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SITTING DAYS—2020

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FORTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION—FIRST PERIOD

Governor-General
His Excellency General the Hon. David John Hurley, AC, DSC, FTSE (Retd)

House of Representatives Office Holders
Speaker—Hon. Anthony David Hawthorn Smith MP
Deputy Speaker—Mr Llewellyn Stephen O'Brien MP
Second Deputy Speaker—Mr Robert George Mitchell MP
Members of the Speaker's Panel—Hon. Kevin James Andrews MP, Hon. Sharon Leah Bird MP, Ms Sharon Catherine Claydon MP, Mr Steven Georganas MP, Hon. Dr David Arthur Gillespie MP, Mr Ian Reginald Goodenough MP, Hon. Dr John Joseph McVeigh MP, Ms Maria Vamvakinou MP, Mr Ross Xavier Vasta MP, Mr Andrew Bruce Wallace MP, Mrs Lucy Elizabeth Wicks MP, Mr Richard James Wilson MP, Mr Trent Moir Zimmerman MP
Leader of the House—Hon. Christian Porter MP
Deputy Leader of the House—Hon. Darren Chester MP
Manager of Opposition Business—Hon. Anthony Stephen Burke MP
Deputy Manager of Opposition Business—Hon. Mark Butler MP

Party Leaders and Whips
Liberal Party of Australia
Leader—Hon. Scott John Morrison MP
Deputy Leader—Hon. Joshua Anthony Frydenberg MP
Chief Government Whip—Mr Albertus Johannes van Manen MP
Government Whips—Mr Rowan Eric Ramsey MP and Ms Nicolle Flint MP

The Nationals
Leader—Hon. Michael Francis McCormack MP
Deputy Leader—Hon. David Littleproud MP
Chief Whip—Hon Damian Kevin Drum MP
Deputy Whip—Mr Kenneth Desmond O'Dowd MP

Australian Labor Party
Leader—Hon. Anthony Albanese MP
Deputy Leader—Hon. Richard Marles MP
Chief Opposition Whip—Mr Christopher Patrick Hayes MP
Opposition Whips—Ms Joanne Catherine Ryan MP and Ms Anne Maree Stanley MP

Printed by authority of the House of Representatives

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PARTY ABBREVIATIONS
AG—Australian Greens; ALP—Australian Labor Party; CA—Centre Alliance;
IND—Independent; KAP—Katter's Australia Party; LNP—Liberal National Party;
LP—Liberal Party of Australia; NATS—The Nationals;

### Heads of Parliamentary Departments
- Clerk of the Senate—R Pye
- Clerk of the House of Representatives—C Surtees
- Secretary, Department of Parliamentary Services—R Stefanic
- Parliamentary Budget Officer—J Wilkinson
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### Federation Chamber

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The SPEAKER (Hon. Tony Smith) took the chair at 09:30, made an acknowledgement of country and read prayers.

COMMITTEES
Selection Committee

Report

The SPEAKER (09:31): I present report No. 11 of the Selection Committee relating to the consideration of committee and delegation reports and private members' business on Monday 24 February 2020. The report will be printed in today's Hansard and the committee's determinations will appear on tomorrow's Notice Paper. Copies of the report have been placed on the table.

The report read as follows—
Report relating to the consideration of committee and delegation business and of private Members' business
1. The committee met in private session on Tuesday, 11 February 2020.
2. The Committee deliberated on items of committee and delegation business that had been notified, private Members’ business items listed on the Notice Paper and notices lodged on Tuesday, 11 February 2020, and determined the order of precedence and times on Monday, 24 February 2020, as follows:

PRIVATE MEMBERS’ BUSINESS

Notices

1 Dr Leigh: To present a Bill for an Act to amend the Australian Capital Territory (Self-Government) Act 1988, and for related purposes. (Australian Capital Territory (Self-Government) Amendment (ACT Integrity Commission Powers) Bill 2020)
   (Notice given 5 December 2019)
   Presenter may speak to the second reading for a period not exceeding 10 minutes—pursuant to standing order 41. Debate must be adjourned pursuant to standing order 142.

2 Mr Wilkie: To present a Bill for an Act to amend the National Greenhouse and Energy Reporting Act 2007, and for related purposes. (National Greenhouse and Energy Reporting Amendment (Transparency in Carbon Emissions Accounting) Bill 2020)
   (Notice given 4 February 2020.)
   Presenter may speak to the second reading for a period not exceeding 10 minutes—pursuant to standing order 41. Debate must be adjourned pursuant to standing order 142.

3 Mr Bandt: To present a Bill for an Act to provide that major emitters of greenhouse gases are liable for climate change damage that occurs in Australia, and for related purposes. (Liability for Climate Change Damage (Make the Polluters Pay) Bill 2020)
   (Notice given 4 February 2020.)
   Presenter may speak to the second reading for a period not exceeding 10 minutes—pursuant to standing order 41. Debate must be adjourned pursuant to standing order 142.

4 Mr Joyce: To present a Bill for an Act to amend the Representation Act 1983, and for related purposes. (Representation Amendment (6 Regions Per State, 2 Senators Per Region) Bill 2020)
   (Notice given 10 February 2020.)
   Presenter may speak to the second reading for a period not exceeding 10 minutes—pursuant to standing order 41. Debate must be adjourned pursuant to standing order 142.

5 Mr Katter: To present a Bill for an Act to amend the Foreign Acquisitions and Takeovers Act 1975, and for related purposes. (Foreign Acquisitions and Takeovers Amendment (Strategic Assets) Bill 2020)
   (Notice given 11 February 2020.)
   Presenter may speak to the second reading for a period not exceeding 10 minutes—pursuant to standing order 41. Debate must be adjourned pursuant to standing order 142.

