealth of Nations, a book by Adam Smith—perhaps one of the greatest books ever written. Smith wrote:

In modern war, the great expense of firearms gives an evident advantage to the nation which can best afford that expense; and, consequently, to an opulent and civilized, over a poor and barbarous nation. In ancient times, the opulent and civilized found it difficult to defend themselves against the poor and barbarous nations. In modern times, the poor and barbarous find it difficult to defend themselves against the opulent and civilized. The invention of fire-arms, an invention which at first sight appears to be so pernicious, is certainly favourable, both to the permanency and to the extension of civilization.

If we are going to fight and defeat ISIS, we need to use every resource at our disposal. We need to realise that the danger to us is not from the arrogance of Western power but from our unpreparedness or our unwillingness to use the military resources at our disposal to defeat this group. To quote retired Lieutenant General Michael Flynn of the US Defense Intelligence Agency, 'Retreat, retrenchment, and disarmament are historically a recipe for disaster.'

In the last few minutes I would like to add some comments about the issues here in our Australian society. We cannot allow, under the guise of multiculturalism, groups in Australia that currently enjoy all the benefits of our free and open society and what they have delivered but at the very same time seek to undermine and reject our free and open society. The price of admission to our nation is to accept our values, as it is said in our citizenship ceremony—which our Prime Minister has often quoted:

I pledge my loyalty to Australia and its people, whose democratic beliefs I share, whose rights and liberties I respect, and whose laws I will uphold and obey.

We have seen people who are not willing to uphold our laws and are not willing to respect the rights and liberties of this country. We have seen that in the shameful issue of child marriage—a complete abuse of human rights. It is a practice that threatens young girls’ lives, their health and their future prospects and robs them of their childhood. Last week we heard the most shocking story about a 12-year-old girl who was forced into a child marriage and who became pregnant and miscarried in a hospital in Western Sydney—a most shocking case. We heard another case only yesterday of a 15-year-old girl who was forced into a child marriage. We need to crack down on this. We need to make it crystal clear that child marriage in Australia is completely unacceptable. (Time expired)

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler) (10:48): When a government comes to the parliament seeking funding for the forthcoming year, it is appropriate that we consider that government's
performance in the year that has just passed. Today I want to address my comments on Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2014-15 and related bills to the Abbott government’s performance in the critical area of infrastructure delivery. This is of course critical to drive economic productivity and drive jobs growth, but the Abbott government is getting it wrong. It is getting it wrong because it has abandoned proper processes that we established through Infrastructure Australia.

That can be illustrated in the fact that, when the infrastructure coordinator left his position on 7 February 2014, one could have anticipated that that position would have been filled just a month or two later. We are now more than a year on and no-one has been appointed to be in charge of Infrastructure Australia. That compares with our performance in government. The parliament first sat in February 2008. Within four months we had passed the Infrastructure Australia legislation, created the body, appointed the advisory council, appointed the infrastructure coordinator and established an office. By the end of that year they had done a national audit of infrastructure and produced infrastructure priority lists on the basis of receiving and conducting proper cost-benefit analysis.

In a year, this government has abandoned proper processes and there is nowhere that that is illustrated more clearly than in Victoria’s East West Link project. In the last budget, the government allocated $3 billion for this project. They took funding from projects that had had proper assessments and cost-benefit analysis and had been recommended by Infrastructure Australia, including the Melbourne Metro project, where $3 billion had been allocated—an essential project for dealing with congestion on the rail network in the growing city of Melbourne. They took money from the upgrade of the M80 project in Melbourne and they took money from Managed Motorways program.

When we look at the cost-benefit analysis—which we can now do, because it has been published by the Victorian Andrews government—we know that the cost-benefit analysis is that there is 45c benefit for every dollar invested, with a BCR of 0.45. That is absolutely pathetic and a fact that shows that the project is simply a dud. And yet money taken from projects, including the Managed Motorways project, had a BCR above $5—or more than $5 for every dollar that was invested was a return in terms of productivity. That shows perhaps more than any other how this government has simply got it wrong, and it is no wonder that the Australian National Office of Audit is investigating the East West Link debacle.

In a letter to me dated February 5, the Auditor-General, Ian McPhee, wrote that the probe would examine what advice the government received on the East West Link and whether it had put in place sound governance arrangements in relation to the funding. In his letter, Mr McPhee wrote that scheduling the audit would require adjustment to its existing audit program. He said:

I have done this in view of the considerable commitment of Commonwealth Government funding made towards the project and the importance of the processes established at Commonwealth level to assess the merits of nationally significant infrastructure investments.

The coalition came to government with two commitments on infrastructure: firstly, there would be proper published cost-benefit analysis of all projects above a value of $100 million—they abandoned that; the second commitment was that they would make payments based upon milestones, on actual construction, and they have abandoned that as well.
A billion and a half dollars are sitting in the Victorian government's bank account paid last financial year for a project for which a hole has not been dug. Similarly, half a billion dollars are sitting in the New South Wales government's bank account from last year, 2013-14, for which a hole has not been dug on the WestConnex project, and $2 billion for the WestConnex project was made available in the form of a concessional loan to the state government. Again, this is before a proper analysis has been done of the project, before the project has begun, and this is a project that has been criticised by the New South Wales auditor in a damning report that was published recently.

The fact is that the promises that the government made on infrastructure have been treated like plates at a Greek wedding—smashed—just like all of their promises about education and health and that there would be no cuts to the ABC and no cuts to pension. It is no wonder that 39 of the Prime Minister's colleagues voted for an empty chair rather than him during the last sitting week. As the member for Longman can attest: anyone who points out the gap between the promises and reality cops a mouthful of Prime Ministerial scorn.

The Prime Minister is rapidly transforming himself into the political equivalent of a Monty Python skit. Deceit is bad enough, but Australians must be also tiring of this government's pitiful attempts to hide its deceit by pretending it is delivering new infrastructure. Day after day, week after week, we see the minister for infrastructure and his junior offsider, the member for Mayo, donning hard hats and announcing what they pretend are new initiatives in an attempt to create the impression of activity. The problem is that almost all of those projects were funded by the previous Labor government. When we took office in 2007, Australia was 20th among OECD nations in terms of investment in infrastructure. When we left office, we were first. We doubled the roads budget and built or upgraded 7,500 kilometres of road; and we rebuilt a third of the national rail freight network—4,000 kilometres of it.

We had a comprehensive, properly analysed infrastructure program that addressed the infrastructure spending deficit of the former Howard government. When we left office, work was underway right around this country. What they have done is embark on a magical infrastructure re-announcement tour, going around the country sometimes pretending that projects are new such as the Majura Parkway, which has been underway for many years. Sometimes they announce a new name for an old project and therefore pretend that it is new, so the F3 to M2 link became NorthConnex; and the Swan Valley Bypass became NorthLink. A new name does not make it a new project—funding was underway for those projects.

I think it is worthwhile going through just some of the projects that have been re-announced. NorthConnex in Sydney, included in the 2013 budget and with an intergovernmental agreement for $405 million from each level of government signed by me and the New South Wales minister in June 2013, was re-announced by the government with a new name, pretending that the project is new. The Northern Sydney Freight Corridor upgrade, $840 million, was announced on 7 December 2011 at Hornsby train station with the then New South Wales Premier, Barry O'Farrell—we were there for the beginning of that project, which has been underway for years—and re-announced by the government in November 2013, and re-announced again earlier this month. The Port Botany rail upgrade, of which the first stage was completed and the second stage commenced in 2012, was re-announced on several occasions in 2013 and 2014. The M80 project in Melbourne, commenced early in 2009 and was re-announced by this government, which did not make a big announcement about the cut
to funding for that project, on 16 October 2013. The Western Highway duplication between Ballarat and Stawell, announced in 2009 and funded in the 2013 budget was re-announced by this government on 29 September 2014. The Clyde Road duplication was funded in the 2013 budget and re-announced on 21 February 2014. The Princes Highway East duplication was funded in the 2013 budget and re-announced by this government on 22 January 2015. The Princes Highway West duplication was funded in the 2013 budget and re-announced on 15 December 2014. The Ballarat freight hub was funded in the 2013 budget and re-announced on 13 May 2014.

In Queensland, the Gateway North upgrade, the second stage of which was funded in the 2013 budget, was re-announced on 30 January 2014. The Warrego Highway upgrade was funded in the 2013 budget and re-announced on 9 October 2014. The Pacific Motorway was funded in the 2010 budget, re-announced on 31 October 2013 and re-announced again on 7 March 2014. Legacy Way, just about completed, construction having commenced in 2011, was re-announced as if it were new in January 2014 and re-announced again in April. Townsville Ring Road was funded in the 2012 budget and re-announced on 22 December last year. The Cape York infrastructure package was funded in the 2013 budget and re-announced on 17 January 2014. Perth City Link was announced in 2009, commenced in 2011, just about completed, but was re-announced by this government in December 2013. The Great Northern Highway, funded in the 2013 budget, was re-announced on 13 December 2013. The North West Coastal Highway was funded in 2013 and re-announced on 16 December 2013. The Swan Valley Bypass was renamed by the government and re-announced on 29 January 2014, even though it was funded in the 2013 budget. The Tonkin Highway and Leach Highway upgrades were funded in 2013 and re-announced on 6 February 2014. The Esperance Port Access Corridor project, for which WA minister Troy Buswell and I turned the first sod and which began construction in May 2012, was re-announced in February 2014. The Midland Highway, for which $500 million was included in the 2013 budget, was re-announced by the government on 23 October 2013 but with $100 million less.

In Tasmania, the North-South rail line, the North East road package, the Freight Rail Revitalisation, the Brooker Highway, the Huon Highway and the Tasman Highway were all funded in the 2013 budget and were all re-announced as if they were new on 3 February 2014 and then re-announced again on 22 May 2014. In the Northern Territory, Tiger Brennan Drive, Central Arnhem Road and the Regional Roads Productivity Package were all announced in the 2012 and 2013 budgets and re-announced by the government. And, of course, the Torrens to Torrens project on South Road in South Australia was funded in the 2013 budget and re-announced by this government, along with APY Lands upgrades, the Goodwood to Torrens project and the Dukes Highway in South Australia.

This is a fraud committed by the government, who do not have any projects or infrastructure agenda of their own and therefore seek to mislead the Australian public about their construction schedule on infrastructure. (Time expired)

Mr COULTON (Parkes—The Nationals Chief Whip) (11:04): I too rise today to speak on the Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2014-2015 and related bills. Before I start, I would like to express my frustration at the fact that delays in passing legislation and the negotiations with the Senate have cost the budget more than $10½ billion over the forward estimates. That is a shame, because the outlook is quite positive for our economy, with historically low interest
rates. Particularly for the people in my part of the world, the depreciation of the Australian dollar and lower energy costs due to the removal of the carbon tax have made conditions much more conducive for business. The other things that have given the businesses in the Parkes electorate reason for optimism are the free trade agreements that have been signed with China, Japan and Korea and the opportunities that those markets will mean for primary producers and the miners in my part of the world.

But there are some issues in this appropriation bill that are particularly relevant to the area that I represent. One of the announcements is the GABSI, the Great Artesian Basin Sustainability Initiative. This has been a very successful program, and the funding was dropped off by the previous Labor government in their last year. I am pleased to say that, through lobbying and meetings with me and the member for Maranoa, we were able to restore the funding for the Great Artesian Basin Sustainability Initiative.

For those of you who might not be aware of the significance of this program, it is the scheme that is known as the piping and capping. Many of the artesian bores in the Great Artesian Basin were put down close to 100 years ago and have been continuously running, forced to the surface by pressure and flowing like that for 100 years. The continuation of this GABSI program has meant that more of these bores will be capped and piped, and the savings for capping and piping on a particular bore are higher than 95 per cent. So this is real protection of the Great Artesian Basin.

I get a little frustrated when the green influence in groups like Lock the Gate talks about the protection of the Great Artesian Basin when in actual fact the GABSI, which was originally funded by the Howard government, has done a wonderful job securing and protecting the resource that is the Great Artesian Basin. It will need to continue on because, as more bores are piped, the pressure increases and bores that were not running freely will be.

One of the issues in the north-western area of my electorate—basically an area around Coonamble, Pilliga, Brewarrina, Walgett and Lightning Ridge—is drought. We now have producers who are staring down the barrel of their third year without production. Indeed, some of these areas have had less than 14 inches of rain over the last three years. The last worthwhile rain that was had in this area was the flood in 2012. While it can be expected that farmers should be able to prepare for a drought that will possibly last a year or even two, I do not believe it is possible for anyone to be prepared to financially manage a drought that goes over three years.

Following on from a visit by the Prime Minister with the assistance of the Minister for Agriculture early last year, the drought assistance program that has gone out into this area has been worthwhile. I will not say that it has alleviated the suffering, because nothing will alleviate the suffering that people face when they are battling a drought constantly, but at last count I think there are over 4½ thousand farm households now receiving household support, which gives some dignity back to those homes by helping people purchase the basic necessities of life. Quite a few hundred farmers have accessed the low-interest loans, of which there are two different sorts, some over five years, some over 10, and those have helped. But I am flagging here today that we may need to look at what else we can do in that area that is defined by the one-in-100-year drought.

Quite recently the Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development, the Hon. Warren Truss, was able to announce some funding under a couple of programs that were very
beneficial for the Parkes electorate. The Heavy Vehicle Safety and Productivity Program was most welcome when it was announced last week. I know from personal experience that funding like $573,000 of Commonwealth funds to go towards the $1.146 million upgrade of the Maskuta Creek Road and the Gil Gil Creek Road in the Gwydir Shire will be very useful for the productivity and safety in that area. The large quarry that uses the roads basically sources the material for the Gwydir, Moree and part of Narrabri shires as well as up into Queensland will now have a safer road for road train access to remove the road material from this quarry. That is a contribution with the federal government, the Gwydir Shire and the local quarry owner.

There is $300,000 for a new rest area. That will be half the funding for a rest area on the Mitchell Highway at Trangie, which will do much to help the safety of many of the trucks that use that road. There is $700,000 towards a $1.6 million widening and rescaling of the Croppa Creek Road at Moree, which will make that highly productive area much safer with the large amount of truck traffic that uses it. There is also $532,000 which will go towards a $1.296 million project for the widening of the Dandaloo Road at Albert in the Central West with the Lachlan Shire, which also will be much appreciated. There is $210,000 for improving signage and safety on various far north-west highways, for a total project of $420,000 with the New South Wales RMS, and $23.795 million for a raft of measures on the Golden Highway from Muswellbrook to Dunedoo. The Golden Highway is a critical transport link into the Central West as B-double access is not allowed down the Great Western Highway into Western Sydney. The Golden Highway now linking to the Hunter Expressway is a major freight corridor into Sydney from the Central West.

There were various bridges announced across the Parkes electorate under the Bridges Renewal Program, but a program that has a great deal of expectation attached to it is the National Stronger Regions Fund. That is $1 billion over the next five years, and that will help boost projects that will increase productivity in regional Australia, particularly parts of the Parkes electorate. The $100 million black spot program for mobile coverage is rolling out, and there is a great deal of expectation as to where those towers will be announced. I have to say this really only needs to be a start. It is a timely reminder that in 2008 in this very place the then Labor government removed the $2½ billion that was the Regional Telecommunications Infrastructure Fund. It rolled into the overall package for the global financial crisis. Since that time, there has been no government money going into improving telecommunications and mobile phone coverage in regional Australia.

The NBN rollout is also starting to get back on track after Minister Turnbull has taken control of this project, and that will also make a difference. But mobile phone coverage is unacceptable and we need to be doing more. When many of the farm machinery that is used now is monitored remotely and when technicians need to have Next G coverage to do an analysis of a breakdown with a tractor or a grain harvester it is important that we have that mobile coverage. I am sure that people in other parts of the country would not put up with having no mobile coverage at all.

The other thing that this government is doing is mutual obligation for welfare recipients to receive Newstart. There is also the Green Army project. It has been very well received in the Parkes electorate. I spoke in this place yesterday about the Green Army project that is up and
running in the Macquarie Valley and one that is about to start up on the border regions at Boggabilla and Toomelah with the Kamilaroi people in that area.

Communities are saying to me that they want their young people to have a reason to get out of bed in the morning, that they want their young people to have a purpose in their lives and that they want their young people to have a proper job. For too long we have been paying people to sit down. That has been soul destroying for those people, it has been bad for the country and it has been bad for the communities in which they live. I am pleased to say that we are well on the way to implementing those programs to get all Australians to put their shoulders to the wheel and to have an opportunity that many of us take for granted.

One of the great programs that is preparing young people in western New South Wales for the workforce is the Clontarf Foundation. They are doing a great job in the western towns. There are also academies at many of the schools—the Girls Academy at Coonamble High School is preparing those young ladies for future life with programs in that town of Coonamble and in other towns. There is much more that we need to be doing.

I would like to welcome the change of focus by the National Drug and Alcohol Council and the new committee chaired by Kay Hull, the former member for Riverina—now with a focus on ice and amphetamine use in our communities. Quite frankly, it disturbs me greatly that beneath the calm and pleasant surface in most of my towns—probably all the towns in my electorate—there is an epidemic that is ripping my communities apart, and that is ice. We really need to focus on this issue. It is particularly difficult; a lot of the people who are dealing in this insidious substance are embedded in the community. They target the most disadvantaged people in the communities and, quite frankly, in many cases there is no way back from ice addiction.

As a parliament and as a society, if we do not address this drug that is tearing our communities apart we will be paying for the consequences for decades to come. We do need to deal with this issue.

Mr PERRETT (Moreton) (11:19): I rise today to speak on Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2014-2015 and related bills. These three bills will bring a total of $1.7 billion in additional funding to be appropriated, and these appropriations reflect the Abbott government’s decisions which were incorporated into the 2014-2015 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook, as well as several machinery-of-government changes.

These bills represent the priorities of the Abbott government. They also represent the ugly tip of an ugly iceberg that we saw last May when the Treasurer delivered his budget. This ugly iceberg has hit the most vulnerable Australian households, it has hit university students and it is attacking pensioners and families—many of whom have already been struggling with rising cost-of-living pressures.

The Labor Party has a long, proud tradition of protecting living standards and raising them. We are a party that is all about supporting jobs and creating jobs, and making sure that this nation has a secure economic future. These are the very tenets of the Labor Party. As Ben Chifley said we are:

... a movement bringing something better to the people, better standards of living, greater happiness to the mass of the people. We have a great objective – the light on the hill – which we aim to reach by working the betterment of mankind not only here but anywhere we may give a helping hand. If it were not for that, the Labour movement would not be worth fighting for.
That famous speech that so many in the Labor movement have gone back to.

We are the party of protecting living standards, supporting jobs and securing our economic future. One would think—any sensible person, anyone who believes in common sense, would think—that all Australian political parties should be about those things. However, this stinking, dead cat of a budget handed down by the Treasurer last year is a failure on all three of these fronts. This budget attacks the living standards of many Australians, especially our most vulnerable people. It does not create a lot of heartache for the top end of town but the people who are most vulnerable are asked to do the heavy lifting. The Treasurer and the Prime Minister made it their priority to have the poorest quartile do most of the heavy lifting, rather than the wealthiest. The last time we saw that sort of tactic imposed in Australia, Ralph Darling was the governor of New South Wales.

Unemployment has risen under Prime Minister Abbott and is now at 6.4 per cent. When we left, it was at 5.7 per cent. We always hear the weasel words, the spin coming from the employment minister, the Treasurer and the Prime Minister who say, 'We have created more jobs.' Well, Australia is a growing economy and that is why the number of jobs being created is growing. So do not stand up and say, 'The pie is growing, if the percentage of people who have no pie at all is actually increasing. Do not try and use those little weasel words. The Australian public understands the unemployment rate. It has always been the factor that we look at in whether the government is doing the right thing.

The rabble opposite have betrayed our economic future in many ways on a variety of fronts, not just because they have sabotaged the economy but because they have failed to invest in education. Despite the promises before the election, despite the fake Gonski embracing and the stickers saying 'we support Gonski', when shadow minister Pyne got into government he broke that promise. Our schools and universities are suffering and will suffer even more in the future yet these are the very economic entities that will enhance productivity and create the jobs and opportunities that my grandchildren will need.

Those opposite have again made a basic error when it comes to the economy by failing to address dangerous climate change. Despite the Prime Minister saying in *Battlelines* that we basically need a price signal attached to dangerous pollution, despite him recognising that and putting it in words—

Mr Champion: Really?

Mr PERRETT: In *Battlelines* he makes it very clear, the member for Wakefield.

Mr Champion: He could put a price signal on doctors instead.

Mr PERRETT: That is right. But he recognised that this will be a big economic challenge, a great social challenge as well as an environmental challenge. But by not pricing pollution and by the political opportunism to win a ballot by one vote—where one person was absent and there was one spoilt ballot—it shows how hollow a man this Prime Minister is. He is a Prime Minister who will do anything.

Mr Whiteley interjecting—

Mr PERRETT: I am sure the gang of 39 opposite are making the noise.

Mr Champion: He must have been 61.
Mr PERRETT: He surely is not that silly—although. By not addressing dangerous climate change, this government is going to sabotage our economy in the future.

Mr Whiteley: So you want a carbon tax.

Mr PERRETT: Of course we need a price on pollution. Every sensible economist, every sensible scientist knows it; only the hollow opportunistic politicians that embrace that recognise that it is not the right thing to do. We need to address dangerous climate change.

The other place where the government has let—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Craig Kelly): Are you seeking a point of order?

Mr Whiteley: Would the member be prepared to take an intervention?

Mr PERRETT: No.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Moreton will continue and there will be silence.

Mr Whiteley interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Interject once more and you will be the first one out. I would not be answering back to the chair, mate.

Mr PERRETT: The major problem with those opposite is that they do not realise where they sit in the Asian Century nor the opportunities that are there. And that was a great misunderstanding.

They are banging the old beat-up-the-foreigner drum loudly at the moment, which goes down like a bucket of cold sick amongst our trading neighbours around us. It is unbelievable. To sabotage the job opportunities that will come by us embracing Asia, they take the VIP off for a 20 minute conference to Sydney to say Asians are stealing our houses, Asians are stealing our land, they are towing it back to China, towing it back to wherever. It was xenophobia writ large, shameful. It belongs to the first parliament of Australia that was debating the White Australia policy rather than the 44th Parliament that should be embracing the Asian century. It was disgraceful.

Labor believes in a strong economy that delivers opportunity for all Australians and does not leave people behind. We saw how flawed the Prime Minister is. There are 39 backbenchers and a line-up of ministers that are disappointed and prepared to change. But it does not matter who they choose, whether it be the communications minister or the foreign affairs minister. It does not matter who the Labor Party is up against because we know what they stand for. We saw their Real Solutions for all Australians—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Props are disorderly, member for Moreton. Put the prop down.

Mr PERRETT: Sorry, Deputy Speaker Kelly. I will put down that work of fiction. It does not matter who they choose because we saw after the election what they really stand for. They do not believe in Medicare; instead, they have embraced a GP tax. They do not believe in accessible higher education for all; instead, they want $100,000 degrees—this dumb but rich policy. They are embracing ball-and-chain degrees that will not give opportunity but instead will cramp Australia's opportunities. We believe in affordable quality child care, not prohibitive fees and cuts to family payments.
We always need to contrast how the situation was when they come into power. We had not just sold Telstra off and had an extra $70 billion in the bank. Let's look at the world when they came to power back in September 2013. The Australian stock exchange was trading at a five-year high—we came through the financial crisis; GDP was running at 2.6 per cent; unemployment was at 5.7 per cent; inflation is not a significant problem at the moment obviously but it was at 2.4 per cent. We had a AAA credit rating provided by all three ratings agencies. We had had 22 years of continuous economic growth largely due to the tough economic decisions made by the Hawke and Keating government, not that Mr Costello made any difficult decisions—he just said 'spend everything that we make from selling hard earned, publicly owned assets'. We had created one million jobs. We were rated by the OECD as one of the best and happiest countries in the world. We had the highest median wealth in the world, at $193,563. We had low interest rates, also not a problem at the moment. And gross government debt, when you compare it to all of the other OECD nations, was well and truly under control.

Here at the beginning of 2015, we are not going to spend a lot of time highlighting the problems and inadequacies of the Abbott government. Obviously that task has been outsourced to the leakers and the 39 backbenchers and the gathering gang of cabinet ministers. They will be talking about how bad the government is. They will be the ones talking about how the Prime Minister is not up to the job and Treasurer Hockey is definitely not up to the job. I think everyone recognises that the Prime Minister's 18-month-long audition for season 6 of The Walking Dead is finally coming to an end.

Instead, while those opposite, the rabble opposite, implode and take those rusted-on mugs the Nationals with them, we the Labor Party will be consulting with the community, working on our policy ideas and consulting with the economic experts, the academics, the health experts, the scientific experts. 'Scientists'—there is a word that does not get heard often by those opposite, but we believe in scientists, especially when it comes to addressing climate change.

Those opposite promised that they would run a stable and united government, but all we have seen is chaos. We have seen disunity. We have seen Australian families suffer. We have seen the Australian economy suffer. We have seen small businesses—their safe space in any economy—suffering most of all. And all of Australia is paying the price because of this.

I know what happens when a government says one thing before an election and then does something different after it. I come from Queensland. We saw what happened there, where a Premier said one thing before the election and then did the opposite. The people of Queensland are waiting. They have their baseball bats cleaned up, nice and shiny. They are waiting. I know that the rest of Australia will have an opportunity also to say, 'This is what we think of a government that says one thing before an election and then does something different after.'

I think one of the great travesties that we have not shone a light on because there is so much dysfunction and chaos opposite is how manufacturing has suffered under this government. I know that the member for Wakefield has been very passionate about that. The Treasurer had an opportunity to look after production in terms of cars. The Prime Minister and the former Minister for Defence made a commitment to manufacturing in terms of submarines, but then it turned out to be hollow words, deception. He was prepared to ramp it
up just to get a couple of extra votes in the ballot, but when it came to delivering on his commitment he was shown to be a completely hollow man.

Look at the other drums they are beating in the corners that they can find: penalty rates and driving down wages, even though real wage growth is, I think, the lowest it has ever been. But still the Minister for Employment is saying wage explosions are a problem. This is the guy paid to be the minister, and he contradicts the information given to him.

We saw in Queensland that people do care about governments. We will hold them to account. We always have. The people have always held governments to account in all democracies, going back 2,000 or 3,000 years.

We need those opposite, the Liberal Party, to change this budget, especially as they come up to preparing the next budget, which is not too far away. Obviously we are focused on policies that support living standards, support jobs and help families, but you need to do that in the context of a growing economy. Sadly, they have missed a great opportunity to boost productivity. Instead, they put a handbrake on the economy.

Mr BROADBENT (McMillan) (11:34): Where is the self-worth and self-esteem of the Labor Party after what you left us with after your years of government? You left this nation with massive debt and continuing growth in debt. The member for Moreton talked about rising unemployment. Who signalled rising unemployment but the former Treasurer, Wayne Swan? He signalled rising unemployment in each budget that they put forward, didn't he? There is a lag in those figures that always comes 18 months afterwards. What did you leave us with? Where did you point the direction of the economy?

It is a disgrace that you can stand there in this day and age and pretend, even with the cuts that you were prepared to make in previous budgets— that you can stand there now and say, 'But we're not supporting those cuts anymore.' What intended hypocrisy! How can the Labor Party that I knew—and that I know some of my people in the seat of McMillan actually vote for—sit there and oppose every balanced part of the budget that this nation needs to make, the cuts that need to be made, the cuts that you as a Labor Party signalled? You signalled that these are the things that have to be done in this nation to get the budget in order so our families will be better off and so small businesses can grow, yet you come in with these speeches that are laden with hypocrisy and duplicity. I cannot believe that you would try to mislead this nation in such a way.

Yes, unemployment figures are growing, and they are the legacy of what the Labor government left us after they were defeated at the last election. When this government came in and began to put our nation's economic wellbeing in order, what did the Labor Party say? It said: 'We'll join with the crossbenchers in the Senate to stop everything. Nothing will go through. No cut, no change—nothing of any substance will go through for the next 18 months until there is an election, which we believe we can win.' That is what it is all about. That is exactly what it is all about. The way you have treated this parliament with contempt is a disgrace and you are continuing to do it with every speech that comes forward—especially that of the member for Moreton. I would have expected more from him.

I made a mistake the other day—

Dr Chalmers: Did you say the member for Moreton?
Mr BROADBENT: The member for Moreton, just to make it clear. The member for Moreton was in that government. He knows the mistakes they made. He knows they were a profligate, spendthrift government. They had no concern for what they were spending; they spent and spent. When the income of this nation took a downturn they did not stop spending. They were actually told by the head of Treasury, 'You can't keep spending like this. We can't afford new programs into the future; we just can't afford it.' He said, 'The money's not there to pay for it.' What did the Labor Party say? 'We don't care.' This is all about politics. It has nothing to do with the best interests of the Australian people or the health and wellbeing of this nation and its economy.

I made a mistake the other day, which I will admit to. I walked out in the middle of a speech by the Leader of the Opposition because I was so disappointed that he made a partisan statement when this parliament and the nation were trying to send a message on closing the gap. It is a bipartisan statement of this parliament that we want that gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people closed in every state, community, city and country. I should not have done that; I should not have walked out. But I was so disappointed with the Leader of the Opposition because I expected more from him on that day. So if there is anybody out there I need to apologise to, I apologise to them now; but I do not apologise for being absolutely disappointed with the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr Champion: Thank you. Apology accepted!

Mr BROADBENT: The two members at the table can laugh; but the smiles will be on the other side of your faces if the reigns are ever handed back to the Labor Party and we go on another spendthrift dream ride: 'We can do what we like because eventually we'll go out of office'—and the Liberal-National coalition will come in again and try to clean up the mess. They say, 'We don't care.' I say to the people of Macmillan and to the people of Australia generally: this is unacceptable at this time because the future of our children, and their children, is now on the line. The further we put off the changes that have to be made to our economy, and the cuts that have to be made, the harder the crunch is going to be. That is the situation we find ourselves in today.

We can no longer, as a country, continue spending billions of dollars more than we are receiving. You cannot do it in a family. Coming out of a small business, as I do, you cannot do it in a business—because if you do, you eventually cannot pay your bills and the bank says, 'You're finished.' That is exactly what happens. You cannot do it on a dairy farm. You cannot do it on a beef property. You cannot do it anywhere within the magnificent contribution that my electorate makes to this country in agriculture. You cannot do it there. You cannot have loans that are crushing the future ability of your family to receive a benefit for the work you are putting in today. Eventually you have to stop and turn around.

That means there will be cuts in this budget and the next budget and the next budget. At the same time, we have to make sure the benefit goes to those who are most vulnerable in our community. The member for Moreton talked about what the Labor Party stands for and what he believes. I think what this parliament should stand for is that first obligation we have to the Australian people: to make sure those most vulnerable are cared for. It happens in a family. If you have one child who is struggling in a family, who gets the most attention from mum and dad? The child that is struggling. The other children are told, 'Get on with it. Fend for yourselves; do the best you can.' The vulnerable child gets the support.
This nation has grown on that egalitarianism. This nation is known for the way it spreads its wealth through the community. But it cannot be laissez-faire. Everybody has to accept that there will be changes. There will be cuts. You have to think about how we are going to afford this and whether it is fair.

Fairness is important in this nation. It goes to the heart of the way we think, it goes to the heart of the way we talk and it goes to the heart of the way we make decisions. If it is seen to be unfair, that is when we respond. If it is unfair in a family, or it is unfair in a business, or it is unfair in the workplace, we will respond as a nation because that is who Australians are. But we cannot stand here and say, 'Let's all go over the debt cliff together.' The time has come for us to change where we are headed in this nation.

Mr Whiteley: Time to show some responsibility.

Mr BROADBENT: It does take some responsibility. It also takes some energy and effort to make sure we take the Australian people with us in the decisions we take.

I need infrastructure in my rural and outer-urban electorate, whether it be the baseball club or the cricket club, the tennis club or the football club. We are in a massively growing area. I have had more than 20,000 new residents come into my area over the last 18 months. Their children all need facilities, be it for soccer—which is one of the great growing sports in my community—baseball, or other sports we have not heard of like indoor slide ball. There are all sorts of things. Some 1,800 people a day go through our sports and aquatics centre, mostly for basketball. All of them could do with extended facilities.

There are bridges in my electorate that need rebuilding, either after fires or because of the fact we now have B-double trucks travelling over bridges that were never designed for that. I have one of the strongest agricultural areas in the nation—the great provider of much of the milk, beef and lamb you consume; the great provider of the wool that is exported and of the manufacturing across Gippsland. We contribute the power out of the Latrobe Valley that runs the nation—and I have fantastic workers there—but we do understand as a people that we cannot live beyond our means.

Politicians in this House and Senate collectively are letting you down because they are not telling you the truth about the nation's finances and where we are headed, what we need to pay for and the infrastructure we need to grow this country. I am not talking about just those listing to this broadcast today; I am talking about their children and their children. We need to have politicians in this nation prepared to project 30 years and see where we are going to be. We need to have politicians in this nation not making promises that we cannot afford and not making promises about what they are going to deliver but never delivering.

We have to be reasonable with our statements and honest with the Australian people and say: 'Today is a time when we have to pull back.' Our national income has been diminished. You did not do it, I did not do it, the Labor Party did not do it and the coalition did not do it. There is a downturn in our earnings. If there was a downturn in the earnings in my businesses I had to stop the spending I was doing throughout the household. We never had to lay off people, which was fantastic. There were people who left, but we did not have to lay anybody off. We went without. This nation at this time has to change the way it is interacting with the Australian people. We need a new conversation to explain exactly the situation we are in and how we need to address it. I expect in the May budget that that will be the case.
It does no good for the Labor Party to stand there speech after speech denying the past completely and denying their hand in the state of the economy today. They are completely denying their hand and saying: 'It is nothing to do with us. The election was the cut-off date. It is a new day today. All the things we said we would cut we are no longer cutting. We do not believe that any more. Anyway, it was the other executive who cut it. We are the new opposition.' To this point I say to the Australian people: not one plan has been put forward by the Labor Party as to how they would address the economic ills of this nation. They have only said, 'We do not like the way you are doing it.' They have the right to say that but they do not have the right to stay completely silent on what plan they would have for the nation.

Mr Whiteley: Unfunded empathy.

Mr BROADBENT: 'Unfunded empathy,' says my friend. It is wrong in this nation at this time to say that the whole fault for what has happened to this nation lies with the government. They should be ashamed of themselves because of the way they have performed since they have come into opposition, and they know that. The great opportunity for the Labor Party today and for politicians of this country is to be honest with the constituents and tell them exactly the situation we are in in this country and how we got here. We need to look to the future to make sure that whatever we as a government want to do we are able to fund and deliver and we are able to look after our most vulnerable—we are able to look after our pensioners and those who are disabled. That should be the No. 1 priority for any government living in this time and this place. We need to do the best we can on behalf of our people.

Dr CHALMERS (Rankin) (11:49): I rise to speak on this collection of appropriation bills. The appropriation bills are largely to do with the running of the government, the departmental costs and the like, but they do afford us the opportunity to talk more broadly, as the member for McMillan and the member for Moreton have, about the budget settings in this country and the way we move forward. It is a privilege to follow the member for Moreton in particular. I thought he raised some very intelligent points about the state of the budget and the state of the government. It was a characteristically good contribution from the member for Moreton.

It is tempting to say that we want to talk about the budget strategy of the government, but in reality the government does not really have a budget strategy. It is confused and chaotic. One day you have the Treasurer saying that there will be more belt tightening in May and the next day the Prime Minister says there will not be. You have a minister saying something about the budget and on the same day another minister saying the opposite.

You have leaks in all directions. It is hard to open a newspaper in this country at the moment without one member of the ERC leaking on another or one member of the cabinet leaking on another. Even the other day in question time—I think it might have been Tuesday—the Treasurer answered one question and said that Australia is like Greece and headed for ruin and then about three or four questions later he said that Australia has a rosy outlook. Not even the Treasurer can come into this place with any sort of clarity in his own mind and talk about the budget strategy.

The government is at war over the personnel. The Prime Minister and the Treasurer are under pressure. The sharks are circling. They are under a lot of pressure. You can see it in question time when they all pretend to read while the Prime Minister speaks. They are at war over the means when it comes to the budget but not the ends. It is tempting to say that the biggest problem with this government is their disunity, the things they disagree on, but really
the biggest problem with this government is the things they do agree on. They all agree on some of the worst aspects of this budget. They all agree on the GP tax. They all agree on $100,000 degrees. They all agree on pension cuts and the hike in the cost of petrol. They all agree on the hike in the cost of medicines. So really the biggest problem is not all this disagreement, disunity and confusion; the biggest problem is the things that are fundamental to the Liberal Party and the Abbott government, which are making life harder for people on middle- and low-incomes and asking the most vulnerable people in our community to carry the heaviest load when it comes to budget repair.

Every single member of cabinet—including the member for Wentworth and the member for Curtin—can pretend that they had nothing to do with this budget. But they did; they sat around the same cabinet table and agreed on the very worst elements of this budget. This budget is stapled to every single one of them. The Prime Minister can pretend that, all of a sudden, the days of good government are here, that there is some sort of reset. But when we look at their policy agenda—not what they say but what they actually want to inflict on the Australian community—we know that absolutely nothing has changed. Were it not such a serious matter, it would have been funny to see the Leader of the Government in the Senate earlier this week when he was asked what has changed with the Prime Minister since he promised that he would change. He had to take that question on notice! That was really an indication that the Prime Minister has not changed at all, the policy agenda is the same, and every member of cabinet has signed up to that policy agenda.

We need to look through the fog of chaos and confusion on the government side of the House. We need to look beyond the political difficulties of the Prime Minister and the Treasurer, substantial though those difficulties are. We need to look beyond the polls and personalities. We need a proper evaluation of where we are at and where we are headed. I did not agree with a lot of what the member for McMillan said. But he did say that we do need an assessment of where we are and where we are going—and we have very different ideas of where we should head. I think it is true that we should take stock of where we are at and also understand properly the costs to the real economy of the ineptitude and incompetence that has infected the Abbott cabinet.

As the member for Wakefield, who is here in the chamber, would recall very well, those opposite promised they would make the budget better. We know that in the 18 months that they have been in government—and this is a fact, not an opinion—that the budget position has deteriorated. In the context of the bills we are discussing today, there is something like a $44 billion deterioration between the midyear update from two Decembers ago and the midyear update last December. That is a fairly substantial deterioration and it is nothing to do with Labor. It compares two numbers from midyear updates both handed down by Treasurer Hockey. They promised to make the budget better but they have made it worse.

That is not the only example we have of where there has been a promise to make something better and it has become worse. They said that, if elected, there would be an instantaneous adrenaline charge. The Prime Minister went to CEDA in Sydney and said that, on the election of a coalition government, there would be an adrenaline charge in the economy, that things would improve. While I was listening to the member for McMillan, something popped up on my email which is interesting in the context of the conversation we
are having right now. I want to read that into the record. I got an email just before, which is the NAB quarterly ASX 300 business survey for the fourth quarter 2014. I quote:

Big business in Australia is losing confidence affecting medium-term growth and capital expenditure plans. Overall confidence among larger firms has now fallen below its long-term average and is weaker than for smaller companies and the broader economy.

That was from the National Australia Bank. It is not much of an adrenaline charge when you think about the stats that are coming through about confidence in the economy. I am privileged to be on the Economics Committee with my colleague over there, the member for Wright. Very recently the Governor of the Reserve Bank appeared before the committee. One of my colleagues—it might even have been the member for Wright—asked him what his biggest fear about the Australian economy was and he said it was the lack of confidence. So, far from the adrenaline charge that the Prime Minister promised, there has been a real problem with confidence in our economy.

The Australian Institute of Company Directors did a survey of directors. Almost 50 per cent of those directors said the performance of the government was having a negative impact on their investment decisions. Taking the politics out of it, that is a very, very worrying aspect of company and business culture in Australia at the moment. I will not quote all the other confidence numbers, but confidence is very weak in the economy at the moment.

We have also had the government promise to make the cost of living better for ordinary Australians. Instead, we have got things like the proposals to jack up the prices of medicine, petrol, visiting a doctor and university degrees. These are all the components of the cost of living, all the things that really matter to the economics of daily life. The Prime Minister said he would make things easier. Instead, he has made things much, much harder.

The problem with all of these factors, particularly confidence, is the way they flow through to the real economy. When the economy does not have the confidence it needs, it flows through into the hard data about the real economy. Growth in our economy is soft. I do not say it with any relish, but growth is softer than we would all like. That has particular implications for unemployment. The unemployment rate is the highest it has been since 2002. That is not an opinion, it is a fact. Unemployment is higher today than it was during the depths of the global financial crisis. Let's think about that for a moment. Right now in Australia the unemployment rate is higher than it was in the sharpest synchronised downturn in the economy since the Great Depression. That is an extraordinary thing that we need to contemplate. That should be a wake-up call for anyone in this place and anyone who cares about the condition our economy is in and our community is in right around the country. That is a stunning stat. The unemployment rate is higher now than it was during the global financial crisis.

I do not want to spend my whole time responding to points that the member for McMillan made, but he showed an extraordinary lack of awareness when he said that, after 18 months of the coalition government, the unemployment rate is somehow Labor's fall. He said that there was a lag. But there is not an 18-month lag in these figures. That is just an extraordinary attempt to state that the unemployment rate, which is higher now than it was during the GFC, is something that Labor should be responsible for—after 18 months of government! You have got to wonder why these people wanted to be the government if they want to spend their
whole time saying that every piece of economic data is somehow the fault of the previous government.

We are now approaching the second budget and there is no clarity on the first one. As I said, when you are getting to your second budget the time has long gone when you can blame other people for the fiscal settings in the budget or for the economic parameters in the budget. Unfortunately that culture of chaos, blame and confusion does not just infect the 2014-15 and the 2015-16 budget; it also impacts on a whole range of other aspects of the Treasurer's job. I am thinking here about the *Intergenerational report*. The Charter of Budget Honesty has covered four treasurers—Costello, Swan, Bowen and now Hockey. Of those four treasurers, the only one who has breached the law of the Charter of Budget Honesty when it comes to handing down the *Intergenerational report* on time is Treasurer Hockey.

We also know, from estimates, that one of the reasons for that delay is that the government are interfering with the migration numbers. They are trying to work out a way that they can paint the worst possible picture about debt and deficit. We know that the Treasury officials have gone to great lengths to point out that this is the Treasurer's document and it is not a Treasury document. They have gone to great lengths to point to the sort of interference that is happening with some of these figures. The Treasurer called this document a critical document last week. I agree with him. If it is such a critical document, it really beggars belief that he cannot hand his homework in on time.