6 Dr Mulino: To move:
   That this House notes the Government’s economic mismanagement and its sustained failure to deliver improved economic outcomes for Australians during its seven year term in office, measured by:
   (a) wage stagnation;
   (b) near record levels of underemployment;
   (c) high and rising rates of labour underutilisation, particularly for young people and in regional areas;
(d) high levels of youth unemployment;
(e) Australia's higher unemployment relative to peer nations;
(f) weak consumption growth;
(g) weak business investment; and
(h) weak and declining productivity growth.

(Notice given 10 February 2020.)

Time allotted—30 minutes.

Speech time limits—
Dr Mulino—5 minutes.
Other Members—5 minutes each.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 6 x 5 mins]

The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

Mr R. J. Wilson: To move:

That this House:

(1) notes:
(a) that from 2013-14 to 2023-24, the Government will provide a record $6.2 billion under the Roads to Recovery Program, with an ongoing commitment of $500 million each year following; and
(b) the significant benefits to the 128 Local Government Areas which will receive an additional $138.9 million in Roads to Recovery drought support funding; and

(2) recognises the real and meaningful difference Roads to Recovery is making to communities right across the country.

(Notice given 26 November 2019.)

Time allotted—remaining private Members' business time prior to 12 noon

Speech time limits—
Mr R. J. Wilson—5 minutes.
Other Members—5 minutes each.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 6 x 5 mins]

The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

Items for Federation Chamber (11 am to 1.30 pm)

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Notices

1 Ms Wells: To move:

That this House:

(1) recognises that:
(a) February is Ovarian Cancer Awareness month in Australia; and
(b) 26 February 2020 is Teal Ribbon Day; and

(2) acknowledges that:
(a) ovarian cancer has the lowest survival rate of any women's cancer;
(b) every year, almost 1600 Australian women are diagnosed with ovarian cancer;
(c) every year, approximately 1000 Australian women die from ovarian cancer;
(d) in Australia, the overall five-year survival rate for women diagnosed with ovarian cancer is 46 per cent; and
(e) there is currently no reliable screening test to aid detection and prevention.

(Notice given 4 February 2020.)

Time allotted—45 minutes.

Speech time limits—
Ms Wells—5 minutes.
Other Members—5 minutes each.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 9 x 5 mins]

The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

Orders of the day

1 Small business and the defence industry: Resumption of debate (from 9 September 2019) on the motion of Mr Thompson—That this House:
(1) notes the important role Australian small business has in the future of our national and economic security through its integral role in our defence industry;
(2) recognises the defence industry's potential for growth in electoral divisions like Herbert and other regional electoral divisions across Australia;
(3) supports opportunities to maximise the participation of Australian companies in all facets of defence procurement; and
(4) acknowledges the Government's commitment to deliver a robust, resilient and internationally competitive Australian defence industry.

Time allotted—40 minutes.

Speech time limits—
All Members—5 minutes each.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 8 x 5 mins]

The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

Notices—continued

2 Mr Khalil: To move:
That this House:

(1) notes with concern the ongoing violence and political instability in Chile, driven by rising economic inequality;
(2) condemns the use of lethal force against peaceful protesters and calls on all parties to refrain from violence;
(3) recognises the importance and right to peaceful protest in any democracy and condemns the use of violence to repress the democratic right of Chilean citizens to protest;
(4) calls on the Chilean Government to include all parties, namely, civil society, unions and indigenous peoples in addition to business leaders in the process for drafting a new constitution;
(5) encourages the work of the Chilean National Human Rights Institute and authorities to investigate human rights abuses and hold those responsible to account; and
(6) calls on Australian companies that do business in Chile to play a constructive role in the solution to end the political instability.

(Notice given 26 November 2019.)

Time allotted—20 minutes.

Speech time limits—
Mr Khalil—5 minutes.
Other Members—5 minutes each.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 4 x 5 mins]

The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

Orders of the day—continued

2 Employment, education and training: Resumption of debate (from 14 October 2019) on the motion of Mr Pearce—That this House:

(1) notes the:
   (a) creation of 1.2 million jobs since the Coalition Government was elected, with 140,000 young Australians securing employment over that time period;
   (b) strong commitment of the Government to reform the vocational education and training sector to better meet the demands of the modern Australian economy; and
   (c) leadership of the Government in November 2018 to commission the Joyce Review, a comprehensive expert review of the Australian vocational education and training system which was delivered in March 2019; and
(2) welcomes the implementation of the Skills Package, a $525 million suite of measures that includes:
   (a) a National Careers Institute and the appointment of a National Careers Ambassador;
   (b) the Foundation Skills for Your Future program—an initiative which will support workers by improving literacy, numeracy, and digital literacy;
   (c) a streamlined Incentives for Australian Apprenticeships program, which will encourage employers to take on apprentices and trainees;
   (d) additional incentives to both employers and apprentices in areas affected by skills shortages under the Additional Identified Skills Shortage Payment measure;
   (e) establishing ten industry training hubs in areas of high unemployment;
   (f) further addressing youth unemployment in regional areas by funding 400 Commonwealth Scholarships for Young Australians;

CHAMBER
(g) a National Skills Commission and pilot skills organisations that will promote a nation-wide approach to skills development and enhance the role of industry in designing training courses;

(h) an extension of the National Rugby League's VET Apprenticeship Awareness Program; and

(i) Energising Tasmania—a partnership between the Commonwealth and the Tasmanian Government to train a skilled workforce for jobs in pumped hydro and energy infrastructure; and

(3) welcomes the prospect of creating a further 80,000 apprenticeships in occupations with skills shortages over the coming five years.