In that speech about the *Intergenerational report*, which I read with interest, the Treasurer said that it needs to be about three things. Obviously he did not mention climate change or other intergenerational issues around sustainability. He did not mention inequality or immobility or any of those things that we should also care about, but he did mention three important things: productivity, participation and budget repair. It is amazing that he talks about productivity when they are cutting education and training and they are trying to build an NBN on last century's copper network. If you cared about productivity, you would not do that. They talk about participation at the same time as they take $1 billion out of the childcare system. If you cared about participation, you would not be doing that. And, if you really cared about budget repair, you would not be giving tax breaks to the 20,000 wealthiest people in the superannuation system and you would not be reopening tax loopholes for multinational corporations that let them shift their tax overseas and sell the Australian people short.

You notice that, when the Treasurer gets up at the dispatch box, some of his colleagues sort of delight in his discomfort.

**Mr Champion:** They drop off, don't they?

**Dr CHALMERS:** They drop off. You can just see the wry smile from some of the colleagues, who quite like the idea of Treasurer Hockey underperforming. But what I say to those colleagues is that you are all responsible for this budget. Everyone who sits on the front bench here and in the cabinet nodded eagerly when the Treasurer and the Prime Minister said they wanted a GP tax, $100,000 degrees and pension cuts. You all nodded your head. You all signed off on it. It is not just their names on it; it is all of your names on it. The member for Wentworth, the member for Curtin—all of the colleagues are responsible for this budget.

There could not be a worse time for this incompetence, division and chaos, when we do have very substantial challenges in our economy and in our society. The member for
McMillan was right to say that revenue is down. There are holes in our tax system. It beggars belief that they would reopen one of them at the same time as they talk about holes in the revenue, but that is the truth. The revenue is down since Howard and Costello, and that is a challenge that we need to address. There is more than one way to skin a cat, though, I think we would say about that. The way they are going about it—asking the most vulnerable people in Australia to fix the budget, while everyone else gets tax breaks and gets off scot-free—is really not the way forward. For a country that cherishes the fair go, that is not the way you go about this really important task.

We will be guided, as we always are when it comes to the budget, by what is right for Australia, what is right for the broad mass of the Australian people—not one or two people in the economy, but the economy in the broadest sense. We want more people to participate in this remarkable quarter-century run of growth that we have had in Australia. Australia is in the midst of one of the most extraordinary periods of growth in the modern economic history of the planet, and we want more and more people hooked up to the opportunities that that brings. Our problem with the budget is that it says: 'We want two Australias. We want two tiers of Australia, with one group, the most vulnerable group, asked to do the heaviest lifting and another group that gets all the gains from economic growth in this country.' That is not what we want. We want a burden fairly shared. We cherish, like the Australian people, the fair go in this country. For as long as the fair go lives and breathes in this country, the Australian people will reject a budget like this. And, for as long as there is breath in the Australian Labor Party, we will stand up for the people who are under attack in this budget.

We had a record of savings in the former government—$180 billion worth of savings. We have also ticked off on $20 billion of savings in the current budget. So we are up for a conversation about belt-tightening. So are the Australian people, but they will not cop a budget which is as fundamentally unfair as this one.

Mr BUCHHOLZ (Wright—Chief Government Whip) (12:04): I rise to speak on Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2014–2015, Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2014–2015 and Appropriation (Parliamentary Departments) Bill (No. 2) 2014. It is always a pleasure to follow the member for Rankin, who sits on the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics with me. The member for Rankin made some very cordial points about the deterioration of the budget. The budget has deteriorated, without a doubt. Some of those factors are beyond our control. The member will know that our exports minus imports, which are our terms of trade, are probably as low as they have ever been. Coal prices some 18 months ago were near on double what they are. Iron ore prices were just on double. We have no control over the growth of our trading partners. We have no control over the pace at which these countries chase their future growth targets. We are the recipient of their demand. As a result, our terms of trade have softened, and I am sure the member on the other side is well aware of that.

The member for Rankin quoted that comment from the RBA governor, Mr Stevens, from when we last met. He forgot to mention that the governor was extremely concerned about the levels of debt that the country had inherited from a Labor government. In fact, the level of debt was probably front and centre. And the Reserve Bank governor is not alone in his commentary when he speaks about the concern about debt. He is flanked by the secretary of the Treasury and many other commentators who say that the debt is an issue and needs to be
addressed, because, for every cent that we are spending on servicing interest, servicing a level of debt, there is an opportunity cost forgone somewhere in the community, whether it be building roads, building hospitals or building schools.

Some people in this place will say that debt is not a problem. They will come here and brazenly say that debt is not a problem. In my opening comments, I said that, as a country, we cannot all the time control our destiny and that we are subject to our trading partners' demand. But I ask you, as a brazen, throwaway line: what would happen if we were to go into another GFC? What would happen to us as a nation if we had another global economic shock? The simple answer is: as a nation we are best prepared for future shocks if we have less debt. That is not the only reason we should be addressing it. The member for Rankin spoke passionately about a fair go for the Australian worker and said that while there was breath in the Australian Labor Party they would continue to fight for a fair go. Can I say: you are not giving the Australian people a fair go when you shackle the next generation to years and years and generations of debt. That is not giving the next generation a fair go. There is a group, between the ages of 18 and 35, that potentially, unless we change the trajectory of expenditure in this country, may not have pensions into the future. That is not giving people a fair go. We are trying to fix that.

If we do not fix the Medicare payment system, there are people working today who will not have a system into the future where they can go to the doctor and seek medical attention on the back of Commonwealth support. That is not a fair go. I suggest that you do not come into this place and falsely claim to represent those hard workers here in Australia, because Labor's policies fundamentally hurt most the people they claim to represent. The member for Rankin spoke about unemployment. The unemployment rate we have at the moment was forecast some four years ago. So do not wake up and say, 'shock, surprise!' We have just come out of the largest capital expenditure program in Australia's history, in 150 years, and we are in a transition phase where we are transitioning from construction through to production. There will be those in this House who will say, 'That's rubbish. Construction will always be there.' We are transitioning from a construction phase to production and, in conjunction, the government is ramping up its massive infrastructure programs, spending in the state of Queensland something like $13.4 billion. In my electorate alone we have $1.8 billion for construction of the Toowoomba range bypass, and the efficiency dividends to businesses, farmers and transport operators will be immeasurable. With strong and fluent transport corridors come opportunities for the future.

This appropriation bill seeks to appropriate around $1.7 billion and passage of this bill will ensure continuity in delivering government essential services. I thought I would share with the House what some of those are. Part 3 of the bill provides an appropriation of around $1.385 million for major elements including: $558 million for the Defence portfolio, reflecting additional overseas operations. That is our operations in conflict zones and theatres. When we get engaged at the behest of the United Nations that comes at a cost, and these appropriation bills seek to identify that. There is $115 million for employment, primarily to pay providers for increased numbers of successful job placements and to implement the new employment services for 2015 contracts. If you have an employment provider out there and there are incentives that the government partners with employment providers to assist people to get
back into the workforce, that part of the appropriation helps those businesses to provide the outcomes that communities are desperately looking for.

The government job reforms are full steam ahead. The government has invested $5.1 billion in a new model to operate from 1 July 2015 to better meet the needs of job seekers, employers and employment service providers. The government is committed to helping more job seekers to move from welfare to work and to start enjoying the privileges of being valuable members of the workforce.

The government's reforms improve the operating environment for providers and significantly reduce the level of red tape and prescription in the model so that the providers are able to focus on what they do best—namely, helping people to get a job, because that is what this government is focused on. And it seems to be working. The member for Rankin said that there was no adrenalin shot in the region. It would please the House to know that over 200,000 jobs were created last year. No-one on the other side mentioned that. In fact, there were 213,900. This equates to around 585 new jobs each day. But no, you will not hear that kind of statistical evidence from the other side. It means that a new job is being created virtually every half minute. In 2014, jobs growth was more than triple the rate of 2013. We are providing job opportunities at virtually triple the rate that the Labor government were.

The Dun and Bradstreet business expectations survey, released on 3 February 2015, found that the outlook on employment is the most positive that it has been in 10 years. The Dun and Bradstreet business expectations survey is not a document to be sneezed at. The most recent ABS labour force release revealed that 37,400 new jobs were created in the month of December, building on the 45,000 new jobs created in November. The unemployment rate at that stage was 6.1 per cent.

The bill also provides for an appropriation of around $240 million which includes major elements such as $40 million for DFAT for a temporary embassy in the Ukraine. In addition to that, there is $90 million to agriculture for concessional loans under the Drought Recovery Concessional Loans Scheme to support New South Wales and Queensland businesses facing drought or suffering the combined impact of the 2011 live cattle export debacle that Labor oversaw into Indonesia.

In recent weeks in this place we have been more than cognisant of the effects of the cyclones in Queensland, and local communities such as my home town of Rockhampton are now cleaning up. Can I remind the House that while that clean-up is happening, there are large pockets that missed out on that very valuable rain and are still in drought and experiencing hardship. It is difficult to fathom after that enormous deluge of rain that there are pockets that missed out on it. I speak of west of Emerald and into the Longreach and Winton area. My heart truly goes out to those people. I spoke to a grazier the other day who is halfway between Longreach and Winton. He informed me that his feed bill to keep his stock alive is in the vicinity of $20,000 a week. The mental strain on those people is difficult fathom. My heart and thoughts go to those who are still struggling.

We will do everything we can in this bill to try to assist through the Drought Concessional Loans Scheme to assist those where we can. These loans are vitally important for the bush. This is $90 million on top of the $280 million that the government pledged last year as part of its $320 drought package rolled out in the 2014-15 federal budget. These loans can assist farmers to get onto the road to recovery when the seasons turn. Farmers face two strategies
when dealing with drought—and there is no right or wrong way in the business model. You either keep your stock and buy in feed and keep feeding them—and I just spoke about the level of expense that that can involve for a farmer—or destock early in the drought. Our national herd numbers normally sit around 35 million. At the moment they are around 26 million. When the drought breaks, the demand and supply pressures at the saleyard mean the buy-in cost to go and buy back the herd is greater. For example, if you have offloaded 3,000 head, for the same money you are probably going to pick up around 1,200 head. From a cashflow perspective, it takes many years for your breeding cycle to get back and be fully efficient again.

One of the criticisms of the drought package is that the loan period is too short, that it is four years. The Minister for Agriculture got the message that those terms needed to be lengthened. I know that area is being addressed at the moment. In managing the drought the biggest demand for cash often comes in the recovery phase when farmers need to restock or when they need to replant. In addition to the government's support, the opening of six new live export markets and record live export volumes is seeing renewed confidence in saleyards across the country. I have spoken about the national herd numbers, but there is another thing which is pushing up prices at the moment.

There is a rule of thumb when selling cattle or sheep, that you do it for two reasons: one, you are out of money and you are looking to create cashflow—it is that simple; and, two, you are out of feed. At the moment in certain parts of the country where there has been good rain and where feed is abundant, when interest rates are low people can restructure their operational overdrafts on their farms so they are not so hard up against the wall when the seasons are not so kind.

In addition, $35 million will go to the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service for additional counterterrorism activities and to repurpose the Australian Defence Vessel Ocean Shield. Robust and rigorous counterterrorism activities have never been so important. This week the government released the review of the Australian counterterrorism machinery.

This government is doing all it can with the fiscal levers that are available to it to provide good government and good leadership to the nation. I remind the nation that if we return to a Labor government, the boats will start coming, the debts will increase and intergenerational debt will increase for those still to come into the system. There is only one option for good government in Australia—that is, a coalition government.

Mr CHAMPION (Wakefield) (12:19): A return to a Labor government would be a return to the fair go and nothing proves that more than the debate on Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2014-2015, Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2014-2015 and Appropriation (Parliamentary Departments) Bill (No. 2) 2014-2015, which is ultimately a debate on this government's budget, which has been a budget of broken promises. To those in the gallery or at home, go and look at the Liberal Party's election manifesto Real solutions for all Australians. It has a lovely photo on it of the Prime Minister and the now cabinet. This document is full of commitments—

Mr Thistlethwaite: Is David Johnston in that photo?

Mr CHAMPION: No, David Johnston is not there. He was airbrushed out before the government even began. This document is full of their election commitments, which they
took to the Australian people. They gave solemn commitments and the Prime Minister in particular elevated trust in leadership, trust in his word and trust in his would-be government to some sort of almighty principle that could never be broken. Yet, what do we have in their first budget? I can tell you: a budget of broken promises.

Take the GP tax. First of all, it was $7 on everybody who walked into a GP’s waiting room or had to have their blood tested or had to get a scan—$7 times $7 times $7. And for some people—asthmatics, diabetics or those with some other chronic illness—it was a compounding $7. So the more tests you got, the more scans you got, the more times you had to go back to the doctor, it was $7 times $7 times $7. We know what happened with the first iteration of that GP tax. It got axed and everybody thought, ‘Phew, we’ve dodged that bullet.’ What we did not know was that the Prime Minister’s second effort was opposed by the then health minister, the member for Dickson, and the Treasurer, who advised the Prime Minister that the second iteration of the GP tax was even worse than the first—a flat $5 cut and a freeze on the rebates to patients and ultimately to GP surgeries. That was not just an assault on patients, not just an assault on the universality of Medicare; it was an assault on the fee-for-service model, which nearly every general practice in the country relies upon. Those general practices were supposed to put that program in by 19 January—an impossible time line to meet, if you know anything about the software requirements or the paperwork that would have to be put in place to do that. I spoke to one practice manager last week in Gawler who had a terrible Christmas rushing around, trying to get all of this organised, only for the government to then sue for peace and go back to the drawing board. Then we read that they are still committed to a price signal, which is a GP tax, on your GP visits. So there is still no certainty after all that time.

At 1.30 today I have to call Dr Bruce Groves, in Salisbury North, who runs a clinic that is committed to helping working-class Australians. I have to explain to him that the uncertainty that has been affecting his GP practice for the last six or seven months is going to continue because of this government’s budget, because of this government’s audacity in breaking their promises.

But it does not stop there. There are cuts to the states of $80 billion on schools and hospitals. We have not yet seen the effect of those cuts. The Senate select committee inquiring into this has received evidence and will continue to receive evidence of how that will affect emergency departments, how that will affect hospitals and how that will affect schools. There are cuts to pensioner concessions. Would you believe it? These are concessions on council rates, concessions for public transport, concessions that help pensioners every single day to cope with the cost of living.

At the last election, this government was constantly banging on about the cost of living. I remember those opposite in this parliament talking about the cost of living. They get into government and cut pensioner concessions—$30 million in my state alone. They do not even have the courage of their convictions out there in the community, pointing the finger at the councils and at the state governments, even though it is their federal cut that has disturbed arrangements that have been in place for decades. There are cuts to pension indexation. They get up in this parliament and say, ‘You will still get your cost-of-living adjustment.’ They neglect to mention they have changed the nature of that cost-of-living adjustment, reducing it over time—an attack on the ability of pensioners to deal with the cost of living. That is
unbelievable for a party that went out there and elevated trust to this sacrosanct principle, that elevated their commitment to this almighty principle on the cost of living. Then they get in and bring down a budget of broken promises, a budget of austerity.

There are cuts to the SBS and ABC. Six grand has been cut from working families. There are cuts to the unemployed, with the government saying to young people under the age of 30 that, if they fall out of work, they will not get unemployment benefits for six months. The effect of that in my electorate will be to make some people homeless. It will leave some people in the most desperate of situations. They do not have the resources to fall back upon. They will end up couch-surfing, they will end up homeless, they will end up without income—a fundamentally un-Australian thing to do.

There are cuts to foreign aid. Some Australians will say, 'Well, you know, charity begins at home.' But, of course, when we see the instability in the world and we know that foreign aid is a measure to increase stability, to improve living standards around the world and to eradicate disease, those cuts will cut bitterly indeed, and we will end up paying the price in the longer term with instability in our region. One-hundred thousand dollar degrees are an assault on social mobility, an assault on the middle class of this country.

There is the proposed privatisation of Australian Hearing, which was formed by the Chifley government in 1947. It has survived the Menzies, Gorton, McMahon, Holt, Whitlam, Fraser, Hawke and Keating governments. It is a tremendous institution that has helped deaf Australians, and this government is thinking about privatising it. When they are doing the scoping study to privatise it, do they ask Health what their opinion is? No. Do they ask Deaf Australia with their opinion is? No, they defunded that organisation, so they cannot possibly hear what it will have to say about it. They just leave it to the bean counters in Finance to establish they get $200 million out of a national institution; they try and squeeze that out of a national institution that has been so important to generations of Australians. This institution was formed to look after veterans of World War II—men like my grandfather, who served in New Guinea—made deaf by cannon fire. It was formed in the wake of rubella outbreaks which made people deaf. It has been a world-leading institution in hearing, and they want to privatise it. You could not believe this stuff. They are hacking into the poorest and most vulnerable, and destroying important national institutions.

Then we look at what they are doing in defence. They talked a good game in defence, but they are cutting Defence Force pay. They attacked us in government for giving three per cent, and they are giving 1.9 per cent. This budget is a bitter austerity. The biggest problem is that it is ultimately self-defeating. The member for Rankin gave some figures in this chamber about consumer and business confidence going down the toilet—that is where it is going. This is confidence-sapping, security-robbing, terrible austerity. We have seen this being inflicted in Europe and it has been an absolute disaster.

In my state of South Australia, we have seen a decision on automotive manufacturing that has been a job destroyer. Up to 10,000 jobs will be gone by 2017, and there is a very poor, minuscule package to deal with that. They forced Holden to make a decision and chased them out of the country, which led to the decision that Toyota made. It has been a terrible collapse. We are yet to see the bitter cost of that collapse. The only benefit of government division in this place is that that miserable member for North Sydney is going to lose his job at roughly
the same time or maybe a bit before. That is going to be the only consolation of the government's divisions, in my opinion.

We now see the submarines decision. I am glad that the member for Hindmarsh is here. He got a little award for being the best noder. He was nodding behind the Prime Minister and then he was nodding behind Senator Edwards—nod, nod, nod. Then we found out that this arrangement that he has extracted from the Prime Minister is not worth hot wind, because we know the Prime Minister's processes are undermining confidence in Australian manufacturing and making the process of appropriating, purchasing and procuring submarines a very, very messy one. That is because they came up with a new language: competitive evaluation process.

We have seen this government being chaotic, divided, rabblers, obsessed with PR, obsessed with hoo-ha and obsessed with rah-rah and spin. They are obsessed with getting a new salesman, like the member for Wentworth, the member for Curtin or Mr Morrison—one or the other. They will get a new leader. We all know that the air is coming out of this Prime Minister. We all know exactly what is happening.

I would just point those opposite to the Council on Foreign Relations and what Joshua Kurlantzick had to say under a headline 'Tony Abbott has to go'. This is the way he begins the article:

Is Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott the most incompetent leader of any industrialized democracy?

That is the beginning of the article. It goes on:

Tony Abbott, however, is in charge of a regional power, a country that is the twelfth largest economy in the world and the only rich world nation to have survived the 2008-9 financial crisis unscathed. Yet in less than two years as prime minister, Abbott has proven shockingly incompetent, which is why other leaders within his ruling coalition, following a set of defeats in state elections, may now scheme to unseat him.

We know that is happening, don't we? I am not sure whether the members opposite are part of the 39 or part of the 61. Some of them have had the Prime Minister in the electorate. That is very brave. It is very brave to have the Prime Minister in your electorate. You would have to be crazy to have the Prime Minister in your electorate when he is the most incompetent leader of any industrialised democracy. Can you believe it?

Joshua Kurlantzick does not stop there, though. He says:

Abbott’s policies have been all over the map, and the lack of coherence has often made the prime minister seem ill-informed and incapable of understanding complex policy issues.

This is extraordinary. What an extraordinary indictment of this Prime Minister, but we should not be surprised. We should not be surprised, given this budget of broken promises. They all went out there with their lovely document. I do not know if the member for Menzies is here; he did not make the lovely PR shot on the front of it. They went to their electorates—Hindmarsh and other places—promising a lot of things, but the electors in those places got something different indeed.

This budget is a budget of broken promises and this Prime Minister will only serve a short period more. This government is terminal. It is terminal because it was built on broken promises and bad commitments. The Australian people will see them off.
The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Vasta): Order! The time allotted for this debate has expired. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Middle East

Mr ANDREWS (Menzies—Minister for Defence) (12:34): by leave—I rise today to update the parliament and the Australian people about Australia's missions in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Iraq—overview

Last month, the Prime Minister and I visited Iraq and the Middle East region. This was my first opportunity as Minister for Defence to visit our Australian Defence Force personnel deployed on operations, and I was deeply impressed by their professionalism in carrying out what is often extremely dangerous work in the service of our country. In Baghdad, I accompanied the Prime Minister to a meeting with Iraqi Prime Minister al-Abadi, and reinforced Australia's commitment to support Iraq as it confronts Daesh. Prime Minister al-Abadi reiterated his support for Australia's military contribution, and expressed Iraq's gratitude for our assistance.

The Iraqi government has asked for our help and we are working with the Iraqi government to ensure that it is able to keep its people safe, reclaim its territory and combat the Daesh threat. But this is not just about helping Iraq. It is also about protecting our people and our interests here at home. Recent events in Australia, Canada, France, Denmark, Nigeria, Pakistan, Egypt and Libya demonstrate the global nature of the threat of terrorism. We cannot allow violent extremism to spread to our shores nor can we afford to let it spread to our region.

Iraq—ADF operations update

Yesterday, the Chief of Joint Operations, Vice Admiral David Johnston, and key operations staff of Headquarters Joint Operations Command provided me with an overview of Defence operations in the Middle East during a tour of the Air Operations Centre and Joint Coordination Centre. In September last year, the Prime Minister announced, following requests from both Iraq and the United States, that Australia would deploy around 600 personnel to the Middle East—including an air task group and Australian special forces—to support the international coalition against Daesh.

Air Task Group

On 1 October 2014 the Australian Defence Force deployed under Operation OKRA and commenced operational flying over Iraq in support of coalition air operations. On the evening of 5 October, Australian aircraft flew their first armed combat missions over Iraq. And on 8 October, Australian aircraft conducted their first airstrikes against Daesh targets. As of 20 February this year, the Air Task Group had completed the following missions:

- FA18 Super Hornet aircraft had completed 167 missions, releasing 205 weapons;
- the KC30A air-to-air refuelling aircraft had conducted 156 missions, offloading more than six million kilograms of fuel to Australian and coalition aircraft;
• the E7A Wedgetail airborne early warning and control aircraft had conducted 71 command and control missions;

• C130J Hercules aircraft had conducted six humanitarian aid drops to persecuted minorities in Iraq, including the provision of food and water to minorities on Mount Sinjar in August 2014; and

• a combination of C130J Hercules and C17 Globemaster aircraft conducted six delivery missions providing 213 tonnes of ammunition and weapons to Kurdish Peshmerga forces to assist them in their fight against Daesh.

Special Operations Task Group

In late 2014, the Special Operations Task Group commenced its advise and assist mission in support of the Iraqi Counter-Terrorism Service at the Baghdad Diplomatic Security Centre and another location in Iraq. As part of this mission, Australian special forces advisers have delivered training in urban combat, close quarter battle skills, countering improvised explosive devices, countersniping, medical skills, counterterrorism operations planning, and command and control. As at 20 February, the Special Operations Task Group had trained 46 students in combat casualty care in the Iraqi Counter-Terrorism Service, while 220 Iraqi personnel had received explosive hazards awareness training. Our support is raising the capability of the Iraqi Counter-Terrorism Service to a level where it will be more effective in targeting Daesh command and control, leadership, resupply and logistics.

We are engaged in a difficult mission that will remain difficult for some time. But with our allies and partners we are making a real difference. Coalition air strikes have helped stop Daesh's momentum. And to date, Iraqi and Kurdish forces have reclaimed approximately 700 square kilometres of Daesh-controlled Iraqi territory.

Building partner capacity

The Prime Minister has said that Australia is committed to doing what it can to make the world a safer place and to make Australia a safer country. Since our visit to Baghdad in January, the government has continued discussion with the Iraqi government and our coalition partners, especially the United States, about what more can be done to help the Iraqis to defeat Daesh and roll back its gains. We are considering a contribution to the coalition Building Partner Capacity mission. On Friday, tomorrow, the Prime Minister will have a discussion with the New Zealand Prime Minister, Mr John Key, about the nature of our possible contribution. Australia welcomes New Zealand's announcement that it will send defence personnel to Iraq to train the Iraqi security forces. The capacity-building mission is critical to countering Daesh in Iraq, and will help Iraq take responsibility for its own security.

Afghanistan—overview

Australia remains committed to the mission in Afghanistan, a decade or more since the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States and the 2002 and 2005 attacks in Bali. This mission has been the longest military commitment in Australian history, involving all elements of the Australian Defence Force, some 33,000 deployed personnel, since 2001. The ADF commitment began as part of the International Coalition Against Terrorism, formed by the United States and its allies in 2001. From 2005, Australia contributed to the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), as international efforts shifted from combat operations, to reconstruction and security sector reform. In 2013, Australia completed its
mission in Uruzgan, and handed over control to the Afghan national security forces. And the end of 2014 marked yet another milestone, with the conclusion of Operation SLIPPER, Australia's military contribution to the ISAF mission.

Sadly, these commitments have come at a price. Forty-one Australian Defence Force personnel have been killed in Afghanistan and another 261 wounded, and add to those, others who have been subsequently affected by their Afghanistan deployments. We have not forgotten the sacrifices of these personnel, nor the sorrow that their families face. Nor have we forgotten the reasons that we must finish this job well. It is strongly in Australia's interest to prevent Afghanistan from becoming a safe haven for al-Qaeda and other international extremist groups. And so, in 2015, Australia remains committed to international efforts to support Afghanistan's security, governance and development.

**Afghan progress**

Following more than a decade of ADF commitment in Afghanistan, Afghan capacity and institutions continue to make encouraging gains. The Afghan national security forces have now assumed full responsibility for securing the Afghan people, and continue to demonstrate their ability to plan and conduct independent operations. Last year, they demonstrated their increasing confidence and capability in providing security for the Afghan elections. They are providing security for the Afghan people, fighting their own battles with tenacity and holding the ISAF gains. At the political level, historic progress was made in 2014 with the peaceful transition of power to the Afghan national unity government. However, challenges remain and Afghan security forces will again be tested in 2015.

**Resolute Support Mission**

The international community has now opened a new chapter in its relations with Afghanistan, with the establishment of the new NATO-led Resolute Support Mission, which began on 1 January 2015 and is planned to conclude on 31 December 2016.

The Resolute Support Mission marks the end of coalition combat operations, with its focus on training, advising and assisting the Afghan Security Institutions and Afghan National Security Forces.

Australia's commitment to the Resolute Support Mission is about 400 Australian Defence Force personnel, deployed under Operation Highroad.

Through a variety of roles, ADF personnel are continuing to make an important and significant contribution to building Afghan capacity.

At the Afghan National Army Officer Academy in Kabul, Australian Defence Force trainers and mentors are developing the future leadership of the Afghan National Security Forces.

Other ADF personnel support our commitment through critical force protection, medical and intelligence roles, embedding within a range of Headquarters, and as military police.

**Future commitment to Afghanistan**

Decisions about the drawdown of ADF personnel in 2015 and 2016 still need to be made, and will be largely shaped by Afghan progress, as well as the plans of NATO and the United States as these develop.
Central to these decisions will be Australia's interest in making a constructive contribution to international efforts, and the importance of cementing the progress we have made in Afghanistan over the course of more than a decade.

We will work closely with our Afghan and international partners to see how Australia can contribute to the next phases of the Resolute Support Mission.

**Welcome home parade**

On 1 March 2014, Prime Minister Abbott announced that Australia will have an Anzac Day style National Commemoration for the completion of Operation Slipper.

This event will give all Australians an opportunity to recognise the commitment and sacrifice of our personnel deployed as part of Australia's commitment to combat terrorism across Afghanistan and the Middle East.

The event will include not only Australian Defence Force members, but also Australian Federal Police and civilian employees from the Department of Defence, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and other government agencies. Marching alongside will be a number of Afghans who were formerly employed with Australia's mission.

I would encourage all Australians to attend this activity, which will be held in each state and territory capital city and Townsville on Saturday, 21 March 2015.

**Maritime and peacekeeping operations**

Beyond our engagement in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Australian Defence Force is supporting vital work in maritime security and peacekeeping operations in the Middle East and around the world.

For more than two decades, Australia has committed a Major Fleet Unit to maritime security off the Horn of Africa.

This commitment, currently under the US-led Combined Maritime Force (CMF), promotes maritime security, stability and prosperity in the Middle East Region.

An enhanced security environment ensures Australia's safe and open access to the region while fostering important trade and commerce.

**Conclusion**

Our ongoing commitments to Iraq and Afghanistan and elsewhere in the Middle East are important for Australia's national security.

It is important to remember that these missions involve real risk to Australian Defence Force personnel.

They are difficult and demanding jobs.

Australia should be proud of the important work that these personnel, these men and women, are doing in our name, and our thoughts on this day and in the future are with them.

I ask leave of the House to move a motion to enable the member for Batman to speak for 14 minutes.

Leave granted.

Mr ANDREWS: I move:
That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent Mr Feeney speaking for a period not exceeding 14 minutes.

Question agreed to.

Mr FEENEY (Batman) (12:49): I rise to take note of the minister's statement on Iraq and Afghanistan. I thank the Minister for Defence for providing this update to the parliament. Parliament is indeed the venue where such regular statements should be given. It provides all elected members an opportunity to debate and discuss decisions that put Australians in harm's way. I will begin by reiterating Labor's strong bipartisan support for the deployment of Australian service men and women to Iraq as part of international efforts against Daesh.

As they always do, our ADF personnel are serving with dedication and distinction. Make no mistake, Daesh is a barbaric organisation, but they should not be dismissed as disorganised or inexperienced in spreading their hateful ideology across Iraq and the wider world. As the Secretary of the Department of Defence told Senate estimates only yesterday:

It is important also to appreciate that Daesh or ISIL is well led. It is not a rabble of immature foreign fighters running around at the back of utes. It is led by experienced former Iraqi generals and others with substantial military experience. So as an enemy, as brutal and as nasty and as terrible as they are, you should not underestimate …

Our forces deployed to the Middle East to degrade Daesh are having an impact. Our RAAF pilots have completed 167 missions, releasing over 200 weapons. Our other Air Force assets, including refuelers, command and control aircraft and heavy-lift aircraft are providing invaluable support for the international mission. This has included humanitarian aid drops to those minority groups cut off and weapons drops to Kurdish Peshmerga troops who are taking the fight to Daesh. Our special forces are now on the ground in Iraq, advising and assisting the Iraqi armed forces. Australia's contribution is making a difference. As the Chief of the Defence Force Air Marshal Mark Binskin said yesterday:

Since our operations began last August, the international coalition has assisted Iraqi and Kurdish forces to reclaim 700 to 800 square kilometres of previously occupied territory and restricted Daesh's freedom of movement, forcing the terrorists to become increasingly defensive.

... … … … for all intents and purposes … their major push and their major strategic message of being able to establish a caliphate is in question.

Ultimately, this battle can only be won by the Iraqis themselves, and so our measure of effectiveness and success will be in making the role of our forces redundant through building the capacity of the Iraqi armed forces.

I can inform the House that the Leader of the Opposition had the honour of visiting Australian forces in Iraq earlier this year. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the government for facilitating the recent visit of the Leader of the Opposition to the Middle East area of operations. Mr Shorten received detailed briefings in relation to the air component and travelled into Iraq to talk to our special operations personnel involved in the advise-and-assist mission. Mr Shorten was able to receive confirmation of the progress that has been made to date in preventing further advances by Daesh, and the effective air operations in delivering humanitarian supplies to those in dire need. He was briefed on the delivery of military supplies to the Peshmerga resistance forces, as well as the operations to degrade the capabilities, freedom of movement and resupply of Daesh. He was also advised of the
preparation for the next phase of offensive operations: to recover major population centres and territories still held by Daesh in Iraq.

I had the privilege of being at Al Minhad Air Base in the UAE in August 2014 and observed firsthand the first mission briefing given to our RAAF crews as they began the task of flying urgently needed supplies to the Yazidis seeking refuge on Mount Sinjar. The Leader of the Opposition and indeed everyone on this side of the House continue to be greatly impressed by the professionalism and the courage of our personnel and their insightful analysis of the theatre of operations. The Leader of the Opposition is determined that they be aware of our complete bipartisan support for their efforts and our concern for their wellbeing.

Labor's support for our nation's deployment is based on four principles: firstly, that we are there at the request of the Iraqi government; secondly, that our activities are confined to Iraq; thirdly, that Australian ground combat units are not deployed; and, lastly, that, if the Iraqi security forces engage in unacceptable conduct or the Iraqi government adopts unacceptable policies, then Australia should withdraw its support. We have noted disturbing reports regarding the behaviour of some Iraqi militia groups, and it is our expectation that these reports will be raised with the Iraqi government.

While the people of Syria have been devastated by civil war and the rise of extremist organisations such as Daesh and Jabhat al-Nusra, Labor does not support Australian military involvement in Syria at this time. There is no internationally supported military or political strategy for Syria, and Labor does not believe that Australian military involvement in Syria could successfully provide relief to the humanitarian crisis that is occurring there.

We note that the government is considering a change to the mission and a possible expansion of the troop numbers involved. We await the government's briefing on that matter. These are the principles that will continue to guide Labor's support for Australia's contribution to the international effort against Daesh.

While the international focus is on Daesh, we also recognise our nation's continued commitment to Afghanistan. As the minister has acknowledged, this mission has been the longest military commitment in Australian history. At the end of last year, Operation Slipper, Australia's contribution to the International Security Assistance Force, came to a close. The ADF can be rightly proud of the role they have played in defeating the Taliban and creating a more stable and secure environment to allow the Afghan government to establish itself. In recent years, the Australian contribution in Afghanistan shifted to improving the capability of the Afghan National Security Forces, with an eye to the transition of all security responsibilities to Afghanistan.

It has not come without a cost. Forty-one Australians have lost their lives during this period, and another 261 Australians were wounded. Our thoughts, as always, are with all of our Defence personnel and their families. We will never forget their sacrifices in serving Australia. Four Australian personnel who served in Afghanistan received the Victoria Cross, and many more Australians have been recognised for their service in other ways. Australia continues to have some 400 ADF personnel deployed in Afghanistan as part of Operation Highroad. Taking training and mentoring roles, they continue to make a vital contribution to building Afghanistan's future capability.
We should also not forget the ongoing efforts being made by our service men and women in peacekeeping and maritime security roles in the Middle East. They continue to have success, particularly in disrupting drug-smuggling off the Horn of Africa. This not only impacts on the drug trade; it also stops money flowing into the hands of criminals and terrorists.

Labor, like all Australians, are proud of the Australian Defence Force and the work it is doing in these dangerous and difficult theatres of operation. We acknowledge their sacrifice and their vital contribution to our national security. I thank the House.

**BILLS**

**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Recognition (Sunset Extension) Bill 2015**

Report from Federation Chamber

Bill returned from Federation Chamber without amendment; certified copy of bill presented.

Ordered that this bill be considered immediately.

Bill agreed to.

**Third Reading**

Mr McCormack (Riverina—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance) (12:57): by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

**Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2014-2015**

Second Reading

Debate resumed on the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

to which the following amendment was moved:

That all the words after "That" be omitted with a view to substituting the following words:

"whilst not declining to give the bill a second reading the House notes that:

(1) the 2014-15 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook showed a $44 billion blow-out in the budget deficit over the forward estimates from the 2014-15 Budget, which represents a $202 million blow-out in the Budget deficit by the Government each and every day;

(2) Government debt is higher now than it was when the Government took office;

(3) the Budget bottom line in the Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook incorporates a series of broken promises, including: the introduction of the GP tax, increasing the petrol tax, cuts to pension indexation, $6,000 cuts to a typical Australian family, plans for $100,000 university degrees, cuts to the ABC and SBS, and a $11.3 billion cut from foreign aid;

(4) the Government continues to undermine business and consumer confidence with its unfair Budget, which are now below the levels at the 2013 Federal Election; and
(5) the Government's failure to have a clear plan for economic and jobs growth has led to the unemployment rate increasing to its highest level since August 2002, when the current Prime Minister was the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations."

Ms MARINO (Forrest—Government Whip) (12:58): In my contribution to this debate on Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2014-2015 and related bills I wish to talk about the coalition government's support for the Rural Financial Counselling Service announced by Minister Joyce only yesterday. The Rural Financial Counselling Service program provides grants to state and regional organisations to provide rural financial counselling to primary producers, fishers and small rural businesses suffering financial hardship and who have no alternative sources of impartial support. The critical part of that is the impartial support. That is exactly what those in extreme circumstances need. What they need is sound, realistic support from someone who has no vested interest in the outcome of the decisions needing to be made, no matter what those decisions are—the decision to stay in that business or not.

Having been through this with fellow farmers I know that there are times when you need these services. The time you need them most is when you are at your most vulnerable, when no matter what you do you cannot control what is actually happening to you. It may be because of a series of droughts or extreme weather events or it may be because of continuous years of low prices for your product, and you may be at the end of your tether after literally worked your guts out for years. You have tried everything within your power to stay in business, but there is no light at the end of the tunnel and your whole situation appears to be hopeless. It is when you are at your most distressed and your most stressed, often struggling to work your way through the business and family issues, that your personal family relationships are also under the most pressure. The whole community suffers as well. With so many small rural communities relying on the profitability of the agricultural and farming sector, when the farmers are struggling, the local small businesses, the local community service and sporting and emergency service organisations all suffer as well. Farmers and their families directly contribute to all of these. This is how our communities actually function in regional Australia.

When you have had to watch your partner and your family suffer immeasurably—those people you love most who have stood by you and worked by your side year after year on the land you love, the property you have worked on perhaps all your life, which could be the farm that you brought as that young couple seeking an opportunity on the land—these support services can be crucial. For some businesses in that situation, impartial, reliable advice will help them work their way through their financial issues—some however will not be able to. It is inevitable that some primary producers and businesses will have no choice but to make the toughest decision of all—to sell, if they can, and leave their rural area. It is how this process is managed that matters most.

The Rural Financial Counselling Service in WA has been operating with its current board and structure since 2008. The core business of this service is to help farming businesses, the individuals, to come to terms with their circumstances of declining profits, increased costs and more complex marketing systems in a rapidly changing environment. The service adopted a strategy to make sure that farmers who engage with the service are taken through a legitimate counselling and business evaluation and management process—that all-important impartial, reliable advice. It allows people to deal with their personal emotional issues as well as their business issues; to work through the grief, the sense of loss, the enormous frustration
about their change in fortunes and the absolutely debilitating sense of failure often brought about by changes that often totally out of their control—this is the family and business is crisis; and ultimately come to terms with the reality of their situation, which can mean either structural change back to perhaps being a profitable business or a more managed, dignified exit from their industry.

To me, the key principles of the WA service are critical in these situations—the principles of not building dependency in the people they work with and to work in a way that increases people's ability to make informed decisions for their business and family and, really importantly, to make these decisions from a calm, focused and informed position. An equally important principle is to have a clear focus on the family's opportunities. That critical 'light at the end of the tunnel'—the hope, the way out, the way forward—is important to all of us. We all cope so much better when we have a plan and know what the first step is that we need to take. That is what the service provides. For those who need the help of these services, it is most important to seek them before they are left without choices—before having to walk away from their property, their business and their life with nothing left.

I know the WA Rural Financial Counselling Service takes take their role very seriously. They know they need to bring lifelong benefits to the people who need their services—the farming families and their communities. I really wish they had been around during the deregulation of the Western Australian dairy industry experience for my friends and colleagues and those who did not have access to a service like this. There are those who, to this day, are still overcome with grief and find it very difficult to come to terms with the decisions that they were forced to make at that time, and to deal with their pain, their sense of failure and the sense of not being in control. Some of these people that I see still cry over what they have been through. The difference between a farming business family that can come to terms with their situation, including the loss, and the ones that do not is massive. It can have lifelong effects—as I know only too well. One feeds into depression, suicide, the failure and the no future and the other takes what they have with energy into a different future—that of contributing, building and learning from the difficulties they have experienced.

So, from my experience in dairy and rural communities, I see that the real job of services like RFCSWA is to help people manage their individual circumstances and the process they need to go through, and to help the family understand and work through the grieving for their losses—the loss of their property, the loss of their dreams, the loss of the hopes of the young couple or individual who started out so many years ago and worked themselves to the bone. There is also perhaps that dreadful thought that, throughout this process, they may have robbed their sons and daughters of a future—the future sometimes being an opportunity of an education or an opportunity in the business—and the thought that they have to leave their community, their lifelong friends. This is part of what they have to go through, but it is a process the WA RFCS uses that returns the all-important sense of control and urgency to the person, the individual. Once a farming family regains focus on the decisions that have to be made, they will create their own solutions. This type of government program should never be a part of delaying the process of people coming to terms with the absolute reality of their position. That is why this service is so valuable in Western Australia. I am so pleased that we
are supporting this service and the continuation of it—of assisting rural businesses and all the people involved to regain focus and find solutions.

RFCS WA's success is built around the fact that it takes the farming family on a journey either assisting to restore profitability in that business or leaving the business and industry with dignity. The farmer gains and takes ownership of the reality of the situation. The person who does not go through an ownership process but is made to fit a simplistic predetermined proposal is likely to be distracted by useless goals and delays their necessary adjustment by years—again, a damaging process to the individual and the business—with an ongoing loss of equity, opportunity and sometimes life itself.

One very important statistic from the RFCS program in WA relates to suicide. This is a very real risk in the challenges facing farming families. With the current approach to rural readjustment, the WA service has dealt with over 1,000 farming businesses across most agricultural sectors. This is the best indication of the effectiveness of the service: there has not been one suicide by either a farmer or a related family member.

The business planning process, while it is not perfect, combines appropriate tailored counselling skills and takes people on an appropriate journey to understand their position. It allows either restructure of the business or exit, but it maintains people's dignity, because they own the process. They are part of the decision-making process.

The way forward for farming families in financial difficulty needs to include the integration of economic, social and environmental factors. Adaptation is a process requiring recognition and management of loss and change—change can be very hard for people to deal with. Extreme care is needed, because each person has their own individual issues and a simple, one-dimensional analysis can be harmful. A sound business planning framework is the vehicle to help people understand their current situation and future possibilities. But, most of all, I know that for the WA RFCS, each person is valued and respected—something that we all want and need. The person matters. Their family matters. Their future matters.

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry in 2012 contracted PricewaterhouseCoopers to conduct a national performance audit of the fourteen Rural Financial Counselling Services in Australia. PWC said of the WA client engagement that it was 'better practice and/or innovation—delivering a higher level of service' when compared to other services across Australia. The report said:

Client services are well managed through the Organisation's Client Management Framework. This framework provides a one-page overview of the client management process and is an effective tool for ensuring that all key steps and decisions are made by the rural financial counsellors and for recording client decisions and outcomes.

It can be incorporated into client management files and used as a tool to review the performance of individual rural financial counsellors.

I have several reasons for having confidence in the WA service. Most importantly, I know that each person is valued and respected. The person matters, their family matters and their future matters.

Counsellors are meeting people often at the worst time in their lives. People like the chairman of the WA Rural Financial Counselling Service, Julian Krieg, take this particular personally. When we see families and businesses in such crisis, it is like dropping a stone in a
bucket of water because of the ripple effect. It affects a whole lot of other businesses in that community. It affects a range of other families besides the individual family directly.

As I said earlier, during the time of such significant change in the dairy industry, there were many families who went through some very tough times. Many of them are no longer in the industry or in rural communities. I saw some small towns like Brunswick Junction lose some wonderful families who had contributed so much to that small community. We saw shops close. The ripple effect has a huge impact in our small regional communities.

I am very pleased that the coalition government is so committed to these types of services in rural and regional communities throughout Australia.

**Ms BRODTMANN** (Canberra) (13:13): The appropriations in these bills reflect changes made in last year's MYEFO update as well as several machinery-of-government changes. In the 2014-15 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook, we saw more broken promises—endless broken promises and more of them last year. The government unveiled another write-down for revenue this year and in following years, and that is on top of the write-down back in May.

The federal Treasurer accused Labor of having a spending problem, not a revenue problem, when we were in government. Yet on the day of the mini budget he came out and told Australians that the government had a revenue problem.

This government promised to get the budget back under control—yet what the 2014-15 MYEFO showed was a $44 billion blowout in the budget deficit over the forward estimates compared to the 2014-15 budget. Let's really put this in perspective. Since the Abbott government was elected, the deficit in the 2014-15 financial year has blown out by $16.4 billion. Debt is higher in the 2014-15 MYEFO than it was in the 2014-15 budget, with gross debt over the forward estimates increasing by $100 billion and net debt increasing by $146.3 billion over the same period.

The news is grim across every other aspect of the economy too. Unemployment has jumped to 6.4 per cent in January, the highest it has been since 2002, when the Prime Minister was the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations. Consumer confidence is still low—nine per cent lower now than it was at the time of the 2013 federal election. And business confidence is still below long-run averages.

These are national statistics, and Canberra is not exempt. In fact, Canberra, as usual under coalition governments, has borne the full brunt of this government's decisions. According to CommSec's most recent *State of the states* report, the ACT has the third weakest economy in the country. Our retail sector was the worst in the country last year, a report by Deloitte Access Economics has found. Our housing market is also suffering, with Canberra posting a price decline over the past quarter and year.

As I said, coalition governments have form when it comes to Canberra. They have form when it comes to their complete disdain—their complete lack of respect—for Canberra and the public servants who serve our nation and our democracy. We have just seen the complete lack of respect for those servants of democracy in recent months, with the offers of below-inflation pay rises to our public servants—and not just the below-inflation pay rises but also the fact that many of the conditions that have been hard fought for over many years are facing possible erosion.
I have spoken in this House many, many, many times about what this coalition government is currently doing to Canberra but also the coalition's form. Its form was brought into stark reality in 1996, when a coalition government was elected on the promise that 2,500 public servants were going to lose their jobs through natural attrition. That ended up being 15,000 public servants here in Canberra—that is one five thousand public servants here in Canberra—and 30,000 public servants across the nation—that is three zero thousand.

What did losing 15,000 jobs mean for Canberra? It meant that business bankruptcies went up. It meant that non-business bankruptcies went up. It meant that house prices fell. It meant that local shops closed down; many of them have not reopened. It meant that our economy went into a slump for about five years. We did not see a crane on the horizon in this town for a very, very long time, because it had basically shut down. We also saw people leave town: our population fell. And we saw many, many people looking for work and only being able to find part-time work because of the loss of 15,000 jobs in this town. It took us a long time to get back up after that economic slump that the coalition government of 1996 foisted on Canberra as a result of its complete disregard for Canberra and its complete disregard and disrespect for the Public Service.

I have said it many, many times: Sir Robert Menzies would be turning in his grave if he saw what this coalition government was doing to his Canberra, his nation's capital, today and if he had seen what was happening in 1996—the denigration of this town. As I said, it took us years to get back up on our feet, and we are just going back to the future again with this government. It is absolutely outrageous. It just shows a complete disregard for the Public Service, servants of democracy. We have also seen the disregard and disrespect for the ADF, with the below-inflation pay offer for the ADF personnel. The coalition, as I said, has form in its contempt and disdain for the Public Service. We saw it nearly 20 years ago and we are seeing it again.

It is because the government just does not understand the impact its disastrous budget has had on my electorate—or it just chooses to ignore it, really. It just chooses to ignore the effect of taking out thousands and thousands of jobs. Already 8,000 jobs have gone, and we are looking at 16,500 across the Public Service. It is almost as if people on the other side of the chamber wear it as a badge of honour—the contempt and disdain for my electorate.

It is rather ironic that, 10 months after the fundamentally flawed budget was handed down, we are still talking about it. Everywhere I go in my mobile offices and my doorknocking, Canberrans are still talking about it, and I know Australians are too. The reason that they are still talking about it is that the budget cuts into our social fabric. The proposals in the budget cut into our social fabric. They cut against the grain of what we are as Australians and what we hold as dear, precious and fundamental to being an Australian. People across the nation and here in Canberra are rightly furious. They are furious because they realise that this budget is bad in so many ways, and it is especially bad for those who can least afford it: low- and middle-income families, single-income families and single parents.

I could really go on talking about the Abbott government's unfair budget for days, because I know that my electorate does, but I am going to focus on a few specific areas that I am very concerned about: the potential privatisation of Defence Housing Australia and the potential privatisation of the Royal Australian Mint. I would also like to talk about two front-line services in my electorate that have had their funding cut.
Both Defence Housing Australia and the Mint were earmarked for possible privatisation in last year's federal budget. The government announced a scoping study on the privatisation of DHA and, according to the Defence Force Welfare Association, the study is going to recommend its sale. We are still waiting to hear what the government has to say on that. In the words of the DFWA:

We fear that the so called independent report will, with the backing of blinkered civilian bureaucrats in the Department of Finance, recommend the selling of DHA for a one off financial windfall to the Government. This would effectively result with ADF families being thrown onto the private rental market and destroy the good work that DHA has done in providing ADF families with quality housing, in the areas where they are needed.

The Abbott government must explain how the privatisation of DHA will improve the effectiveness of the provision of housing to thousands of ADF personnel and their families. DHA has been an extremely successful part of defence support arrangements over many years, vastly improving the housing circumstances of Defence personnel and their families. Surveys show DHA has a customer satisfaction rating of 92 per cent, proving this is the sort of support the ADF wants. DHA is also continuing to achieve above 90 per cent for most of its key performance indicators.

During Senate estimates in October last year, DHA's managing director, Peter Howman, said:

We are achieving all of those KPIs, so we are providing an absolutely good product that helps with the retention and employment of Defence personnel.

I want to underscore that. According to DHA, it helps with the retention and employment of Defence personnel. So not only does DHA provide a key service to Defence personnel and their families; it has continued to be a reliable and increasing source of revenue for the government. Towards the end of last year the organisation posted a $90.1 million net profit, $5.8 million above the budget estimate. So, like many of its thought-bubble policies, the Abbott government has failed to justify its plan to sell DHA. Since the Abbott government outlined its intention to sell DHA, Defence personnel and their families have been left in a state of uncertainty. As long as the Abbott government refuses to make a case for the sale, we must assume this decision is purely ideological.

Just recently I was at a Hearts of Valour event that a dear friend of mine, Richard Rolfe, organised. There were multiple VCs and Cross of Valour recipients, and it was quite an extraordinary achievement to get all these awarded and honoured individuals in one room. I had a number of people coming up to me and saying, 'Please, Gai, keep fighting the good fight to ensure that DHA is not privatised.'

We are also seeing a similar situation play out with the Royal Australian Mint. The Mint was also earmarked for privatisation in last year's budget. The uncertainty of the Mint's future has placed the 200 employees who work there under stress as they are constantly living in a state of limbo. They have been living in a state of limbo since the Mint was earmarked as a potential privatisation in the budget last year—the last 10 months. So again I call on the government to explain what impact selling the Mint will have on the budget bottom line. I also call on the government to answer questions like: how will it ensure the integrity and security of the Mint if a private company takes over? What kind of regulations will accompany the sale if it goes ahead?
Due to time, I now turn very briefly to look at some decisions that were made in last year's Mid-year Economic and Fiscal Outlook update that have caused some concern in my community. I have been very vocal about my outrage and disappointment over the cuts made in the latest funding round of the Department of Social Services, and two organisations in my electorate have been adversely affected by these funding cuts. The first is Karralika.

The government announced an end to its funding of the centre's family program just two days before Christmas, when everyone is heading off for their holidays and gearing up for spending time with their family and friends. This incredible organisation that provides an extraordinary community service not just to Canberra but also to the capital region was told two days beforehand that they were facing funding cuts. On 23 December Karralika received a letter from the Department of Social Services informing the centre that funding for its child and family program will cease as at 28 February 2015. That is this week. The funding cut means the region's only residential drug and alcohol rehabilitation service for families affected by addiction will be forced to close. Eight families, including nine adults, 14 children and one pregnant mother are currently in the program, and there are seven families on the waiting list. In the words of the centre's CEO, Camilla Rowland:

Some of our families will be homeless because they don't have accommodation to go to … of course there's been cuts to housing funding as well.

After huge outcry across the country as thousands of front-line services received funding cuts, the government announced bridging funding to a number—just a number of them. Fortunately, Karralika was included in this bridging funding, which will assist with client transition plans until the end of June this year. But there is no commitment past June this year, and I know staff and clients at the centre are very concerned about the program's future. I have written to the Minister for Social Services, urging him not to carry out these cuts, and I will continue to campaign against this short-sighted and unfair decision.

I cannot talk about the other service, because I have run out of time; but, in concluding, these are just some of the measures outlined in last year's budget or minibudget that have or could have a devastating impact on my electorate. This is still a budget that has the biggest impact on those who can afford it least: low- and middle-income earners, the sick and their carers, pensioners, the unemployed, the young, the people who are battling with addiction, parents who are battling with addiction and trying to improve their lot in life. It is a budget that will both entrench and widen the gap between rich and poor in this country. It is a budget Australians will not stand for and it is a budget that Labor will not stand for.

Mr CHESTER (Gippsland—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Defence) (13:28): In the brief time I have available this afternoon I want to put on record my complete support and confidence in the future of an iconic Gippsland company called Patties Foods. Patties was started by the Rijs family about 50 years ago. It started as a small cake shop in my home town of Lakes Entrance, but now it has grown enormously to employ up to 500 staff at its Bairnsdale factory. It is a world-class food production business. I have visited the production facility in Bairnsdale on many occasions; in fact, it is probably the first place I take visiting ministers and other members. I have had the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister for Agriculture all visit the plant, and they have been impressed by the facilities on offer.
As most people would know, Patties has been caught up in a product recall associated with an outbreak of hepatitis A and an alleged link to frozen imported berries. It is important to say that that link is yet to be scientifically established, as the testing does continue. This has been a very tough week for Patties management and for Patties staff. Of course there are concerns about people whose health has been impacted, and the possibility of a link to the berry products is something that should be taken seriously and is the No. 1 priority for the company. But I do urge consumers to continue to support this great Australian company.

I enjoyed a Four'n Twenty pie for breakfast today, as members can tell from the pie missing from this pack! I join my state colleague Tim Bull and the member for Riverina and the member for Rankin, who are also very keen to support the pastry products that are made in Bairnsdale. I urge the Australian community to host their own family pie night and support Australian jobs. We do not want to make a bad situation any worse.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott): Thank you. I remember—what was it:

Four and twenty blackbirds baked in a pie …

Were they meat pies or blackbirds? That is a little fairytale I had as a child.

The debate is interrupted in accordance with standing order 43. The debate may be resumed at a later hour. The Parliamentary Secretary may have leave to continue his remarks.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Budget

Ms MACKLIN (Jagajaga) (13:30): Today we condemn the Abbott government's heartless cuts to vital community organisations. The ones that I want to highlight are in my electorate: Diamond Valley Community Support, Banyule Housing, Banyule Support and Information Centre and Volunteers of Banyule, all of whom provide critical support to vulnerable members in my community.

These organisations are at the very front line of community support. They provide services to those who often have nowhere else to go through emergency relief to those under extreme financial stress and by helping those battling homelessness and mental illness—even those recovering from the devastation of bushfires.

These organisations were all informed via email on the eve of Christmas that they will be losing funding to continue their good work. They were shocked to find the cut was effective from January, plunging them into turmoil. In an act of recognition of the chaos they created, the government then delayed the start of these cuts to March.

Most of my organisations still are not sure what the true extent of the damage will be, but they all know this: it will hurt their clients, services and volunteers. And it will hurt my community in Jagajaga. I call on the government to reverse these heartless cuts to community organisations immediately.

Green Army Program

Mr HOGAN (Page) (13:32): Today I would like to announce that there are 13 new Green Army projects that are going to be rolled out across the Northern Rivers and the Clarence Valley. This is in line the four that we already have running from the first round, so there is going to be a total of 17 projects rolling out across the community. This means that Page has
one of the highest number of Green Army projects in Australia, and I congratulate all the people that have tendered for those and got those projects up and running.

As we know, the Green Army projects provide opportunities for young Australians between the ages of 17 and 24 years to gain training and experience in environmental projects, in the conservation and environmental fields and in conservation management, whilst participating in projects that generate a real change in our environment.

I would just like to touch on where a few of these projects are. We have two biodiversity projects in the Big Scrub—stages 3 and 4; there are two running for koala habitat restoration within the Lismore LGA; there is the Richmond River riparian restoration project; there are two conservation and vegetation restorations in the Clarence Valley; there is coastal corridor enhancement going on; there is rainforest and river restorations—three stages of those that are going to happen; and other coastal corridor enhancements.

I commend the people involved in this project, the skills they are learning and the minister involved.

Budget

Dr CHALMERS (Rankin) (13:33): It is my honour to follow the member for Jagajaga, who is an absolute champion for community groups right around the country.

The $270 million in cuts to the DSS discretionary grants program will spell disaster for hard-working local organisations and for the most vulnerable people who depend on them so much. On Monday, 20 community groups from my area held a crisis meeting to discuss the government's massive cuts to emergency relief and homelessness program funding. The groups received letters—on Christmas Eve, of all days—telling them that their funding would be cut, meaning programs would be shut down and jobs cut as well.

An email I received from a constituent sums up the situation at Logan East Community Neighbourhood Association in my electorate very well: 'At this centre we have met many local people of various backgrounds, ages and nationalities experiencing different crisis situations. They would come into the centre being broken and in despair and then would find hope and help.' LECNA is one of many groups who will be forced to cancel their emergency relief programs as well as their KNIT training program because of these cuts.

Families at the point of despair will miss out on emergency relief because of this government, young people with nowhere to sleep at night will miss out because of this government and devoted professionals who work hours of overtime for vital groups will lose their jobs because of this government.

I join with the member for Jagajaga and everyone on this side to call on the minister to restore funding to LECNA and to the other vital services being hit in my community.

Green Army Program

Mr PASIN (Barker) (13:35): I was delighted to host the graduation for the first round participants in the coalition's Green Army Program for the Murraylands Green Army projects by hosting an afternoon tea for the participants in my electorate office last Thursday in Murray Bridge.

These projects improved the condition and connectivity of habitat remaining in the Murraylands. Participants were involved in reserve management, including the proclamation
of two new conservation parks at Monarto and Lauwari and preparing these areas for increased visitor usage. Activities included weed and pest animal surveys, planning and control, visitor needs assessments, visitor surveys, fire management, constructing trails, pamphlet development, seed collection, revegetation and promotional events. Participants worked closely with Aboriginal traditional owners, agency staff and community groups such as Birds SA and Friends of Parks Inc.

I congratulate Alisha Chaplin, Chelsea Butler, Dillon Milloy, Joel Schubert, Doug Wuttke, Ryan Duke, Tim Armstrong and Mark Doosjen-Stirling on their graduation and on their excellent contribution to our community and to our local environment. I also pay tribute to Green Army supervisor, Adrian Williams, and to project sponsors, Conservation Volunteers Australia and the SA Murray Darling Basin Natural Resources Management Board.

The Green Army is a hands-on, practical, grassroots environmental action program that supports local environment and heritage conservation projects across Australia. The Green Army delivers tangible benefits for the environment and Australia's heritage, and provides young people with skills, training and experience to help them enter the workforce, improve their career opportunities and further their education and training. (Time expired)

Budget

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (13:36): On Christmas Eve last year, an organisation in my electorate of Canberra was informed that it would have its funding cut. What a cruel Christmas present for my local community from this heartless government. But my community was not alone. Around Australia, community organisations are reeling from this government's dramatic cuts to community grants. Some $270 million has been slashed from some of our most important frontline services. Right around the country, the community sector is being ravaged by these cruel cuts. And vulnerable Australians will bear the brunt. These organisations are the backbone of communities. They provide services to our most vulnerable people. Emergency relief, financial counselling, parenting programs, support for bushfire victims, housing and homelessness organisations and organisations for people with disability have all been affected.

In Canberra, the ACT Chinese aged care service, which provides a range of key services to elderly members of the Chinese community across all of the ACT has had its funding cut. The ACT Chinese Australian Association had been receiving funding from the government to conduct the ACT Chinese aged care information and referral services to help elderly Chinese to communicate and remain in place. Those services have been cut too.

I call on the government to reverse these heartless cuts.

Chinese New Year

Mr COLEMAN (Banks) (13:38): Last weekend I was fortunate to attend the inaugural Sydney Chinese Lantern Carnival on the foreshore at Darling Harbour. The event was a huge success. Sydneysiders were given a spectacular Chinese New Year experience as dazzling lanterns lit up the area. I was fortunate to attend the carnival on both Friday and Saturday night. On Saturday night it was great to have the Prime Minister attend the event. We had the opportunity to walk around the lantern displays and see the impressive lanterns including fish, floating lotus flowers and flying dragons. There were thousands of people there on both nights.
The lanterns were all made in Zigong, the lantern capital of China, and brought to Sydney especially for the event. There were also live performances, music and fireworks to add to the carnival atmosphere. The lanterns are not only beautiful and decorative but they also symbolise Chinese history and culture. Originating in the Han Dynasty, the lanterns represent the light of hope at every Chinese New Year celebration and have come to symbolise family reunion, luck and good fortune in the New Year.

I would like to thank the Australia China Economic, Trade and Cultural Association, ACETCA, for organising this great event. In particular, I would like to thank ACETCA's Executive Chairman, Amen Lee, and Founding Chairman Lam. Thank you also to Robert Kok, Councillor for the City of Sydney, who directs Sydney's Chinese New Year events, which go from strength to strength every year.

Budget

Ms RYAN (Lalor—Opposition Whip) (13:40): Lalor has wonderful community agencies delivering smart, efficient, strategic programs that support the most vulnerable in my community. They work together creatively to ensure maximum bang for the federal grant buck. They all rely on a paid and unpaid workforce to support individuals and families on their worst day, and beyond that worst day until they are back on their feet. These organisations have been operating with an austerity axe posed above their heads since this government took office.

In that time, we have: had a PC report outlining positive outcomes this sector gets; had a Senate inquiry to which my community groups made individual and collective submissions demonstrating their commitment; had $270 million cut as announced in the budget; seen the dismantling of the COAG; seen worsening unemployment and dramatic increases in evictions—a real problem in my electorate and the queues are getting longer by the day.

And, finally, on the eve of the long awaited grant announcement we have a sector in confusion. Services who have worked in my electorate for decades are still unsure what their responsibilities will be, how far their grant will need to stretch and who they will be working alongside and with.

My community deserves better. These agencies deserve better. Our most vulnerable deserve better. These grants support people through their worst days. These grants create positive outcomes in the worst circumstances.

Anzac Centenary

Mrs McNAMARA (Dobell) (13:41): Last week, I was privileged to attend the official opening of the Anzac Centenary display at the Entrance Long Jetty RSL Sub Branch Military Museum, where I met descendants of locals who served during the First World War. I congratulate the museum volunteers for their commitment and dedication in keeping the Anzac spirit alive and well throughout Dobell.

The military museum was established in 1990 and is visited by bus tours, schools, community groups and the general public. The museum has an extensive display of military artefacts and memorabilia dating from the Boer War. Most items in the museum have been donated over the years by members of the RSL, returned service personnel, their next of kin and the public.
The Anzac Centenary display displays a German machine gun from the Western front, a photo album from Lance Corporal George Lionel Williamson, who survived the Gallipoli landing and an original leather Pickelhaube helmet from the World War I German forces.

In the lead-up to Anzac Day, the museum will welcome thousands of locals and school children to view the exhibits. Entry is free. Through this museum, Central Coast locals and visitors alike will have the opportunity to commemorate the centenary of Anzac and discover personal connections to the brave men and women who served our nation.

I would like to congratulate everyone who has been involved with this museum and also the Entrance Long Jetty Sub-Branch, which definitely has a commitment to our local community in keeping alive the Anzac spirit and also to returned servicemen who go into local schools and provide an excellent education.

Budget

Ms COLLINS (Franklin) (13:43): I too want to talk about cuts to community organisations. It is good to see the member for Lyons in the chamber because one of the community organisations that is very concerned about the cuts that they have had from the Department of Social Security's community grants program. Some $270 million was slashed. One of those community organisations that is concerned is the Dunalley Tasman Neighbourhood House.

Mr Hutchinson: They have got an extension.

Ms COLLINS: They have got an extension, yes, but they have been cut. They have been told $140,000 a year. They have had an extension to 30 June but they have been cut. This area was ravaged by bushfire's just two years ago. They are delivering services like post-fire trauma courses at this neighbourhood house. They do great work and they should not have been cut from the funding. And they should not have been told, with hardly any notice, that they were getting this cut because of the great work that they do. All of the staff, the volunteers and all of the community members rely on these services at this Neighbourhood House. The great services that they provide include: post-fire trauma courses; facilitated playgroups; family support programs including healthy relationships, parenting and domestic violence services; boat building at the primary school; and autism and special needs courses. A whole range of courses at that Neighbourhood House will be under threat.

Mr Hutchinson: You should be standing up for your constituents, Julie; let me worry about mine. I am doing a good job.

The SPEAKER: The member for Lyons, you do not have the call.

Findlay, Ms Leah

Mrs WICKS (Robertson) (13:44): I rise to recognise Leah Findlay, a local resident in my electorate of Robertson, whose inspiring commitment and community service has led to her being nominated as a finalist in the 2015 National Youth Awards, in the category of Youth Courage. Leah is legally blind. She is an outstanding role model on the Central Coast and right across Australia, and she is a fantastic tutor and peer mentor for Indigenous students.

She has completed an arts-law degree at the University of New South Wales and just last week started undertaking a PhD with a focus on the role of the media in criminal trials. Over the last four years at the university, Leah has volunteered in and assisted with a number of
programs that lend a hand to other students, all while maintaining an excellent academic record. Her journey from Blackwall, on the peninsula, to university is a four-hour round trip every day, as she joins the tens of thousands of other commuters from my electorate who travel regularly to Sydney.

At age 24, it is clear that Leah is a young woman with passion, commitment and dedication who is determined to help others. She is also very modest. She admitted to me that she is amazed by how far she has come and that she is very, very humbled by the nomination for youth courage. The awards will be presented on 16 April, during National Youth Week, so good luck to Leah and to all of the finalists, and thank you for your inspiring example to all of us.

**East West Link**

**Mr BANDT** (Melbourne) (13:46): I call on the Prime Minister to wean himself off his unhealthy addiction to toll roads. On 6 February, the Prime Minister appeared in Melbourne, saying that he and his government would do ‘whatever they humanly can’ to get the East West toll road built. What an astounding thing to say. How ludicrous that the Prime Minister would return this year to Melbourne and declare that he and his government would try to continue to push the East West tollway. He himself declared that the Victorian election, an election that saw a first-term Liberal government turfed out and a record number of Greens MPs elected into parliament, a ‘referendum on the East West Link’. Victorians knew then and they know now that the East West toll road is a dumb idea that will drain the public purse.

The afternoon after the Prime Minister appeared in Melbourne, I launched a petition calling on him to ditch the East West toll road. Within hours, hundreds of people had signed the petition and shared it with their family and friends. And now 6,251 people have added their names.

I call on the Prime Minister: listen to the 6,251 people who have signed this petition and to the millions of Victorians who turfed out the state Liberal government and rejected your dud plan for an East West toll road. Prime Minister, ditch the East West tollway once and for all and divert the $3 billion in federal money into projects that will really clear congestion, improve productivity and lower pollution. Invest that money into clean, fast and affordable public transport for Melbourne.

**Lyons Electorate: Woodsdale Memorial Wall and Garden**

**Mr HUTCHINSON** (Lyons) (13:47): Recently I attended the official opening of the memorial wall and garden at Woodsdale, in Tasmania’s southern Midlands, in my electorate of Lyons. The Levendale and Woodsdale History Rooms received a $1,280 Centenary of Anzac grant to construct a memorial garden and a wall to honour the memory of young men from the district who fought with the Australian defence forces in World War I.

It was Elaine Midson’s inspiration that saw the project become a reality. Her father, Ernie Dare, was a POW on the Thai-Burma railway during World War II and her mother, Doreen, a keen historian, identified the 35 young men from Levendale and Woodsdale who served in World War I. Lieutenant George Eppingstall, Sapper Patrick Kelly, Private Norman Roberts and Private Victor Wiggins made the ultimate sacrifice, along with Private Herbert Kingston, who was killed at the landing at Gallipoli on 25 April 1915.
Elaine's brothers, Greg and Adrian Dare, did the heavy lifting for the memorial wall, which now formally recognises these men, by collecting the local stone used in its construction and setting it in place. It is a wonderful community project, and Elaine was supported by locals Pam Montgomery, Fenton Scott, Alec Dean, Julie Belette, Keith Mann and Ray Cooke. I thank them all.

**Budget**

**Mrs ELLIOT** (Richmond) (13:49): On Christmas Eve last year, many community organisations in my electorate of Richmond were told that they would have their funding cut. This was a bad decision from a bad government. In regions like mine, they blame the National Party for these cruel and heartless cuts. Two hundred and seventy million dollars was slashed from some of the most important front-line services right across the country. These organisations are the backbone of our communities. They provide services to our most vulnerable people, services like emergency relief, financial counselling, parenting programs, housing and homelessness organisations, and youth support.

I recently joined with the Family Centre in Tweed Heads to launch a petition to save the REALskills program. The government axed this early intervention and prevention program, which helps young people gain important life skills and knowledge. REALskills has a proven track record of making a difference to the lives of so many people.

I turn to Byron Bay. The General Manager of Byron Community Centre, Paul Spooner, says its long-running emergency relief operation will cease at the end of March due to these cruel cuts. He said the loss will be a blow to society's most vulnerable, like 'people who need things like food vouchers just to provide food on the table for their children'. We are talking about people who are going to have their electricity cut off.

The North Coast branch of St Vincent de Paul says the federal government has cut its emergency relief budget by 70 per cent. The manager, Brian Goodall, said:

> There are a lot of people in New South Wales especially the Northern Rivers who depend on us to survive, especially mothers with kids, people are going to go hungry …
>
> … We've had an unfair budget and now this …

Locals blame the National Party for these cruel cuts. It shows that, when it comes to regional Australia, you cannot trust the National Party.

**Bennelong Electorate: Ermington Scout Hall**

**Mr ALEXANDER** (Bennelong) (13:50): I rise to speak about a Bennelong institution that finds itself under threat. The 1st Ermington Scout Group hall has been located on Kissing Point Road for over 50 years. Thousands of sausage sizzles and even more scouts have made this hall an important part of the community. We all know the excellent work that the scouting movement does in helping our young people stay fit, learn life skills and connect with their local community. Their home is an integral part of this and has been sustained by community grants and donations from local groups, organisations and individuals. People have always dug deep for their local scout hall.

However, the leaseholder of the property, Sydney Water, has recently informed the Ermington scouts that their lease will not be renewed. There is a genuine fear in the community that the land will be instead sold to a developer. Development and urban renewal are of benefit to the community but only when done appropriately. Clearly, the destruction of
a community asset like the Ermington Scout Hall does not qualify as appropriate development.

I stand here in parliament and call on Sydney Water to maintain this important scout hall and community facility. I stand side by side with the people of Ermington and will be joining them on Sunday for a community meeting to try to save the 1st Ermington Scout Group hall.

**Fowler Electorate: Community Services**

Mr Hayes (Fowler—Chief Opposition Whip) (13:52): Community organisations in my electorate are being treated woefully by this government, which has slashed $270 million from the community grants program. Organisations that provide emergency relief, financial counselling, parenthood programs and housing for homeless people, as well as support for people with disabilities, have all been affected.

In my electorate the New South Wales Spanish and Latin American Association for Social Assistance runs their program that caters for aged care improvement and healthy ageing; their funding has been cut. The Fairfield and Liverpool Migrant Resource Centres have had their funding cut; this impacts grossly on their emergency relief programs, which have assisted hundreds of disadvantaged local people with food supplies and paying essential bills. The Vietnamese Community in Australia—New South Wales Chapter have advised me their funds are being targeted; this will impact on their money management program which has operated for the last two years, providing invaluable help to people with a gambling problem.

These organisations have operated for many years, providing essential services for the wellbeing of people in my community. However, they are now facing the decision as to which services they can provide. It will certainly impact on the quality and sustainability of their services. These cuts will hurt the homeless, impact on people with disability, hurt victims of abuse and result in job losses, particularly among those dedicated people who volunteer their time to community— (Time expired)

**Capricornia Electorate: Tropical Cyclone Marcia**

Ms Landry (Capricornia) (13:53): Work continues on the recovery phase of ex-Tropical Cyclone Marcia in my electorate of Capricornia. This was the biggest storm in a generation to strike the Capricorn Coast. Rockhampton, Yeppoon and Marlborough districts have been declared state disaster areas. I want to stress that I have not been idle while here in Canberra. In the past 72 hours, I have been pounding the corridors of Parliament House, meeting with senior ministers and lobbying for help for residents, small businesses and industries in our region. There are many issues to face.

Capricornia’s primary producers have been dealt an overwhelming blow. Our pineapple industry and horticulture and tropical fruit sectors have sustained terrible losses. It is not only fruit crops that have been destroyed; established fruit tree stock has been wiped out. One farm alone is expecting losses of between $600,000 and $1 million. These are family farms that employ local people and are an important part of our economy. I am anticipating an announcement outlining an assistance package for primary producers in the near future. I have also been lobbying for workers who cannot earn their normal income because their place of employment is shut down. Finally, I want to thank and acknowledge all the people, both professional services and volunteers, who were working tirelessly to help those affected.
Mr CLARE  (Blaxland) (13:55): We already know how unfair and out of touch this government is. We saw it in the budget; we saw it in the tax to go to the doctor or the cuts to the pension. I thought that was as bad as it could get. But now it gets even worse, because this government is now cutting emergency relief funding—that is, money for things like food vouchers or medicine vouchers; money for things like nappies or blankets—for people in desperate straits and people in crisis; people who cannot afford to feed and clothe their kids or keep a roof over their heads. When did this government do this? Christmas Eve. The day before Christmas, they rang community groups around the country and said, ‘We are cutting off your emergency relief funding.’

One of those organisations is Holroyd Community Aid. They have been doing this at the edge of my electorate for 48 years. Forty-eight years of looking after people in crisis, helping 2,500 people a year—people like Mary. Mary is not her real name, but I met her the other day and this is her story. I am protecting her identity. She lost her job. Her husband walked out on her. She has four kids and she cannot afford to feed them or pay the rent. She went to Holroyd Community Aid and asked for assistance, and they helped her out to get her family back together. If you need any more evidence of how unfair this Prime Minister and this government—(Time expired)

Mrs PRENTICE  (Ryan) (13:56): One of the special things about the electorate of Ryan is that we host the second-largest population of military personnel in Australia. We are always welcoming new members and their families as they adapt to their new location and make new friends. I was delighted to attend the Defence Community Organisation welcome event for these families at Gallipoli Barracks last weekend.

There were many community and government organisations present, standing by to welcome and support our Defence Force families. The day was hosted by the Defence Community Organisation, a group which offers programs and services to Defence families. They support families with the challenges they may face living the military way of life, but they also provide opportunities.

It is important we have these groups to make life easier for our Defence Force families as they relocate into new communities. It was a great day and a wonderful opportunity to meet so many members, their partners and their families. I particularly want to thank those support groups in the community and welcome all of our new Defence Force families to Ryan. We have a wonderful and inclusive community and I am sure all the families will enjoy their time in that location.

Ms CHESTERS  (Bendigo) (13:58): Words used to describe this government to keep coming up over and over again are: cruel and incompetent. There can be no greater example of how cruel and incompetent this government is than how they have handled community grants—$270 million has been cruelly cut from organisations that deliver food relief and help out those most vulnerable in our community. They are incompetent because of the way in which they have handled things since they announced these cuts. They are cruel—they told them on Christmas Eve. They told organisations like Bendigo Family and Financial Services...
that they would not have funding next year to help people try to pick themselves back up by helping with counselling and food relief. They are incompetent, because this government then rang Bendigo Family and Financial Services to say, 'You can have this funding for an extra 30 days. You can keep helping people for 30 days.' Then they rang them again—incompetent!—and said, 'You can have it for another 30 days.' Is Bendigo Family and Financial Services going to get another phone call today so they can continue to do their good work for another 30 days?

This is no way to deliver emergency support in our community. This government should reverse these cuts to community grants and help out organisations that help people pick themselves up. This government needs to stop being cruel, stop being incompetent and start to deliver for their communities. They must start to support the organisations that are doing this very important work. I call on them to reverse these cuts. (Time expired)

Riverside Lions Club

Mr NIKOLIC (Bass—Government Whip) (13:59): If there is one place I would rather be this evening it is Aurora Stadium in Launceston where Hawthorn is taking on Collingwood. That is not because I am a Hawthorn or Collingwood supporter—indeed, I barrack for the mighty Carlton blues—it is because my Lions Club will once again be manning the mobile kitchen at Aurora Stadium. Since its formation almost 50 years ago the Riverside Lions Club has raised approximately $5 million for worthy causes in northern Tasmania. When voluntary Lions labour and materials are taken into account, the actual effects achieved are double that.

The members of my club are truly lions of our community and strongly embrace the mission and purposes of Lions International. Through their commitment and selfless service, the members of Riverside Lions continue to change many lives for the better. In recent years we have made donations in the hundreds of thousands to organisations like the Royal Flying Doctor Service, we have renovated apartments at Spurr Wing, where sick kids from the country and their families can access affordable accommodation—

The SPEAKER: It being 2 o'clock I interrupt the member for Bass. In accordance with standing order 43, the time for members’ statements has concluded.

MINISTERIAL ARRANGEMENTS

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:00): I inform the House that the Minister for Immigration and Border Protection will be absent from question time today as he travels to Malaysia to discuss initiatives to counter people-smuggling and formally hand over the first of two former Customs Service Bay class vessels to the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency. The Minister for Foreign Affairs will answer questions on his behalf.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Australian Human Rights Commission

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Leader of the Opposition) (14:01): My question is to the Prime Minister. On Tuesday the Secretary of the Attorney-General’s Department said that the Attorney-General had wanted him to point out that the government was prepared to consider a specific senior role for the President of the Human Rights Commission, but yesterday the Prime Minister said: ‘She was not asked to resign and no inducement had been offered.’ Prime Minister, what is the government’s story today?
Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:01): The same as yesterday, the same as the day before that, the same as the day before that. Our story is always consistent, it is always correct and it is always to do the right thing by the people of Australia. Old 'Beltway Bill' cannot help himself—

Mr Burke: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Can you ask the Prime Minister to address members by their correct titles please and withdraw the reference he made.

The SPEAKER: I call the Prime Minister. He will address members by their correct title.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: We will have silence on my left so that, if they are addressed by their correct title, you will hear it. The Prime Minister has the call.

Mr ABBOTT: To put the—

Opposition members: Withdraw!

Mr ABBOTT: There is nothing unparliamentary about 'Beltway Bill', but I will obviously—

Opposition members: There is!

The SPEAKER: Assist the House. That will be fine.

Mr ABBOTT: I will obviously refer to the Leader of the Opposition by his correct title. To put the Leader of the Opposition's mind at rest: she has not been asked to resign and no inducement has been offered, as the President of the Human Rights Commission herself has said. The bottom line is this: under members opposite—

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr ABBOTT: It is all about the children; that is the truth. It is all about the children. Under members opposite there were 2,000 children in immigration detention because those opposite started the boats and they could not stop the boats. Under this government there are just over 100 children in immigration detention.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: There will be silence on my left!

Mr ABBOTT: The Labor Party put the children into detention; this government takes them out of detention. I am looking forward to the big tick of approval from the Human Rights Commission.

Economy

Mrs GRIGGS (Solomon) (14:03): My question is to the Prime Minister. What action is the government taking to strengthen the Australian economy and create more jobs, including in my electorate of Solomon?

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:04): That is a terrific question from the member for Solomon—a really terrific question—because on the weekend, with the member for Solomon, I helped to open the Australian Agricultural Company's new meat-processing facility near Darwin. It is a $100 million plus investment, it will employ 300 people and it will process some 300,000 head of cattle every year. It is just about the biggest private sector investment in agriculture in northern Australia in years. I will have more to say about northern Australia next week. This is what happens when you have a government that is open for
business. This is what happens when you do not have a carbon tax. It is what happens when you do not ban the live cattle trade and it happens when you do—

Mr Snowdon interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Lingiari!

Mr Snowdon interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Lingiari is warned!

Mr ABBOTT: have three major free trade agreements that eluded governments for up to a decade. Our economy is strong and it is being helped by the policies of this government. Economic growth is now 2.7 per cent, up from 1.9 per cent a year ago. Jobs growth last year was three times the rate in the last year of the Labor government. Export volumes are up seven per cent on a year ago. Building approvals are at near record levels and they are up nine per cent on a year ago. Retail trade is up four per cent on a year ago and last year the registration of new businesses was at an all-time record high. Consumer sentiment was up eight per cent in February and it is at the highest level in a year. Job ads are up 14 per cent on a year ago. The Dun & Bradstreet business expectations survey released earlier this month found that the outlook on employment is the most positive it has been in 10 years.

Interest rates are low, petrol prices are low, power prices have come down, and the dollar is more competitive so it is no wonder that the people of Australia are more optimistic, but to keep the optimism you need a government that is open for business, and that government is this government. Just one bit of information that I am sure the House would like to hear: Qantas has just announced their half-year profit of $200 million. The company that wanted a guarantee 12 months ago now has just released a half-yearly profit of $200 million. The abolition of the carbon tax added $59 million to their bottom line. Do you know what? That man wants to bring it back. He wants to hit the profitability of every company in Australia.

Australian Human Rights Commission

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Leader of the Opposition) (14:07): My question—

The SPEAKER: One moment. The member for Solomon.

Mrs Griggs: Madam Speaker, I just wanted to draw your attention to the member for Lingiari and ask that he withdraw the very unparliamentary comment he made to the Prime Minister.

The SPEAKER: To assist the House, the member should withdraw.

Mr Snowdon: I do not know what it is that I—

The SPEAKER: I would ask the member for Lingiari to withdraw if he used an unparliamentary term.

Mr Snowdon: Madam Speaker, with great respect I do not know what I said that was unparliamentary. But if I have upset those cheap petals over there, I do withdraw.

The SPEAKER: The member for Lingiari will leave under 94(a). The member for Lingiari then left the chamber.

The SPEAKER: I call the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr SHORTEN: My question is to the Prime Minister. Yesterday, and again today, the Prime Minister has said of the President of the Human Rights Commissioner that she was not
asked to resign and no inducement has been offered. But at Senate estimates his Attorney-General said that Professor Triggs's position was untenable and that he hoped she could be encouraged to resign or would be willing to serve the government in other capacities. Why does the Prime Minister persist with a position that no-one believes?

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:08): This is not a question. It is much more an accusation than a question from the Leader of the Opposition. I repeat: the President of the Human Rights Commission has not been asked to resign. No inducement has been offered, as the President herself has declared to Senate estimates. But the government has lost confidence in the President because the President, in consultation with Labor ministers, thought that it was political to have an inquiry when the number of children in detention was almost 2000.

Ms Owens interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Parramatta will desist and is warned.

Mr ABBOTT: The President thought it was political to have an inquiry into children in detention then.

Mr Dreyfus interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Isaacs will desist.

Mr ABBOTT: So what did she do? She had an inquiry, presumably a political inquiry, when the number of children in detention was 200 and declining all the time. I am delighted to have questions on this subject from the Leader of the Opposition. I invite the Leader of the Opposition to continue asking questions on this subject because every question that he asks gives me the chance to declare that members opposite were total failures when it comes to border protection. Thanks to consistent failure, thanks to a weakness of will, thanks to a lack of ability to govern on the part of members opposite—

Dr Chalmers interjecting—

Mr ABBOTT: some 50,000—

The SPEAKER: The Prime Minister will resume his seat. The member for Rankin will withdraw and then leave under 94(a).

Dr Chalmers: I withdraw 'pathological liar'.

The SPEAKER: I name the member for Rankin!

MOTIONS

Member for Rankin

Mr PYNE (Sturt—Leader of the House and Minister for Education and Training) (14:10): I move:

That the member for Rankin be suspended from the service of the House.

The SPEAKER: The question is that the member for Rankin be suspended from the service of the House.
The House divided. [14:14]
(The Speaker—Hon. Bronwyn Bishop)

Ayes ...................... 86
Noes ...................... 55
Majority ................. 31

AYES

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Question agreed to.

The SPEAKER (14:18): The member for Rankin is suspended from the service of the House for 24 hours under standing order 94(b).

The member for Rankin then left the chamber.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Australian Human Rights Commission

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:18): I welcome questions from the Leader of the Opposition on this subject, because every time the Leader of the Opposition questions me or other ministers on this subject it gives us the chance to let the people of Australia know that Labor started the boats; this government stopped them; Labor put children into immigration detention; this government is letting them out. The most decent, the most compassionate, the most humane thing you can do is stop the boats, because that means that there are far fewer people in immigration detention, and that is what every single one of us wants.

Infrastructure

Mr ENTSCH (Leichhardt) (14:19): My question is to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development. Will the Deputy Prime Minister
inform the House how the government is working with the states to boost growth and create jobs?