Time allotted—35 minutes.
Speech time limits—
All Members—5 minutes each.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 7 x 5 mins]

The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

Notices—continued

3 Ms T. M. Butler: To move:
That this House:

(1) notes:
(a) the importance of grassroots youth arts organisations, including Backbone, based in the electoral division of Griffith;
(b) that for thirty years Backbone has helped young people find purpose, develop skills and contribute to our nation's culture; and
(c) that despite Backbone's success, the Government has cut its funding, and the organisation now faces closure; and

(2) calls on the Government to urgently commit to restore funding to Backbone.

(Notice given 11 February 2020.)

Time allotted—remaining private Members' business time prior to 1.30 pm
Speech time limits—
Ms T. M. Butler—5 minutes.
Next Member speaking—5 minutes.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 2 x 5 mins]

The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

Items for Federation Chamber (4.45 pm to 7.30 pm)
PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Notices—continued

4 Ms Claydon: To move:
That this House:

(1) notes that:
(a) Aged Care Assessment Teams (ACAT) are teams of medical professionals which run clinical and psychological checks on older Australians who have applied for home or residential aged care;
(b) based in hospitals across the country, ACAT are ultimately responsible for assessing which older Australians should receive government-funded care;
(c) teams usually include a nurse, plus another healthcare worker such as a physiotherapist, occupational therapist or social worker;
(d) the Government has announced that it will privatise the ACAT workforce from April 2021, when a tender will be put out for organisations to deliver this vital assessment; and
(e) on 14 January 2020 the Chair of the Royal Commission into Aged Care, Mr Gaetano Pagone QC, issued a statement saying the Royal Commission's interim report 'did not endorse the Government's stated position' on privatising the aged care assessment teams;

(2) supports the retention of ACAT as a publicly provided service;

(3) commends the Health Services Union, United Workers Unions and Australian Nurses and Midwifery Federation for their continued advocacy on behalf of working people in healthcare across Australia, and particularly in the aged care sector; and

(4) condemns the Government for its continued failings across aged care policy.

(Notice given 4 February 2020.)

Time allotted—50 minutes.
Speech time limits—
Ms Claydon—5 minutes.

Other Members—5 minutes. each.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 10 x 5 mins]

The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

Orders of the day—continued

3 Black Spot Program: Resumption of debate (from 21 October 2019) on the motion of Mr L. S. O'Brien—That this House:

(1) notes the important, practical contribution the Black Spot Program makes in addressing the nation's road toll under the National Road Safety Action Plan 2018-2020;

(2) recognises the need for the Government to continue to invest in the Black Spot Program to improve road safety and reduce the death toll;

(3) commends the Government for putting road safety at the forefront of infrastructure investment, with further commitments to providing an additional $50 million per year from 2019-20 to 2022-2023 to the Black Spot Program; and

(4) acknowledges the Government's Black Spot Program reduces on average at the treated sites, death and serious injury from crashes by 30 per cent according to data from the Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics.

Time allotted—30 minutes.

Speech time limits—

All Members—5 minutes. each.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 6 x 5 mins]

The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

Notices—continued

5 Mr Bandt: To move:

That this House:

(1) declares an environment and climate emergency;

(2) recognises that:

(a) the recent report of the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), Special Report: Global Warming of 1.5 °C, indicates that we are facing a climate emergency, and as a result, meaningful action on climate change is urgent, at home and internationally;

(b) this IPCC report has found that the world is not on track to limit global warming to less than 1.5 degrees Celsius;

(c) at a national level, England, France, Wales, Scotland, Ireland, and Canada have all declared a climate emergency; and

(d) extreme weather events will devastate large parts of Australia and radically impact food production, water availability, public health, infrastructure, the community and the financial system;

(3) notes that the Government has acknowledged urgent action is required to address climate change; and

(4) calls on the Government to take urgent action consistent with the internationally accepted science.

(Notice given 11 September 2019.)

Time allotted—20 minutes.

Speech time limits—

Mr Bandt—5 minutes.

Other Members—5 minutes. each.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 4 x 5 mins]

The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

Orders of the day—continued

4 Recycling: Resumption of debate (from 25 November 2019) on the motion of Dr Allen—That this House:

(1) recognises the imperative of improving waste management, reducing unnecessary packaging and boosting recycling in Australia;

(2) acknowledges that:

(a) Australians generate about 67 million tonnes of waste each year, of which 37 million tonnes is recycled;

(b) only 12 per cent of the 103 kilograms of plastic waste generated per person in Australia each year is recycled, mostly overseas;

(c) for every 10,000 tonnes of waste recycled, more than 9 jobs are created; and

(d) waste related activities add $6.9 billion to the economy annually;

(3) welcomes the Government's recent $20 million commitment for innovative projects under round 8 of the Cooperative Research Centres Projects grants to grow our domestic plastics recycling industry; and
notes that this is part of the Government's Australian Recycling Investment Plan, a package of initiatives totalling $167 million designed to grow and strengthen Australia's domestic recycling industry, and to support industry and community initiatives to lift recycling rates in Australia.

Time allotted—45 minutes.
Speech time limits—
All Members—5 minutes each.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 9 x 5 mins]

The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

5 Captioned telephone handsets: Resumption of debate (from 10 February 2020) on the motion of Mr Gorman—That this House:
(1) notes that:
(a) the captioned telephone handset, CapTel, is a popular service amongst the Australian deaf and hard of hearing community;
(b) according to the Department of Communications there are approximately 4,000 CapTel handset users in Australia;
(c) the average age of people using the service is 80; and
(d) with an increasing aging population, it can be expected more and more Australians will need to rely on this service to communicate;
(2) acknowledges the distress and loss that CapTel users and their families are experiencing due to the planned discontinuation of the CapTel service in February 2020;
(3) condemns the Government for its decision to:
(a) remove the CapTel service without any consultation with its users; and
(b) purchase an inferior, outdated, and less user-friendly product, forcing often elderly users to learn a new piece of technology or lose the ability to communicate; and
(4) encourages CapTel users and their families to contact their federal member of parliament to explain to them the importance of the CapTel service for the deaf and hard of hearing community of Australia.