Mr TRUSS (Wide Bay—Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development) (14:19): Thank you to the champion of the North for that very, very important question. He recognises how important productivity-improving infrastructure is for our country. Not only does it improve our economy and give us a better chance as a nation to be competitive in the future but it creates jobs now. In northern Australia, there are substantial commitments by this government towards upgrading the infrastructure of the North. Our $50 billion program—which incidentally is $16.4 billion more than Labor promised at the last election—a $50 billion commitment to infrastructure, includes some very important projects in the North, particularly in the member for Leichhardt's electorate. There is the Southern Access Corridor into Cairns—two more stages beyond the one that we completed that was left over from the previous government. There is the $210 million package to upgrade roads through Cape York Peninsula—a very substantial commitment. On top of that there is the Edmonton to Gordonvale duplication—not quite in the member's electorate, but he is a man who certainly fought hard to achieve that. That is the best part of $1 billion worth of roadworks in Cairns and Far North Queensland. That is going to be an important job creator for that region. Between them, these projects will create thousands of jobs, and they are thousands of jobs on top of what has already been created under the infrastructure program of this government. The Toowoomba Second Range Crossing, for instance—a project which I am pleased to see is now supported by the Labor state government in Queensland, even though it has always been opposed by members opposite—

Mr Albanese interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Grayndler will stop interjecting!

Mr TRUSS: is expected to create 1,800 positions once it gets underway. WestConnex in Sydney is expected to provide 10,000 jobs, including a lot of apprenticeships. NorthConnex in Sydney is expected to provide around 8,700 jobs. The Cooroy to Curra section, section A, has created, 1,600 jobs; and then, once that is completed, they will move on to section C.

Mr Albanese interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Grayndler will cease interjecting. Member for Grayndler, if you wish to stay in the chamber you will desist or leave under standing order 94(a).

Mr TRUSS: The Perth Freight Link will create 2,400 jobs; the Western Sydney Infrastructure Plan, 8,000 jobs; the Pacific Highway, 2,000 jobs.

Mr Albanese interjecting—

The SPEAKER: Then take an early mark and leave under 94(a).

Mr TRUSS: But of course, there will be 7,000 jobs that will not be created because of Labor's decision to end the EastWest project in Melbourne. That is 7,000 lost jobs but tens of thousands will be created by this government because we know infrastructure means jobs; infrastructure means productivity.
Australian Human Rights Commission

Mr DREYFUS (Isaacs—Deputy Manager of Opposition Business) (14:23): My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer to evidence at Senate estimates that the secretary of the Attorney-General’s Department took notes of his phone call with the Attorney-General where a specific role for the President of the Human Rights Commission was discussed. Given the seriousness of these allegations, will the government release the notes?

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:23): They are notes that belong to the gentleman who made them—whom we have total trust and confidence in. Members opposite should not attack the honesty and the integrity of the secretary of the Attorney-General’s Department.

Economy

Mr BROADBENT (McMillan) (14:24): My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, will you outline how the government is building jobs, growth and opportunity and how will this assist all Australians?

Mr HOCKEY (North Sydney—The Treasurer) (14:24): This is more good news for Australia, and I thank the honourable member for McMillan—who is indeed an honourable man—for his question. I say to the parliament: there has been more good news today. On the back of the fact that under this government three times the number of jobs have been created every day than were created under the previous Labor government, the Australian Bureau of Statistics has just released data that confirms that the average weekly wage in Australia has now risen to $76,800—

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr HOCKEY: Sorry—the average wage in Australia—

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: We seem to be having the usual Thursday behaviour and we can just do without it. We will have some silence in the chamber so we can hear answers of questions when they have been asked.

Mr HOCKEY: The average wage in Australia has now increased to $76,800 a year. It increased by 2.8 per cent this year, so that works out at $1,476.30 a week. With the higher wages comes greater prosperity.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The cacophony will cease!

Mr HOCKEY: Importantly, I remind the House—and I think the member for McMahon should listen carefully to this—that the second highest tax threshold kicks in at $80,000 and the rate is 37c. So, obviously, within a couple of years it is entirely possible that someone working in Australia earning average wages would be in the second highest tax threshold. That starts to detract from growth in the economy because the more we tax individuals the slower the economy ends up being.

We want to give Australians more money and more jobs, and that is one of the reasons why we are so pleased with the announcement today from Qantas that they are not only back in profit but they have made a very good profit. They have turned around $619 million in one year, and they have been able to do that on the back of a more prosperous economy but also
getting rid of the carbon tax, which is $59 million. It is not just Qantas. McMillan Shakespeare—Australia's largest provider of salary packaging and novated leasing, employing 850 Australians—announced that they were back in profit. There has been a 62 per cent increase in their profit despite the fact that the previous Labor government wanted to close down the leasing industry when it was last in government. We are the party for jobs; we are the party for prosperity.

Broadband

Mr WILKIE (Denison) (14:27): My question is to the Minister for Communications. Minister, problems with the NBN rollout remain one of the most prevalent issues raised with me by constituents in the greater Hobart-Glenorchy-Taroona area. Minister, what is the situation exactly with the NBN in Denison, and what is the plan to finish the job? A detailed answer by suburb in my electorate, including time lines, and a comment about the situation in Tasmania more broadly would be very helpful. Thank you, Minister.

Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth—Minister for Communications) (14:28): I thank the honourable member for his question. The overall progress of the NBN rollout in Denison is that the fixed line network is now ready for service in areas covering 11,842 premises. It is under construction in areas covering 21,200 premises; and, looking to the 18-month rollout plan, which will begin in the next year, that will include areas covering 27,800 premises. That last part will be mostly fibre-to-the-node. That means that, by June next year, work on the NBN's fixed line network will be complete in areas covering 60,800 premises in the honourable member's electorate. Virtually no other electorate in Australia will be as advanced as Denison in terms of the NBN rollout. It is impractical to outline each suburb and its upgrade timetable, but I will give the honourable member details of that later in writing.

Moving to the complaints about the NBN rollout, I will break them into four categories: firstly, the hold on the rollout due to the mismanagement of how asbestos material was removed from old infrastructure; secondly, the halt of the construction due to a commercial dispute—

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr TURNBULL: Madam Speaker, I am seeking to provide an answer to an honourable member about his electorate. The opposition have so little respect for honourable members—

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr TURNBULL: If there was an opportunity for the people of Tasmania to understand how little regard the Labor Party have, look at the pathetic way they are treating the honourable member for Denison and his constituents and the people of Tasmania.

Ms Burke: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I am surprised the member for Denison has not raised the issue of relevance to the question, and I would ask the minister to return to it.

The SPEAKER: I think the interjection that said that the member for Denison could not hear it was probably quite accurate. I would have some silence on my left and right; otherwise, those people who are clearly seeking an early plane and an early mark will be able to leave perhaps as a group.
Mr TURNBULL: Asbestos has been an issue. The NBN Co and its contractors and Telstra are dealing with that very effectively. The last complaint from members of the public in Tasmania to Comcare about asbestos was in June last year. There was clearly a massive problem with the contractors not making any money. Indeed, work stopped in Tasmania completely—dead stopped—well before the last federal election, because they were going broke doing the work. So we had to renegotiate all of those contracts. That has been done and work is now proceeding, as I have described.

One of the other big problems was that, in typical Conrovian manner, the Labor government was describing premises as being serviceable when they were not. We have reduced the number of unserviceable premises dramatically in Denison. It is down to only 1,500 premises, and they are being addressed even as we speak.

Australian Human Rights Commission

Mr DREYFUS (Isaacs—Deputy Manager of Opposition Business) (14:32): My question is to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, representing the Attorney-General. Yesterday the minister said in relation to the role the government offered the president of the Human Rights Commission:
I can advise that no such offer was made.

In fact, the secretary of the department said:
The Attorney-General wished me to point out that the government was prepared to consider a specific senior role ...

If the minister believes what the secretary said, why did she say the exact opposite to him?

Ms JULIE BISHOP (Curtin—Minister for Foreign Affairs) (14:32): I thank the member for his question. Yesterday I said that no such inducement had been offered, and I said that she was not asked to resign and that no such job offer had been made.

Fuel Prices

Mr MATHESON (Macarthur) (14:33): My question is to the Minister for Small Business. Will the minister update the House on the steps the government has taken to ensure Australians pay fair prices for their goods and services, like petrol.

Mr BILLSON (Dunkley—Minister for Small Business) (14:33): I thank the member for Macarthur for his question. This government understands that fuel prices are a significant cost for many households in Australia. I am pleased report that today the ACCC has delivered its first quarterly petrol monitoring report following a new direction from this government. This is the first report under a new direction that recognises that our government knows that market forces alone are not sufficient in every circumstance to deliver efficient fuel pricing and to make sure that consumers' interests are looked after.

This report reveals great news for motorists, which I thought the whole parliament would have been interested in. The report reveals that petrol prices in our five largest cities decreased by 28c between June and December of last year and that they fell a further 14.6c a litre in January—the lowest price since January 2009. The ACCC found that petrol price reductions in the five largest cities were very much consistent with the fall in international crude oil prices and in the price of refined petrol.
But we also found that in not all cases was that savings being passed through in full and in a timely way to our regional centres. This direction issued by this government enables the ACCC to dive deeply and to have a close examination of what is happening in those markets where we are not seeing full value passed through. ACCC chairman Rod Sims said today that the combined reduction in fuel prices in capital cities of 42.7c a litre 'would be worth $1,000 a year to the average household if sustained'.

The ACCC is doing its job under a new direction from this government. The ACCC is able to do its job because, unlike the previous government, we are giving the ACCC the resources it needs to do its business. What we found under the previous government was that, while they were changing leaders and changing ministers—five in 15 months—the actually forgot to give the resources to the ACCC to do its job properly. With five ministers in 15 months, you can understand why the ACCC—

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The minister will resume his seat.

Mr Feeney interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Batman is usually better behaved, so he can just take a warning.

Mr BILLSON: With five ministers in 15 months, it is not surprising that Labor forgot to give the ACCC the resources it needs. We have and it is doing its work. This is about making sure that Australian consumers get good value for money. We are delivering the savings from the carbon tax. That is what you can do when the ACCC has the resources that it needs. We have not been distracted like Labor when they were in government.

Australian Human Rights Commission

Mr DREYFUS (Isaacs—Deputy Manager of Opposition Business) (14:36): My question is to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, representing the Attorney-General. On Tuesday, the Secretary of the Attorney-General's Department said a 'specific role' was considered for the president of the Human Rights Commission. Minister, what was that role?

Ms JULIE BISHOP (Curtin—Minister for Foreign Affairs) (14:37): There was no job offered to the president—

Opposition members interjecting—

Ms JULIE BISHOP: Excuse me, I have said four words. Would you just wait? I repeat: there was no job offer made to the president of the Human rights Commission. There was no request for her to resign and there was no inducement offered. A role was raised that related to international affairs, the details of which—

Mr Husic: You'll be sweating ballot papers!

The SPEAKER: The member for Chifley will withdraw.

Mr Husic: I withdraw.

Ms JULIE BISHOP: As the Secretary of the Attorney-General's Department said in Senate estimates, it was a sensitive matter that he did not wish to give details of in Senate estimates, so I do not give details of it.
National Security

Mr LAUNDY (Reid) (14:38): My question is to the Minister for Foreign Affairs: will the minister advise the House on steps the government is taking to engage with the community to build resistance to the radicalisation of young people and counter the threat of foreign fighters?

Ms JULIE BISHOP (Curtin—Minister for Foreign Affairs) (14:38): I thank the member for Reid for his question. I acknowledge the support that he gives to communities in his electorate, particularly the work he is doing with Muslim communities in Reid, and I know that the member for Reid would want me to recognise in that regard the work of the members for Watson and Blaxland.

The government is determined to prevent vulnerable young people leaving Australia to join the terrorist conflict in Syria and Iraq and to counter the radicalisation of our citizens that leads to it. In a relatively recent phenomenon, vulnerable members of our community are being radicalised online, seduced through social media with a simplistic and violent narrative of terrorist organisations, particularly Daesh.

The government has a clear strategy for working with our communities to build resilience to counter this extremist narrative and to combat radicalisation. We have increased community engagement to highlight our humanitarian contribution to those who are suffering in Syria and Iraq. We are challenging the lies that Daesh spreads to demonise those who oppose its demented ideology.

Through one of our outreach programs, Living Safe Together, we are helping communities work with individuals at risk of radicalisation through mentoring and coaching, education and employment. We are identifying and shutting down terrorist websites. We are removing extremist content. We are addressing the impact and appeal of extremist narratives on Australian audiences and we have made advocating terrorism an offence under the Criminal Code.

But to be successful in our efforts, the government cannot do it alone. Our National Security Hotline—1800 123 400—has now taken well over 200,000 calls from the public and the hotline remains a key tool for the community to provide information and intelligence on a range of security related matters. Indeed, based on the advice of our law enforcement and intelligence agencies, over 100 passports of those seeking to travel to the terrorist conflict have been cancelled.

I express my gratitude to the brothers, sisters, parents and friends of those who have taken the step of calling the National Security Hotline, going to the police or seeking the help of community leaders to save a loved one before it is too late. The actions of these people provide a vital source of information for our security agencies.

Virtually all Australians are appalled by Daesh and its barbaric activities. Our Muslim community, its leaders and its mosques play an important and essential role in combating extremism. They are working to counter the lies and deceit spread by Daesh, and to prevent members of our community from heading down the path to radicalisation.

I thank all Muslim community leaders for this vital support. I applaud all those who are opposing extremism and helping prevent the flow of foreign terrorist fighters, finance and
other support to terrorist organisations. Through these partnerships with our communities, the
government is taking firm steps to keep our people safe from terrorism.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The SPEAKER (14:42): Before I call the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, I wish to
advise the House that we have us in the gallery today Kirsten Livermore, former member for
Capricornia. We also have with us the Hon. Judi Moylan, who was a minister in the Howard
government and who continues her important work with juvenile diabetes. We make you both
very welcome.

Honourable members: Hear, hear!

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Australian Human Rights Commission

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Leader of the Opposition) (14:42): My question is to the
Minister for Foreign Affairs representing the Attorney-General, and I refer to her earlier
answer: what is the difference between a specific role and a job offer?

Ms JULIE BISHOP (Curtin—Minister for Foreign Affairs) (14:42): There is a world of
difference. It depends who raised the issue of the role, and no specific job offer was made.

Crime

Mr IRONS (Swan) (14:43): My question is to the Minister for Justice: will the minister
inform the House what action the government has taken to protect people in my electorate of
Swan and elsewhere from the illegal firearms trade?

Mr KEENAN (Stirling—Minister for Justice) (14:43): I thank the member for Swan for
his question. He is always very keen to work with me on law enforcement projects within his
electorate. He knows that trafficking in guns is a deadly crime and, if we even have a small
number of illicit firearms entering the community, it represents a significant threat to the
safety of the community.

In Victoria alone, Victoria Police tell us that more than 10 crimes a week involve the use of
illicit guns. The Australian Crime Commission estimates that there are up to a quarter of a
million long arms illegally in the community and up to 10,000 handguns within the illicit gun
market.

When Labor were in government, they reduced our ability to detect and seize illicit guns by
reducing the funding and resourcing available to our law enforcement community, but
particularly to the Customs service, which had $700 million of cuts and meant that sea and air
cargo inspections were significantly reduced, stopping the ability of our border agencies to
stop illicit guns and other illicit contraband from coming onto our streets. They also cut
funding to the Australian Federal Police, and they cut a staggering 30 per cent out of the
budget for our national criminal intelligence agency, the Australian Crime Commission. Since
we have come to office, we have gone about remediying this reckless approach. In particular,
we have reinvested $88 million in Customs to make sure that they have a better shot at
screening out contraband before it hits our streets.

Illegal firearms remain the weapon of choice for organised criminals to commit violent
acts, and we have been focused on doing all we can do to stop the trafficking in illegal
firearms—significantly by introducing legislation to make it an offence to traffic in guns and
gun parts in and out of Australia, and by creating the National Anti-Gangs Squad, which disrupts organised criminals who profit from the illicit gun trade. Since the full implementation of the National Anti-Gangs Squad, we have seized more than 286 illegal firearms. We have launched the Australian Ballistics Information Network, which is cutting-edge technology that essentially acts as fingerprints for guns, matching guns to criminals and matching guns to crime scenes.

When Labor were in office, because they cut resources to our law enforcement community and cut resources to our border agency, they left us more vulnerable to the infiltration of organised crime and their ability to bring illicit guns into the community. Now, in opposition, they have irresponsibly stopped us from implementing our election commitment of minimum sentencing of up to five years for people who traffic in illegal guns. We will continue to do all we can to stop organised crime from profiting from the illegal gun trade, we will not tolerate criminals threatening the safety of our community, and we will continue to focus on getting guns off the streets.

**Australian Human Rights Commission**

**Mr Shorten** (Maribyrnong—Leader of the Opposition) (14:46): My question is to the Prime Minister. At Senate estimates, the Attorney-General said

As I am at pains to point out to you, I have a high regard for Professor Triggs. It was an awkward situation.

So, if the Attorney-General has a high regard for Professor Triggs, was this whole thing the Prime Minister's idea?

**Mr Pyne**: Madam Speaker, on a point of order, question time is about asking questions of the government; it is not fishing expeditions by the opposition, especially when they make up quotes which were not mentioned in the Senate estimates yesterday. That is not the purpose of question time, and I would ask you to rule it out under standing order 100.

**Mr Burke**: Madam Speaker, on the point of order, the assertion from the Leader of the House is that the Prime Minister is not capable of answering whether something is his own idea.

**The Speaker**: No, the member will resume his seat. That is not speaking to the point of order. The Leader of the House makes a fair point.

**Opposition members interjecting**—

**The Speaker**: And the guffawing can stop. The Leader of the House makes a fair point, and I do not believe the question is in order and as such will rule it out of order. I call the honourable member for Eden-Monaro.

**Dr Hendy**: My question is to the Minister—

**The Speaker**: The member will resume his seat. I call the Manager of Opposition Business

**Mr Burke**: Madam Speaker, I am just trying to work out what the ruling is on why that was out of order.

**The Speaker**: Because it is in breach of—the Leader of the House will resume his seat. I am ruling it out of order under both standing orders 98 and 100.
Broadband

Dr HENDY (Eden-Monaro) (14:48): My question is to the Minister for Communications. Will the minister update the House on the progress of the National Broadband Network? Has the company responsible for rolling out the network provided the government with a financial statement of what the cost to Australians would have been to continue with a full fibre network?

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr Pyne: Madam Speaker, on a point of order, the member for Isaacs made an unparliamentary expression across the chamber to me, and I ask that he withdraw it.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr Pyne: I heard you. I heard it, and I have been required to withdraw it, and I would ask you to withdraw it.

The SPEAKER: The member for Isaacs would assist the House if he would withdraw.

Mr Burke: Madam Speaker, on the point of order, you have frequently asked the member for Isaacs to withdraw comments, and I have never complained. I was sitting next to him. Not a word came from his mouth. If it assists the House, he can pretend to withdraw, but it is one of the rare times he has been quiet.

The SPEAKER: Perhaps we will accept—the Leader of the House?

Mr Pyne: Madam Speaker, there was an exchange over this particular term between the Leader of the Opposition and me last year, in which I was misinterpreted in what I had apparently said across the chamber, so I know the term extremely well, and that was the term used by the member for Isaacs, and I ask for it to be withdrawn.

Mr Dreyfus: I withdraw.

The SPEAKER: I thank the member for Isaacs. I now call the member for Eden-Monaro.

Dr HENDY: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am very happy to. My question is to the Minister for Communications. Will the minister update the House on the progress of the National Broadband Network? Has the company responsible for rolling out the network provided the government with a financial statement of what the cost to Australians would have been to continue with a full fibre network?

Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth—Minister for Communications) (14:50): I thank the honourable member for his question. Only yesterday I was in Queanbeyan with the honourable member, where the first business in the area was being switched on to the NBN fixed-line network. You know, this was the Hendy effect. Prior to the election of the honourable member as the member for Eden-Monaro, there was no NBN in Eden-Monaro at all, but now, with the Hendy effect, it is sprouting up all over the place. We have almost 3,000 premises now ready for service, an additional 10,700 either under construction or in build preparation, and another 10,700 again in the 18-month rollout plan.

In Senate estimates this week, we had a very interesting exchange with the former minister for communications Senator Conroy. He, of course, is the shadow minister for defence.

Mr Champion interjecting—
The SPEAKER: The member for Wakefield! Do you want an early mark?

Mr TURNBULL: You would not see much evidence of that, but in fact he is the shadow minister for self-defence, because he spends all his time, like the famous Lieutenant Onoda, emerging from the jungles and fighting the old war. He comes back to fight the case for his misguided project.

We actually got some hard facts from the NBN Co this week which are of great importance. I remind honourable members that in April 2013, not long before the election, the NBN Co advised all of us—advised Australians—that the cost of passing and connecting premises with fibre was between $2,200 and $2,500. That is what they said. That was the work they had done. So inadequate were the management and accounting systems at the NBN Co that this figure was not just a little bit wrong; it was massively out.

We have since had a full audit, a full forensic accounting analysis of the cost of the project—and bear in mind it has now passed over half a million premises, so we do actually know—and this is what the real cost is. This is the apples-for-apples comparison. In April 2013, when they said it was costing $2,200, it was actually costing $3,359. Now it is costing $3,600. Costs have gone up, in fact, because the contractors were losing money at the time and the contracts have had to be increased so they make money.

The reality is that the Labor Party in embarking on this project did not even know basic facts. They did not have the management skills to know what it was costing. They were billions and billions of dollars out, reminding us yet again that Labor cannot manage anything.

Australian Human Rights Commission

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Leader of the Opposition) (14:53): My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer to his foreign minister's previous answer—that a role was raised with Professor Triggs that related to international affairs. Now that the government has finally admitted a specific role was discussed, why won't the government tell Australians what it was?

Honourable members interjecting—

Ms Julie Bishop interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The minister will resume her seat. The proper form of the House for dealing with this matter is at the end of question time, when the Minister for Foreign Affairs may seek indulgence to show where she has been misrepresented.

Mr Pyne: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. That is definitely true—that the Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party can seek other forms of redress in the House—but questions also must comply with standing order 100(d) and they should not contain inferences, imputations or hypothetical matter. I would have thought that, under any of those heads, making up a quote and pretending that the foreign minister said something that she did not say only moments ago would offend section 100(d) of the standing orders. A correct quote is an entirely different matter, but a made-up one would not therefore be in order and would rule the question out of order.
Mr Burke: On that point of order: if it would help with authentication, I am happy, if the government is willing, to table a transcript of the remarks that were being referred to. I seek leave to table the document.

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: There will be silence on my left and right. The problem with that is that tabling a document which is a published public document is not permitted under the standing orders.

Mr Burke: It is not. It is an immediate transcript that has been typed up. I am seeking leave to table it.

The SPEAKER: Ah. Is leave granted to table?

Leave not granted.

The SPEAKER: I think it is fair to say that I thought you were tabling a Hansard, and it is somebody's typed-up—

Ms Claydon interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Newcastle is not in her seat and may not speak.

Mr SHORTEN: If it helps, I am happy to rephrase.

The SPEAKER: I would be obliged if you would rephrase.

Mr SHORTEN: My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer to the foreign minister's previous answer in question time, where she said: 'There was no request for her to resign and no inducement offered. A role was raised that related to international affairs.' Now that the government has finally admitted a role was discussed, why won't the government tell Australians what it was?

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:56): The Leader of the Opposition should stop verballing the Minister for Foreign Affairs.

Honourable members interjecting—

Mr ABBOTT: He should stop verballing the Minister for Foreign Affairs. If he is going to quote the Minister for Foreign Affairs, he should quote her accurately and in full. The Minister for Foreign Affairs, critically—

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: There will be silence on my left.

Mr ABBOTT: said it would depend on by whom it was raised. It is very telling that the Leader of the Opposition in his attempt to smear and character assassinate has omitted fully quoting and accurately quoting the Minister for Foreign Affairs.

Ms Owens interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Parramatta has already been warned.

Mr ABBOTT: While the Leader of the Opposition is engaged in character assassination and semiotic analysis of Senate estimates, this government is getting on with doing the right thing by the people of Australia. The right thing by the people of Australia was not to start the boats as Labor did but to stop the boats as this coalition did. The right thing by the people of
Australia was not to put children into detention as Labor did but to release children from detention as this coalition did. This is a coalition which delivers good government—

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The Prime Minister will resume his seat. I have already said that those people who want an early mark can leave in a group. If there is an outbreak like that again then the group will leave. The Prime Minister has the call.

Mr ABBOTT: It is precisely because the President of the Human Rights Commission was incapable of appreciating—

An opposition member interjecting—

The SPEAKER: You want to be the first of the group?

Mr ABBOTT: the difference between starting the boats and stopping the boats, the difference between putting people into detention and taking people out of detention—it is precisely because the President of the Human Rights Commission was incapable of understanding this distinction that this government has lost confidence in her.

It is, in the end, a question of judgement which, I am afraid to say, the President of the Australian Human Rights Commission lamentably failed to demonstrate. But, oh no, members opposite are backing the lack of judgement shown on this very issue, because when it comes to putting children into detention and when it comes to putting people at risk of drowning at sea, that mob opposite are the guilty party! That is what they are—they are the guilty party.

I stand by the Attorney-General, I stand by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and I absolutely stand by the Secretary of the Attorney-General's Department.

Food Labelling

Mr HOGAN (Page) (15:00): My question is to the Minister for Agriculture. Will the minister update the House on steps the government is taking to improve country-of-origin labelling so that Australians can better identify where our food comes from?

Mr JOYCE (New England—Minister for Agriculture) (15:00): I thank the honourable member for his question. Today, more than most days, it is a great pleasure to be able to talk about how this government is bringing forward a form of food labelling which is diagrammatic—properly represented in a diagram so we can see at a glance where the food came from; that is simple to understand; that deals with proportionality, so that what is actually in the package is represented as a proportion; and that is compulsory.

It is important that we do this because we are dealing with other people's money when they go to a shop. They should know where our food is grown, whether it is covered by our FIDO sanitary laws, whether it is covered by our occupational health and safety requirements, whether it has been grown under our labour rates and whether it has been grown, most particularly, to support our Australian farming families and our Australian farms.

This has been an issue that has been flying in the fog for so long that it is going to take this government to land it. The Labor Party obviously had a crack at it. I had a look at their 2011 election promises and at 2007, when they were under Kevin Rudd. In 2007 they said that they would simplify and strengthen food-labelling laws. But they have not had much luck, because I looked at my emails today and there were 22,000 emails there—22,000!—saying that they
have not done it and that people are relying on this government to deliver. They realise that the other government failed.

We have been progressing this. We have been progressing it through the green paper and we are progressing it in light of making sure that the Australian people know exactly which country the food they are eating comes from—this is overwhelmingly supported by the Australian people. They also want to know more about the farms that it was grown on. That is why we are changing our Foreign Investment Review Board guidelines, so that we can tell the Australian people clearly about the ownership—who owns what. That is why we are reducing the Foreign Investment Review Board limits from $252 million down to $15 million.

There is also an alternative policy. They want to take it from $252 million to $1,000 million dollars—to a billion. The shadow minister for agriculture—the member for Hunter—said that he would debate me any time, any place. So we gave him a time and we gave him a place—we gave him the Woolbrook hall at 7:30 on Friday night. But he does not want to at any time and any place—he wants it in Canberra during working hours!

That is the whole thing: they are fascinated about this building—they are fascinated about what happens in this building. But they have no fascination and no interest whatsoever in the Australian people.

**MOTIONS**

**Abbott Government**

**Attempted Censure**

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Leader of the Opposition) (15:03): I seek leave to move a motion of censure against the Abbott government.

Leave not granted.

Mr SHORTEN: 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 immediately:

That the House censures the government for:

1. launching an unprecedented attack on the Australian Human Rights Commission, designed to undermine its independence;
2. treating an independent statutory office holder with contempt;
3. directing the Secretary of the Attorney-General's Department to offer an inducement to the President of the Australian Human Rights Commission in return for her resignation; and
4. attempting to mislead the Australian people in its bid to cover up its offer of an inducement.

There is no doubt that Tony Abbott is the worst Prime Minister in Australian history!

Mr PYNE (Sturt—Leader of the House and Minister for Education and Training) (15:05): As the opposition has elucidated no new information at all today, I move:

That the member be no longer heard.

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

The House divided. [15:10]

(The Speaker—Hon. Bronwyn Bishop)

Ayes ..................... 86
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Question agreed to.

The SPEAKER (15:13): Is the Leader of the Opposition's motion seconded?

Mr DREYFUS (Isaacs—Deputy Manager of Opposition Business) (15:13): Every day there is a new lie from this government.

Mr PYNE (Sturt—Leader of the House and Minister for Education and Training) (15:13):

I move:

That the member be no longer heard.

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

The House divided. [15:14]

(The Speaker—Hon. Bronwyn Bishop)

Ayes ..................86
Noes ..................53
Majority.................33

AYES

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Andrews, KJ
Baldwin, RC
Bishop, Ji
Broad, AJ
Brough, MT
Chester, D
Ciobo, SM
Coleman, DB
Entsch, WG
Frydenberg, JA

Alexander, JG
Andrews, KL
Billson, BF
Briggs, JE
Broadbent, RE
Buchholz, S
Christensen, GR
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CHAMBER
Question agreed to.

The SPEAKER (15:15): The question now is that the suspension motion be agreed to.

Mr PYNE (Sturt—Leader of the House and Minister for Education and Training) (15:15):
I move:

That the question be now put.

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

The House divided. [15:17]

(The Speaker—Hon. Bronwyn Bishop)

Ayes .................85
Noes .................53
Majority ..............32

AYES

Abbott, AJ
Andrews, KJ
Baldwin, RC
Bishop, JI
Broad, AJ
Brough, MT
Chester, D
Ciobo, SM
Coleman, DB
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Coulton, M (teller)
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Gillespie, DA
Griggs, NL
Henderson, SM
Hockey, JB
Howarth, LR
Hutchinson, ER
Jensen, DG
Joyce, BT
Kelly, C
Landry, ML
Ley, SP
Marino, NB
Matheson, RG
McNamara, KJ
Nikolic, AA (teller)
O'Dwyer, KM
Question agreed to.

The SPEAKER (15:18): The question is now concerning the original suspension motion, and the question is that that motion be agreed to.
The House divided. [15:19]
(The Speaker—Hon. Bronwyn Bishop)

Ayes ...................... 52
Noes ...................... 85
Majority............... 33

AYES
Bandt, AP
Bowen, CE
Burke, AE
Butler, MC
Byrne, AM
Chesters, LM
Claydon, SC
Conroy, PM
Dreyfus, MA
Ellis, KM
Ferguson, LDT
Giles, AJ
Griffin, AP
Hayes, CP
Jones, SP
Leigh, AK
MacTiernan, AJGC
Mitchell, RG
O’Connor, BPJ
Parke, M
Ripoll, BF
Ryan, JC (teller)
Snowdon, WE
Thistlethwaite, MJ
Vamvakinou, M
Wilkie, AD

NOES
Abbott, AJ
Andrews, KJ
Baldwin, RC
Bishop, JI
Broad, AJ
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Collins, JM
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Elliot, MJ
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Fitzgibbon, JA
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Husic, EN
King, CF
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Marles, RD
Neumann, SK
O’Neil, CE
Perrett, GD
Rowland, MA
Shorten, WR
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Henderson, SM
Hockey, JB
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Hutchinson, ER
Jensen, DG
Joyce, BT
Question negatived.

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (15:25): I ask that further questions be placed on the Notice Paper.

QUESTIONS TO THE SPEAKER
Parliamentary Behaviour

Mr PYNE (Sturt—Leader of the House and Minister for Education and Training) (15:26): Madam Speaker, I have a question for you. During question time today the member for Rankin was named and suspended from the House for using an unparliamentary term and then repeating it when he was asked to withdraw it. Subsequently, he tweeted exactly the same insulting phrase. Apart from the defamatory nature of it, of course, which you cannot comment on, my question to you is: is that a contempt of parliament and would you mind investigating it, and reporting to the House on Monday the outcome of your investigation?

The SPEAKER (15:27): I will take a look at the question raised by the Leader of the House and report to the House on Monday.

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR (Gorton) (15:25): Madam Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation.

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

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR: I do, most grievously, Madam Speaker.
The SPEAKER: In that case, indulgence is granted for the purposes of correcting the record.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR: In Senate estimates today, the Minister for Employment said of my statement about the government's plans to change penalty rates that it was untrue. He compared my conduct to that of Joseph Stalin. I stand by my statement and, for the record, invite the minister to apologise for comparing me with a mass murderer.

The SPEAKER: No. Personal explanations are merely to correct the record.

**QUESTIONS TO THE SPEAKER**

Hansard

Mr FITZGIBBON (Hunter) (15:26): Madam Speaker, I have a question to you. I remind you of the agriculture minister's admission that the *Hansard* record of an answer he gave last year had been substantially amended. Given the extent of the changes, I ask you to investigate the circumstances of the request and whether the changes agreed to were within *Hansard* guidelines; and I offer you certain documents that are relevant to the question which help explain why I choose to raise the issue now.

The SPEAKER (15:27): I will not be receiving documents but I will take the question as it has been asked, consider it and come back to the House.

Hansard

Mr DANBY (Melbourne Ports) (15:27): Madam Speaker, I have a question for you about the administration of *Hansard*. In yesterday's *Hansard* the member for Curtin is recorded as saying: 'I can advise no such offer was made.' Are there any corrections that have yet to be made to *Hansard* or is yesterday's *Hansard*'s answer by the member for Curtin accurately recorded?

The SPEAKER (15:27): If you are referring to the greens, that is precisely what they are.

Mr DANBY (Melbourne Ports) (15:22): *Hansard* as it is on the parliamentary table.

The SPEAKER (15:22): I have no knowledge of it. What are you are asking me to investigate?

Mr DANBY (Melbourne Ports) (15:22): I was asking you if you were aware of any changes to the member for Curtin's answer as she delivered it yesterday. If not, would you investigate whether there are.

The SPEAKER (15:22): I am not aware. I will take a look at it.
BILLS

Building Energy Efficiency Disclosure Amendment Bill 2014
Treasury Legislation Amendment (Repeal Day) Bill 2014
Amending Acts 1970 to 1979 Repeal Bill 2014
Customs Amendment Bill 2014
Statute Law Revision Bill (No. 2) 2014
Crimes Legislation Amendment (Unexplained Wealth and Other Measures) Bill 2014
Australian Citizenship Amendment (Intercountry Adoption) Bill 2014
Intellectual Property Laws Amendment Bill 2014
Federal Courts Legislation Amendment Bill 2014

Assent

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

AUDITOR-GENERAL’S REPORTS

Report No. 24 of 2014-15
Commonwealth Ombudsman Report for 2013-14


Ordered that the reports be made parliamentary papers.

DOCUMENTS

Presentation

Mr PYNE (Sturt—Leader of the House and Minister for Education and Training) (15:29): Documents are presented as listed in the schedule circulated to honourable members. Details of the documents will be recorded in the Votes and Proceedings.

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Child Care

The SPEAKER (15:29): I have received a letter from the honourable member for Adelaide proposing that a definite matter of public importance be submitted to the House for discussion, namely:

The importance of supporting Australian families with affordable, quality and accessible child care.

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—

Ms KATE ELLIS (Adelaide) (15:29): I rise today to call on the parliament to acknowledge the importance of supporting Australian families, including through access to
quality, affordable and accessible child care. I do this today in what is perhaps an uncommon tone for this parliament during a matter of public importance debate. I am seeking to outline the cooperative approach that the opposition intend to take with the government on this issue and the reasons why we see it as so critically important that we continue to see progress and reform in this area.

We on this side of the House know that child care is incredibly important to Australian families. We know that it matters every single day in the lives of over 775,000 families who rely upon our childcare system. It matters to the more than 1.1 million Australian children in care. What happens with childcare policy has a direct impact on those children in long day care, on those children in family day care and on those children in out of school hours care. It is with each and every one of these children and their families in mind that I rise to speak today.

I also rise because we on this side of the House know that Labor have an incredibly proud record when it comes to supporting the early childhood sector. We have been the party of reform when it comes to early childhood and child care. Back in the Whitlam government in 1972 it was Labor that introduced the first Child Care Act. Under the Hawke government in 1984 Labor introduced fee relief for Australian parents. Of course under the Rudd and Gillard governments we increased the childcare rebate to 50 per cent, we introduced the policy of universal access to preschool and kindergarten for Australian children and we worked with all of the state and territory governments, of every political persuasion, to agree upon the National Quality Framework and ensure that Australian children get the best start in life.

We want to continue to play a constructive role in an area we are deeply committed to. We want to work with the government as they compile their response to the Productivity Commission and recognise the importance of that work to Australian families. The Minister for Social Services, who is at the table, has invited me to meet with him and put forward our views and concerns going forward. We do appreciate the nature in which that has been engaged. We know we need to continue to carefully reform our early childhood education and care sector. We will be working with the government to ensure that their response takes into account the best interests of Australian children, the feedback from this vitally important sector and an assessment of the impact on families of any of the changes.

We on this side of the House have absolutely no intention of repeating the sort of obstructionism that we did deal with from those opposite when they were in opposition. We saw firsthand many members who sit opposite now oppose the National Quality Framework. We saw from those opposite statements about how wrong we were to pursue universal access and try to increase the hours that four-year-olds received in our kindergartens and preschools. In perhaps the most extreme example we saw those opposite not only vote against our measure to pause the cap on the childcare rebate but indeed the now Prime Minister write to every single childcare centre in Australia outlining how damaging that measure would be, only to then be elected to government and extend the very same measure in his very first budget.

That is not the game we will play. We will be better. We will remain focused on the needs of Australian families. Unfortunately perhaps for those opposite, that does not mean we intend to sit back and let them entirely off the hook and give them free rein to do whatever they want in this space. We have seen the government do some dreadful things in this area,
particularly in the last budget. There are some serious concerns remaining about the cuts they have announced. We would not be doing our job if we did not continue to point out those concerns whilst also working constructively on how we can help them to do better in the future.

We will not turn a blind eye and we will not stay silent when families and educators rely on us to point out the impact of the $1 billion in cuts. At the same time this government did not prioritise child care in the last budget they cut $1 billion and yet managed to find over $2½ million to hand to big polluters and over $1 billion to give to multinational corporations by reopening tax loopholes. There are still some damaging cuts on the table, including the $157 million cut to the family day care sector, which we do raise because as recently as last week I was with the member for Watson when I spoke to some of the providers in Western Sydney about the impact that the $35 a week price increase is going to have on their families. We also know that there are still proposed cuts to the childcare benefit before this parliament.

If the government want to be taken seriously and if they want a conversation with Australian families in good faith, we hope they intend to do better, to reassess these priorities and to look at ways they can come up with a package that in the very least remedies the damage of the last budget. We hope that the new minister will distance himself from that record of his immediate predecessor. I have said to the new minister, both publicly and indeed privately, that we do welcome some of the measures he has announced—the support for the National Quality Framework and walking away from the ill-considered regulations that the previous minister announced about family day carer’s children—and we hope we will continue to see improvement in this sector.

As our policy work continues Labor have outlined the principles by which we will judge both the government and our own policies moving forward. We are committed to the following principles. Principle No. 1 is that any childcare package must be based on the dual policy pillars of increasing workforce participation and promoting the best interests of Australian children. It is incredibly important in this debate that, whilst there is a lot of focus on workforce participation—as well there should be—we do not lose sight of those who do not have a voice in this debate, and that is Australian children.

Principle No. 2 is that reform must address affordability issues and the out-of-pocket costs of Australian families, not just limit government costs. This is an important point because I have lost count of how many times in the last year or so I have heard members opposite parrot the albeit misleading statistics that the previous minister had circulated to them about childcare fee increases under our government. There has been a lot of focus on that from those opposite. But what I have never once heard them mention is the out-of-pocket costs of Australian parents. And there is an important difference. When we were in government we worked hard to reduce the out-of-pocket burden on Australian parents from what it was under the Howard government. We did that, of course, by increasing the childcare rebate.

It is important that we focus on the realities of the burden that is being placed on the family budget. We know that those opposite have not released the same transparent information that we regularly put out on out-of-pocket costs and the rate of disposable income that parents were spending on their childcare fees. With proposals from the Productivity Commission which are based around a benchmark price, not necessarily the actual price that Australian parents are paying, we think it is incredibly important that we remain focused on affordability.
Thirdly, we believe that a restructured system must improve the accessibility of child care and give due consideration to the impacts that reform will have on investment decisions and waiting lists. This is a very complicated sector. You cannot just change one thing without it impacting on a range of other decisions. We as a parliament need to make sure we reduce waiting lists, not continue to see them blow out. Fourth, recognition needs to be given to the sector's current and future critical workforce issues. Ultimately we on this side of the House know that we would not have a childcare sector if we did not have the hardworking, valued professionals who work there each and every day.

So we are hopeful that we can see damage remedied and some real improvement to child care in Australia. We have got a really proud record of achievement in this area, but I would not for one moment suggest that we do not need to be trying to constantly improve the system. We know that, if we were starting from scratch, nobody would come up with the system that we currently have. We need to continually work together to make sure that we can do better for Australian families. That is something each and every one of us on this side is absolutely committed to. We hope that we can work cooperatively to come up with some real solutions and make sure that the sorts of attacks we saw in the last budget are discontinued and we see much better from this minister than we saw from his predecessor.

Mr MORRISON (Cook—Minister for Social Services) (15:40): I am very pleased to rise to speak on this genuine matter of public importance. I welcome the approach taken by the shadow minister. I will not be seeking to make any political points in this debate. I want to acknowledge the work of the former minister, Minister Ley, who is now the Minister for Health, and thank her for the tremendous work she did in this role. It is disappointing that, in what I would see as a bipartisan debate, we would engage in denigrating the minister. But putting that to one side, I want to focus in this contribution on the challenges that are ahead. Australian families want us to just fix the problem. That is what they want to see. They do not want to hear about pointscoring backwards and forwards—what they did, what we did—and all those sorts of things. They are just not interested. They just want to see a better system. The goal that we have is quality, affordable care which gives children the best start in life and helps parents to stay in work and get back to work when they have children. That is what we are seeking to achieve. Quality care. Absolutely. Affordable care. Absolutely. And, as the shadow minister said, accessibility is tied up in those issues. Absolutely.