Time allotted—remaining private Members' business time prior to 7.30 pm
Speech time limits—
All Members—5 minutes each.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 4 x 5 mins]

The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

Australian Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity Committee
Human Rights Committee

Membership

The SPEAKER (09:31): I have received a message from the Senate informing the House that Senator Stoker has been discharged from attendance on the Parliamentary Joint Committee on the Australian Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity, and Senator Scarr has been appointed a member of the committee; and Senator Chandler has been discharged from attendance on the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights, and Senator McLachlan has been appointed a member of the committee.

BILLs

Statute Update (Regulations References) Bill 2020

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Tehan, for Mr Porter.
Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr TEHAN (Wannon—Minister for Education) (09:33): I move:
That this bill be now read a second time.

The Statute Update (Regulations References) Bill 2020 makes minor and technical changes to the Commonwealth statute book to enhance its usability, facilitate interpretation and administration, and promote consistency.
Statute law revision acts and statute stocktake acts have been passed on a regular basis since 1934 as a means of removing obsolete and spent provisions from the statute book and correcting mistakes in drafting. They are traditionally noncontroversial and regarded as an essential means of keeping the Commonwealth statute book accurate and up to date.

The process of statute law revision and update aims to enhance the clarity and efficient use of the statute book.

This bill contains one schedule, which updates specific references to regulations in 10 principal acts across the Commonwealth statute book.

These references have become out of date due to the repeal, replacement or renaming of those regulations, or are at risk of becoming out of date in future for these reasons. The bill omits references to specific regulations and specific provisions of regulations, replacing them with more general references to the acts under which the relevant regulations are made. The bill also makes minor consequential amendments to support the operation of the amended provisions, including altering headings and inserting notes.

These ongoing corrections and improvements to legislation are important to ensure that the Commonwealth statute book remains up to date, accurate and user friendly.

I commend this bill to the House.

Debate adjourned.

Treasury Laws Amendment (2020 Measures No. 1) Bill 2020

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Sukkar.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr SUKKAR (Deakin—Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Housing) (09:35): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

This bill contains two measures that maintain the integrity and efficiency of Australia's tax system.

Schedule 1 to the bill amends the Income Tax Assessment Act 1997 to extend the definition of a significant global entity to include members of large business groups headed by proprietary companies, trusts, partnerships, investment entities and individuals.

SGE is a concept to define, generally speaking, a group of entities under the control of a large multinational. Such groups are a key focus for tax authorities to prevent profit shifting.

Many of the significant measures undertaken by this government to tackle multinational tax avoidance rely on this SGE definition. These include the multilateral anti-avoidance law, the diverted profits tax and penalties applying to false or misleading statements, late lodgement of documents or tax schemes. SGEs are also required to prepare and submit general-purpose financial statements to the Australian Taxation Office.

Extending the definition therefore will ensure that multinationals cannot structure to avoid our multinational tax integrity rules, which remain amongst the strongest in the world.

Schedule 2 to the bill makes permanent the current temporary capital gains tax relief for merging superannuation funds, which is otherwise due to expire on 1 July this year. The current arrangements remove unnecessary impediments that would otherwise apply to mergers by allowing super funds to transfer revenue and capital losses to a new merged fund and to defer taxation consequences on gains and losses from revenue and capital assets.

Extending the relief will give fund trustees certainty when planning merger activity and will provide wider benefits to fund members and the superannuation system as a whole through increased fund scale and efficiencies.

This measure implements recommendation 21 of the Productivity Commission's final report, titled Superannuation: assessing efficiency and competitiveness.

Full details of the measures included in this bill are contained in the explanatory memorandum.

Debate adjourned.

Treasury Laws Amendment (Your Superannuation, Your Choice) Bill 2019

Second Reading

Consideration resumed of the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.
to which the following amendment was moved:

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

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

(1) notes that too many Australians retire without adequate retirement savings; and

(2) reaffirms its commitment to the legislated superannuation guarantee rise to 12 per cent before 2025"

Dr ALY (Cowan) (09:39): I rise to speak on the Treasury Laws Amendment (Your Superannuation, Your Choice) Bill 2019. Much has already been said about this bill. I think we had a fair time debating this bill in the House yesterday, and as I was sitting in my office I heard the familiar twang of the member for Goldstein, delivering one of his usually very fervent diatribes. I stopped to listen, to see what the member for Goldstein was saying about this bill, thinking he might be defending the bill and that he might be debating the merits of the bill and defending the government's position on the bill and the reasons this bill is necessary. Unfortunately, that wasn't the case, because the member for Goldstein, in attacking Labor and Labor's standing up for workers, took his time to deliver what, to my mind, can only be described as a really quite curious case of hypocrisy.

That said, and considering that we have had some time to debate this bill, I would like to take the time to look at the merits of the bill and examine it in a little more detail, adding, of course, to the debate that has gone before me, particularly from my Labor colleagues on this side of the House. They have pointed out Labor's position on the bill and the reasons we are reserving our position on the bill until we've had a full Senate inquiry, and why we're proceeding cautiously. While we support the principle and intent of the bill, we are proceeding cautiously around some of the aspects of the bill.

To begin, the bill really is a single schedule, just providing that employees under workplace determinations or enterprise agreements made on or after 1 July 2020 have the right to choose their superannuation fund. It seems very simple indeed, doesn't it? And don't we all want the right to be able to determine our own financial future? Don't we all want the right to be able to choose the products on which we spend our hard-earned money. So, choice in superannuation is something that Labor supports. That is why we have a proud track record when it comes to superannuation and why we want to continue to fight for a stronger and fairer superannuation system.

We are also committed to making sure that every worker is in a high-performing fund and that adequate information is available to empower consumers with the information they need to make choices in their best interests. As many on this side have pointed out, while we do support choice, we also want to have those safeguards in place to ensure that that choice is made in a very informed way and that the bill actually does deliver what it intends to deliver. To that effect, the shadow minister put forward some amendments to the bill. Particularly, those amendments point to and speak to Labor's commitment to superannuation, because those amendments ask that the House notes that too many Australians retire without adequate retirement savings. Isn't that a fact? People in my electorate, for example, are coming to me at the age of 60, having just been made redundant after working for 30 years for a company that has either not contributed to their superannuation or not adequately contributed to their superannuation, or they just didn't have any superannuation. Those people are now facing not just the next few years in poverty, being unable to pay their bills and unable to get a job, but, given the fact that Australians are living longer, they're also facing at least 20 and perhaps even 30 years in that condition. It particularly adversely affects women and older women, who are more likely to live in poverty in their later years.

So, I think the amendment the shadow minister moved—that the House notes that too many Australians retire without adequate retirement savings—is perfectly reasonable and entirely appropriate. The other part of the amendment that was moved by the shadow minister reaffirms the commitment to the legislated superannuation guarantee rise to 12 per cent by 2025. I'll come back to that a little later.

Our position on the bill as it stands at the moment is that we note that the Senate Economics Committee is currently conducting an inquiry into this bill, so we reserve our position on the proposed choice-of-fund changes until after the Senate committee has made its report. In other words, we want to see scrutiny of the bill. We want this bill to be scrutinised, and for good reason. I'll go through some of those reasons. The first reason is that we aren't quite sure of the unintended consequences of this bill and whether there will be any adverse consequences of this bill. Concerns have been raised about employees, for example, being forced by their employers into superannuation funds which are underperforming and may be substandard compared to the employees' existing entitlements. This parliament hasn't fully explored the unintended consequences of the bill in that regard.

In a submission to the previous Senate inquiry on the bill, Industry Super Australia indicated that, of those employees covered by enterprise agreements, only 7.4 per cent have no choice of superannuation fund. That's a very small percentage, 7.4 per cent. In actual fact that represents just 1.9 per cent of the workforce. It seems a remarkably small percentage of the workforce that actually have no choice in their super fund. Even within super funds there are choices. When I was an academic, I was on UniSuper, and I know, for example, that UniSuper
offers you choice within the UniSuper fund. The industries which have the highest percentage of people who have no choice are education, retail, construction, public administration, wholesaling, electricity and agriculture. There are questions around that which I think the Senate committee should be looking into.

But, whilst we support choice and the intentions of the bill, one of the most pressing and important reasons why Labor reserves its right to fully support this bill and would like to see further scrutiny of this bill in a Senate committee is this government's track record on superannuation and its ideological opposition to industry super funds. Forgive me for being cynical, but part of me thinks that perhaps this bill is just a manifestation of that ideological opposition to industry super funds. My concern is that this ideological opposition to industry super funds goes even further amongst some members of the Liberal-National party caucus. Recently we've seen Senator Bragg call for all kinds of superannuation to be made voluntary for people earning under $50,000.

**Mr Husic:** It was backed up by another Liberal senator.

**Dr ALY:** Absolutely, backed up by another Liberal senator, as my colleague here says. We also had a WA Senator, Gerard Rennick, describe superannuation as a cancer. Describing superannuation as a cancer is absolutely extraordinary, if you ask me. When you have statements like that coming from the other side, I think it's perfectly natural, it's due diligence and it's the right step to take to ask that any legislation that even touches upon superannuation be fully scrutinised and looked over with a fine-tooth comb, because you simply cannot trust that side of the House when it comes to ensuring Australians have the right superannuation, have access to superannuation and are guaranteed superannuation so they do not have to live in poverty in their ageing years.

**Mr Husic (Chifley) (09:49):** Thank you for the opportunity to speak on this legislation, the Treasury Laws Amendment (Your Superannuation, Your Choice) Bill 2019. I think it is important that the debate that we are undertaking now sends the strongest possible signal to working Australians about what is being done to their prosperity, both now and in retirement, because what we have is this faux concern of conservatives about the incomes of working Australians, claiming that greater choice needs to be provided to working Australians about their retirement incomes. On its face, absolutely no-one would have an argument about choice—people should be able to make, and are entitled to make, decisions about what's best for them—but always be concerned when a conservative is saying 'working Australian' that they've got their best interests at heart by providing choice.

The member for Cowan just outlined the number of people, who are denied choice as a result of enterprise agreements that cover them, is about seven per cent of people. It's probably about one per cent of the entire workforce. So people need to see through this argument that we've got to inject more choice. This has also been evidenced by some of the comments of conservative senators, people from the other place—be it as has been indicated by Senator Bragg or the other new senator from WA that's just come in—who have either described superannuation remarkably as a cancer or who have said that this type of thing, for example superannuation, is a choice.

This really goes to the agenda of conservatives when it comes to retirement incomes for working people. They're quite happy that people who are well-off have their income and financial arrangements sorted out and can look after themselves, and more than enough for them to have arrangements that protect their retirement incomes—but not for average Australians, not for working Australians.

Conservatives are perpetuating, right now, a double whammy, because what they're trying to say is that the superannuation contribution shouldn't be increased in years to come. Why? Because it will come at the expense of wages—that wages aren't growing and how can you then have an increase in superannuation? Here's the double whammy as it affects working Australians: the coalition has absolutely no policy to increase wages for working Australians. They keep saying that they will; they never deliver. Wages have flat-lined for absolutely years, so they have no wages policy to lift wages now. Then, in the absence of the policy, the conservatives use that very point to justify no increase in superannuation contributions in the years ahead. So working Australians are hit now, when wages don't increase, and then they will take a hit when they retire, through either moves to make superannuation voluntary or to deny proper growth in the contributions. This is the biggest challenge in terms of the long-term prosperity of Australian workers—that is, the way that this double whammy, as I describe it, of no wage increase now, no superannuation increase in the years ahead and lower retirement incomes when working Australians finally get to put their feet up after working and slogging in workplaces across the country. They are denied prosperity.