Quality improvements have been made and they should be maintained. The National Quality Framework has contributed to the quality of service delivery in the child care and early learning sector. But it has come at a cost. We have to acknowledge that these changes have come at a cost. The Productivity Commission report does go into some detail on those matters of increased cost. It actually goes further to say that perhaps the regulatory hand in what I would call 'out of non-core hours' of child care goes too far and stymies the ability to provide affordable care outside those non-core hours. It makes a number of recommendations in these areas. I commend those recommendations to state and territory governments because that is where those regulations now sit. Quality does come at a cost, but quality is important to families in terms of who is looking after their children.

But having dealt substantively with the issue of quality, the focus now must really be to ensure that this care can be affordable and available. The Productivity Commission report released last week, which was initiated by the government and the former Minister Ley,
ensures that we can have a comprehensive look into the myriad of issues contributing to the
delivery and affordability of child care for Australian families. That report puts forward a host
of recommendations which the government will consider as we move to finalise a new
package in relation to child care, a package that we will continue to work on with the
opposition, with the crossbench members of both this House and the other place, with the
sector and, most importantly, families. At the end of the day, the reason we spend $7 billion
in this area is to help families and their children. They are the ones we are seeking to assist.
This is not an industry subsidy. This is not a wage subsidy for those working in the sector.
This whole policy is about trying to ensure that families who are confronting the challenges
they have to maintain a standard of living and provide for their children are in the best
possible position to make a decision that they can stay in work and go back to work.

For many Australian families there is no choice about whether they get to stay home and
care for the children, if one of them chooses to do that, or go back to work. Many, many
families simply do not have that choice because they need both incomes to ensure that they
can maintain the support and aspirations they have for their children as they grow up. So we
want to empower those families. We want to help them as they sit around their kitchen table
and work through the issues when they have children and, after they have children, when they
say, 'How can we go back to work and how can we do it in a way that will enable us to
maintain the quality of life that we have as a family and that we aspire to in the future for our
family?' We want to make that process simpler. We want to make it more affordable. We
want to make that decision easier for families as they work through this.

This is a system which, if you had started from scratch, as the shadow minister said, would
not look this way. It certainly would not look this way, not unlike the broader social services
spend—$150 billion a year, with eight out of 10 income tax payers required to pay the bill for
welfare in this country every day. We have got to get more out of that expenditure than we are
getting now, because it includes what we pay—around $7 billion a year—in the area of
support for child care.

The commission has made a very important point, and that is that it must be targeted. It
must be targeted to those who need it most, in relation to these decisions that they have to
make. That means middle- to low-income families. They are the ones where these economic
issues are going to be most impacting on their decisions. That is not to say that those on
higher incomes are not impacted by these economic issues as well. Their needs must also be
addressed in the government's package. But it is those middle- to lower income families,
families on less than $180,000 a year, working to provide the best for their children's future,
who need to be very much in our minds as we make these decisions.

The other thing it is about is work. Yes, there are absolutely important issues around early
learning and the importance of that for young children. That is acknowledged, I would hope,
by every member of this House. And, yes, there are absolutely issues that go to disadvantage
in the community and children who may need to be supported into child care for reasons other
than economic participation. They should be addressed by different measures, but the subsidy
that is provided through these programs has to be about work. Where people are earning or
learning, where they are making the effort to go and seek work and to be able to be in the
workforce—single mums, single dads, two-income families trying to stay as two income
families—that is why it should be there, not to hand out heavily subsidised childcare services
to those who are not in the business of earning or learning or wanting to be earning or learning. There has to be a closer nexus in how we work these subsidies. It needs to be tied to a very clear purpose.

We need to ensure that the measures that we are engaged in are anti-inflationary—do not drive up the costs—because costs have been rising. Costs rose under the previous government. They continue to rise under this government. We need to make sure that the way we deliver payments in this sector, the way we deliver the support, does not just continue to rise up the costs. The benchmark price as put forward by the Productivity Commission is imperfect, but the idea of a benchmark price and how that can be set is a matter worthy of consideration, and we must continue to work through it.

We cannot have a system which basically just gives a blank cheque to prices in a sector where we are providing the level of support we are. There has to be an understanding the taxpayer is going to provide for a particular type of service. It is not going to extend to whatever service providers may wish to provide. There is a core element to this. It must be flexible, to understand the modern dynamics of the workplace and the various jobs people are in. They might be firefighters, police officers, nurses or others who have a very different working environment to most Australians in terms of shift work and things of that nature.

There are families who have children with disabilities that have quite specific needs, and the commission makes many recommendations in those areas but particularly recognises the contribution that can be made through home based care—often referred to as nannies, but I think it goes more broadly than that—and the need to provide support to a service in an area which is registered, which has appropriate regulatory controls and ensures that those sorts of options are available to Australia families.

It needs to be accessible, I agree. The commission report demonstrates that the accessibility issue that needs to be managed is very, very patchy. You cannot take a 'one size fits all' approach, as the programs that have been provided to date have and, frankly, they have failed. We need to have a more bespoke, more targeted way of ensuring that we are addressing these issues of accessibility in how we spend the taxpayers' dollars.

We need to remember that we have a diverse range of service providers in this area: profit, not-for-profit, government providers. They all do an important job, but let us remember that it is the private sector operators who make up over half of the places that are there. They are the ones building the new centres, substantively, and, interestingly, for families in disadvantaged areas it is actually private sector operators who are offering lower prices than operators from the other services. But they are all important and they all need to be part of it. The most important thing is that it needs to be funded, and that is where the opposition and the government will have to come to some agreement so we can pursue this issue together. (Time expired)

Mr WATTS (Gellibrand) (15:50): I welcome the tone that the minister has brought to the debate today. I know that the shadow minister supports this tone of engagement, because the minister is right that Australian families, Australian parents, care about outcomes, not political games here. It is in our overwhelming national interest, however, to encourage as many women as possible to return to the workforce after having children. The evidence on how to make this happen is clear. Unsurprisingly, when making a decision about whether to return to the workforce after having children, Australian families get together and they weigh
up the costs and the benefits of that decision. They look at how much they would earn after tax from returning to work, and they weigh that against how much they would have to pay for child care in order to do so. In this respect, the Grattan Institute has noted:

... there is very good evidence that the major influences on female workforce participation are marginal tax rates and the net costs of childcare.

It is not rocket science. However—and we should bring this to account in a spirit of engagement—during the last five years the focus of those opposite in this area has been on an expensive and inefficient paid parental leave scheme, against overwhelming evidence that the big game in female workforce participation is child care. Frankly, it shows how out of touch the Prime Minister was with how parents and families make decisions about how to care for their children and how to return to the workforce.

In 2009 the Productivity Commission noted, in its report *Paid maternity, paternity and parental leave*, about paid parental leave:

Full replacement wages … would be very costly and … would have few incremental labour supply benefits.

Similarly, the Grattan Institute has made it clear:

... international experience suggests that government support for childcare has about double the impact of spending on parental leave.

We hear now, however, that the government wants to start to engage with the main game and is seeking the support of the Labor Party. This is welcome news and we welcome the spirit of engagement. We welcome the government to the real debate that parents and families care about in this space. We want to work with the government to reform this sector so that Australian families will be better off and so that children can get the best start in life.

We will work constructively on any measure the government comes up with to repair the damage caused by their last budget and we will do it in good faith. We say this because this is a debate that we in the Labor Party have been having since Whitlam. Whitlam was the pioneer of federal involvement in early childhood development. He recognised the importance of supporting community childhood centres and introduced the Child Care Act in 1972. Since then, Labor has introduced fee relief for parents under the Hawke government as well as the childcare rebate and the National Quality Framework, a very important part of this debate in ensuring the quality of care and the developmental effects that our children are getting out of their time in child care.

We are willing to work with the government but we want to work towards bettering our system, not dismantling it. We will hold the government to account for their cuts to child care in the last budget and we will also resist any attempt by this government to further attack the essential services that Australian families rely on. I know that the Hobsons Bay City Council in my electorate met on Tuesday night of this week to discuss ways to meet the shortfall in government funding for family day care services. The options were not pretty; and, as the largest provider in the area, it spells danger for families in our local community.

While we want to work with the government towards a better childcare system, we cannot forget that the government has cut $157 million from family day care services. We cannot forget that the government has cut $450 million to outside school hours care. We cannot forget that
the government has cut subsidies for early childhood education degrees. We cannot forget that the government has cut federal funding for all Indigenous child and family centres. And we will not forget that this government has cut, in total, $1 billion in childcare funding. So we welcome the government to the real debate in this place, and we hope that they enter the debate about funding changes to our system to enable women to return to the workforce so that we can lift our female workforce participation rate up to the higher levels amongst OECD countries instead of the lower levels we have today. And we hope they will support efforts to fund a system that supports quality and investment in our children and investment in our human capital for the next century—investment that will particularly bring disadvantaged families and children along to try to bridge the gap of disadvantage that we currently see in the system.

I say this very genuinely: the minister is right that families do not care about the politics in this place. They care about outcomes for parents, for families and for children. We will engage in this debate in a spirit of good faith and will seek to deliver an outcome, in partnership with the government, that meets these principles.

Ms O’DWYER (Higgins—Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer) (15:55): I welcome the debate that we are having here at the dispatch box today about the importance of child care in our national economy and the importance of child care for families right across this country. I congratulate the shadow minister for bringing forward this motion, and I also congratulate my colleague the Minister for Social Services for the very inclusive way he has gone about tackling one of the great challenges that we face as a nation: the challenge to make sure that for the $7 billion that the government spends on supporting families we get the very best outcomes for those families. We want to focus on getting accessible and affordable child care, we want parents to be happy with the quality of that child care, and we want it to be the child care they need to ensure that they can participate in working life if that is their choice.

We know that the best form of welfare is a job, and the minister delivered an excellent speech to the Press Club only the other day that spoke about these elements. We know, however, that the participation rates for some people—particularly for women aged between 25 and 44—is much lower than in comparable countries in the OECD. We lag behind Canada, New Zealand, the UK and the United States. One of the critical questions we have to ask ourselves is: why is this? Why does Australia lag behind these other countries? Why is our labour force participation for women so much lower? I think the first and most obvious answer is that we have not yet been able to crack the issue of affordable and accessible child care.

Beyond that, the Productivity Commission, which has done such excellent work in the final delivery of their report, has highlighted another aspect which I think is a huge impediment particularly for women getting back into the workforce; that is, the interaction between our tax and transfer system and how women, in particular, are making the choice as to whether or not it is worth it to go back to work. The Productivity Commission highlighted in its interim report that in 2012-13 over 70 per cent of families who used approved early childhood education and care services also received another government payment. This payment was, on average, one of four types of payment, and the commission looked at the interaction between the way these payments work, the childcare situation and why it is that families sometimes make the choice not to return to work. They looked at the effective marginal tax rates of
people in different scenarios. I am going to outline one particular scenario that I think illustrates this point, and that is the scenario of a single mother, Nicola, and her two-and-three-year-old children. Nicola earns $31.54 per hour and sends her children to long day care at a cost of $88 per day per child. When she thinks about providing for her family, she has to think about how working will affect her eligibility for the parenting payment, the family tax benefit part A, the childcare benefit and the childcare rebate. Of course, she has to think about the income tax system as well.

Scarily, the commission's analysis shows that she faces an effective marginal tax rate of 38.6 per cent in working a solitary day. The effective marginal tax rate if she works a second day rises to 66.5 per cent and to 76.3 per cent on the third day. The killer, though, is that, on the fourth day, that rises to 111.5 per cent. At this point, Nicola is financially better off to stay at home rather than to work.

Clearly, these are complex issues; clearly, the interaction forms part of a disincentive for people to get back into the workforce; and, clearly, this is an issue the Productivity Commission has highlighted and an issue that the government needs to address. I welcome the spirit of cooperation that we have heard in the chamber here today from those opposite, and I look forward to working with them to be able to deliver the very best outcome for Australian families.

Ms RYAN (Lalor—Opposition Whip) (16:00): I would like to thank the parliamentary secretary for her words, and I join my colleagues on this matter of public importance. I really do welcome the tone of this debate and the subject of this debate being a matter of public importance. I spoke earlier in the week on this exact topic in an adjournment speech and made some very similar remarks to those of the parliamentary secretary.

I would like to start by saying that, if we are going to have this national conversation about child care, we need to put some landmarks in about where we are. I apologise if some of my early comments may seem to be critical of the government, but we do need to get to a space where we can have this conversation before it begins. I welcome the rhetoric from the government and the way it has changed—we on this side of the House all do. It has been framed with the change of minister, a change of portfolio and a response to the Productivity Commission's report. But I have some concerns about that change in portfolio—that the educative matters in early childcare education and care are not being given the seriousness that they deserve.

I cannot ignore the cuts that have come. I wonder, too, if this congeniality and collegiality coming from across the chamber is not in response to the community outrage and the sector outrage that I have had communicated to me in Lalor about the cuts in that first budget. I do think we need to put that marker down before we can really start this serious conversation, and I call on the budget to reverse those cuts if they are serious about wanting to have this conversation.

I do join my colleagues the member for Adelaide and the member for Gellibrand to say that I am willing to assist in this conversation. As an educator, as someone with experience around learning and around children's milestones, I am willing to assist—like the sector, the families and the educators are willing to assist government to get this right. But, of course, I am a little bit wary. I am a little bit wary when I hear some of the rhetoric that is still coming across. It is not an industry subsidy. It is not a wages subsidy. I am listening really carefully, because the
first part of a conversation is to listen—and I am listening really carefully, and I have some concerns. I have some concerns that we are separating quality from the educative function of early child care so early in this national conversation—because that is what is important. The quality framework has improved this system. It has professionalised this sector. Monitoring childhood milestones, childhood learning, childhood language development, cognitive development, emotional development and physical development is red tape. Unless we get agreement on that, this conversation, for me, cannot go forward.

I refer to the PriceWaterhouseCoopers report of September 2014, and I bring to the chamber's attention that this is not just a question of child welfare or of women's participation and men's participation in the workforce. This is a question of our future. This is about our economic future. This is about developing a vision that is going to see a smarter Australia. This is about our economic future and building the workforce of the future. This is about the early start we give our children across the sector. It is about including all children and their needs. The PriceWaterhouseCoopers report suggested that the projected benefit to the gross domestic product in increased participation of vulnerable children in early childhood 'education'—I make that clear; I am not talking about child minding and babysitting—is worth $13.3 billion.

So this is a really important conversation. Of course it is important because it is about the children. Of course it is important for me as a feminist, because it is about female participation in the workforce. But it is also important for our country for us going forward that we come to grips with the importance of education, that we see early childcare education not through the lens as a cost but through the lens as an investment in this country's future. We need to get to a space where we can really have that conversation and stop the rhetoric about burden and as if having children looked after is a release for the parents to go to work. Those things are part of this conversation; they are not all of this conversation.

WYATT ROY (Longman) (16:05): As somebody who has sat in this parliament for nearly five years now—I might not look like I have been here for five years, but it is nearly five years—there are many moments where you feel deeply let down by the quality of the debate and the partisan politics that infiltrates this place on an almost daily basis. But, when you see a motion, it gives you enormous hope. Perhaps that it is political naivety, but it gives me enormous hope that we can come here as the elected representatives of the Australian people and work together to formulate policies that will make this country as good as it can be. Ultimately, that is why we should all be in this place—to make this country as good as it can be.

The former speaker, a member of the Labor Party, said that the rhetoric about 'a burden on our society' degrades that level of debate, and I think she is absolutely right. We do face a challenge as a nation, but we do not have to frame that challenge as a burden; we should look for the opportunity in how we meet that challenge. It is true: as the youngest person in this place, I worry about the future a lot. Today there are about 7½ people working for every person that is not and, according to the Productivity Commission, by about 2050, that will only be 2½. Of course that is a challenge—not a burden but a challenge.

But there are amazing opportunities. We are in the middle of a growing region with nearly a billion people coming into the middle-class, and we have some of the most intelligent, capable and aspirational people in the world living in this country. If we can get more women
who have made the great decision to have a family to go back into the workforce, that will be a great thing for our society and our country. If we can have more women being economic contributors to our country after they have had a family and pay tax, we grow the economic pie for all Australians.

This policy challenge, I think we all agree on both sides of the chamber, is: we want to see as many women as possible go back into the workforce after they have children. We want to make sure that the next generation of Australians have the highest-quality level of child care and an educational experience. We want to have the best possible social outcomes in any policy that we bring before this place.

This is a great test for us as elected members—as a government and as an opposition—as to how we face the reform task for our nation. If we can achieve something collectively on this policy, there is enormous hope and optimism for what we can achieve in other policy areas—economic policy—for our country.

On the journey that we have had around this issue, there is a lot of agreement already. We agree that we need to have the highest-quality child care possible for our children. We have achieved that to a great extent with the reforms of the former government, but those reforms have come at a cost. We have to be realistic about this. If we are to have the world's best-quality child care, it comes at a cost. If we want more women to go back into the workforce after they have children, we need to make it as affordable and accessible as possible. Accessibility will be a big challenge for a big country with not many people across a very, very large land space.

On affordability, I think we can achieve an enormous amount, if we work collectively. I would say to all members, but particularly members in the opposition: let's seize the moment that we have now to run at that reform task and work collectively to achieve an affordable and very effective childcare system.

The Productivity Commission have put out a good report, working from almost a budget neutral position—$200 million in additional expenditure. I would say to members opposite—and members on this side: if we are to seize that opportunity, if we are to have this affordable, effective system, we have to be able to fund it. Let's work together—and that means the Labor Party putting funding options on the table—so that we can fund this world-class system. That is the challenge we all face, and I hope we are up to it.

Ms O'NEIL (Hotham) (16:10): I want to acknowledge the contribution of the member for Longman and the others who have spoken in what has been a really good debate and probably one of the few times in this House that I have felt there is a sense of civility and united purpose behind what we are here to discuss.

I want to make a contribution today as a member of parliament, as the member for Hotham representing my constituents but also as a working mum. We have tried just about every type of childcare arrangement you can find in our household. We have had occasional care. We have had family day care. We have had traditional child care. I have been a stay-at-home mum, and my partner has been a stay-at-home-dad. I have sat on waiting lists for months. I have been in situations where I cannot find the child care that I need.

Just as a young person in this chamber can give special insight into youth issues and someone from business can give insight into what is happening in the private sector, as a user
of this system, I can give a little insight into the challenges. I want to say to the parents out there who may be listening: we get it. There are people in this chamber who are struggling with these very issues—the circumstances may be wildly different—but we understand that this issue cuts right to the heart of how you live your life every day as a family. We take that responsibility very seriously, and I think that is why we are seeing this level of civility in the chamber this afternoon.

As a Labor person, I think we have a really proud history in bringing the importance of early childhood education to the fore. Today there is general recognition across most of the policy world and out in the general community that early childhood education is of critical importance. It was Gough Whitlam back in the seventies who started the national conversation about this subject. It was Gough Whitlam who put this on the agenda of the national government. Since then you have seen successive Labor governments try to adapt the system to changing times. I think we will see this conversation about changing times continue.

I want to provide a couple of reflections on some things that I think are changing and things that we need to adapt the system to. Before I do that, I want to acknowledge the important work that the current shadow minister has done in this space. We have heard the words of the member for Lalor about the importance of quality. That is of critical importance. Early childhood education is not just about looking after kids while mums go to work. That is very important, but we cannot forget the critical importance of those early years of education. The shadow minister has been the one to put quality on the table time and time again when we have this debate, and I was pleased to hear her do so again this afternoon.

I want to acknowledge that we know families have changed. One of the reasons why we are having this discussion about child care and how we deal with early childhood education is that we are continuing to see these trends. Single-parent households are a much bigger feature of our lives and our economy than they were 20 or 30 years ago. We see the economic imperative of that, and some of other speakers have talked about the importance of improving female workforce participation—which I know many in this chamber will be aware of—and the Grattan Institute has suggested it is a bigger economic growth lever for this country than tax reform. Just think about the standard, length and detailed debate that we have about tax in this country versus early childhood education. Again, this is one reason why we welcome this debate.

I also wish to talk about the growing notion of the importance of early learning. It is very important to us in particular, as Labor people, because of the social justice angle to this. We know that young Australians who are entering early learning are about twice as likely to develop developmental delays when they come from a low-income household versus a high-income household. We also know that early learning is the key to trying to address these disadvantages. So some of the work of the academics in these areas suggests that just one dollar that we spend on a child in early learning is worth the equivalent of $7 of spending later in life. So this is a really important way for us to ensure that we have equal opportunity for Australians. I know, again, that this is something that we share—in a general sense, perhaps—with those on the other side of the House.

I am very pleased to hear the overtures of the minister, and we have heard that our shadow minister has said that she is very comfortable going into these discussions with an open mind.
But I do want to put on notice that the early signs that I see about policy development in this area do give me a little bit of cause for concern. We have heard the government talk at length about their commitment to families, but there are certain budget measures, including $1 billion in cuts to child care, that I am not sure are supporting that sentiment. We have heard those on the other side of the House talk about the importance of supporting women. Again, I am not sure the evidence lines up there. But I will say, in the context of the bipartisanship, that I am keen to work with the government on this issue. (Time expired)

Dr GILLESPIE (Lyne) (16:15): It is very pleasing to see that we have an outbreak of cooperation here this afternoon, both in sentiment and in substance. There appears to be furious agreement that child care is a worthy social phenomenon. It is self evident. Child care is so important, because children themselves are important. They are our greatest asset, whether as a parent or collectively as a nation. So we do look after them. Good parents do so instinctively.

The other issue that is important for the nation is female workforce participation, because we are an ageing population and we need more people in the workforce if our economy is to grow, and there are vast skills in the female workforce. It is also important for families, because it is not a question of whether it is good for the economy of the nation; it is vital and important for a family that they have a second income just to cope with mortgages, which in the capital cities and metro areas are enormously expensive. Even in the regions, mortgages are expensive. So parents have no choice; they need to work. It is also important for the health and wellbeing of mothers to use the skills that they have learnt in years of training, in either vocational training or higher ed.

Child care itself is vitally important for the child, because, as previous speakers have outlined, there are much better outcomes for the child if they have been exposed to early learning in the year before they go to school. I do not think there is any argument from this side about the benefits of that: they are learning social skills and preparing themselves for the socialisation that needs to be in place for a child to learn effectively. Some children have no siblings at home. We have smaller families now. In generations past, you got looked after by your older brothers and sisters; you mixed with your older brothers and sisters. But, with one or two children in a family, children of many single-child families need to go to day care, family day care or long day care—whatever the situation—to get those social skills. It can also be good for the family itself, because going to day care in any shape or form is an oasis of calm, logic and reason for some families who are challenged with a pretty chaotic situation at home.

But the reality of economics jumps in everywhere in life, particularly when we have massive deficits and debts to cope with. If we were a company, they would call us trading whilst insolvent. So we have to do things as best we can with that valuable $7 billion and a bit more. We need to countenance all sorts of ways to get those children into the early learning space and to get women back into the workforce.

It is ironic that we put a financial limit on childcare benefits and rebates for those that are working, because they are the people that we really need to get in there. You can claim your car as a cost of your employment if you are a small business man, or all your tools, computers or office costs, because if you do not have those costs your business cannot work. If you are a small business woman, you cannot work if you have childcare responsibilities. So why isn't
child care up to a certain limit, when a woman is working, counted as a tax deduction or a cost of doing business? We need to consider those things. If someone is working at home so that the other person can go out to work, why isn't income splitting allowed if it means you are not drawing on the Commonwealth purse to subsidise child care.

We need to consider these things when we have limited fiscal ability to get children into care. What is better than day care is their own mum, but a lot of these mothers need to work, because life is really expensive. The cost of living is expensive. We thoroughly look forward to getting a good resolution to this important issue. (Time expired)

Ms VAMVAKINOU (Calwell) (16:21): I really welcome the opportunity to speak on this MPI and to join my other colleagues on what is a very important issue. Child care is a very, very important issue in my electorate of Calwell. Whilst I would like to note that I understand that taxpayers, in the last financial year, have spent some $5.7 billion in supporting some one million families with the cost of child care, I also want to make the point that thousands of those families are my constituents. I cannot emphasise enough the significance and the importance of child care in Calwell, and in particular quality and affordable child care.

I am very privileged to have many wonderful childcare centres operating in my electorate, and I have enjoyed over the years, and continue to enjoy, visiting them. In particular, I like to listen to their concerns. I talk to the parents, and I get a lot of feedback from them. One of the things that I hear a lot from my constituents is that they want their members of parliament—in their case, and my other colleagues in this case—and, indeed, governments to respond adequately and appropriately to the childcare needs of their local families.

I stress the point that affordability, accessibility and, above all, quality of childcare provision is a priority. It is a priority for my constituents, and I believe it is a priority for a large number of Australian families. In my case, in the case of the people who live in my electorate, a large number of them are from non-English-speaking backgrounds and also on the lower socioeconomic end of the spectrum; therefore, affordability becomes a major issue. My local mums and dads obviously rely on a childcare system that they can afford and that they can have confidence in. They want to be able to leave their children in an environment which is safe, where they feel their children are being cared for and where it is a childcare system that is not just a holding pattern until pick-up time for the kids.

The working families in my electorate need child care because they have to work. They have to work because they have to balance their budgets. Many of them, of course, choose to work as well. Many of my constituents are shift workers or rostered workers. Many of them need to improve their skills and further their education in order to be able to broaden their job opportunities. So the whole issue of balancing work, family and childcare is critical. It is an ongoing and ever-present concern in the federal seat of Calwell.

So my local families and my childcare providers I am certain would look forward to this very constructive debate, especially in light of the release of the Productivity Commission's report, and I join with my colleagues and in particular the shadow minister in participating in this conversation with the government, in looking at ways we can assist the government in putting together a package that should respond to the needs of ordinary Australian families. I join with my colleagues to make the point that there have been measures in the budget—I make reference to the $1 billion cut to child care—that obviously are of concern and are certainly of concern to the families in my electorate. I make the point that the $450 million cut
to the Outside School Hours Care program is a considerable concern to the people in my electorate. The $157 million cut to the family daycare services, which will see an increase in fees of about $35 per week is a problem to an electorate that is, as I said, on the lower socioeconomic spectrum. We are obviously very concerned about legislation that is still in the parliament and looks to the $235 million cut to targeted childcare benefits that were aimed to help lower- and middle-income families. It will be families in my electorate who will be directly affected in the event that that legislation is passed.

Child care is an issue that rightfully all of us should be concerned about. We should be concerned about giving our constituents—in particular the women in our electorates—opportunities to return to work. We also should be mindful that child care is a precursor to successful education.

Ms HENDERSON (Corangamite) (16:26): There is a lot of love in this chamber, and it is great to be part of this debate. I would like to start off my contribution by congratulating both the member for Adelaide and the member for Higgins, who are both pregnant with their first child and due to give birth very soon. They are about to face the challenge that so many working women have faced: how to stay in the workforce while caring for children, how to manage work commitments and also be a great mum. It is a juggle. I also acknowledge the wonderful work of the member for Hotham, who has a young son. I have been chatting to her about how she manages, and she is doing a terrific job under very difficult circumstances.

I share with my parliamentary colleagues today in welcoming the tone of this debate. I want to particularly congratulate the Minister for Social Services on his speech yesterday, on his approach today in the House. I also will not be responding to some of the criticisms, because I feel that in this debate we need to focus on the positives. There has been much said in the Productivity Commission report that is incredibly positive, and I have to say that, as the mother of nine-year-old Jeremy, I too, like the member for Hotham, have tried every sort of child care—long day care, au pairs, nannies, family, friends, after-school care. It is very challenging, and I really do welcome the increased focus on flexibility. I think that is perhaps one area where the previous government did not have enough focus; in this modern-day age we do not live in a nine-to-five world. Particularly for parents with more than one child in long day care, it is incredibly expensive. We need to make sure we give families the best option.

I want to comment in relation to universal access. I welcome our support of universal access and also the national quality framework. With the former minister we had a wonderful visit to Colac. We met with Kathy Thomson from the Millville Child Care Centre, and she emphasised how important this was to her. I can tell you I was disappointed to hear of the criticisms of the former minister, the Assistant Minister for Education, because Sussan Ley has done an incredible job in initiating this Productivity Commission report and in recognising what modern families want and need. She has listened, and we as a government recognise how important quality care is.

I also welcome the focus on targeting those who need child care the most, and we do that with a great deal of compassion. We understand that we need to focus on low- and middle-income families, the families that perhaps have fallen through the cracks. Under the Labor Party the cost of child care went up by some 50 per cent, and it did not help families get back to work. We recognise that for low- and middle-income earners it is so incredibly important to
give them every opportunity to work because for so many families it is necessary. It is vital to
give their families every opportunity to give their children a great future.

We know, of course, that in some respects we are lagging behind other OECD nations
when it comes to women in the workforce, particularly women with children under the age of
five. But we also recognise that it is also very challenging for sole parents.

I have a truncated time today—of course, I realise that, Madam Speaker. I very much
welcome our government's support and the emphasis on affordable, quality and accessible
child care. I welcome the very positive nature of this debate and I look forward to working
with the minister and members on both sides to deliver a great solution for the $7 billion that
we are spending each year.

**ADJOURNMENT**

The **SPEAKER** (16:30): I propose the question:

That the House do now adjourn.

**Fowler Electorate: Festivals**

Mr **HAYES** (Fowler—Chief Opposition Whip) (16:30): Last Wednesday week, I had the
opportunity to attend the auspicious Lunar New Year celebrations at the Vietnamese Buddhist
Phuoc Hue Temple. In fact, this is fifth occasion that I have had the privilege to join in on the
festivities with the countdown to Lunar New Year, a very significant and important
celebration for Vietnamese and Chinese Australians.

At the Phuoc Hue Temple I was joined by more than 15,000 Vietnamese Australians, who
came together to pray for good health and prosperity for the Year of the Goat. As well as
various Vietnamese community leaders, I was joined by parliamentary colleagues.
Community leaders included: Dr Thang Ha, President of the Vietnamese Community in
Australia; Dr David Tang, Dr Hao Vu and Dr Vinh Tran from the Australian Vietnamese
Aged Care Services; and not to forget the great work of Mr Quang Luu, from Vietface TV,
and a good friend of mine, Dr Lieu Vinh Binh. We were entertained by the magnificent lion
dancing by Dong Tam and by the spectacular fireworks that followed, that lit the sky up at
midnight.

As the federal member for Fowler, I am honoured to be able to attend an event such as this,
that really celebrates the very essence of what it is to be a part of our multicultural community
in this country. While I get to attend many cultural events, the cultural richness of the Lunar
New Year is something that I really admire as it showcases our rich diversity and
multiculturalism.

Amongst the many traditions associated with Lunar New Year, such as handing out the red
pockets to children for good luck, I have also adopted a personal practice of visiting at least
10 Buddhist temples, a custom maintained very much by the Vietnamese and Chinese people
in this country. My temple visits started on the first day of the new year and concluded the
day after. I visited the Buddhist temples in Cabramatta, Bonnyrigg, Canley Vale and St Johns
Park.

In addition, I also had the pleasure of attending the celebrations at the Chinese Mingyue
Lay Buddhist Temple hosted by the Australian Chinese Buddhist Society. I personally thank
President Vincent Kong and Chairman James Chan, together with Jensen Tran, Tony Trinh
and the whole of the organising committee for their dedication to the Australian Chinese community. Their religious work and charitable endeavours have brought my local community closer together. The Lunar New Year is a festival that is obviously a fantastic celebration, and it is a celebration for all Australians in my community.

This weekend, I will also attend the Tet Festival, one of the most popular events hosted by the Vietnamese Community in Australia group. President, Dr Thang Ha and his management committee, comprising Dinh Tran, Janice Le, Peter Nguyen, Davy Nguyen and Maria Tran, have done a tremendous job ever since their appointment. They are a young team, but are making a difference for the better in our community. I wish them all the best for the festival this weekend, which will see something like 60 thousand people attend the celebration over the three-day period. My grandchildren particularly enjoy this because I get to take them and they wear traditional Vietnamese dress—ao dai—

Mr Craig Kelly: I’ve seen them there!

Mr HAYES: The member for Hughes has actually seen them there; he knows how much they enjoy the Vietnamese culture!

We live in a very remarkable society, which has come to be defined by our cultural diversity. Lunar New Year is an important part of that and truly reflects Australia’s multicultural spirit.

In closing, I would like to end by wishing all Australians celebrating the Lunar New Year a prosperous and peaceful year. The Year of the Goat is traditionally associated with hope, peace and tranquility, and I hope it will bring good luck, health and happiness to all those families. To the Vietnamese families I say: chuc mung nam moi! And to my Chinese families I say: sun nin pal lok!

**Child Marriage**

Mr CRAIG KELLY (Hughes) (16:35): Unfortunately I rise to speak on a subject that is not as happy as that of the member for Fowler. What I would like to raise this evening is the issue of child marriage.

Child marriage is a violation of human rights. It robs girls of their childhood and adolescence, bringing those to a premature and unnatural end by imposing adult roles and responsibilities before the girls are physically, psychologically or emotionally prepared. Child marriage also robs girls of their education, and it damages their health and their long-term prospects.

We know from overseas studies that complications from pregnancy and childbirth together are the main cause of death among adolescent girls aged 15-19 in developing countries—the main cause of death. We know that girls married young are more vulnerable to domestic violence and sexual abuse than those who marry later. We know that it is not uncommon for childhood marriage to impose social isolation upon those girls, bringing unwanted separation from their friends and family. It also entrenches them and their future families in poverty.

However, child marriage is not something that is restricted to poor, backward and isolated parts of the developing world—it is happening right here in our Australia today. Last week it was reported that a 26-year-old man was convicted of sexual assault matters after marrying a 12-year-old girl in a backyard Islamic ceremony conducted by an imam in New South Wales. She later became pregnant and miscarried. The so-called husband was only caught when he
rocked up to Centrelink, seeking benefits for his 12-year-old wife, and the police were called. And yesterday, in another case, documents in a Bankstown court revealed that an unemployed man allegedly beat his 15-year-old child bride after marrying her in an Islamic ceremony officiated by a sheikh in Sydney's west last year. The case was only discovered when the 15-year-old girl took herself to a Bankstown hospital believing she had suffered a miscarriage. The court heard that the girl had stopped attending high school at the time of her marriage and was not working. Court documents also revealed the man allegedly threatened the girl bride's family over the phone, including her mother when she raised concerns. The accused said to her, 'If you start, I'll finish it.'

These are not isolated cases. Dr Eman Sharobeem, the executive director of women's health services in Western Sydney said that these cases of underage marriages were 'just the tip of the iceberg'. She estimated there were at least 60 child brides living in south-western Sydney with many more destined for child marriage. Good Shepherd chief executive officer, Robyn Roberts, said of child marriages that evidence suggests it is prevalent in the community.

Child marriage has no place in Australia. Our Australian values hold that Child marriage is a violation of human rights. The values of Australia hold that the decision to marry should be a freely made, informed decision that is taken without fear, coercion, or undue pressure. It is a decision that should be made by an adult when the adult is ready. Australian values hold that those broad choices must be freely made, not only in regards to marriage but in all aspects of her life.

To paraphrase our Prime Minister Tony Abbott: no one should come to live in Australia and seek to enjoy the benefits that our values and freedoms have delivered while at the same time denying and rejecting those very same values and freedoms. We cannot allow this violation of girls' rights. This discriminatory and primitive idea around the value of women and girls in our society is festering in our suburbs under the guise that it is just another multicultural practice. We cannot allow the sexual exploitation of our children under the name of child marriage. We cannot afford the lost opportunity, the waste of talent that child marriage causes.

We must re-evaluate our laws. We must re-evaluate our immigration practices. We must re-evaluate our education standards to ensure that we stamp out this most abhorrent practice of child marriage.

**Employment**

Ms CHESTERS (Bendigo) (16:39): Today I rise to speak to the House about the growing problem with temporary work visas in this country, specifically in relation to the 417 visa, also known as the backpacker visa. In my electorate we have quite a lot of food processing and we still have quite a number of agricultural farms in operation. There have been numerous complaints to my office and through the local media of exploitation of some workers on these visas. Further there have been complaints from locals saying that they are missing out on jobs, that they have applied to these companies for work and they believe that they are not being employed at the expense of those on the 417 visas.

Everyone acknowledges that our migration system is complex. Everyone acknowledges that our fair work and industrial relations systems are complex. But it is compounded when the two very separate areas collide, which is what is going on at the moment with the
temporary work visa system. One particular case I wish to highlight in my electorate is with KR Castlemaine. They are known to all of us as Don's smallgoods and bacon. We have probably all got some of their products in our fridges. We probably all enjoyed their hams over Christmas. But what happened before Christmas in their factories caught most locals off guard.

It is quite common in Castlemaine to pick up extra work at 'the baco' before Christmas. Lots of people take on the extra work whether they be university students returning home or mums and dads wanting a bit of extra money for the Christmas period. But this year a number of them missed out on that casual work. The company revealed to the local media that they had engaged a migration agency to supply 417 visa workers to the site. What we then discovered was that these workers were being paid the award, making them cheaper than the workers who usually get this Christmas work. I should note that KR Castlemaine is one of the biggest employers. They do employ 1,200 people. But it was still 100 jobs that people were concerned were not going to local people but were instead going to temporary workers under the 417 visa system.

There is a simple fundamental unfairness if local workers miss out on jobs to overseas temporary workers who are here because they are cheaper. We are in a process with the company to compile a list of local workers who are willing to put their hand up. This is not an isolated case unfortunately. This is quite common in the meatworks industry. There are stories that some meatworks have up to 70 per cent of their workers here on this visa scheme. I asked the Prime Minister, in the great example he used today in question time about the new meatworks that have opened in Darwin, is it one of the workplaces where 70 per cent of the work is being performed by people currently here in this country on 417 visas? Within that system itself there have been multiple media reports recently about the breaches occurring and about people being exploited under that system. Thousands of workers are being underpaid wages or denied entitlements by their Australian employers.

This week, the office of the Fair Work Ombudsman revealed it has recovered more than $20 million in the last year alone from bosses who had not paid their workers properly. Despite this good news that the Fair Work Ombudsman is recovering money, there is increasing concern about the rising number of complaints from overseas workers being denied their entitlements and that this is just the tip of the iceberg. It calls into question the whole integrity of the system if so many people who are being exploited are coming forward to complain.

The industries that were highlighted in this particular report were hospitality and construction. In hospitality, a number of workers coming forward are British or Irish people who have a basic understanding of their rights. My concern is for the people who are here from non-English-speaking backgrounds, who may not understand our work rights. I call on the government to investigate this area and to set up an inquiry into the 417 visa system.

**Economy**

Mr LAMING (Bowman) (16:45): We are an optimistic nation and, frankly, I think you could say we rate ourselves, whether it is in a sporting contest, economically or in tourism. At any level, we are a country that is enormously optimistic. We are not, of course, unblemished by error. At times, we have elected a Labor government that has plunged us into debt and...
deficit, but at the heart of it all we are optimistic enough to know that we can make our way through it.

Of course, in any international comparison, we do not have the debt that other nations do. We often turn to Europe and look for the saviour of Europe, the banking nation of Germany, which only has a 55 per cent debt-to-GDP ratio. On that comparison, it is favourable, but let us never forget the strong and resilient AAA rated banks of 2009. Let us never forget the strong mining sector. And let us never forget the large surplus, the large cupboard of resources, that John Howard left for the Labor Party to help them through that global financial crisis.

The answer was quite simple. In late 2008 Treasury did panic, with inappropriate modelling, to find that there would be a gap in our GDP thanks to the crisis, but within six months they had corrected their input, understood that we were not directly tied to the American economy and revised their estimates in early 2009 to say that there would not be a hole in our GDP. But, of course, politically that was not good news for Rudd and Swan, who continued on their crazy 6.5-per-cent-of-GDP stimulus, which ran for four years and ran us into the ground.

Coming from Brisbane as the member for Ryan does, she will be very familiar with those tunnel borers that work their way quietly under Brisbane building those magnificent tunnels. That was the Labor Party, plunging us down, entombing us in debt and then, of course, getting stuck and having to be bailed out. This was a Labor Party strategy, of course, that had no end. They could neither stop the boats nor stop the debt, so that has fallen upon us, through no fault of our own. We are determined to find solutions.

But I say today that in 2015 we are a different nation. We have gone through extraordinary, tough choices in 2014. We have taken tough choices around stopping new spending, treating taxpayers' money with respect, being cautious about overspending, and pulling back, often pausing and freezing, payments in order to get that tumbling deficit under control. John Howard once said that going into debt is easy—it is like riding an escalator down to the basement—but coming out of debt is the hard work. It is like climbing up a fire escape.

I can never promise the people in the gallery an easy path, but I can say that young Australians primarily view their life as one that is together, in many ways, with a large amount of private debt. It is something they have become used to. So they expect government to be able to manage public debt without sacrificing our ability to put food on the table, have security in our jobs and access the essential services that we could afford last year. They are not always cheap, but they should be affordable.

In 2015, we are looking for an optimistic projection of where this country could go. We are looking for a road show about the Intergenerational report that does not say that we are all doomed—that does not make puerile projections about needing to treble GST if we do nothing by 2030, in some sort of Malthusian fallacy that nothing ever changes. Of course times will change. Of course international appetite for our resources will change. Of course conditions, our currency and our terms of trade will all change. They are very, very hard to predict. We cannot even predict the budget deficit for this year within a few billion dollars. Why should we be overly reliant on generational predictions?
My point is this: Australians are fundamentally optimistic, and they want an optimistic message from their government that we can do this together by working together. We can do it by driving growth, by driving revenue, by driving entrepreneurship and through that opportunity—because government just has one job at hand, and that is to provide, fundamentally, opportunity to its people. In the end, we can shuffle money between citizens, but we have to provide opportunity for everyone and give them every chance at success. And that must be the message in 2015.

Let us not be overly reliant on intergenerational predictions which basically say we must go without now in order to give money to someone a generation from now. Let us not be overly reliant on tax white papers that are basically smokescreens to say we are trying to change the amount of tax we pay.

Australians are asking for a projection that is clear and optimistic, and that can be done by identifying what Australia's great assets are and capitalising on them. Australians, particularly young Australians, know fundamentally what they are: we dream more than anything of gaining a qualification, and we do not mind paying for what we deserve and what we have earned. We do not mind as long as we know we have a chance at owning our own place, at getting and keeping a job and at making sure that services are available those who need them most. There is not so much a budget emergency, but we have a fairness emergency, and it is something that must be addressed in 2015.

Television Sports Broadcasts

Mr HUSIC (Chifley) (16:50): Madam Speaker, you know winter is coming, and you also know what comes around the corner with winter. On 5 March the NRL season begins again, and I think I have spotted you once or twice wearing the jersey of a team that we both admire, the Parramatta Eels! In early April, another game that apparently attracts the attention of people like the member for Higgins will start—and I refuse to name it here at the dispatch box, but that starts on 2 April. There is a lot of excitement. People like to go to the games. I certainly love watching the Eels play, and I have seen the Wanderers and the Kings and many other teams participate in sport. Live sport is one of the great experiences you can have.