The national system of superannuation in this country, by any measure, has been a national success. Economically speaking, when you look at our ranking—our relative strength compared to others—and you look at the national savings pool that's been put in place, we have the fourth-largest savings pool on the planet and we have a system that will provide $3 trillion for investment to strengthen the economy to allow us to support businesses, both here and overseas. There are very few countries that can say they have that. We, then, cannot...
only provide for a strong economy now but we can provide for retirement incomes down the track. By any measure: very successful. Yet, it seems that the biggest bug bear of those opposite is the existence of this system—(1) of superannuation and, (2) the industry super funds that bring together employer representatives, employee representatives and independents. This somehow is offensive to conservatives. I actually think, in economic terms, the biggest challenge for us, in this country in particular, is to get our heads around the idea that bringing people together actually works. In superannuation terms, the types of arrangements that exist on the board of superannuation funds where you get employers, employees and independents workers together is a good model that shouldn't just be extended from within superannuation but should be the collegiate approach we use in dealing with the big economic issues confronting the nation. We should be ensuring that that's being replicated.

Choice is being denied. The people who support that system constantly get denigration being levelled at superannuation, particularly industry superannuation. People who choose to support that are being told, 'No, you shouldn't have the choice to support that; you should choose a retail fund run by banks instead.' The statistics are compelling—that is, the returns delivered by industry super relative to retail super. No objective person would opt for a retail fund, if they saw the returns delivered. Based on those returns and based on the statistics, we get told, 'No, you need to be given more choice,' as has been extended through the rhetoric behind this bill. People should be given more choice to choose to what? Opt for a lower performing fund? That is what's been argued. Again, this is part of this broad agenda that we're seeing that would deny working Australians much more strength in their retirement incomes when they decide they've worked long enough and want to be able to, when entitled to, draw on their superannuation for retirement income. This is, as I said, the most offensive thing that we've seen. We believe, rightly, we should see this referred off to a Senate committee for further contemplation, to test some of the assumptions behind the legislation and, importantly, to test the mechanics of what the legislation would do when implemented.

More than anything else, in my contribution today, I wish to be able to send the message to working Australians that they are being denied prosperity now through a failure and absence to have a wages policy that sees serious wages growth and through the denied growth of superannuation incomes or contributions that will lead to stronger incomes in the future. This double whammy is ripping working Australians off. We have a situation for those working Australians too. I've made these types of contributions previously, so forgive me for repeating them, but some working Australians are having to hold down multiple jobs. Sure, people might hold down two jobs, but there are a number of people who hold down four jobs just to get by. The fastest growth that we're seeing is in terms of people and their jobs. I wonder about their superannuation and the strength of their post-retirement incomes when, through the bulk of their working life, they've had to hold down four jobs. This is the stuff our parliament should be contemplating.

There's the rampant growth of underemployment: people not getting the hours that they want and people not getting the income outcomes that they want to make ends meet. And then we suggest that we're going to extend superannuation choice to them somehow and that this will strengthen post-retirement incomes when the stats reveal that superannuation outcomes are better in industry super than they are in retail. This is terrible. Ultimately I am genuinely concerned about the public policy ramifications of this. If people's post-retirement incomes aren't keeping pace with what's required for retirees to make ends meet when they've decided they'll no longer work, where does government step in? You can see pressures will likely emerge on government to provide further support to self-funded retirees under a superannuation system that's not delivering to them. We can do these things now, but at some point the bill will fall due and we as a parliament will likely be required to respond to those circumstances. It'll be the result of the decisions we make on bills like this. This is not right. We should be ensuring that working Australians get a better deal. These types of bills are dressed up as choice but are really about delivering fewer choices, weaker income and fewer options for people later down the track. We should be calling out these types of bills strongly.

I definitely support the shadow minister's amendment. I wait to see, through the referral to a Senate inquiry process, what is revealed through that inquiry, because we should not be making rushed or blithe decisions that impact on the future prosperity of Australians who have contributed much to the growth and the strength of our economy through their labour. We should be doing things to support them, not deny them choice in the years ahead.

The SPEAKER: The original question was that this bill be now read a second time. To this, the honourable member for Whitlam has moved as an amendment that all words after 'That' be omitted with a view to substituting other words. So the question before the House is that the amendment moved by the member for Whitlam be agreed to.

The House divided. [10:04]

(The Speaker—Hon. Tony Smith)
<table>
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<th>Ayes .......................... 67</th>
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<td>Noes ........................... 76</td>
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<td>Majority ....................... 9</td>
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**AYES**

Albanese, AN  
Bandt, AP  
Bowen, CE  
Burney, LJ  
Butler, MC  
Byrne, AM  
Champion, ND  
Claydon, SC  
Collins, JM  
Dick, MD  
Elliot, MJ  
Freelander, MR  
Gorman, P  
Hill, JC  
Jones, SP  
Kelly, MJ  
Khalil, P  
King, MMH  
Marles, RD  
Mitchell, BK  
Mulino, D  
Neumann, SK  
O'Neil, CE  
Payne, AE  
Phillips, FE  
Rishworth, AL  
Ryan, JC (teller)  
Smith, DPB  
Stanley, AM (teller)  
Templeman, SR  
Thwaites, KL  
Watts, TG  
Wilkie, AD  
Zappia, A

**NOES**

Alexander, JG  
Andrews, KJ  
Archer, BK  
Broadbent, RE  
Chester, D  
Conaghan, PJ  
Coulton, M  
Dutton, PC  
Evans, TM  
Flint, NJ  
Gee, AR  
Goodenough, IR  
Hammond, CM  
Hawke, AG  
Howarth, LR  
Irons, SJ  
Kelly, C  
Landry, ML  
Ley, SP  
Liu, G  
Martin, FB  
McIntosh, MI  
Morrison, SJ  
O'Brien, T  
Pasin, A  
Pitt, KJ  
Price, ML  
Robert, SR  

Allen, K  
Andrews, KL  
Bell, AM  
Buchholz, S  
Christensen, GR  
Connelly, V  
Drum, DK (teller)  
Entsch, WG  
Fletcher, PW  
Frydenberg, JA  
Gillespie, DA  
Haines, H  
Hastie, AW  
Hogan, KJ  
Hunt, GA  
Joyce, BT  
Laming, A  
Lesser, J  
Littleproud, D  
Marino, NB  
McCormack, MF  
McVeigh, JJ  
O'Brien, LS  
O'Dowd, KD  
Pearce, GB  
Porter, CC  
Ramsey, RE (teller)  
Sharkie, RCC
Question negatived.

Original question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Third Reading

Mr TEHAN (Wannon—Minister for Education) (10:08): by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

COMMITTEES

Road Safety Joint Select Committee

Membership

The SPEAKER (10:09): I have received advice from the Chief Opposition Whip that he has nominated Mr Thistlethwaite to be a member of the Joint Select Committee on Road Safety to replace Mr Zappia.

Mr TEHAN (Wannon—Minister for Education) (10:09): by leave—I move:

That Mr Zappia be discharged from the Joint Select Committee on Road Safety and that, in his place, Mr Thistlethwaite be appointed a member of the committee.

Question agreed to.

BILLS

Social Services and Other Legislation Amendment (Simplifying Income Reporting and Other Measures) Bill 2020

Second Reading

Consideration resumed of the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Ms BURNEY (Barton) (10:10): I rise to speak on the Social Services and Other Legislation Amendment (Simplifying Income Reporting and Other Measures) Bill 2020. The amendment that has been circulated in my name reads:

That all 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 the Government's:

(1) stubborn defence for three years of its failed Robodebt program which frightened thousands of innocent Australians with false or inflated debts; and

(2) repeated attempts to cut the pension and social security".

While Labor support this bill, we are seriously concerned about the government's ability to implement these changes. We will be examining the detail very closely in an associated Senate inquiry. We are putting the government on notice to get the implementation of these changes right.

The bill will change the way income is reported to Centrelink so that it is reported when a person is paid, not when it is earned. It will improve the accuracy of income reporting by removing the requirement for people to estimate their total pay, based on the number of hours worked. In most instances, people will receive their pay slip before reporting their income. The shift to reporting income when it is paid will more closely align the receipt of employment income with the timing of Centrelink payments. It will make it easier for people to manage their budget.
The bill will also enable Centrelink to use Single Touch Payroll information from the Australian Taxation Office to prefill income for Centrelink reporting. It will not automate reporting. Individuals will still be required to check and certify income that is prefilled using the Single Touch Payroll system.

Improving the accuracy of income reporting will reduce the incidence of overpayment and underpayment. For many, the new reporting system will be more straightforward than the existing reporting arrangements. Many will find the prefilling of Single Touch Payroll data convenient when it commences. I note that ACOSS and other stakeholders support the changes in the bill because, if properly implemented, it could make interacting with Centrelink easier for people on social security.

The bill does not make any changes to payment rates, thresholds or eligibility criteria for payments, which is very important. The savings associated with the bill are related to the projected improvements in reporting accuracy only.

The government must get this right. Labor is very concerned that the government runs a very high risk of not being able to implement these changes, just as it could not implement the robodebt properly and has run down Centrelink services to the point where pensioners are waiting months to get the pension. The last thing we want to see is people having their payment cut off and being saddled with unfair debts because Centrelink failed to manage this properly. If people have questions, they should not be left waiting on the phone for hours. It is absolutely critical that the government has the right systems and resources in place to make this work.

The reality is that the government's track record on managing our social safety net has been pretty horrendous. The government must not let these new reporting arrangements go the way of robodebt. This is a government that has pursued thousands of innocent Australians with false or inflated debts for three long and extremely anxious and fearful years. For three fearful years, the government has stubbornly tried to defend this shambolic, cruel and illegal robodebt system. This is the government that has sought to make claiming or applying for income support so challenging, so difficult, so painful and so frightening, in the hope that vulnerable Australians will just give up. It is also the government that has axed thousands of Centrelink jobs and outsourced them to labour hire. Over that time, pension processing times and call wait times have skyrocketed. We have seen this clearly, particularly through the estimates process.

Older Australians who have done the right thing by this country—who have worked all of their life and contributed by paying taxes—have been forced by this very government to wait months for their pensions, spending hours on the phone just to speak to someone at Centrelink. It is little wonder that the community is so anxious about the government's ability to implement these new reporting arrangements. Pensioners are not fools. They will not be fooled by the government cutting the pension. In every single budget, the government has tried to cut the age pension. They have tried to cut the pension and increase the pension age to 70 in every single budget, including the three budgets for which the current Prime Minister had the job of Treasurer.

In the 2014 budget—and I know that sounds like a long time ago, but it still has effects—they tried to cut pension indexation, a cut that would have meant pensioners would be forced to live on $80 a week less within 10 years. This unfair cut would have ripped $23 billion from the pocket of every single pensioner in Australia. In the 2014 budget, the present government cut $1 billion from pensioner concessions—support designed to help pensioners with the cost of living. In the 2014 budget, this government also axed the $900 seniors supplement to self-funded retirees receiving the Commonwealth seniors health card. Also in the 2014 budget, this government tried to reset deeming rate thresholds, a cut that would have made 500,000 part-pensioners much worse off.