But not everyone can get to a game, and they prefer to watch on TV. Certainly I remember when I was watching the grand final last year. In 2014 I was staggered that you still could not get, on your primary channel, the main sporting events of this country on high definition. It is something that I raised publicly at the time, and I was very critical of the fact that free-to-air channels do not do this, but they commendably and patiently explained that it was not entirely their fault.

They certainly do feel the anger, the ire, of footy fans. In particular I note this one on the fan site BigFooty, who said:

In this modern era with billion dollar TV rights it is nothing short of a joke that our sports biggest day is shown in SD.

... ... ...

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

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

If you go to the industry group Free TV, they will explain that the reason for this is that there is a requirement that the primary channel be in standard definition in this country and,
under the anti-siphoning laws, you have to show a lot of these big events straightaway on that primary channel. That has an impact in terms of what people can watch. Some may say that not everyone is capable of getting an HDTV. That does not appear to be the case, because if you look at nearly every single capital city in this nation, over 90 per cent of homes have a high definition TV. It is not the case that people will miss out if we change this over. It is also probably worth noting that analogue TV is being switched off in this country; it is the equivalent of putting E10 fuel in your car when 98-octane is freely available.

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

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

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

Self-made, or self-described, Messiah, the Minister for Communication, has been talking about a lot of things outside his portfolio and gracing us with his wisdom. He has also shown that by all accounts he is able to bring people of all different walks together. In fact, he can bring together people who do not actually like him to agree with things he is proposing. Given that he has these great persuasive and lobbying skills, you could expect that he would be able to deploy them in a way the public would appreciate. I certainly think the public would appreciate it if we were able to change the law, cut the red tape and make sure our sports are in high definition glory. It is the least we could expect in this day and age—particularly when we are able to see, for example, sports like the World Cup shown on SBS and ESPN subscriber TV in high-definition. Certainly the bulk of the public, and those who do not have subscriber TV, should be entitled to see something that in this day and age, in other parts of the world, is freely available. You would expect a country as great as ours to be able to show the sports the public love. Go the Eels and enjoy the rest of 2015.

Life Sciences Queensland

Mrs PRENTICE (Ryan) (16:55): I rise today to continue the theme of innovation and speak about an organisation in my electorate which does incredible work bringing industry and research together to create better outcomes for Queensland and Australia. In a suburban office in the electorate of Ryan a small team, dedicated to the economic development and diversification of knowledge-intensive industries, is achieving great outcomes. Life Sciences Queensland has 157 members—bold and innovative organisations, large and small, covering the spectrum of life sciences: human health; animal health; and agricultural, environmental, industrial and marine biotechnology. Many members are from research and development and innovation backgrounds across the sectors. Life Sciences Queensland or LSQ works to ensure its members and the broader life sciences industry work together to complement each other's capabilities and demonstrate that Australia, and indeed Queensland, is relevant in a global biotechnology setting. LSQ supports and promotes industry sectors and individual organisations to promote growth, build the profile of the sector and enhance the capacity and capability of the life sciences industry.
With the Australian health-care industry being ranked as the 12th largest in the world, and with an annual spend of $121 billion, it is little wonder that an industry-led organisation like Life Sciences Queensland is such a success. With events at the hugely successful Innovation 20, held to coincide with the G20 in Brisbane, the success of Life Sciences Queensland will no doubt continue to build on the solid foundations it has created.

A large part of the success of Life Sciences Queensland has to be attributed to its indefatigable chief executive officer, Mr Mario Pennisi. Mario has been with Life Sciences Queensland since its inception and has been a tireless champion of the work they undertake. Mario is the always smiling and enthusiastic face of LSQ, whether it is in the media or in the boardroom. He is passionate about the place and role of Queensland as a research hub in the world of life sciences and that is demonstrated through the dedication he has not just to LSQ as an entity, but his belief in the sector as a whole.

Life Sciences Queensland works to bring together industry and researchers not just from Queensland but from around the world. They hold events all over the world, like the upcoming LSQ Queensland BIO Reception in Philadelphia, as well as holding events in Queensland to bring international industry and potential investors to meet with researchers and tour their facilities. There are already two major events scheduled for this year, the Life Sciences Futures Showcase in May and the Australia Bioenergy and Bioproducts Symposium in October.

Life Sciences Queensland is doing an amazing job of promoting the capability of Queensland to the world. With wonderful, life-changing medical technology like Professor Ian Frazer's Gardasil vaccine for cervical cancer the future of medical research in Queensland is looking strong. While Gardasil will no doubt see the instances of cervical cancer continue to decrease in future years, the endeavours of Life Sciences Queensland are not just confined to medical research.

Another Ryan constituent, Professor James Dale of the Queensland University of Technology, is working on a bioengineered banana, which provides up to 15 times more vitamin A than traditional bananas, to be grown in sub-Saharan Africa. According to the World Health Organization, vitamin A deficiency is the No. 1 preventable cause of blindness in children and of maternal mortality in the world. Professor Dale's research and test crops are being funded in a large part by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The World Health Organization estimates that between 250,000 and 500,000 children become blind each year as a result of vitamin A deficiency, and half of those die within a year of becoming blind. I commend Professor Dale on his foresight and skill which have made such a difference in this area.

Queensland and its life sciences industry are well served by Mario Pennisi and LSQ. Their tireless work will reap large results for Queensland and Australia. The world will benefit from innovative technologies that will save and enhance life and Australia will gain a reputation as a hub of the medical world. I am pleased to have had this opportunity to highlight the work of Life Sciences Queensland and I look forward to updating the House on their progress in the months and years ahead.

The SPEAKER: It being 5 pm, the debate is interrupted.

House adjourned at 17:00
Thursday, 26 February 2015

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott) took the chair at 09:30.

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

Intergenerational Report

Dr CHALMERS (Rankin) (09:30): Members of parliament have many different roles, and one of them is to plan for the future. That requires us to understand the trends and the developments on the horizon in order to ensure that we have that economic settings right so that future generations can enjoy better living standards than what we have today. That is what makes the Intergenerational report such an important initiative. I agree with the Treasurer on one point, and perhaps one point only, and that is when he described it as a 'critical' document. If it is such a critical document, the question is: why has he breached the law of the Charter of Budget Honesty in delaying its release beyond the five-year limit? It says a great deal about the confusion and incompetence in the Abbott government right now that this Treasurer will be the first of the four treasurers covered by the charter to breach it.

This Treasurer cannot get anything right. In a speech last week he spoke about three areas—not climate change, and not growing inequality or social immobility or inclusive growth, which did not get a look in, but three other important areas nonetheless. He spoke about the importance of productivity at the same time that he is cutting money for education and training, limiting access to university and relying on last century's copper network for broadband—all with costs to our human capital, technological infrastructure and productivity. He talked about workforce participation at the same time as he is cutting a billion dollars out of child care. And he talked about budget repair—a crucial objective, but one hampered by his worsening budget position, the tax breaks that he has given to the wealthiest people in the superannuation system and the loopholes that he has reopened for multinational corporations shifting their tax dollars offshore.

The IGR should outline in detail the cost of the government's decisions. Unfortunately, it has already been seriously compromised by the government's plan to play politics with it. We know from estimates that there has been interference in the forecast for migration, which has serious consequences for the budget numbers. This interference is why the Treasury secretary and the head of the fiscal group went to such lengths yesterday and the day before to describe this as the Treasurer's document and not the Treasury's. Another revelation was that the government is spending hundreds and thousands of dollars on market research leading to a taxpayer-funded advertising campaign. Australians are rejecting the government's budget because it is fundamentally unfair, not because it has not been spun well enough. There is not an the absence of spin; there is an absence of heart and an absence of vision, which no amount of taxpayer funded ads will fix.

We eagerly await the release of an Intergenerational report which is so late now that the Treasurer has breached the law. Despite the fact that the document has been compromised, we will engage constructively in the debate about the future of this country and its economy, because nothing is more important.
Housing Affordability

Mr VARVARIS (Barton) (09:33): I rise today to speak on the issue of housing affordability. It gives me great pleasure to speak on this because this has been a topic of concern for many constituents in Barton and no doubt in many other electorates of my parliamentary colleagues.

Owning a home is the great Australian dream. This is a dream that many young couples and families strive towards with years of meticulous financial planning and hard work. As politicians, we want to ensure that all Australians can actively work towards achieving this with the right resources. In my 15 years in local government, and recently as the federal representative of Barton, housing affordability and the ability to enter the residential market for the first time is, without question, one of the most common complaints that I hear and read about. Whilst this problem hits Sydney and Melbourne the hardest out of most other capital cities, nonetheless it is our responsibility to ensure that our residents can have a fair go at buying their first home.

I certainly acknowledge that even with dual incomes, buying a home in Sydney remains fiercely competitive. Therefore, I can understand that my constituents are perplexed that the residential market does not always operate as a level playing field. Many of my constituents have contacted my office to inform me that they feel that the goalposts keep shifting with regard to home ownership. They save up enough money, only to lose out time and again to buyers who potentially flout the rules or where properties are developed and completely marketed elsewhere, other than Australia. Foreign investment itself is not the issue, but if the rules of foreign investment in residential property are not adhered to and then not enforced, Australians lose out.

I am proud to say that, since coming into office, this side of government has been actively working to redress the balance of home ownership. Just yesterday, the Prime Minister, along with the Treasurer and I, went to visit a home for sale in Kogarah, a popular suburb for residential rental and purchases in the heart of Barton. It was a unique opportunity to meet with constituents, hardworking Australians, to hear of their experiences in the residential property market. This is a familiar scenario across the country. I have heard many stories of Australians being priced out of the property market by unrelenting, unchecked foreign investment. This is something that the coalition is steadfastly committed to rectifying.

Appropriate financial penalties are needed to ensure that real estate agents and buyers, in their actions, are abiding by the rules. Furthermore, new application fees set to be introduced at the time of purchase of a property will go towards the administration of our foreign investment framework. I look forward to working with my colleagues and my constituents on this important issue to ensure that foreign investment and housing affordability work together for our nation's best interests.

Anzac Centenary: The Digger's View

Mr CONROY (Charlton) (09:36): With events to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the First World War and the Anzac landing taking place across the nation, I take this opportunity to inform the House of a particularly significant local project. Juan Mahoney, who lives in my electorate of Charlton, has produced an extraordinary pictorial titled The Diggers View, a book which presents an entirely unique depiction of the First World War. It
contains handwritten letters and diary entries from Australian soldiers, describing in intimate detail the progress and consequence of the war at a personal level. It also includes an extensive glossary of military terms, battle statistics and biographies. Though it is perhaps the vivid colour photographs that serve to illustrate this tragic chapter of Australian history in a new and unseen way.

At the turn of the 20th century, and amidst the most horrid atrocities to face modern Europe, the emerging technology of colour photography was not widely used. Each of the photographs in this book has been painstakingly restored and colourised by Juan and his team, in a process that can take anywhere from one day to one week to complete. The artefacts themselves were sourced by Juan over a five-year period, and given he is a local many of these are from the Hunter region. The 9th Brigade of the AIF features prominently, as it was made up of the 33rd, 34th, 35th and 36th battalions, which were formed or trained in the Newcastle and Hunter region. It features, for example, a picture of six Air Force personnel posing with a presentation aircraft, the Upper Hunter Battle Plane, donated to the war effort by the Upper Hunter District. Another picture shows a horse-drawn carriage, loaded with comfort boxes for troops, standing in King Street, outside the Newcastle department store 'Scott's'. Yet another shows the memorial outside the Newcastle Post Office, built in 1916 and covered in floral tributes. And there is a letter from Lieutenant Arthur Lean, Newcastle's own, of the 35th Battalion, to his parents on Easter Monday, where he writes honestly and frankly about the men in his battalion. He says:

It is funny to lie here in my room listening to the men talking. They say some funny things at times especially if a few beers in. They curse and grumble but they also laugh and joke. One chap has just remarked, "When I enlisted I was full of two things, good Australian beer and patriotism."

They sometimes lie in bed and swear most vilely about work and at other things. Other times they quote poetry, sing songs and laugh for hours. They argue most heatedly on every conceivable subject and Billy Hughes gets a fair share of it.

I am sure he did!

Through the support of the Charlton Anzac Centenary Committee, copies of this book will be donated to the libraries of every school in the electorate, which will be a fine addition to their collections. I congratulate Juan on his work and thank him for his dedication to bringing these scenes from the war into living colour.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott) (09:39): Before calling the member for Parkes, I welcome the Deputy Speaker and members of the Papua New Guinea parliament, our great friends and neighbours.

Honourable members: Hear, hear!

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

Disability Employment

Mr COULTON (Parkes—The Nationals Chief Whip) (09:39): I would like to speak about Employ-Ability Week. Next week in Dubbo a local organisation is promoting Employ-Ability Week. For over 20 years Break Thru People Solutions has been helping job seekers to connect with employers, and next week they will be promoting the employment of individuals who
have a disability. One in six Australians of working age has a disability, but often the
disability can be minor and the employer may not even know.

In a recent survey of 230 employers in the Orana region in central New South Wales found
that one in five employers indicated they were interested in employing people with a
disability. I believe that this low number is because there is a general lack of awareness in the
community about what the term 'disability' means. Academic studies have concluded that
workers with a disability are not more likely to be injured at work than other employees.
Businesses should also be open to receiving information about employing people with
disabilities and talking to local service providers.

It is important to bust some myths in relation to employing people with disability. Workers
compensation claims are no higher for employers of people with a disability, and these
workers are actually less likely to have a workplace injury. Evidence shows that productivity
levels for most people who have a disability are equal to those of other employees. In other
cases, eligible people with a disability can access a process of productivity based wage
assessment to determine fair pay for fair work. There can be a misconception that people with
a disability struggle to fit in with the existing workforce. People with a disability make up 20
per cent of the population, so most people will have friends or a family member with a
disability. Employers who are concerned about absenteeism can be assured that research
shows that there is a 39 per cent lower use of sick leave amongst staff with a disability
compared to other employees.

Break Thru solutions will be working to promote their disability employment service in
Dubbo over the next week, beginning from 1 March. Break Thru solutions are a disability
employment service provider and are able to assist individuals with employment, integrating
education and training, non-vocational assistance, rehabilitation services, work experience,
job search and job placement.

**Defence Procurement**

**Ms PARKE (Fremantle) (09:42):** I too would like to welcome our friends visiting from
the parliament of Papua New Guinea. Welcome to this place.

The week before last, the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union organised an event
here in Parliament House to draw attention to the importance of the Australian shipbuilding
industry and to relaunch the 'Save Australia's Shipbuilding' campaign. At that event a
shipbuilder from South Australia spoke about his concern for his own employment future, for
the economic and social welfare of his family and the wider community of which they are a
part. Most poignantly, he talked about the pride his sons took in the work he did, their interest
in being able to follow in his path as a skilled manufacturing worker and of course his fear
that this opportunity simply will not exist in the future.

There are many families in my electorate of Fremantle who have the same concern. As I
have described in this place before, there is a strong tradition of maritime related
manufacturing work in Fremantle, and the Australian Marine Complex in Henderson
continues to be the site of some of the most important defence construction and maintenance
work in the country. There are more than 200 shipbuilders employed in Collins class
submarine maintenance and work on the Anzac air warfare destroyers across both BAE and
the Australian Submarine Corporation shipyards. Of course, those jobs depend on clarity and
certainty in relation to future contracts. Currently the shipbuilding work depends on the three AWD upgrade projects that have been awarded, but there is no certainty of work beyond 2017.

The danger for Western Australian shipbuilders is that, as the future grows more uncertain, there is a possibility that companies like BAE could be forced to consider relocating jobs out of WA and, ultimately, that shipbuilding jobs could be lost altogether. Just as the shipbuilder from South Australia made it clear that manufacturing is not only about jobs in terms of numbers but also about families, networks of families and, often, linked generations of people who have been drawn to the productive value and satisfaction that is embedded in a craft and trade that has existed for centuries, so too those connections and traditions exist in the community I represent. I know there is more than one father-and-son combination at work in the Australian Marine Complex within my electorate. In fact, I know that in at least one case there is a father whose two sons—a qualified tradesman and an apprentice—share his shipbuilding passion.

As I have said, more than 200 workers are engaged in shipbuilding through the ASC and BAE yards in Henderson, and as members of the AMWU they take pride in their work and their craft. They know that shipbuilding is vital to this country, especially when it comes to defence projects, and they are custodians of a trade that must not be jeopardised and of jobs that must be maintained for the benefit of the wider community and for future generations. As the member for Fremantle I will continue to support them in their campaign to save Australian shipbuilding.

Dobell Electorate: Australia Day Awards

Mrs McNAMARA (Dobell) (09:45): Too often, the discussion regarding youth on the Central Coast is focused on challenges such as unemployment and mental health—and I have raised these important issues many times in this place. But today I take the opportunity to promote some of the fine young men and women who give the best to our community, from local sporting champions to members of the Dobell Youth Advisory Committee. I am proud to stand in this parliament and boast about the many academic, social and sporting achievements of young people who call the Central Coast their home.

The magnitude of talent amongst our youth was prominently displayed at the recent Wyong Shire Council Australia Day Awards ceremony. A record 11 nominees vied for the Youth Award, and many other young people found themselves nominated for categories including the Environmental, Sports Person and Community Service awards. Many of the nominees are active in our local community, taking up volunteer positions with local sports clubs and community committees, including Nathan Conner, a member of the DYAC, whose achievements I have previously had the pleasure of sharing with the parliament. I have worked closely with several of the nominees over the past 12 months and today I acknowledge their achievements.

Maddison O'Gradey-Lee was awarded the Wyong Shire Council Australia Day Youth Award. Currently completing year 12, Maddi is a member of Wyong council's Wyong Action Team, which is implementing the council's Youth Engagement Strategy. Maddi is currently developing a mental awareness program called 'It's all about me'. Maddi's aim is to break the stigma around youth mental health, and she hopes to let people know where to turn for help and how they can help others who are dealing with such issues.
Another member of the Wyong Action Team is Rhys Reid, who has focused his efforts on making council's outdoor gyms accessible to young people. Rhys understands the benefits to physical and mental wellbeing stemming from an active and healthy lifestyle and is determined to spread this message far and wide.

Ethan Milne, Secretary of The Entrance District Cricket Club, was nominated for the Sports Person Award for his services to local sport. For the past 2½ years, Ethan has been instrumental in expanding the opportunity for members of the local community to participate in sport. His enthusiasm for the game of cricket and its contribution to a healthy and active lifestyle provides pathways for those members of the community looking to become involved. Ethan is also an active surf-lifesaver and gives his time throughout the summer to volunteer patrols. In addition to Ethan's outstanding contribution to local sport, he was a recipient of the Dr John Lincoln Youth Community Service Award for providing over 500 hours of community service in recent years.

These are just some of the many examples of young people in my electorate who are achieving extraordinary things for their community. It is my pleasure to recognise, in the parliament today, these fine young adults, and I look forward to sharing many more of their achievements in the future.

Royal Australian Mint

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (09:48): Over the last few weeks I have been raising my concerns about the Abbott government's plans to privatise the Royal Australian Mint. The Royal Australian Mint, located just down the road from here, is facing an uncertain future. The Mint was earmarked for privatisation in last year's horror budget, meaning its 200 employees have been living in a state of limbo for 10 months. I call on the Abbott government to explain what impact selling the Mint will have on the budget bottom line. The Prime Minister must answer questions like: how will the government ensure the integrity and security of the Mint if a private company takes over? What kinds of regulations will accompany the sale if it goes ahead?

A number of concerns have been raised to me by members of the public: do we allow foreign owned bidders to enter the divestment market to provide competition for the sale of the Mint? Would some of the activities of a privatised Mint be able to be contracted out to foreign owned businesses? As long as the Abbott government refuses to make a case for the sale, we must assume its decision is purely ideological.

These questions are front of mind because last weekend the Royal Australian Mint celebrated its 50th birthday. There were a range of celebrations that attracted thousands of people who have worked at the Mint over its 50-year history. In fact, more than 3,200 people have worked for the Mint. It was a pleasure to meet them at an event on Saturday night at the Arboretum. It really was a pleasure to be able to meet so many of them. Some of those who attended have worked for the Mint for more than 35 years: people like Wayne Hennock, who still works there; Max Izzard, who is retired now but worked there for 47 years; and Jack Crosbie, who worked there for 23 years. It was fantastic to meet so many of the Mint's dedicated staff over the weekend and commemorate their achievements. There were people who have been fitters and turners, graphic designers, marketing managers, managers, communication managers. There is a whole community there who are doing wonderful work. In fact, they call themselves the Minties family. They are dedicated, they are proud of their...
work and they are contributing. They are very proud of the fact that they are contributing to our nation's economy and our nation's story. The Mint's staff have contributed in some way to the 15 billion coins that have been made there and they have shared their story with more than 250,000 people who have visited, including 42,000 children.

I would like to thank Ross McDiarmid for making me so welcome on Saturday night at the celebration and Sarah for looking after me. Sarah looked gorgeous in mint-green dress with her mint-green nails. It was wonderful to meet so many of the Mintie family.

The Mint has a vitally important role in our society. It marks important national events and milestones and keeps a record of Australian society through coinage. It reflects part of our national identity, and there are key concerns that need to be addressed if the government wants it privatised.

Queensland: Cyclone Marcia

Ms LANDRY (Capricornia) (09:51): Work continues in the recovery phase of ex-tropical cyclone Marcia in my electorate of Capricornia. This was the biggest storm in a generation to strike the Capricorn Coast. Destructive winds of up to 285 kilometres per hour demolished homes, uprooted trees as big as houses and shredded roofs and power lines. The Rockhampton, Yeppoon and Marlborough districts have been declared state disaster areas.

Deputy Speaker Scott, I want to stress that I have not been idle while here in Canberra. In the past 72 hours I have been pounding the corridors of Parliament House meeting with senior ministers and lobbying for help for residents, small business and industries in our region. There are many issues to face. Capricornia's primary producers have been dealt an overwhelming blow. Our pineapple industry and our horticulture, and tropical fruit sectors have sustained terrible losses. It is not only fruit crops that have been destroyed. Established fruit tree stock has been wiped out. Once replaced, it can take new trees four to seven years or more to grow to a mature stage where they can bear commercial fruit. This includes lychee, mango and avocado trees. One farm alone is reporting losses of between $600,000 and $1 million dollars. These are family farms that employ local people and are an important part of our economy. One of the horticulturists is Wilson's lettuce farm at Emu Park which has sustained major damage. This farm supplies gourmet lettuce to Coles, Woolworths and IGA, from the Sunshine Coast to Townsville. I am anticipating an announcement outlining an assistance package for primary producers in the near future.

Households, families, individuals and the elderly are also suffering. Many people are finding it difficult to access basic assistance for food, clothing and accommodation. I am calling on the Queensland state government to amend the criteria for what is known as Immediate Hardship Assistance. The rules for eligibility set down by the state government require struggling residents to meet all the criteria. This should be softened to give ordinary Capricornians facing severe times the help they deserve. I have also been lobbying for workers who cannot earn their normal income, because their place of employment is shut down and for small businesses which cannot open to earn an income. Finally, I again want thank and acknowledge all of the people, both professional services and volunteers, who are working tirelessly to help those affected.
Veterans Access Network

Mr MARLES (Corio) (09:54): I rise this morning to speak about the Veterans Access Network. This network was introduced under the former Labor government to meet the unique needs of our veterans communities. However, the Abbott government is proposing changes to the network service delivery model which would see the closure of a number of Veterans Access Network of offices across Victoria and New South Wales. This proposal potentially means that Geelong's Veterans Access Network office will be shut down in a matter of months. In that event, the remaining support services would be absorbed into the Geelong Centrelink customer service centre. The very real prospect that the government may close the Geelong office without a sufficient replacement has raised significant concerns in our veterans community.

The Geelong office currently services a diverse range of cases and inquiries, not only within the more central suburbs of Geelong but also throughout the entire Barwon-Southwest region. It exists as a local avenue for assistance in accessing veterans' services, and is commonly called upon by the Geelong Surf Coast Veterans Centre, Geelong RSL, the Ocean Grove Barwon Heads RSL, and the Vietnam Veterans Geelong Sub-Branch, in addition to hundreds of individual clients every year. The Geelong office staff members are the primary point of contact for any veteran who is seeking support with issues ranging from pension benefits to mental health issues. The personalised service currently delivered through the Geelong office connects veterans and war widows with a local expert in veterans' affairs entitlements who can provide them with the timely advice and support they need after military service. Furthermore, shopfront services are critical in enabling veterans and war widows to overcome the technological barriers created by having to access services online or over the phone. This community-orientated model of service delivery is designed to ensure that the Department of Veterans' Affairs is best able to support our veterans in effectively navigating the complex and often overwhelming processes for accessing the range of benefits and support services they need. Abandoning a service-delivery model which is equipped to accommodate the specific needs of Geelong's veterans will inevitably compromise accessibility and efficiency. When you take away the supports of a dedicated local service centre, you take away specialist veterans' affairs expertise in our region; you force our veterans and war widows to join the already overburdened Centrelink queues; and you risk making them feel ostracised by a system that is supposed to be giving them a helping hand. Creating such a situation would be simply unfair. Hoping that the Centrelink Geelong service centre can successfully replace the role of the Geelong veterans' affairs office is plainly wishful thinking. The Veterans Access Network offices are already being shut down in other regional areas. Geelong's veterans have been given an insight into the ramifications of shutting down the Geelong centre, which leads the president of the Vietnam Veterans Association, Rieny Nieuwenhof, to say that this is highly concerning and upsetting for many veterans. The Abbott government needs to listen to the concerns of the Geelong veterans' community, and seriously reconsider its plans to close our local Veterans Access Network office.

Deputy Speaker, if I may speak on another matter—I am sure you will allow me this indulgence: today I would like to remember that yesterday was the anniversary of the passing
of Alli Murphy in our community of Geelong, something about which I spoke in this chamber a year ago today. My thoughts are very much with Stevo and the twins.

Wannon Electorate: Road Infrastructure

Mr TEHAN (Wannon) (09:58): I rise today to talk about a very successful event I was able to participate in on behalf of the community last week, and that was the opening of a brand-new section of duplicated road on the Western Highway between Burrumbeet and Beaufort. This 23 kilometres of road is part of the government's program to duplicate the Western Highway from Ballarat to Stawell. This is a $505 million program, of which the Commonwealth is contributing $404 million. But it is not the money which is the important thing here; it is two other factors: 480 jobs are being maintained while this duplication is taking place, and it is reducing travel times along the highway for my local communities—there are 5,000 vehicles that use this road every single day, and it is the major thoroughfare between Adelaide and Melbourne. The work that the federal government is doing in duplicating this highway is making our communities safer, and improving the productivity of the nation.

It is part of a wide-ranging program that the coalition government has for improving road infrastructure in my electorate of Wannon. It includes $2.5 million for the Condah Hotspur Upper Road, a $25 million commitment to improve the Great Ocean Road. There is $200,000 for the Warmambool Intermodal Terminal upgrade and expansion and, as part of the government's $2.1 billion Roads to Recovery program, councils in the Wannon electorate will receive $55.9 million for local road construction and street repairs. There is more to come with the Bridges to Recovery program, which we will have an announcement on very shortly. We have also allocated $4 million to carry out detailed planning for bypasses for the townships of Ararat and Beaufort. As the duplication of the Western Highway continues, those bypasses will become a reality. Also, as my good friend the member for Corangamite also reminds us about, there is $205.2 million for the duplication of the Princes Highway from Waurn Ponds to Colac, which will also substantially benefit commuters travelling between my electorate and Melbourne.

This government is serious about improving road infrastructure in regional and rural areas in Australia. It backs that commitment with real money and is delivering real progress on improving the nation's roads, and it is one of many reasons why I am proud to be a part of this coalition. (Time expired)

Bandler, Mrs Faith

Mrs ELLIOT (Richmond) (10:01): I rise to pay tribute to Faith Bandler, who passed away on 13 February at age 96. Faith was a woman of great courage, who was a fierce campaigner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights and a tireless advocate for social justice. She was born in Tumbulgum in the Tweed Valley in Northern New South Wales, in my electorate of Richmond. Faith's extraordinary legacy lives on there and throughout our nation.

Faith's activism was initially shaped by her family's hardship and experiences of injustice. Her father, Peter Mussing, was taken from his home on Ambrym Island, Vanuatu, at the age of 13 and sent to Mackay to work in the sugarcane fields. He later escaped and married Faith's
mother, Ida. They lived on the New South Wales North Coast, working on a banana farm, and Faith attended the local Murwillumbah High School.

During World War II, Faith worked in the Australian Women's Land Army, where the poor and inequitable pay conditions gave rise to her campaigning for equal rights. She became involved in the Aboriginal Australian Fellowship and the Federal Council for the advancement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait islanders—both formed in 1957.

Her advocacy steered a course for the granting of citizenship for Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, and her brave involvement in a Freedom Ride through segregated towns in 1965 created much positive momentum. Faith led the campaign for over 10 years for a constitutional referendum to remove discriminatory provisions from the Constitution. This campaign resulted in the 1967 referendum being put to the people. The referendum succeeded in all six states, attracting nearly 91 percent support across the country. This was due in large part to Faith's tireless efforts.

Following the success of this campaign Faith wrote a number of books and in 1974 decided to direct her energies to the plight of her own people, the 16,000 descendants of South Sea Islanders. She founded the National Commission for Australian South Sea Islanders and, in 1975, made her first emotional journey to her father's birthplace on Ambrym Island.

Amongst her many achievements, Faith Bandler was also a founding member of the Women's Electoral Lobby. Importantly, Faith's contribution to Australian history has been recognised through many awards, including an Order of Australia, the Human Rights Medal and, in 1997, being officially recognised as a Living National Treasure. Faith's contribution to human rights was also recognised in 2000 by Nelson Mandela, who awarded her a certificate of dedication. Faith's special links with the Tweed have been recorded by the erection of a plaque on the river bank at Tumbulgum. This riverside park is named in her honour—the Faith Bandler-Mussing Park.

In conclusion, I would like to repeat those words delivered by the Opposition Leader in the House on Monday in his condolence motion relating to Faith's passing. He said:

All of us in the Labor Party offer our heartfelt condolences to Faith Bandler's family and loved ones. Let us promise to honour her memory by carrying on her work. Let us vow not to rest until Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are honoured and recognised in our nation's founding document. Let us make Faith Bandler's lasting memorial a full life of equal opportunity for every Australian. In Faith's words, 'It would be a wonderful thing.' May she rest in eternal peace.

Tasmania: Infrastructure

Mr NIKOLIC (Bass—Government Whip) (10:04): A week ago my colleagues the member for Lyons and the member for Braddon welcomed the Prime Minister to Northern Tasmania where he announced a major government investment in Tasmania's irrigation schemes. This was wonderful news for my community, and these five schemes will become strategic enablers of our future prosperity. Often in politics we talk about short-termism but these are things that year on year, political cycle after political cycle, will be strategic enablers for our future prosperity. When it comes to farming, you need two key things. Principally, you need certainty when it comes to water and by any measure these schemes deliver that—95 per cent water certainty. That makes sure that farmers, who often invest in their farms only when times are good and just struggle through when times are bad, are going to have much more certainty in relation to their on-farm investments.
This investment also reinforces the government’s commitment to infrastructure as a foundation for future growth. Whether it is the Midland Highway or the Hobart airport or converting marginal farmland into something more productive, these projects will help our community thrive and generate jobs. We are fortunate to be situated where we are in the Asian century. People often talk about the economic vitality of the North Atlantic, the European countries and America, through the forties and the fifties and the sixties and so on, but now they are saying that the engine room of global dynamism for the foreseeable future will be in Asia. Here we are, sitting astride the Pacific and the Indian oceans, able to leverage the benefits of growing middle classes from India to China. By some estimates, a middle-class of 500 million today in that region will triple to 1.7 billion people between now and 2020. It is an extraordinary growth of people, and as they move into the middle class their demand for things—for clean, green, fresh produce—will certainly increase.

My view is that there is a tactical linkage between the irrigation schemes I have described and the free trade deals that trade minister Andrew Robb negotiated last year. Enhanced local agricultural production in Northern Tasmania will feed into some of these growing markets, and it will be wonderful for my community in Northern Tasmania. It is wonderful to see we are utilising our natural resources in a way that is environmentally sustainable, that supports our agricultural sector and that gives farmers the certainty they need to invest and create more jobs. I congratulate the Prime Minister and his leadership team for investing in these wonderful irrigation schemes.

**Burwell, Mr Leon**

**Ms HALL** (Shortland—Opposition Whip) (10:07): Every member of parliament has members of the community who are very special. Today I would like to talk about one of the very special people in the Shortland electorate. This person has made an enormous contribution not only locally but throughout Australia. That person is Leon Burwell. On 7 February I went to a tribute lunch for Leon Burwell. Leon has touched the lives of so many Special Olympics athletes. Leon was awarded the OAM in January 2006 for his services to sport through a range of organisations, but particularly for his support of athletes with an intellectual disability. He comes from Valentine in the Shortland electorate, and he has been the driving force behind Special Olympics in the Hunter since 1981. He was largely responsible for bringing Special Olympics to Australia.

As I am sure other members know, Special Olympics was established in 1976 as an arm in Australia of a movement started in America in 1962. Before Leon retired he was a lecturer at Newcastle University, a person who had been involved in sport all his life. He was an assistant coach of the Newcastle Falcons, and since retiring he has worked tirelessly with Special Olympics throughout Australia. He is the type of person that gets so much out of watching special olympians achieve, helping them to reach their potential. He has set up programs in a wide range of areas. Of course his love is basketball, but he has also set up programs for track and field, swimming, soccer and gymnastics. When I attended the testimonial luncheon for Leon on the 7th, person after person stood up and spoke about his contribution to Special Olympics, not only in Australia but internationally.

As well as being involved in the Special Olympics, he has been a member of Lions for many, many years. In 2011 he got the national volunteer award in the Shortland electorate. In paying tribute to Leon I have to also mention his wife Pat, who has also been involved in the...
Special Olympics. She has always been there to hand out the medals as he undertook the main work. *(Time expired)*

**Papua New Guinea**

Mrs PRENTICE (Ryan) (10:10): I have spoken before about the challenges faced by our neighbours in Papua New Guinea. They have some of the biggest health problems in the Pacific region, often lacking the most basic health care, and these problems are exacerbated by the terrain and remoteness of their villages. Recently I was delighted to be invited to the opening of the new Pacific International Hospital in Port Moresby. The PIH has been paving the way for better health for the past 17 years; however, this new hospital will ensure even more access to healthcare services.

PNG Prime Minister Peter O'Neill envisaged this hospital project many years ago when he was the young executive chairman of Finance Pacific, so it was great to celebrate the opening with him on what was also his birthday. The CEO, Dr Amyna Sultan, has spent 15 years in Papua New Guinea as an eye surgeon in the private sector and a volunteer surgeon in public hospitals. It was her experience working between public and private systems that allowed her to realise the value of public-private partnership models in health care. Dr Sultan, along with her husband, Mohammed, has been the determined driving force behind this new hospital.

The first Pacific International Hospital was established in 1997 as a diagnostic centre and since then it has provided quality health care in Port Moresby. The services and treatments the PIH provides include some PNG medical firsts. It was the first to perform a CT scan. It was the first with a haemodialysis unit. In 2001 it was the first private health facility in Port Moresby to offer 24/7 emergency care. It was also the first to use mammography and has now conducted more than 3,000 free mammograms.

The new hospital will offer treatment that previously has only been available offshore, including specialist services to treat diseases affecting the heart, brain, eyes and women's health. There are four operating theatres for general surgery, orthopaedics, gynaecology, cardiac surgeries and neurological surgeries. The new hospital will now also be able to offer open-heart surgery all year round and includes an MRI machine. The hospital will also continue to provide a discount to public patients on MRI and cardiac studies that are unavailable at the public hospital as it has previously done with CT scan services.

These are all services we take for granted in Australia, but this will make a major difference to the health of the people of Papua New Guinea. The hospital is also keen to collaborate with other health facilities to work towards making affordable, quality health care available to every Papua New Guinean. This is a massive step forward in improving the health of people who previously had no option but to go overseas or have no treatment at all. Indeed, as I have said previously, people will now want to be medivaced in to Port Moresby to access these new leading-edge health facilities.

Once again, I congratulate Dr Amyna and Mohammed Sultan—and I know the member for Macquarie supports me—and the PNG government not only for their determination and perseverence to make this new facility a reality but also for their continued commitment to improving health care in Papua New Guinea.
Vietnamese Australians

Mr WATTS (Gellibrand) (10:13): Last week I joined the Vietnamese community in my electorate to welcome in the lunar new year. At the 'East Meets West' festival in Footscray, at Quang Minh Temple in Braybrook and at the Tet celebrations at Sandown on the other side of Melbourne, thousands and thousands of Australians gathered to celebrate the new year and welcome in the year of the goat.

The celebrations were particularly big this year because 2015 is the 40th anniversary of Vietnamese migration to this country—and what a 40 years it has been. Today Vietnamese-born Australians make up our fifth largest migrant community. There are now over 200,000 Vietnamese-born people living in Australia. They are a shining example of what multiculturalism brings to our country. The Vietnamese community has given us many doctors, lawyers, small business owners, artists and activists who have contributed much to Australian society. Where would we be without Australians like Footscray's own Tan Le, former Young Australian of the Year, a community advocate and successful telecommunications entrepreneur in San Francisco; Hieu Van Le, the Governor of South Australia; Anh Do, the comedian, actor and author of The Happiest Refugee; Anh's brother Khoa, another former Young Australian of the Year, in 2005 and a lawyer, screenwriter and philanthropist; one of my favourite fiction writers, Nam Le; my favourite YouTube producer, Natalie Tran; and, of course, Luke Nguyen, the world-famous chef and TV personality? These people are exceptional individuals who have made enormous contributions in their fields, to their communities and to the Australian identity.

On this 40th anniversary, we should pause to remember and take note of the fact that many, many members of the Vietnamese-Australian community were asylum seekers. Their arrival in Australia was treated with great trepidation in some corners. Many expressed fears that the Vietnamese asylum seekers coming to this country were 'different' to past migrant or refugee groups, that Australia's cultural values would be swamped by their arrival or that they would entrench Asian crime gangs in our country. The Australian Vietnamese community often had to confront racism and hostility as a result of this prejudice. But, despite it all, doubters were proved comprehensively wrong. They were on the wrong side of history. Australia's Vietnamese community have shown the strength of Australian multiculturalism, and they have shown that we have nothing to fear and much to gain from refugees in our community. We should learn a lesson from this as a nation about the way that we treat subsequent asylum seeker communities following in their footsteps. They have much to offer us and we have little to fear from them.

Throughout the streets of my home suburb today are banners put up by the Vietnamese community saying, 'Thank you, Australia'. They are everywhere in the streets of my community. These banners have touched me, but they have also embarrassed me, because as a member of parliament I am the one who should be saying thank you to the Vietnamese-Australian community. So, in this place today, I send a very clear message to the Vietnamese-Australian community. I say: thank you. Thank you for everything you have done to make Australia the country it is today, thank you for coming to Australia and thank you for repaying our faith in you. I wish everyone in the Australian Vietnamese community a happy Year of the Goat.
Mrs MARKUS (Macquarie) (10:16): I rise to speak about the Hawkesbury Agricultural College Cairo Centenary Memorial Dinner held last Friday evening in the Soldiers Memorial Hall, at the University of Western Sydney in Richmond. Alumni of the college, fondly referred to as 'the old boys', held the reunion dinner in honour of all students and staff who gave service and sacrifice in World War I. In total there were some 750 men from the college that served in the war.

Dr William Helsham, who was a doctor in Richmond and taught at the college, enlisted in what was to become the 1st Light Horse Field Ambulance. For that reason, 40 college men joined the light horse field ambulance and some 135 were light horsemen. Twenty-two joined either the Royal or the Australian Flying Corps, almost 60 served in the Veterinary Corps, and at least 70 served with the artillery units, if not as drivers again using horses to pull guns and ammunition supplies. Dr Helsham also established the Richmond Ambulance Division of St John Ambulance in 1913, and it continues today.

The dinner replicated the dinner held at the Eden Palace Hotel in Cairo. Some two months later, many from that dinner took part in the landing at Gallipoli on the original Anzac Day in 1915. The Soldiers Memorial Hall was turned into the Eden Palace, Cairo, and there was an enormous effort made to replicate the original dinner, with the menu depicting the original selection and the original program of events. A cake was made in the shape of a pyramid beside a slouch hat. Even the national anthem from that time, *God Save the King*, was sung. The dinner was a remarkable display of honour, respect, camaraderie and college spirit 100 years ago. The reading of the *Ode to Stanley Campbell* was a particularly moving moment, as was a seat reserved with a slouch hat at the plate in honour of Lieutenant Harold T Watkins, the first to lose his life at Gallipoli, representing all those who died in action. I particularly wish to thank Grant Chalk, Vice President of the Hawkesbury Alumni Chapter, and all those who spared no effort to honour those who served in World War I.

I wish to read from this poem, the *Ode to Stanley Campbell*:

So he survived the pointless killing of the Dardanelles campaign,
And the horror of the Western Front, the shelling and the rain.
In the rent and wretched trenches
His defiant fist he clenches,
But the shrapnel tears him fiercely and he'll never rise again.
A vision comes to Stanley Campbell of a favoured country lass
And a Blood and Mustard blazer and a sunlit Christmas mass.
He no longer hears the shelling,
And his final breaths are telling,
For the blood is now his own blood and the mustard now is gas.
Stanley Campbell died one hundred years and half a world away,
There's no telling what he'd say or do if he was here today.
But I'd like to think he'd stand again,
With his kindred Blood and Mustard men,
And honour well his fallen friends with a long and proud Hoopray!

*Time expired*
Ms O’WENS (Parramatta) (10:19): On Sunday, I was delighted to join the Ekushe Academy to celebrate International Mother Language Day. It is a day celebrated on 21 February all around the world, and it is a day that commemorates an event in Bengali history of particular significance to our Bengali Australian community when the Bengalis fought for the right to speak their own language. A protest began on 21 February and four students were killed marching for the right to speak to their language: Abdus Salam, Rafiq Ahmed, Abul Barkat and Abdul Jabbar. My community commemorates their death and their contribution every year.

A language, of course, is much more than words; it actually contains the way a community shares information and ideas. It is, in every sense, culture. As we celebrate International Mother Language Day, it is worth reflecting on the fact that the world loses a language every 14 days. Every 14 days one more language disappears. The most recent one, the Bo language, a language spoken in India’s Andaman Islands, died with its last remaining speaker, Boa Senior, earlier this month. When Boa Senior’s parents died some 40 years ago she became the last remaining speaker of that language which is over 70,000 years old. It is said that she was very lonely. She had to learn other languages and other ways to communicate. That Bo language is one of two languages that the Andaman Islands have lost in the last three months.

In Australia, that is a story that we have lived many times. Most of our 250 Indigenous languages are already gone—an extraordinary loss, not just to our Indigenous people and not just to Australia but to the world as a whole. Only 13 of those languages are still commonly spoken and another 110 have just a handful of speakers, all over the age of 40. Over the next two to three decades, we will live the experience of the Andaman Islands in the loss of languages that date back tens of thousands of years and hold concepts which cannot be expressed in any other language.

I spoke to a young Australian constituent of mine recently whose parents are from India. He speaks Hindi and English equally well, and he was telling me how amazing it is that sometimes he cannot say what he wants to say in one language or the other, even though he speaks them both equally, because the concept in Hindi, which comes from a different place, cannot actually be said in English words and vice versa. So we have this richness in Australia of our modern languages, even as we lose so many that we have had before. Dharug, which is the mother language of the country on which I live, is not spoken very often, but if you come to Parramatta I will say to you, ‘Gia wullawa nullawulla,’ which is Dharug for ‘come and rest a while’.

Ms PRICE (Durack) (10:23): Last week I had the pleasure of opening the Newman Trade Training Centre, which is located in Newman Senior High School, allowing the young people of Newman to embark on a new lifelong journey. This particular centre was built with $1.5 million from the Australian government. It will allow the students to take lessons in engineering and metal fabrication design. Some students will gain a qualification in Certificate II Engineering, and they all will experience life beyond school. It is a real launching pad for the young people of the Pilbara, and it was particularly pleasing to see so many young women in the first cohort.
Newman is some 1,200 kilometres north of Perth. It is in the eastern Pilbara in my electorate of Durack. It is essentially a BHP mining town, with a giant iron ore mine right on its doorstep. The new trade training centre is offering specific training opportunities for students, as well as pathways to satisfying jobs and careers. And many have mining, construction and allied callings, including tourism, firmly in their sights. The new facilities at Newman Trade Training Centre will give students the best chance to learn workplace skills. Skills training through a trade training centre at a secondary school provides a basis for students to pursue further training after school or to enter the workplace. Trade training centres do have a special role in engaging young people who may have switched off from mainstream education. It is a very effective hook.

The centre demonstrates to all in the region the federal government's commitment to building an education system that equips students to succeed in an increasingly competitive world. We all know that the skills we teach in schools must meet the needs of industry. The Newman Trade Training Centre is doing just that as it partners with BHP Billiton and other local businesses which support many of the school's programs to enhance and enrich students' learning. It is a clear example of the training provided in school aligned to meet the needs of the local economy and workforce demand.

I take this opportunity to congratulate all who worked very hard to make this centre a reality, and acknowledge the hard work of the Principal of Newman Senior High School, Ms Milanna Heberle, and the VET team.

A fire swept through the Newman Senior High School last October, causing extensive damage of around $4 million. I wish to pay tribute to the school, led by Principal Heberle, for the positive way that the school community rolled up its sleeves to enable the students to continue with their studies and education. But why should I be surprised? That is the Pilbara way and that is their can-do attitude.

**Throsby Electorate: National Broadband Network**

Mr STEPHEN JONES (Throsby) (10:25): I want to take this opportunity to congratulate the residents of Tullimbar near Albion Park in my electorate of Throsby. I attended a meeting with them on Sunday last to further their campaign to see the National Broadband Network rolled out to their suburb.

The National Broadband Network is keenly awaited by residents throughout the Illawarra, the South Coast and the Southern Highlands in my electorate. They are very keen to get it. There is a lot of rollout going on but, equally, there is a whole heap of suburbs that are not getting it or that do not know when they are going to get it, and they absolutely need it. I am pleased to say that the strong advocacy for the project by myself and the member for Cunningham has seen many suburbs throughout my electorate and the neighbouring electorates with connection to the National Broadband Network.

The problem faced by the residents of Tullimbar is quite simply a problem of infrastructure failure. They are one of these new suburbs that has fallen between the chairs. It was built before the Labor government's National Broadband Network legislation mandated that all new suburbs with more than 100 residents must have fibre to the premises included in the infrastructure build in the same way that electricity, water and guttering are connected to those new suburbs. It was built before then and what frustrates them enormously is that they
see the new suburbs just across the road or just up the road being connected to the National Broadband Network and they are not getting it.

The problem is the distance from the exchange and the fact that when the suburb was built it was built on pair gain and RIM technology, which was suitable then but which is not suitable now. There is very limited ADSL, and when they do get it they are often paying for ADSL but getting dial-up speeds. They feel like they are getting ripped off—and I agree with them.

I was pleased to see both Telstra and the National Broadband Network turn up to address the meeting, and I thank the Minister for Communications for his role in facilitating the people from the NBN who turned up. The message to Telstra was quite simple: they understand that what Telstra is providing is a workaround until they get the NBN. They are willing to pay a fair price for their broadband but no more than they should be paying for the service they are getting.

The message to the National Broadband Network is that they want it. I can find no better at words than the words of one of the residents who turned up—and there were schoolkids, small business people and families there. But one particular bloke—92 years old—got up and said, 'I'm 92 and I want to see the National Broadband Network in my house before I turn 100.' Well: 'Hear, hear!' to him! The message to the NBN is that there is money to be made here.

**Bueti, Mr Giovanni, OAM**

Mr PASIN (Barker) (10:29): Yesterday I was given the opportunity to attend the funeral of John Bueti, a Mount Gambier icon who, sadly, passed away on 20 February after a long and courageous battle with cancer.

John—or Giovanni—Bueti was a friend both to me and to my family, as he was to so many people in my community of Mount Gambier. No—John was more of a mentor to me. Indeed, if it were not for civic leaders like John I do not think that a young Italian lad from Mount Gambier would ever have become the member for Barker.

In any event, my family and I were deeply saddened to learn of John's passing. Fiona, Bella and I extend our condolences to John's wife, Gerardina, and to his children, Tony, Pas, Peppi, Angela and Dino, their wives and husband, and to his many grandchildren.

John was truly a gentleman and a giant. In October of last year, it was my honour to be asked to take leave again from this place by the Prime Minister to be present to acknowledge the peerless contribution John had made to our community at his investiture into the Order of Australia at Government House in Adelaide. John was a wonderful servant of the Mount Gambier community. John migrated from Italy's Reggio Calabria in 1954 and went on to forge a lasting impression in the Mount Gambier community and endeared himself to everyone who was lucky enough to meet him through his warmth, community spirit and bubbling enthusiasm.

By trade he was a mechanic. He operated in partnership with wife the Central Caravan Park in Mount Gambier. John's strongest contribution was through community service. I recall when I on the City of Mount Gambier John insisting that we establish a memorial to those people who had travelled to Mount Gambier from distant lands to provide industry to the town. We established 'Memories in the suitcase'. Whilst that marble structure is a credit and
an acknowledgment of all migrants who made their home in my hometown, it is particularly relevant to John because he was the driving force behind it. John was also deeply involved in Rotary. He earned the Paul Harris Fellowship in 2005. He was a founding member and vice president of Italo Australian Club in Mount Gambier.

Mount Gambier has lost one of its most respected citizens, a man who led by his own actions. I recall at the funeral yesterday his son Peppi recounting one of his father's favourite lines, 'If you're a leader without followers, you're simply going for a walk.' John never just simply went for a walk. In my maiden speech, I indicated that Adam Lindsay Gordon said:

Life is mostly froth and bubble, Two things stand like stone, Kindness in another's trouble, Courage in your own.

John was a kind man, a courageous man— (Time expired)

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Goodenough):** In accordance with standing order 193, the time for constituency statements has concluded.

### BILLS

**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Recognition (Sunset Extension) Bill 2015**

Debate resumed on the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

**Mr SNOWDON (Lingiari) (10:32):** The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Recognition (Sunset Extension) Bill 2015 seeks to extend, as its name suggests, the sunset date of the act by three years to 28 March 2018. The recognition act was passed unanimously by the previous parliament. It recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the first inhabitants of Australia and records the parliament's intention to move towards constitutional recognition. This is not a new idea.

The sunset date set in the legislation as 28 March 2015 was to give the parliament and the public a date by which it could consider further steps towards a referendum on constitutional recognition of Indigenous peoples. The Prime Minister had indicated his view that the referendum was likely to be held in 2017. That is an issue, I think, which is open for some discussion. If the act were to collapse, there would be no legislative instrument of Indigenous recognition in place and it would be viewed as a backward step on the path to constitutional recognition.

The review panel established under the recognition act comprised the Hon. John Anderson, AO; Tanya Hosch; and Richard Eccles. They recommended an extension of the sunset date to no more than three years to align with the timing of a potential referendum. The Joint Select Committee on Constitutional Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples made this recommendation in its progress report tabled on 27 October 2014, following their very wide and extensive national consultations. It is important that we pass this piece of legislation. I am pleased to say that, as you would expect, there is strong bipartisan support for that objective.

This legislation gives me an opportunity to talk about a range of things, one of which is history. Whilst we are today talking about national recognition, we all know that our nation's
founding document is silent on the special place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and we accept that it is now a historical wrong that has to be put right. That has not always been the case. Indeed, the time since Federation has been littered with many examples of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their supporters canvassing for recognition and change, without a lot of support—except in one particular instance, and I will come to that in a moment.

It is worthwhile understanding that calls for recognition to amend the Constitution to give the Commonwealth power in Aboriginal affairs went back to the first decade after Federation, so this is not a new discussion. Churchmen, anthropologists and activists such as Bessie Rischbieth of the Australian Federation of Women Voters had argued that the federal government should have responsibility for Aboriginal people and that that should be recognised in the Constitution. Many events have happened since then.

There were great movements in New South Wales in the thirties and forties to give recognition to Aboriginal people and their rights, none of which were taken up. Then, in the fifties and sixties, we saw some significant change. That was largely as a result of a movement by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, but mostly Aboriginal people in the southern parts of Australia, and some in the Top End, who set about trying to change the views of the Australian community on the need for recognition of Aboriginal people.

Instrumental in this was an organisation known as the Legislative Reform Committee, which, in 1965, became the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, FCAATSI. It took the responsibility of keeping the constitutional amendment issue politically alive. It had some very interesting people behind it, including Lorna Lippmann, who was a leading convener within the Legislative Reform Committee. She wrote to all members of parliament explaining that section 51(xxvi) needed to be amended so that 'the federal government may take positive steps to improve the lot of Aborigines'. Other members of that committee were Shirley Andrews; Lady Jessie Street; Barrie Pittock; Gordon Bryant; Joe McGinness—someone I knew well and who was from a family in Darwin, a Kungarakan man, who subsequently moved across to Cairns and there died many years ago now; Faith Bandler, whose life we celebrated at a funeral service at the University of Sydney this week, and I will say more about her in a moment; Bert Groves; and Edna Blackshaw. The Bandler family were integrally involved right throughout this process.

Following the passage of the Constitution Alteration (Repeal of Section 127) Bill in February 1966, Barry Pittock, who succeeded Lorna Lippmann as the convener of this committee, refined a petition sent to the committee by Mr AS Luchetti MP. In February 1967 at a cabinet meeting, the then Attorney-General Nigel Bowen reviewed the arguments put by his predecessor, Bill Snedden. Bowen considered the merits of the Wentworth proposal and told cabinet that he believed there would be widespread dissatisfaction if the Commonwealth did not think about section 51(xxvi). He urged members to support a proposal that the government hold a referendum to seek legislative power for the Commonwealth with respect to Aborigines by omitting the words 'other than the Aboriginal race in any state'.

It is an open question, a live debate, in some quarters about whether or not there was in fact a power already held by the Commonwealth or whether it used that power to pass legislation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. In fact, I learned this morning that, every 3½ months since Federation and up until the referendum in 1967, the Commonwealth had passed
either legislation or regulations that were solely for and directed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people. This was revealed by John McCorquodale, who wrote a book, a monograph, published by Aboriginal Studies Press, *Aborigines and the law: a digest*, which explains very clearly that there was a question about whether or not these special laws were needed, because the Commonwealth had previously had that power, which it had expressed by passing legislation and regulations specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

Nevertheless, in April 1967, a delegation from the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, FCAATSI, came to the parliament to seek the support of all federal members on the question of Aboriginal recognition. In response to the parliamentary support, churches revealed their support in favour of a yes vote. The Australian Council of Churches, the Methodist Commission on Aboriginal Affairs and the Society of Friends had developed Aboriginal affairs policies which favoured greater Commonwealth power in formulating and implementing policy for Aboriginal advancement. The FCAATSI set up a national 'vote yes' campaign, with a directorate headed by Gordon Bryant and my friend Joe McGuinness.

On 27 May 1967, over 90 per cent of the Australian electorate did vote yes on the question put, and of course the size of the vote was fundamentally important. And it is important that, in any discussion about any other potential changes to our Constitution, recognition is given to the fact that we need strong bipartisan support. This is really important in the context of actually giving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people the recognition they properly deserve within our Constitution. It is also important to accept the need—as has been amply demonstrated—to remove section 25 of the Constitution, which says that the states can ban people from voting based on their race, and remove section 51(xxvii), which can be used to pass laws that discriminate against people based on their race. Clearly, these should go. Then there is the question of how we provide adequate recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians within the Constitution, and there are various proposals being put in this regard.

There is a recognition campaign which is being driven across this country which I would encourage members of this parliament and the community to get behind to ensure that when we come to a vote on this question, as we inevitably will, the question put in the referendum will be one which was finally settled as a result of discussion and negotiation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders across this country as well as with the broader community. We must get behind it and make sure that it is actually successful.

Earlier this week, I spoke about Faith Bandler and her wonderful life—and she was given enormous tributes this week. It was a great privilege for me to attend her funeral, and there were wonderful speeches given. But I have here an interview Faith Bandler did in 2004, involving George Negus. Faith Bandler said:

So we got the petition going and I started to take this petition around—calling on the government to … well, hold a referendum to give the Indigenous people equal rights. And I peddled this petition from '57 until '67 with my little group. We only had a little handful. There would have been no more than 9 or 10. Every day for 10 years, except for the weekends, I took that petition around. I spoke, I suppose, to every VIEW club that was in existence, to every Rotary Club I could think of, Lions, churches, schools, um … Oh, you know, it just went on. It was pointless getting signatures to a petition. The petition, of course, had to be presented in the House. So every day … when the Speaker called for petitions, we'd
have someone there to hop up with ours, and this went on for 10 years. We only had to get 100,000 signatures but we got 10 times that over. And we kept getting the federal members to present our petition, to present it, to keep it going. The most important visit to Parliament House was a visit with our executive—
the one I referred to earlier. She went on:
They came from each State to meet Prime Minister Menzies and I am sure it was that visit that turned the tide, and I'm sure we convinced the prime minister that a referendum should be held.
That war of attrition, which is surely what it was, started with a small handful of people in the 1950s and culminated with the resounding success of the referendum in 1967.

We now have a real opportunity to set things right once and for all. If we are to set things right once and for all, we need a united voice across this parliament and across the community. If it takes us going to every town hall meeting, to every Rotary Club, every Lions Club, every church meeting and every trade union meeting across this country, then we should do it. We should mobilise the community around the importance of this particular question, understanding that finally we can put to rest forever the notion that somehow or another Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples should not be recognised within our Constitution. That recognition is properly deserved. We need to do that so that we can say that this nation is actually a mature country, so that we can look at ourselves in the mirror and say, 'At last we have recognised what should have been done at the time of Federation.' Sadly it was not. We have that opportunity now. Let's make sure it is successful by working across this parliament and across the wider community to ensure that when the referendum is put we get 90 per cent or more. (Time expired)

Mr McCORMACK (Riverina—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance) (10:47): I acknowledge the fine words of the former speaker, the member for Lingiari, and acknowledge the work that he does in his electorate on behalf of Aboriginal people. I know the percentage of Aboriginal people that he represents in his Northern Territory seat is far in excess of that in other electorates in Australia.

It is important as a National Party member to also add my words to the debate on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Recognition (Sunset Extension) Bill 2015, because members of the National Party represent a far higher percentage than many of the other electorates in Australia. I know the number of Aboriginal people that Mark Coulton, the member for Parkes, represents is significant. I know the great contribution that he has made in these sorts of debates by acknowledging the work that is being done to close the gap. Certainly he was in the House last night talking of that very thing.

This is an important bill. This is an important debate. I commend the member for Aston for taking this into the House yesterday. In his second reading speech he talked of the final report making it clear that we have not yet reached a point where we can proceed immediately to a referendum. He is correct, of course. Indeed, if we did, it would perhaps fail.

There have been only eight referenda out of the 44 held since 1906 which have passed successfully. The last referendum to pass was on 21 May 1977. There were a few questions at that particular time, including on the age of retirement for Federal Court judges, as well as some others. This is almost unbelievable, but the last successful referendum at an election—to give the Commonwealth power to legislate on a wide range of social services—was way back on 28 September 1946. So not too many referenda pass the public's scrutiny, pass the public
test. If we are to properly acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Constitution, we must ensure that it is passed by the public. I heard the member for Lingiari talking about bipartisan support, and that is on the table but more importantly we must get the public to come along with us as well. That is going to be the big test. I notice the member for Hasluck has just joined us in the chamber—he is doing all he can and I will be interested to read what he says about this. His presence in the House of Representatives has also shed new light on why we need to properly and appropriately recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Constitution.

The Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Senator Nigel Scullion, had some very interesting words to say on this subject at the Nationals federal council held in Canberra on 30 August last year. He took members of the National Party on a journey into Indigenous affairs and the important work that he is doing. He said:

This is important because so much is happening—and the Nationals have always taken a keen interest in Indigenous affairs because they share many of the rural and remote challenges and opportunities.

Like a few in this room I’m sure, I didn’t really think that the Apology we made in 2008 would matter.

I couldn’t see the apology helping at all to close the vast gap on vital issues such as Indigenous life expectancy, remote children’s education, housing, decent work for adults and community safety.

All the symbolic trumpeting was wonderful, but I could not see what difference it could make.

It takes a big politician to admit that he was wrong, but Senator Scullion went on:

How wrong I was.

The changes to the way Aboriginal people as individuals and as communities saw themselves after that apology were extraordinary. Clearly, those who would diminish the importance of symbolism as something that doesn’t have a role to play in practical outcomes are quite wrong.

Symbolic change must happen if practical changes are to succeed.

He is right, of course. He said:

They go hand in hand. The government’s response to the Forrest Report will give us the practical policy future while constitutional recognition of our Indigenous peoples will give the matching symbolic change. They are twin engines in a plane that we must bring in to land together.

Senator Scullion is correct, and he has done a lot to help close the gap. Of course there is much more work to be done. I spoke in the chamber earlier in the week on the Closing the Gap report. There were some impressive initiatives and impressive achievements over the past 12 months, but much more needs to be done if we as a government, this as a parliament and we as a nation are to bring about much-needed change in the sorts of things we want to see—making life expectancy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people similar to that of non-Indigenous people, and making sure that children are attending school. We have made significant progress in the number of Aboriginal year 12 attainees and we have also made significant progress with the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people going to university and indeed graduating from university. But much more needs to be done.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the first inhabitants of this country and recognising them in our Constitution represents a wonderful and historic opportunity to recognise their unique culture, their unique history and the enormous contribution that they have made to Australia’s past and Australia’s present and that they will make to Australia’s
future. The original act expires at the end of this month and it is important, it is critical, it is crucial, that this bill pass the parliament by 5 March. The act recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the first inhabitants of Australia and records the Australian parliament's commitment to work towards a referendum on Indigenous constitutional recognition.

We cannot put a referendum to the people and have it fail. We cannot put it to the people and have it not succeed. I know that there was good work done by the last government to try to get not only Aboriginal recognition but local government recognition in the Constitution. It was seen as a time that it was all being rushed, that it would not be possible, and that we would not be able to get people to come along with this. Therefore, it was stalled, wisely so. As I said, we cannot afford to have this go to the people and not succeed. Recognition in our democracy's founding document would be a significant watershed moment, as it would acknowledge the enormous contribution that Indigenous Australians have made over many, many centuries. I believe that it would also, and I am sure my colleagues in the Federation Chamber would agree, help to close the gap and unify the nation even more so than is the case today. A referendum is to be held as soon as possible to ensure that parliament's formal recognition of our first Australians continues.

I acknowledge the Prime Minister for going into a remote community for one week a year and governing Australia from a remote community, often in Arnhem Land. He has not done that just as Prime Minister—he did it as the opposition leader and even before that—as his contribution to what he sees as important as far as this process is concerned. The Prime Minister said he hopes to see a successful referendum held on or before 27 May 2015. That date is significant, because it is the 50th anniversary of the 1967 referendum which ensured that Indigenous Australians were counted as full citizens and gave the Commonwealth government responsibility for Indigenous affairs. The government is committed to fixing the Australian Constitution. That word fixing is important, because the Constitution does need to be amended, to be fixed, so that it acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians as the first peoples of this great nation.

I represent a number of Aboriginal people in the electorate of Riverina. Indeed, at the last census, in 2011, 4.7 per cent of the people in the Riverina who filled out a census form acknowledged that they were of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent. That is a large number. They make a wonderful contribution to the Riverina community and I am sure that they will continue to make an enormous contribution to the Riverina community, as they always have. Aunty Isabel Reid, a Wiradjuri elder from Wagga Wagga and a passionate advocate for constitutional recognition of our first Australians, said recently, 'We are moving forward but we still have a long road in the country.' It is people such as Aunty Isabel, with her enthusiasm, advocacy and determination, who carry the potential for constitutional recognition to be achieved. May that soon happen.

Mr STEPHEN JONES (Throsby) (10:58): I would like to acknowledge the presence in the chamber of the member for Hasluck. We were together on Saturday in Emerton in the electorate of Chifley as a part of the Joint Select Committee on Constitutional Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, which the member for Hasluck chairs. The member for Hasluck would remember, as I do, the welcome to country that we were given by Uncle Greg, who is an elder of the Dharug tribe. We were very honoured to be welcomed to
country in language. Uncle Greg said as part of his evidence to the committee in blunt but fairly resonant words: ‘What youse people have gotta know, youse people who are writing the Constitution, that we fellas have been here for thousands of years. That's a fact.’ I thought that those words were a very prescient preface to the debate we are having in the House and the evidence we have been hearing before the joint select committee.

This bill, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Recognition (Sunset Extension) Bill 2015, extends the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Recognition Act 2013 to extend the sunset date by three years to 28 March 2018. The recognition act was passed unanimously by the previous government—quite an achievement, given the fractious nature of the 43rd Parliament. This is an issue on which there was unanimity across all of the parties and all of the members of the 43rd Parliament.

We again find ourselves in a bipartisan debate in the 44th Parliament, jointly recognising the need to extend the recognition act. A sunset date of 28 March 2015 was included in the extant act to give parliament and the public a date on which we could focus a time line if you like—a deadline if you like—so that we could focus our minds on the task of constitutional recognition of the first Australians. The current Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, has indicated that a referendum is most likely to be held in 2017. If we were not to extend the act, we would find ourselves in a deplorable situation where there would be no formal act of recognition because the extant act would have elapsed, and between now and the period when the people of Australia vote on a constitutional amendment, there would be no formal act of recognition of this parliament, unlike acts that have been passed by many of our sister parliaments throughout the federated states of Australia.

In its view, the review panel, which is commissioned by this piece of legislation, comprised of the Hon. John Anderson, known to all members in this place, Tanya Hosch, who is joint CEO of the Recognise campaign, and Richard Eccles, recommended the extension of this legislation. They formed the view that we were not yet ready to take a proposition to the Australian people. The joint select committee on which I serve made a recommendation consistent with the review panel's report, and that recommendation was tabled on 27 October last year, following our national consultations. As our parliamentary spokesperson, our shadow minister, Shayne Neumann, the member for Blair, has said, Labor is committed to pursuing substantive and meaningful changes in the Constitution—a point echoed, underscored and made very clear by the Leader of the Opposition when he addressed the Garma Festival in East Arnhem Land last year, where he made it very, very clear that Labor believes in recognition and has very strong views about the form in which that constitutional recognition should occur. It should be meaningful and it should be substantive and it should deal with the issue of systemic and longstanding discrimination against the first peoples of Australia.

Australia prides itself on being a place of fairness and equity, a place where Jack or Jill is as good as their master. However, our nation's founding document is itself actually silent on the special place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. I see the member for Griffith in the chamber at the moment. I am probably a little bit older than her. When I studied law as a student at university in New South Wales, I was taught that the doctrine of terra nullius was a part of the common law of Australia—that is to say, Australia was a vacant place when the white fellas got of a boat at Port Phillip in 1788. To the extent that it was inhabited, the first
Australians were considered nothing more than part of the flora and fauna of the landscape. Of course, all of that changed with the landmark decision in Mabo and the Commonwealth on 3 June 1992, after a case brought by the plaintiff, Eddie Mabo, succeeded in overturning that doctrine. We were then able to hold our heads as Australians and say that the common law of this land was brought into line with what every historian and what common sense was telling us to be the case, that the first people of this country, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, have been here for no less than 40,000 years and enjoy an enduring connection to country. Indeed, something that all Australians can be proud of is that we now share in and are a part of the oldest and most continuous culture anywhere on the planet—something that I am very pleased to say we now acknowledge at every civic ceremony around the country.

We have taken great steps since 1992. And of course, the action did not start from then. We had the 1967 referendum, which most speakers in this debate have acknowledged. I have mentioned the historic 1992 Mabo judgement. We have had the historic Northern Territory land rights legislation; the actions by former Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam; the landmark speech of former Prime Minister, Paul Keating, at Redfern; and the acknowledgement of and apology for some of the worst wrongs, by former Prime Minister Rudd—a moment which my generation of parliamentarians and, indeed, my generation of Australians has marked down as one of those Kennedy or Lennon moments—we all know where we were in Australia when Prime Minister stood in this place and gave that landmark speech. We now have bipartisan agreement to the annual Closing the gap report on how we are addressing inequality between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians, and there is the importance of having—as we did two weeks ago—that annual tabling of the report, together with a debate in this place about how we are going against those targets.

We have come a long way. I strongly commend this bill, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Recognition (Sunset Extension) Bill 2015, to the parliament. But I cannot stand here in all honesty and not express some disappointment about the necessity to move an amendment to this act in order to extend it by some three years. It would have been my preference that we already be in a position to have a consensus position within this place, between both houses and all parties, a proposition that we could put before the Australian people; and, if the Australian people had not yet voted on it, that we would know what the proposition was and that we would know a date certain upon when the Australian people would get to exercise judgement upon the proposition. It will happen, I am certain, and it will be a great and unifying moment in our nation's history.

I pay tribute to the work that is being done by the committee on which I serve. It is a great honour. I believe that, whenever I leave this place—hopefully by choice of mine and not of others—I will mark my service on this committee as one of the great privileges that I have been able to hold as a member of this place. But I must say this: I am disappointed that we have not yet reached a bipartisan proposition. In making that observation, I make no reflection on my fellow members of that committee. The review panel makes the point that Australians are not yet ready to focus on this issue. I simply make the observation that it is unrealistic of us as parliamentarians to expect Australians to focus on a proposition when the parliament has not yet focused on the proposition.

That is why there is bipartisan support for the recommendation that both houses of parliament convene for a full two days, and that we debate the proposition of constitutional
recognition, allowing every member and every senator to express their views; the views that they represent on behalf of their constituents, on behalf of their parties, and on behalf of their own consciences, as members of this place. So that the people of Australia, seeing this great spectacle of every member and every senator in this place expressing their views, know exactly what the issues are—creating the momentum that is necessary. creating the education that is necessary, and creating the focus that is necessary, for this parliament to get on with the job of fixing upon a proposition which removes the racist provisions within the Constitution. These are provisions that most Australians, I warrant, would not know were there, and would be horrified to know were part of the founding document of this nation. If you were to tell most Australians that our Constitution contemplates the rights of states to exclude people from their electoral rolls on no other basis than the basis of their race, I would guarantee that most Australians would be horrified—horrified that our Constitution contemplates a type of racism and discrimination that the laws of our state and federal parliaments prohibit. They would be astounded that our Constitution contemplates such discrimination and would support the proposition to remove it.

I am sure that most Australians seized of the momentum created by the High Court's first and second Mabo decisions, the eradication of the doctrine of terra nullius from the common law of this land and the fact that they now enjoy a more balanced education than they did when I was in school would say it makes common sense that we recognise the first Australians within our birth certificate, as the Prime Minister has quite pithily described it—our Constitution. They would say, 'This is the right thing to do.' I think most Australians would also support the proposition that parliaments should not be able to discriminate against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, certainly not to their detriment, on the basis of their race.

I think it is a simple proposition and we should be able to fix on a form of words which enable the Australian people to adjudicate on those three propositions to alter our Constitution. It will be an historic moment of unification, healing and celebration so that we can do as Uncle Greg implored us to do in his welcome to country and his address to the recognition committee in Emerton last Saturday and do as one of the witnesses to that committee said in very powerful and passionate language—'Australia does not have a white history. Australia does not have a black history. Australia has a history. Our Constitution should recognise that, and our children should be taught that in our schools.' I commend the bill to the House.

Mr WYATT (Hasluck) (11:12): I would like to acknowledge the sentiments expressed by all previous speakers, because their contributions to this debate are important and they reflect their thinking across the breadth of issues that Australia has to consider. I am pleased to speak on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Recognition (Sunset Extension) Bill 2015. This bill will extend the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Recognition Act for three years until 28 March 2018.

Extending this bill was a recommendation of the Joint Select Committee on Constitutional Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples The committee's progress report, tabled in both houses in October 2014, recommended that the bill be extended to align the proposed timing of a referendum to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in
the Australian Constitution, which is an important element of the work that we have to do in this House.

The former minister for indigenous affairs the Hon. Jenny Macklin MP first introduced this bill in 2012, describing it as an interim step towards recognition and a measure to assist in raising awareness and building a national consensus for constitutional change. Section 3 of the act reads:

(1) The Parliament, on behalf of the people of Australia, recognises that the continent and the islands now known as Australia were first occupied by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples—

It acknowledges that as a fact—

(2) The Parliament, on behalf of the people of Australia, acknowledges the continuing relationship of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with their traditional lands and waters.

(3) The Parliament, on behalf of the people of Australia, acknowledges and respects the continuing cultures, languages and heritage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

A piece of legislation cannot itself walk us down the road to all Australians recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as peers. Above all, this is a people's movement that has growing public support and ownership, and it is critical in the success of the proposition. Extending the life of this bill is a demonstration of the support that the public call for recognition has in both chambers.

I would concur with the former speaker that on this particular occasion the debate needs to occur in both chambers of the parliament if we are serious about the role that we play in representing our constituents and the work that we do in representing the sectional components of our electorates. Every one of us has Indigenous populations within our electorates.

As we represent constituents, equally we should debate those things that are extremely important in the landmark life of this nation as it moves to a formal position of shared peership, shared recognition and an acknowledgement that we have a shared history in this nation and that the continuity of Indigenous people's relationship with this land is 40,000 years plus. Whether or not the length of time is debated does not matter. What is important is that, at the time of the writing of the Constitution, consideration was not given to the traditional owners of this continent. They were excluded from the processes that charted the way for the development of the Australian birth certificate, our Constitution.

The coalition, the Greens, the Labor Party and the members of the crossbenches that the committee has spoken to have committed to their privileged role in showing active national leadership on this issue. I am also committed, as chair of the joint select committee which is tasked with reporting to government on how the actual recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples takes form. Among the recommendations made by the committee so far is that sections 25 and 51(xxvi) be removed, to remove references to race from the Constitution. The committee has heard that these recommendations have overwhelming community support. It is the committee's strong view that any proposal must both preserve the existing Commonwealth laws relying on section 51(xxvi) and the Commonwealth's powers to make laws with respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and, equally, contain a powerful statement of recognition, not a statement of symbolism.
I think there are some landmarks, and Mr Stephen Jones referred earlier to the Redfern speech. I was there when that speech was delivered, and it had a powerful impact on the people who were in attendance because for the first time what they heard was a recognition of the historical place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in this continent and in this country that we all love.

The apology is another.Whilst some thought that it was a cynical process, it was a moment of healing. It brought together memories, and painful memories, of the past. It acknowledged that we had a history that was unsavoury in many senses. Although there are people who were in institutions who found that it saved them, what occurred to individuals was problematic. When Prime Minister Rudd delivered that apology, you could see the impact that that had on the thinking of not only Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people but many Australians who sat with us on that day. The influence that it had on their thinking was that we have a joint past, that we have a joint future. The process of acknowledging a wrong had righted that unrecognised and often unspoken element that was in existence around not acknowledging that impact. The sorry statement will remain as a landmark comment.

I went to a breakfast recently, and I found it interesting that a senior Aboriginal woman, when former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd spoke at the breakfast, leant towards me and said: 'He's my hero. He recognised my pain, he helped me to acknowledge the past but he opened the opportunity for me to think of the future and to let go of the hurt and the bitterness that I had within me.' That was a powerful residual impact of an apology that happened some time ago. She, in that quiet moment, uttered those words, and there are many others who feel that.

The step towards recognition within the Constitution will be of a similar ilk. Australians and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will say, 'This is us, collectively acknowledging that we are equal as peers, that we stand together and that we forge a future for the children who come after us.' But we recognise the history and the tradition, and what was once a proud continent that has changed. I echo Noel Pearson's comments about having three parts to Australia: we have the history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; we have the post-1788 period during which we developed a British heritage; and, post the world wars, we developed a heritage enriched by those who came from across the seas, who contributed to this country and society and form the communities today that are a reflection of so many nations.

The committee is conducting final hearings across the nation and will present a final report to parliament in the coming months. I congratulate and thank the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of the Greens for the constructive and multipartisan dialogue that they have been having on this very important issue. I acknowledge the deputy chair of the committee, Senator Nova Peris, and Greens spokesperson for Indigenous affairs, Senator Rachel Siewert. I acknowledge the commitment of committee members including the opposition spokesperson for Indigenous affairs, Shayne Neumann MP, and our own Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Senator Nigel Scullion. I take this opportunity to thank Hon. Christian Porter MP for his considerable legal contributions to the committee's progress report before his appointment as Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister this year. Mr Porter was replaced on the committee by Sarah Henderson, the member for Corangamite, and I look forward to benefiting from her considerable experience in the law and in public life, including in the media.
Beyond the select committee, I urge all senators and members to learn about the proposals contained in the committee’s progress report and to seek the views of their constituents about constitutional recognition. Contained within the committee’s progress report is the recommendation that each house of parliament set aside a full day to debate the committee’s recommendations, but I reflect on the comments made by Mr Jones about the time it would take in order for all members to speak—and I believe that all members should take this historic opportunity and moment to speak, because all of them should reflect the views of their constituents. They should reflect the views of all who live within their electorates, particularly the views that come from Indigenous people that live within their electorates.

It would also be symbolic of the commitment of each and every member of both chambers to have a stand in respect to recognition—and I will respect the views of those who oppose it—but it is important that we all speak about the reasons why recognition is important and why we as a nation should ensure that the birth certificate of this nation includes the names of the two living groups that have had a continuity of existence on this continent. If we have unanimous support within the parliament, then we as political leaders will influence those that live within our electorates. I remain of the view that setting aside parliamentary time for debate would be a powerful, democratic mechanism towards recognition, held alongside nationwide conventions to seek the views of all Australians, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

From a personal perspective, I enjoy being equal with my peers in this parliament. It does not matter what our heritage is; what is important is the way in which we have respect for each other and have integrity about the things that we believe in and what our heritage is in the way that we contribute—because it is through that relationship that we build a common recognition and a common respect.

The completion of the Constitution will be an important point since the birth of this nation for the next stage of maturity and it will place us well not only within our own psyche as a nation of peoples but also within the global community. I think that, through their work, the expert panel that commenced this process and of which I was a member saw the richness of achieving recognition.

But I would also hope that those things that cannot be recorded on and etched into the birth certificate can be etched into a bill of recognition or an act of recognition that will encapsulate all of those things that are extremely important to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, that will remain within the constructs of this parliament and that will remain as a legislative instrument or act that should not be changed or amended. Equally, with the issue of prohibition of discrimination, I would hope that the Racial Discrimination Act is never set aside—it has only ever been set aside for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people—but maybe in that act we should insert an amendment that requires an absolute majority of both chambers before any setting aside or amendment can occur, so that we protect the inherent rights of all Australians who face the prospect of determination.

I am looking forward to the time that I finish my term in this House and I can sit back and, with this proposal being recognised by all Australians, say, like Mr Jones, that I served with an incredible group of people and that incredible group took us to a point at which we convinced the majority of states and the majority of Australians to accept formal recognition within the Constitution. We can then relish the fact that we were here in a period that opened
Ms CLAYDON (Newcastle) (11:26): I thank the member for Hasluck for his contribution on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Recognition (Sunset Extension) Bill 2015, and I certainly look forward to working with him and many other members of both the House and the Senate on ensuring the constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia. I absolutely support the bill, which seeks to amend the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Recognition Act 2013, its short title being the recognition act, and to extend the sunset clause that was part of that act by a further three years, taking us through to 28 March 2018.

The recognition act was passed unanimously by the previous parliament, and it recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the first inhabitants of Australia and records the parliament's intention to move towards constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. When the act was first passed in this parliament a sunset date of 28 March 2015 was included, to give the parliament and indeed the Australian people a date by which they could consider further steps towards a referendum on constitutional recognition of Indigenous peoples. That was an important focus for both the nation and the parliament at the time, but 28 March 2015 is clearly very close; it is looming on our horizon so there is a clear need for this extension being sought today. If the act were to lapse there would be no legislative instrument of Indigenous recognition in this place. That could easily be read as a very backward step on our journey towards constitutional recognition. That is not something that I believe any member of this parliament would endorse.

However, it is important that any extension be limited and the review panel established under the recognition act has recommended the extension of the sunset date by no more than three years, to align with the timing of a referendum which we now understand the Prime Minister has indicated will likely be held in 2017. The Joint Select Committee on Constitutional Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples also made this recommendation in its progress report, which was tabled in parliament on 27 October last year following a quite extensive national conversation.

Labor is absolutely committed to pursuing substantive and meaningful change to our Constitution, change that both unites nation and reflects the hopes and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Australia prides itself on being a place of fairness and equality. However, our founding document is silent on the unique place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in our nation. It is a historical wrong that in my view and Labor's view must be made right. I know that is a view shared by many others in the House.

We have taken giant steps previously. The 1967 referendum is referred to by many in this area. I would also draw the attention of the House to the High Court's historic Mabo and Wik decisions, to former Prime Minister Paul Keating's Redfern speech and, more recently and more topically, the Close the Gap framework that this parliament uses both to measure and gauge progress we make on bridging the inequality between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.
Because the Closing the Gap initiative is something that we have been dealing with in the parliament this fortnight, I would like to touch very briefly on it. The Prime Minister, himself, described the seventh Closing the Gap report, which is before us, as being 'profoundly disappointing'. I share the Prime Minister's view. Only two of the seven targets that we were trying to make some progress on have seen some significant benefits and return to Indigenous people. We are failing to address a number of areas. I spoke in the House on the continuing failure to commit to an additional justice target. There is clearly a lot of work for us to do on many of the practical and substantive mechanisms to address inequality between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. I know it is a matter of concern for some people that we are debating constitutional recognition: in the eyes of some people that is a symbolic action and we need to have it running in conjunction with all of the very practical work we are doing on the ground. I would suggest, and I hope, that the Australian parliament is more than capable of doing both and running simultaneously discussions around practical and symbolic mechanisms to address these inequalities.

The bill before the House will help us maintain some momentum towards constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as we continue to work together on a proposal for a referendum, but it is most definitely not the only undertaking required to ensure that we right this great wrong. Multipartisanship is critical for any referendum proposal to succeed, and there needs to be a strong consensus on timing and content. The timing and nature of the change must involve Aboriginal leaders and community members as well as the wider, non-Indigenous, community.

The positive role that the Joint Select Committee on Constitutional Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples is playing is an important arm of engagement. I acknowledge the work that the committee has undertaken to date, including its extensive travel around the country, listening to communities and continuing those conversations wherever it goes. Engaging with the community and getting a broad public consensus around the need for constitutional change in the lead-up the referendum is the only way any question put to the Australian people will be successful.

History tells us that referendums in Australia are rarely successful. But, if you take people on the journey with you, they can be supportive and constitutional change can occur. Of the 44 referendums held since Federation, only eight have been successful. This is a very sobering matter of fact and why we really need to get this process right. Significantly, the most successful referendum in Australia's history was the 1967 referendum, where more than 90 per cent of our citizens voted 'yes for Aborigines', as the campaign at the time was called.

This is in stark contrast to the most recent referendum, which we had back in 1999, which proposed to alter the Constitution so Australia could become a republic and to insert a new preamble. The no result was resounding for both questions. I confess to being an active participant and campaigner for the yes vote, but we were not successful at that time. On the question of the republic, about 54 per cent voted against, and more than 60 per cent voted against the preamble question.

So there are some very important lessons to be learnt from the previous referendums that have been put to the Australian people. A number of those lessons have been very well articulated and outlined by Williams and Hume in their 2010 paper People power: The history and future of the referendum in Australia. In that paper they identified three key aspects for a
successful referendum in Australia, the first one being bipartisan support, the second one popular ownership and, finally, popular education. For constitutional recognition, at this stage we would be confident in saying that we have at least the first key aspect lined up—having bipartisan support. Indeed, we have multipartisan support. But I would argue that we are yet to achieve that broader public ownership. I think we still have some significant work to do in that space. We have had some success in community education programs, but again one would not be resting on work done to date. There is certainly room and a need for much more to be done in that space.

Federally funded organisations like RECOGNISE have been playing an important role and doing some tremendous work in the community in building public awareness of and community support for constitutional change to date. But, again, if we are serious about constitutional recognition and the success of a referendum on the matter, the federal government must continue to provide financial support to education initiatives that support community groups and activities giving Australians an opportunity to learn more about constitutional recognition. We must continue these programs at great speed, I would suggest.

While we do need mass ownership of the issue, this cannot be used, in my view, as an excuse to further delay the change to the constitution. So I would like to see a better funded and resourced community education campaign and for that to happen much sooner rather than later. Community education initiatives must take many forms and engage as many people as possible if a referendum is to be successful. Discussions need to happen in every community, every town, every city and every suburb. What we know is we need robust discussion and a strong sense of public ownership.

In December last year I was honoured to take part in one such community initiative in my electorate of Newcastle—the University of Newcastle's inaugural Wollotuka Yarning Circle. The Yarning Circle is an initiative of the Wollotuka Institute and is the flagship event of the organisation's new direction in social engagement and discussion, ensuring that local Aboriginal people and the wider community have a platform to take part in the national debate on Indigenous affairs. December's Yarning Circle focused on how constitutional recognition would impact the lives and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and I was joined in this discussion with the community and fellow panellists Jeff McMullen AM and Teela Reid—a talented young woman lawyer and University of Newcastle and Wollotuka graduate. It was a very healthy and robust discussion on that evening. I believe all participants came away with a determination to do more, to double our efforts, in discussing this issue in our communities and networks and to convey a strong understanding of the importance of recognition within our respective circles. These sorts of initiatives are truly deserving of support, wherever and whenever they occur. They are the sorts of initiatives that will engage and educate the broader community and help to build a consensus for change.

We have before us, in my view, a historic, once-in-a-generation opportunity to acknowledge the unique status and cultural significance of the first Australians and to remove discriminatory provisions that have been used against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in this nation. We must not let the opportunity pass. The Australian Constitution is our founding document and it is lacking in a number of respects, as has been made clear, and this is our chance to make that right. There are ongoing discussions to make sure that we have a
way forward. It is my view that we absolutely cannot walk away from this moment of promise. (Time expired)

Mr ZAPPIA (Makin) (11:41): In rising to speak on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Recognition (Sunset Extension) Bill 2015, I strongly support the view that we need to extend the act of parliament that was established, from memory, in 2012. By doing so, I think we at least continue to provide some level of legal recognition of the fact that the Indigenous people were here prior to white settlement. Indeed, it has taken us over 100 years, following the establishment of our Constitution, just to get to this very point of providing that kind of recognition. The extension of the sunset clause associated with the original legislation is appropriate.

I assume that it was hoped at the time the legislation went through parliament in 2012 that, by now, we might have got to the point of having held the referendum and thereby resolving this issue. If we had held the referendum, we would have hopefully got a yes vote to the changing of the Constitution and, in turn, that would have sealed the issue that is the subject of this discussion. Indeed, one would have to ask just why, when the Constitution was established, it was framed in the way that it was. I accept that in 1901 the thought processes of the people who established the Constitution would have been entirely different from those of people of today. The Constitution reflects the general attitude of white settlers in this country towards Indigenous people. The treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people since white settlement in Australia has not been a record that Australia as a nation can be at all proud of. From the moment Captain Arthur Phillip and his crew set foot on Australian soil, it has been an uphill struggle for Indigenous people to be treated with the equality to which they are entitled both as human beings and as the 'settlers' who were here prior to white settlement.

I have been reflecting on some of the key process that we have seen in the last 100 or so years. Whilst I do not want to go through an exhaustive list by any means, I want to provide a snapshot of what has happened since white settlement in 1778. From 1778 right through to 1928, we can look back on a whole list of what we call Aboriginal killings, or Indigenous Australian killings, some referred to as massacres. That went right through to 1928. They have all now been documented for all to see. In 1909 right through to the 1970s, Indigenous children were removed from their families. We saw the presentation of the Stolen Generations report by Sir Ronald Wilson and Mick Dodson, highlighting the injustices that were committed over a period of almost 100 years. And that was after the establishment of the Australian Constitution and the national government, so we cannot just point the finger at individual states who had their own laws in place the time. In about 1935 we saw William Cooper form the Australian Aborigines League, which was perhaps the first protest movement by Indigenous people in this country—again, protesting the injustice that they were continuously subjected to. In fact, a few years later in 1939, we had the Cummeragunja walk-off, where some 200 Indigenous people walked out of a mission in New South Wales, crossed the river Murray into Victoria, and then settled on the other side in Victoria—in a different state—again, that was because of the unfairness with which they were being treated.

In 1967, we saw the first breakthrough when, at least in the referendum to change the constitution, there was some recognition finally afforded to the Indigenous people of Australia. At about the same time, interestingly, Vincent Lingiari initiated the Wave Hill
cattle station walk-off, where the Indigenous people who worked on that station were being treated very differently to the white people, and that led to an eight-year strike which, in the end, was resolved. But it was an eight-year strike, that arose because of the discrimination that was being perpetuated against Indigenous people working in cattle stations across Australia. It was also Vincent Lingiari into whose hands Gough Whitlam poured the soil in 1975, as a symbolic acknowledgement that this was their land and that they were entitled to land rights. Those land rights were finally confirmed by the Mabo case in 1992. That was, in my view, the first time that the question had been properly tested in the courts; the question as to the legitimacy of their claim that they had been in this country prior to the arrival of white people in 1778. That was immediately followed by the Native Title Act. The Native Title Act came into effect 215 years after white settlement in this country—it took 215 years for Indigenous people to finally be recognised as having been the previous custodians of this land, before white people. That shows just how slowly we have moved as a nation in recognising Indigenous people. Then in 2008, the apology by Kevin Rudd was very well received—but it took 100 years after children had been taken away from their families for that to happen as well. And we have seen the Closing the Gap process begun.

I highlight of those occasions simply to make the point that it has been a very uphill struggle for Indigenous people, from day one, in order to be in any way recognised. The truth is that, whilst we have made all of those changes and all of those recognitions, we still have a long way to go. I am pleased to say that most of those critical changes that I have referred to were initiated by a Labor government. Earlier this week, the House debated the Closing the gap report. In my view, equality and closing the gap is not confined solely to measurable statistics, such as health, housing, education, employment and so on. There are many other examples of Indigenous people having been treated appallingly over the years, for which those responsible should hang their heads in shame.

There are countless examples of Indigenous Australians who enlisted for service in World War I and World War II and other conflicts, who served this nation with honour and who were prepared to die for their country, Australia, but when their service ended so did the brief recognition that had been given to them. They were effectively sidelined with no recognition whatsoever.

I recently spoke at service in Adelaide about what happened in the bombing of Darwin. One of the things that happened in Darwin subsequent to the bombing was that Indigenous people played a crucial role in protecting the coastline and assisting in any way they could. These were not enlisted people; these were Indigenous people who just lived in the area and took it upon themselves to help out in any way they could. They were never recognised. I believe it was the current member for Lingiari, the Hon. Warren Snowdon, who finally provided some measure of recognition to them. It is that kind of recognition that goes a long way towards closing the gap between what they have done and not been recognised for in the past and affording them the recognition that they quite rightly deserve.

I referred to stories. Again, there are many, many stories of people such as Eddie Gilbert. He perhaps could have been one of the finest cricketers in this country. He was one of the few people who the records show was able to bowl out Sir Donald Bradman. I believe he bowled him out for a duck. He was a person who was such a good player and yet he was denied the opportunity to play cricket for Australia simply because he was Aboriginal. I am aware of
other similar stories. Whilst I am aware that things have changed today, again, it took a long, long time. Indeed, it was not until 1964 that we had the first Indigenous person representing Australia in the Olympics. That just simply highlights the discrimination I refer to. Closing the gap would be given a huge boost if we equally recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait islanders when they have served Australia in an exceptional way as we do for all other Australians. I am pleased to see that we are starting to do that now.

In making my contribution to this discussion today I want to recognise two Indigenous people who come from South Australia and who have come to my attention in recent days for the special place that they deserve in our history. The first is a person by the name of Hubert Frank Tripp. He was an Indigenous person from South Australia who served in World War I. Shortly before his 23rd birthday he enlisted. He was sent to join the 10th infantry, from memory, at Gallipoli. He was there for several months and then returned later on in that year. My understanding is that Hubert Tripp was also the very first Indigenous South Australian to be allowed to play in the South Australian football league in 1910. He was one of those people who made a breakthrough. He broke through in being enlisted and sent to Gallipoli and also being allowed to play South Australian league football. I understand that later this year his name will be engraved on one of the pavers at a special Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander memorial that is being established at the Torrens parade grounds in Adelaide specifically to try to redress some of the injustice of these people never having been recognised for their service to their country.

The other person that I take this opportunity to recognise is Hubert Tripp's cousin, Marj Tripp. Marj also made history as the first Aboriginal woman to join the Royal Australian Navy in 1963. She was 17 years old at the time. This was before the referendum, so it would have been quite a feat for her to have been given the right to enlist and join the Navy. I can only imagine that part of the reason for that breakthrough of Marj enlisting at that time would have been her own determination. Nevertheless, it happened and it was, again, a good thing. Today I recognise both of those people. Recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders for who they are, for what they have endured and for what they have contributed to Australia will go a long way towards closing the gap and providing constitutional recognition for them.

The issue of constitutional recognition has now been with us for years. It has been the subject of discussion and public debate for as long as I can recall being in public life—and yet we are still not there. It now looks like the referendum might be held in 2016 or 2017. It is my view that to deny the Indigenous people of Australia the right to be included in our Constitution is to deny the truth. In my view the recognition of Indigenous people in our Constitution is, conversely, a recognition of the truth. I cannot imagine anyone having any good reason why the truth should not be acknowledged. The fact of the matter is that it can be acknowledged by recognising that the Indigenous people of Australia were here before white settlement.

The success of the referendum is entirely in the hands of the political leaders of this country. If there is goodwill, if there is bipartisanism from all politicians and all party leaders, the referendum will succeed. If there is not goodwill then I know that in one way or another it will be undermined. My call is for political leaders across the country to unite and once and for all correct the injustice that has been done to Indigenous people by the denial of their existence in this country prior to white settlement.
Dr STONE (Murray) (11:56): The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Recognition (Sunset Extension) Bill 2015 is very important for the nation of Australia and I have no doubt it has bipartisan support. It comes about because in 2013 the parliament passed the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Recognition Act and for the first time the continent and the islands now known as Australia were deemed to have been first occupied by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples—in other words, we recognised through that parliamentary act that Indigenous Australians existed. I have always had trouble with the word 'occupied'. My family's farm has been in the family for six generations, and we never refer to that land having been occupied by the family. We say we owned it. I do not know why we have this incredible difficulty in Australia in using the word 'owned' when it comes to Indigenous Australians and this continent. Let me say, for the sake of the record, that we should recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples owned their tribal areas, their countries or their nations whether as island states in the Torres Strait or on mainland Australia, when ownership of the country was divided up into some 200 or so separate nations on the mainland.

The issue now is that Australia's Indigenous ownership of the country needs to be recognised in the Constitution. The act in 2013 gave us a two-year sunset period for the referendum to be put forward and ideally supported so that we could have the Constitution changed. That would then give us this recognition that we all in this place believe is deserved—it is a no-brainer. The difficulty for us is that on 27 March 2014 a review panel was set up in accordance with the act and the review panel reported back, on 19 September 2014, that in its view we needed to extend the sunset period by a year to make it three years before the vote so that there was less likelihood of the referendum being not supported by the majority of Australian people. It is a fairly complex matter and we have to make sure that the final proposal is understood by Indigenous Australians, parliaments and the people. We have to make sure that it is not contentious in any way, that recognition is just understood as being the right thing for Australians to be doing, so that we have a result similar to the one we achieved for the referendum on 27 May 1967.

At that referendum we had 5,700,000 Australians vote yes, which was 91 per cent favourable for the proposal that Indigenous Australians could now have laws made for them in the federal sphere—in this parliament—and it also talked about ensuring that Australian Indigenous people were counted in the census.

That was an overwhelmingly supported referendum. We want to have the same result for this referendum, and that is why it would be a shame, we all agree, if we went to the people too soon, before all of the work has been done. That is why I very strongly support this amendment. Let's extend this time frame—that is why this is called a 'sunset extension bill'—to a third year so that we can properly acknowledge our shared history and the incredible value we place on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their heritage. I would hope that we will acknowledge their ownership of the country before colonisation and the continued ownership of parts of it by Indigenous Australians.

I want to put a little history into this debate, because I think it is always important to know where we have come from and how we have evolved in our thinking about Indigenous Australians. Some people do not understand that we do not in fact at this point in time have a
very—how shall I put it?—‘commendable’ history in relation to recognising the rights of Indigenous Australians in modern Australia.

I want to quote from the statutes of Western Australia 1944, from the Native Citizenship Rights Act. This is where they decided in Western Australia to grant a certificate of citizenship to Aboriginal people on certain conditions—and it could also be withdrawn upon certain conditions. Let me read to you from section 4(1):

… any adult person who is a native within the meaning of the Native Administration Act, 1905-1941, may make application for a Certificate of Citizenship to a resident or stipendiary magistrate or Government Resident in the magisterial district in which he resides.

It goes on to say that by the date of the application the person making the application has to show that:

… he has dissolved tribal and native association except with respect to lineal descendants or native relations of the first degree, …

In other words, you can continue to talk to your mum and dad and perhaps your children, but anyone beyond that degree of relationship should be disassociated from forthwith.

The person may also have served in the Navy, Air Force or Army—at least that acknowledged that more than 1,000 Indigenous Australians were in the First World War, fighting for their country bravely and courageously beside the non-Indigenous Australians. And we are talking about 1944, so they were also at that time again looking to defend Australia. So if you had served in the navy, air force or army you could be entitled to citizenship as long as you received an honourable discharge. You also had to show that you were a proper and fit person to get this certificate.

What did that mean? The act said:

(a) for the two years immediately prior the magistrate shall be satisfied that applicant has adopted the manner and habits of civilised life;
(b) the full rights of citizenship are desirable for and likely to be conducive to the welfare of the applicant;
(c) the applicant is able to speak and understand the English language;
(d) the applicant is not suffering from active leprosy, syphilis, granuloma or yaws;
(e) the applicant is of industrious habits and is of good behaviour and reputation; …

It is interesting that we still do not require a lot of our new citizens to be able to speak English but in 1944 the Western Australian Indigenous person had to demonstrate that.

This certificate of citizenship could, of course, be withdrawn in the following way:

Upon complaint of the Commissioner of Native Affairs or any other person, a magistrate may suspend or cancel a Certificate of Citizenship if he is satisfied that the holder-

(a) is not adopting the manner and habits of civilised life; or
(b) has been twice convicted of any offence under the Native Administration Act, 1905-1941, or is of habitual drunkenness; or
(c) has contracted leprosy, syphilis, granuloma or yaws.

I find this extraordinary as we today debate, very carefully, the morality of withdrawing citizenship, from someone who has dual citizenship, on the basis of a terrorist act. And yet in 1944, it would seem given this legislation that we were quite comfortable withdrawing...
citizenship from an Indigenous Australian on the basis that they had contracted a disease, had been drunken, or had in any other way been seen not to be living a civilised life. I am making this point to demonstrate how far we have evolved in the 70 or so years since Indigenous Australians were not considered to be Australians in any sense of the word.

We have come a very long way—even though the Closing the gap report of last week demonstrates that we still have a huge distance to cover, in terms of the capacity of an Indigenous Australian to lead a life that is in any way comparable in terms of health, employment, safety, freedom from discrimination, or even having similar levels of incarceration to non-Indigenous Australians. We have so far to go. But I want to make the point that it was only in 1944 that we thought it was quite appropriate to require an Aboriginal Australian to deny their Aboriginality in order to get a piece of paper which allowed them to vote or to drink. Another condition was that they no longer associated with their family, unless they were immediate family—mother, father, son or daughter. This Citizenship Act was also promulgated in like-minded states at about the same time. And we had some very famous cases. We had the very sad case of our very famous painter, Albert Namatjira, who was first given citizenship, and then had his citizenship checked, because he chose to share alcohol with some of his relatives at the time.

I am strongly supporting this bill, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Recognition (Sunset Extension) Bill 2015 so that we extend the time for Australians to be educated about the need for the referendum to be passed absolutely unanimously—if that is humanly possible in Australia with a referendum!—and for us to embrace a constitutional amendment which would recognise the unique status of Australia's Indigenous peoples. We must acknowledge our shared history. We must acknowledge the bad parts of our history so that we do not continue to blame the victim, as we often do in Australia today. We have to acknowledge that, for Indigenous Australians, the first 100 years—at least—since 1788 were made desperate by warfare between them and the native police, some frontier settlers and pastoralists. In the case of Indigenous Australians, they were trying to defend their country and their own peoples, and in the case of the pastoralists and the new settlers, they were trying to defend their lives too, and their flocks and their possessions. We have to acknowledge that warfare. We have to acknowledge the fact that Indigenous Australians were pushed off their land to places where they did not belong, or onto country that they did not own themselves, which caused further distress between competing Indigenous nations, which led to more warfare, and more bloodshed. We have to acknowledge the poverty, the degradation, the lack of employment, and the disease, that typifies a lot of that early contact history. At the same time, we have to acknowledge that there were triumphant parts. There were the times, again for about a century, when Australian Aboriginal and Indigenous peoples were indispensable in the white settlement of remote Australia, and in the pastoral industry; they were the stockmen, they were the managers of very remote places; and they were great managers of livestock, husbanding livestock in difficult circumstances. We have to acknowledge the Indigenous women, who were pioneers in every sense with the white Australians at the time in the work they did—domestic work and often also as stockwomen—and who were at the same time surviving and raising their families in extremely difficult conditions.

We have to acknowledge the terrible period when we thought that it was wise to take away children of mixed descent because we thought that their 'white blood' gave them the right—
which is how we explained it at the time—to be raised as whites, or because we felt that they would be contaminated and further degraded, discriminated against or neglected if they stayed with their Indigenous mother, who was often living in impoverished and dire circumstances in remote places or even in cities.

We have to acknowledge all of that so that we can understand why today a lot of Torres Strait Islanders and Aboriginal people are drinking at high-risk levels, are using drugs of dependence and are in despair, as evidenced by their rates of suicide, gender based violence and incarceration. If we understand our history, we can then put into greater context why Indigenous Australians today are very often in great distress. I chair a committee inquiring into the high-risk use of alcohol in Indigenous communities. Speaker after speaker conveys to us in evidence the distress of these Indigenous communities, most recently in Cairns just last week.

We have to do better. Part of our need is to recognise Indigenous Australians, their rights, their responsibilities and their unique status in our society as owners of this country before we arrived. Giving another year to make sure that Australians understand that so that the referendum is a resounding success is what this new bill will allow us to do.

Mr TUDGE (Aston—Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister) (12:11): I firstly thank members of the House for their contribution to this debate on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Recognition (Sunset Extension) Bill 2015 over the last two days. There have been some very constructive and, in many cases, emotional contributions from members right across the chamber, and I appreciate the words that they have said.

In some respects, this is a very straightforward bill. All that it seeks to do is extend the operation of an existing act of parliament for another three years. It is an act of parliament which has unanimous support across the parliament and one which we all share in the objectives of. The process of extending this act for another three years also gives us the opportunity to reflect on what the original purpose of the act was and its ongoing relevance to today's debate. When you reflect on the original purpose of this act, you see that it was trying to achieve three things. Firstly, it was a formal declaration for the first time by this parliament that, indeed, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were here before white settlement just over a couple of hundred years ago. That is an important declaration and statement which is made in this act of parliament. Secondly, the act requires an assessment, a review, of the readiness of the Australian people for constitutional recognition, and it outlines in a bit of detail how that assessment should take place. Finally, the purpose of the act was really to be a stepping stone towards constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

In reflecting on those three purposes, I believe that they are largely still relevant. Certainly it is still very relevant that we have this parliamentary declaration that, yes, Aboriginal people were here and were the first inhabitants of this land. The assessment has been conducted; that can be ticked off. That assessment showed that, in fact, the Australian public is not quite ready just yet to have the constitutional referendum and that more work needs to be done to educate people and to let them know exactly what the proposals are going to be.

The goal of this being a step towards recognition is still the most important goal of them all. This is a very important thing for the government, and I know that view is shared by the opposition. We do want to see constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Islander peoples. We do want to amend the Constitution, and there are two reasons why we are seeking to do that. The first is that there are some clauses in the Constitution today which, in essence, propose that laws be made on the basis of race. Our view, and I think it is a widely shared view, is that that is not a concept which has relevance in today's day and age—we should not be making decisions on the basis of race and indeed alternative forms of words should be included. The second reason for wanting constitutional change is the proper acknowledgement and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. People are quite surprised that in our most important document of the land there is no acknowledgement at all, no mention, of the first inhabitants of the country. Of course it acknowledges our British heritage—it does that through the institutions the Constitution creates by its acknowledgement of the British Crown, who remains our head of state—and of course the document is written in English, as a result of our British heritage. So the Constitution properly recognises our British heritage but there is no recognition of the other important heritage which I think is a great part of the nation-state of Australia.

In summary, those are the two things we are trying to achieve through constitutional change. We have heard some eloquent contributions over the last couple of days on why members of this parliament are so committed to achieving this. Given that there is a reasonable amount of consensus about the objectives we are trying to achieve, what is so difficult about it and why does it take so long? Any constitutional change in this country is exceptionally difficult. Any time you alter any word you need to be very sure about what the implications are going to be. There is still some debate about what the precise form of words should be. We need to come to a consensus on the form of words, and we are being very ably assisted on that by the terrific work which Ken Wyatt and his committee are doing. In the weeks ahead they will be providing a form of words which hopefully will provide a basis for reaching consensus.

There is a warning, and that is that only eight out of 44 constitutional referenda in this country have ever succeeded. Even if you have bipartisan support for a constitutional question, there is no guarantee it will succeed. Our aim must be to find a form of words that will bring the Australian public along with us on this journey so that when we do take this proposition to the Australian people in the years ahead we will get a resounding endorsement of it. As the member for Murray articulated a short while ago, we should seek a unanimous consensus but at least our aim should be something in the vicinity of what was achieved in 1967, when 90 per cent of the Australian public voted for change to the Constitution—a change that had such great moral significance. We are coming up to the 50th anniversary of that in 2017.

I again thank members for their contributions on this bill. The government is absolutely committed to seeing constitutional recognition occur in the years ahead, and we will be fighting very hard to ensure that we get that broad consensus across the community.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Ordered that this bill be reported to the House without amendment.
ADJOURNMENT

Mrs GRIGGS (Solomon) (12:20):
That the Federation Chamber do now adjourn.

Community Legal Centres
Domestic Violence

Mr MITCHELL (McEwen—Second Deputy Speaker) (12:20): I rise to air my disgust at the Liberal government for turning its back on vulnerable people in the electorate of McEwen, especially those who are suffering from domestic violence, who are predominantly women. Sadly, I would like to start by bringing to the attention of the chamber some of the key statistics. As White Ribbon tell us, one woman is murdered by her current or former partner every week. Family violence is the leading contributor to death and disability in Australian women aged under 45. Seventy five per cent of assaults against women happen at home.

The City of Whittlesea in my electorate has one of the highest rates of family violence in the northern metropolitan region of Melbourne, and that increased by 35 per cent in the last two years. Over the past 14 years, there has been an increase of 268 per cent compared by 172 per cent state-wide. Incidences of family violence increased last financial year to 2,359 and 60 per cent of all assaults recorded by police arose from family violence. In 55 per cent of cases, victims had their first contact with a support agency. Thirty nine per cent of cases had contacted police and 41 per cent had applied for an intervention. Emotional and physical abuse were present in 72 per cent of all cases.

The City of Whittlesea ranks sixth in Australia on the socioeconomic index for disadvantage. It is also one of Australia's fast growing municipalities with high levels of mortgage stress. These statistics are deeply disturbing which is why it is inconceivable that this government has cut funding from the highly valued Whittlesea Community Legal Service. The community legal service are a free legal service for people living in the City of Whittlesea and surrounding areas, with a number of their cases directly relating to domestic violence. They help those who have suffered emotionally and physically at the hands of perpetrators nearest to them. They help those who need the help the most. This government slashed their funding.

I want to let this chamber know just how much it would cost to keep this important and, at times, life-saving service in operation. Overall, funding to the Whittlesea Community Legal Service is set to be hit by a reduction of approximately $232,000, more than 30 per cent of its total community legal service funding over the next two years. The embattled Attorney-General has announced community legal sector funding cuts which have deep and lasting impacts on our communities. The government have cut the final two years of Commonwealth funding to boost generalist and family law services, which is $120,000 per annum. They have cut funding for lawyers working with local Family Relationships centres, which assist separating couples with legal advice, casework and legal education which costs only $59,000 per annum.

How dare those opposite say they are about 'good government' when they are callously taking away the only support some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged people in our communities have. I have written to the Attorney-General urging him to consider a funding request from the Goulburn Valley Community Legal Centre, which services many constitutes
in the northern region of McEwen. The funding request from the Goulburn Valley Community Legal Centre is $207,000. That is enough for them to keep their services going beyond 1 July 2015. All the government can say is, ‘We're not going to discuss funding until after the May budget.’

Effectively, community legal centres have been left in limbo and they will remain that way until the government makes a decision at the end of May. Again, many members of our community rely on the centre's support and resources in their darkest times, including when fleeing family violence and seeking support for separating families. What are these families going to do after 1 July this year? The cruel cuts by this government mean families and individuals suffering family breakdowns and domestic abuse will no longer have anywhere local to go. It goes to the personal values and priorities of this government. It can find $3.5 million to fund a law expert in a witch-hunt but not $500,000 for community legal centres that actually make a difference.

There is a silver lining: the Andrews' Labor government in Victoria. I commend Daniel Andrews for establishing a royal commission into family violence. Again, the differentiation of Labor values versus Liberal values is clear. Whilst Labor has royal commissions into domestic violence and into systematic abuse against children, those opposite spend $57 million on a witch hunt into trade unions—that achieved nothing. These are the values that separate us. Labor is all about putting people first; that is what Labor governments do. And good government is about looking after our people and our communities, but that is not what the Abbott government are doing. It is time the Abbott government changed their twisted priorities and focused on Australia, not on themselves.

**Domestic Violence**

**Mr Hawke** (Mitchell) (12:25): I also rise to raise the issue of domestic violence, ironically enough. I want to say to the member for McEwen: it is beneath him to politicise this issue of domestic violence. While those cuts may be significant, and he may want to raise that issue, we are together as one with this scourge in our community. The Abbott Liberal government is doing everything it can to ensure this issue is addressed, as it should be, by our whole society, and by our whole parliament, working together.

I would like to speak about the Lisa Harnum Foundation, which has been established by a resident of my electorate, Aileen Mountfield. Aileen is a member of the Hills Domestic Violence Support Group. The Lisa Harnum Foundation is named, of course, after a very prominent case that gripped Sydney and gripped Australia: the very tragic case of Lisa Harnum who was murdered by her fiance. She was 30 years old when she died tragically as a result of her then fiance, Simon Gittany, throwing her from the 15th floor balcony of their apartment in the City of Sydney. Lisa's mother has agreed for the foundation to use Lisa's name. The foundation will offer residents from across Sydney and across Australia a place for women to come and visit, and access a range of services. It will have information, counselling and recovery groups.

I want to point to the dynamism of the approach that is being taken by the Lisa Harnum Foundation, which will directly address the needs of women with domestic violence issues in new and modern ways, including through the use of apps and other technology. This will address some of the very great difficulties that we hear, from police and from all of our services for domestic violence, that women have when they are engaged in these abusive and
violent relationships. We know that just under 500,000 Australian women reported that they had experienced physical or sexual violence or sexual assault in the past year. More than one million women have experienced physical or sexual assault since the age of 15, by a perpetrator who was their current or previous male partner. Almost 40 per cent have experienced physical assault in the 12 months before the survey, which was from the Australian Bureau of Statistics. These rates are absolutely unacceptable in our modern society, and they require the action of government, both state and federal.

That is why it was so pleasing that the government announced that Australian of the Year, Rosie Batty, would advise state and federal governments on the new control order system to prevent domestic violence. We are so excited about the fact that Rosie has put domestic violence on the national agenda this year. There are alarming statistics and developments in this space. These show us that under-reporting is still a massive problem; that the hidden domestic violence, of those who are not able to come forward, or cannot be identified, is just as bad as the data that we already know about and the problems that we already have. Rosie and her incredible strength and her selfless efforts are so important in this area. The Lisa Harnum Foundation, established last year, and the efforts of its founder and Executive Director, Aileen Mountfield, are also going to be so important in this vital area, allowing for greater reporting, greater identification, and greater assistance in what are very difficult circumstances. They are to be to be commended. The foundation will provide for a circuit-breaker in Sydney, where these very tragic circumstances captured our entire city. There will be free-call phone number services; there will be specialised services in relation to domestic violence: services in the form of information, support, counselling, financial counselling, education, and group work; and group activities for women who have experienced some form of abuse. These groups are non-confronting, leading women into rebuilding their self-esteem, self-worth and self-confidence. As I have described, the use of new technologies, and the use of new methods of allowing women to be able to seek help from inside abusive relationships, and from inside abusive paradigms from which they cannot escape, is going to be, I think, a shift in paradigm and very vital to the ongoing effort. Announced on White Ribbon Day, the app will be a great revolution in this space, and will allow for very important leaps forward for women in abusive and dangerous situations.

If people are in unsafe or threatening situations, they can access these clever technologies without fear of getting caught. I am not going to go into too much detail about them because they are primarily for women in domestic violence situations and part of their success will be in the secrecy about them. I think this is a real step forward. I am going to be very pleased to be at the launch of the Lisa Harnum Foundation. I think this will make a great contribution to the effort against domestic violence. I will be proud to speak at the opening and I commend Aileen Mountfield and everybody involved in the step forward that we are making in this space.

Melbourne Electorate: Urban Planning

Mr BANDT (Melbourne) (12:30): We need a new discussion about the future of our cities because at the moment there is no planning in planning. There is a proposed development and proposed changes in my electorate of Melbourne that starkly illustrate what is wrong. A private developer wants to build a huge 17-storey apartment building at the Downtowner site, at the corner of Queensberry Street and Lygon Street in Carlton. The development is clearly
wrong for the site. It will tower above its generally low-rise surrounds, does not respect the area's heritage and does not appear to comply with the planning scheme. There have been over 50 objections from local residents and businesses, and the Carlton Residents Association has strongly condemned the proposal as totally out of place. I stand with the community in its fight against this utterly inappropriate development.

But I note with concern another new threat facing Carlton that shows an utter failure to properly plan our cities. The council, dominated by people who do not live in the municipality, has voted to rezone sections of Carlton as capital city zone, the same zone that currently applies to the CBD. The capital city zone is proposed to expand into Carlton, west of Swanston Street and to the old Royal Women's Hospital site.

The problem is the capital city zone carries an exemption to residents' and property owners' third-party rights: the right to object to a development, the right to appeal a decision and, worst of all, the requirement of a developer to provide full notice of their plans to local residents. You would have no right, if you lived in this part of Carlton, to be told about a proposed multistorey development next door. Under these circumstances, with transparency and all rights for local residents removed, what sort of scrutiny will be applied to projects in the future? What accountability to the local community will there be for the big developers who seek to push the envelope and build ever bigger buildings?

The Greens have fought hard against the affront to democracy that is the removal of third-party rights. The Greens City of Melbourne councillors, Rohan Leppert and Cathy Oke, strongly support third-party rights. They have worked closely with the Carlton community and moved twice to reinstate third-party rights into the capital city zone last year, but both times the Liberal majority on council dismissed these moves.

Let's be clear: the Greens support inner city development in agreed urban renewal areas. Melbourne's urban boundary cannot keep expanding, spreading outwards and taking over arable land, and that in turn means a level of urban renewal inside these boundaries. But any development in areas with established communities, like Carlton, must be undertaken in a transparent way, with as much community control as possible.

Now, though, this decision has been sent to the state Minister for Planning, the Labor member for Richmond, Richard Wynne, who has the final say. Sitting on Minister Wynne's desk are two documents. The first is the final version of a planning scheme amendment to rezone Carlton west of Swanston Street to capital city zone, complete with a removal of residents' third-party rights. The second is a request to send a draft planning scheme amendment to rezone the old women's hospital to capital city zone, along with a removal of residents' third-party rights, to a planning panel for further assessment.

But there is a third document: the state Labor government's election manifesto. Page 88 says:
Labor will review planning and environment laws … to:
• Promote the principles of third party rights in all processes
So I say to the state planning minister: do what your election manifesto says. Put back into all of these zones, existing and proposed, the third-party rights enjoyed by Victorians in the rest of the state: the right to know about a development, the right to share an opinion on the development and the right to participate in the objection and assessment process.
This is one of the first tests for the new Labor government. Labor, will you follow the Liberals or will you follow the Greens? The Greens have long stood up for community-centred planning. In Melbourne, we are working for better representation for residents and an end to the undemocratic power wielded by business. We are working for an end to developer donations to local council candidates, we are instituting processes for community participation in drawing up council budgets and we are pushing for a return of planning powers to communities and democratic councils, not VCAT and the state minister. We will hold Labor and the Liberals to account. But if local communities continue to be overridden by outside powers, and if Labor's Minister Wynne signs off on the attack on residents' rights, we will continue to see disasters like the Downtowner site redevelopment.

**Gilmore Electorate: Paper Mill**

Mrs SUDMALIS (Gilmore) (12:35): This week was a very sad time for Gilmore. Whilst in many parts of Australia the increase in employment is beginning to really make a difference for families and prosperity generally, we have heard the announcement that our local iconic industry, the Australian Paper mill, will be closing during 2015. The mill is a specialist industry, with world class production of papers for identity documents, watermark papers, cheques and, most importantly, our Australian passport paper. As a candidate before the last election I was privileged to visit the site. We discussed opportunities, knowing that a lot of local artists use imported paper for their works, and we explored the concept of a different range of products. They took up that concept and produced a very fine drawing paper.

The workers at the mill have done everything possible to extend the life of the mill. We have been in regular contact since I was elected to office. The industry has explored every avenue, requesting an inquiry into the possible dumping of product into Australia, but there was no evidence to support that. The executives of the mill supplied me with samples of different grades of speciality paper, with and without watermarks. We did a letter of appeal to every minister, assistant minister and parliamentary secretary, asking them to consider the purchase of such paper for their correspondence. I thank all responders, and there were many, for getting back to me but there was confusion regarding the ability to purchase outside the whole-of-government contracts that were already in place. We sent copies of all correspondence to the group at the mill. Following that, we managed to get the Australian made paper which did meet all criteria to be put back on the whole-of-government list. However this did not directly help our local mill, except that they did receive orders for regular copy paper when their sister mill could not meet demand.

In particular, I wish to acknowledge agriculture minister Barnaby Joyce, Attorney-General George Brandis, justice minister Michael Keenan and foreign minister Julie Bishop for their positive and active response to the purchase of Shoalhaven paper. Just the other day, the newly appointed Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Industry and Science, Karen Andrews, informed me that her new letterhead and envelopes will be Shoalhaven paper. I continue to lobby Foreign Minister Bishop, regarding passport paper, to encourage other nations to consider the purchase of our local world-class product. I thank her for her continuing efforts, but as we know this is not a rapid resolution process. In the meantime, production to meet demand for Australian passport paper only uses up about three weeks of working mill time each year. In these times of world instability, people abusing their use of

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passports and terrorists possibly forging passports, it very much disappoints me that we will lose our safe, secure and world-class production.

We do not write a cheque very often anymore, and that was one of the mill's mainstay production lines. There are very few corporations or businesses that use watermarked paper to protect their correspondence—that is very much a thing of the past. There has been a slow but steady decline in the use of speciality papers. The mill in its heyday employed more than 600 people, so you can see how important this industry has been to our local area.

Whilst at this time there only remains a very professional and dedicated team of 75 employees, the closure of the plant will have a devastating effect. The flow-on loss to the Shoalhaven is estimated to be in the order of $20 million. Last year we wrote to the Minister for Trade, who gave assistance links for Austrade to the mill to encourage export development concepts. Collectively we have explored as many options as possible to keep the mill as an ongoing industry. Sadly, this week the owners have decided, due to several years of financial loss, they can no longer invest in our paper mill in the same way as it continues to lose money.

We have now contacted Centrelink to assist the employees to manage their finances and optimise their benefits. Today I have also written to the Minister for Industry and Science, as well as the Prime Minister, to request further assistance from any avenues they are able to tap into for the workers of the mill. My thoughts and prayers are with the 75 Shoalhaven workers who came home on Tuesday with the most awful news. On a personal level, I find this situation very distressing. It is a challenge and I wish to convey my sympathy and a sincere offer of support to everyone concerned. Should any of the workers or the families need further help in any way, they will only have to contact my office. We may not be able to resolve all their questions straight away, but we will do our absolute best.

Religious Tolerance

Ms MacTIERNAN (Perth) (12:39): History has some very powerful lessons for us. It helps us to get a better perspective on the issues of the day. Today, one of the big issues is the pressure that the Muslim community in Australia is under. Its leaders are being called on to do more. Individual community members feel variously embarrassed, angry or conflicted by the violence that is being perpetrated in the name of Islam around the world and in at least one instance in our own country.

Earlier this week I had a very lovely Muslim taxi driver who poured out to me his passionate commitment to this country, how he appreciated the freedom that this country had given him and his family and how he appreciated the public education that his children were receiving. He said he could not understand those who would seek to come to this country if they did not value these things. Like the vast majority of Islamic Australians, he was overwhelmingly committed to the values of tolerance and freedom.

It is important for us to understand that Australia has been here before. In the 19th and 20th centuries, it was the Irish Catholics who worked in the spotlight, whose loyalty and patriotism was under suspicion. The police, the Protestant polemists and, indeed, some of the Catholic hierarchy believed that the Australian Irish community sheltered devotees of the principle of violent insurrection. In a striking parallel, there was even a crazed supporter of the Fenian cause, Henry O'Farrell, who made an attempt to assassinate Prince Alfred during a visit to
Sydney. There were mass rallies in response to this, and when leading Catholics described the acts of Henry O'Farrell as those of a lone madman they were howled down. It was felt by the community that this was part of a much bigger problem that we had with Irish Catholics. There were demands for purges of Irish Catholic disaffection and, indeed, there was an anti-Catholic union formed. Of course, we had political leaders get into the frame. Henry Parkes, who was never one to let a political opportunity go by, beat the drum and decided to exploit the hysteria. He introduced urgent bills into the parliament for the better suppression and punishment of seditious practices and attempts.

We need to look at what has happened in the past and at the role of Irish Catholics here today. The Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition both are Catholics, something perhaps unimaginable during the time when Irish Catholics were under such deep suspicion. We have to learn from this. We have a problem at the moment with terrorism. It is a problem, particularly with the technological capacities available today, which we really must address. But it is a problem that we as Muslim and non-Muslim Australians must work together to resolve. We simply cannot make the mistake we made 100 and 150 years ago and cast suspicion on an entire community. Rather, we must recognise that we can work together, that we can move through this, and that ultimately we will be a society, when the absurdity of the Catholic-Protestant sectarianism the past seems absurd, I am confident that if we keep committed and focused we can make that Muslim and non-Muslim divide equally absurd.

**Solomon Electorate: Hospitals**

Mrs GRIGGS (Solomon) (12:44): Long before I was selected to represent the people of Solomon, I was lobbying for a new hospital in Palmerston. I attended the first ever community meeting on this topic, which was held at the CMAX cinema in Palmerston. Throughout the 2013 election campaign and my first term in office I fought hard for the people of Palmerston to get a hospital. I was involved at the beginning, not because there was any political gain in it but because Palmerston is my community. Palmerston is where I raised my family and where my granddaughter is going to grow up.

So I rise today to update the House on the progress towards the Palmerston Regional Hospital. But before I get down to brass tacks, I would like to fill in honourable members on some context. The Country Liberals raised the idea of the Palmerston hospital in 1999 and the very next year delivered a 24-hour clinic. But guess what? Labor closed that clinic. The Northern Territory Labor Party had 11 years in office which ended, fortunately, in August 2012. Federally, the Labor Party held office, as we know, for six years to September 2013. During this time, progress towards the Palmerston hospital saw the assembly of a temporary fence on a three-hectare piece of land where they claimed they were building this hospital. Even the Palmerston mayor said that the site was unsuitable. You see, Labor never really meant to build a proper hospital in Palmerston, which is my home town, as I said. It is the fastest growing city in Australia, yet Labor selected a site with no room for growth or expansion. It was just three hectares. That is typical, isn't it?

The Labor health facility was essentially to be a box-ticking exercise. It was as little as they could get away with. This says a lot about Labor. But even after setting the bar so low they still botched it. Not a sod had been turned when governments changed at both the state and federal level and plans began again for a proper regional hospital, a facility which will serve Palmerston, the rural area and Darwin.
The federal Labor government initially offered to contribute $70 million if the Northern Territory government contributed $40 million. As Leader of the Opposition now Prime Minister Abbott and I are committed to raise the federal contribution to the $110 million. So there is a $150 million investment between the federal and Northern Territory government which will now deliver a 24-hour emergency department, a specialist ambulatory care unit, cardiology, renal medicine, cancer services, paediatric services and natal and postnatal obstetrics, with scope to include birthing in stage 2.

Under this coalition government, this hospital has progressed from temporary fencing which Labor erected on a three-hectare piece of scrub to a 45-hectare site with headworks and design well underway. Residents of Palmerston are already seeing work underway around the intersection of Temple Terrace and the Stuart Highway. The roads, intersections, traffic signals and parks in the area are already in the process of being upgraded to accommodate this brand-new health facility.

The coalition government are taking this very seriously. We are giving it the attention it deserves. This is a government of infrastructure, and there is no infrastructure more important than hospitals. The previous Labor government spent more time building detention beds than it ever did building hospital beds. But we are about building hospital beds. The coalition are building a hospital to provide a high level of care to the people of Darwin, Palmerston and the surrounding areas for not just now but well into the future. We are going to build a hospital that is state-of-the-art and is going to deliver services for the next 50 years. I look forward to working with the new NT health minister, Minister Elferink. And I look forward to working with my Palmerston based Territory colleagues—Lia Finocchiaro, the member for Drysdale, Nathan Barrett, the member for Blain, and the education minister Peter Chandler—because the four of us are the Palmerston team and we are going to do deliver a hospital for Palmerston for now and in the future. The people of Palmerston can count on us to deliver and to do what we say we are going to do, and that is to build a hospital that is going to service the community for the next 50 years.

Question agreed to.

Federation Chamber adjourned at 12:49
QUESTIONS IN WRITING
Toowoomba Range Crossing
(Question No. 472)

Mr Albanese asked the Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development, in writing, on 22 September 2014:

In respect of his announcement of 10 September 2014 on the shortlisting of three consortia to submit project proposals for the Toowoomba Second Range Crossing, as of this date, (a) what advice had Infrastructure Australia provided to him or his Department on this project, and (b) had a benefit-cost ratio (BCR) for the project been assessed by Infrastructure Australia; if so, what is the BCR.

Mr Truss: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

(a) The Toowoomba Range Crossings currently on the Infrastructure Priority List with a categorisation of real potential.

(b) The proponent's stated BCR in their December 2012 Business case is 1.27:1. Infrastructure Australia is currently awaiting updated information from the proponent in order to assess the BCR further. This is expected soon.