In 2015 this government did a deal with the Greens to cut the pension received by around 370 pensioners by as much as $12,000 a year by changing the pension assets test. In the 2016 budget, this government tried to cut the pension to around 190 pensioners as part of a plan to limit overseas travel for pensioners to six weeks. In the 2016 budget, they also tried to cut the pension to over 1.5 million Australians by scrapping the energy supplement for new pensioners. The government's own figures show this would have left over 563,000 Australians who are currently receiving a pension or allowance worse off. Over 10 years, in excess of 1.5 million pensioners would have been worse off. Those are just the plain facts.

But, on top of this, the government also spent five years trying to increase the pension age to 70. It took five consecutive rate cuts before they even adjusted the deeming rates—and then only after a concerted campaign from seniors groups and from Labor. The coalition government still has cuts to pensions in the budget. They want to completely take away the pension supplement from pensioners who go overseas for more than six weeks. This will see around $120 million ripped from the pockets of pensioners. This government also still wants to make pensioners born overseas wait longer before qualifying for the age pension, increasing the residency requirements from 10 to 15 years. There is no logic to any of this. There is no reason except to save money, on the backs of those people that have spent their entire life contributing to the Australian community and to society.
Labor has fought these cuts tooth and nail. This is the only reason the Liberals and the Nationals have flip-flopped and given in. No-one spends five years, including three as Treasurer, trying to cut the pension and increase the pension age to 70 unless it is what they believe really should happen. This is why pensioners know that this Prime Minister cannot be trusted.

The government also has a bill before the parliament to cut Newstart by doubling the liquid assets waiting period—once again, no reason and no logic, except a money grab. This government wants to make vulnerable Australians who have been made redundant wait for up to six months before they can access Newstart. There is no rationale, as I said, for increasing the liquid assets waiting period for people who lose their job or are made redundant. Once again, these are people who have worked hard all their lives and contributed always. As I said, it is nothing short of a cash grab, taking money out of the pockets of workers at the very time when their savings matter the most.

The existing waiting period of up to 13 weeks for people with modest savings is long enough. These cuts to Newstart will make you draw down on everything you've got before you can access support. This will push vulnerable Australians to the edge of poverty. They will have nothing left for emergencies, nothing left if their car breaks down, nothing left if their whitegoods need replacing, nothing left if a family member becomes ill. A waiting period that is too long or a liquid asset threshold that is too high is counterproductive. It doesn't help people get back on their feet. It pushes people towards desperation. For people who lose their jobs or are made redundant, having a financial buffer is incredibly important. It means being able to support yourself while retraining. It means being able to keep the car on the road so you can look for work and keep paying the rent or mortgage. If a person's circumstances spiral because they run out of savings, if they lose their home or their car, that just makes it harder for them to get back into employment.

The reality is that these cuts will disproportionately impact Australians aged 45 or over who have recently been made redundant. We all know—this is important, and I hope the minister in the chair is listening—that half of all Newstart recipients are aged 45 or older. Over the past six years, under the Liberal government, the number of Newstart recipients aged 45 or older has surged to 60,000, and a quarter of Newstart recipients are aged 55 or older. The psychological impact is enormous. These are people who have worked all their lives. They've worked, they've earned, they've contributed to taxes, and they find themselves in these circumstances. And now they have been made redundant in their hour of need.

With this incredibly cruel measure, the government wants to tell these people to wait longer. Not only will they have to wait up to six months but also we know that Australians aged 45 or older have the most difficulty re-entering the workforce. We know that it could be far longer than six months before they can re-enter the workforce, because, beyond money, they will need time to retrain, to upskill, to find another job—not an easy thing to do when you're 55. There are three Newstart recipients for every job vacancy. Two million Australians are either looking for work or looking for more work. And 130,000 Newstart recipients have a job but don't earn enough money or receive enough hours of work to get off the payment. This government has sought to demonise Australians who have done the right thing but have found themselves in unfortunate circumstances. This government refuses to accept the reality facing these Australians.

In conclusion, it is for these reasons that Australians simply do not trust the government to get social security right. These are Australians who have worked all of their lives and have done the right thing by contributing taxes all of their working lives and have then found themselves out of a job. They should not have to worry about how they will continue to keep a roof over their heads, food on the table and the bills paid. They just should not. They should not have to worry about waiting longer to access support. They should not have to worry about waiting months for their pensions to be processed. They should not have to worry about waiting for hours on the phone to speak to someone in Centrelink and they certainly should not have to worry about false or inflated debts being pursued against them. As I indicated at the beginning of my speech, there is an amendment to this motion that has been circulated in my name. I move:

That all 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 the Government's:

(1) stubborn defence for three years of its failed Robodebt program which frightened thousands of innocent Australians with false or inflated debts; and

(2) repeated attempts to cut the pension and social security".

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Rob Mitchell): Is the amendment seconded?

Ms Kearney: I second the amendment and reserve my right to speak.

Mr SIMMONDS (Ryan) (10:27): I rise to speak on this very important piece of legislation, the Social Services and Other Legislation Amendment (Simplifying Income Reporting and Other Measures) Bill 2020, and
to support and commend the bill to the House. First, after the contribution of the previous Labor speaker I think it's very important to point out to members of the House that this bill contains no changes in the rates of payments that people are receiving. In fact, this bill is simply about accuracy in ensuring that people who are receiving assistance from the Commonwealth are getting the right amount each time that they are entitled to under Australia's safety net.

I'd also take umbrage to the previous speaker's comments regarding pensioners, because, as members of this House will remember, this government is the best friend that pensioners have had. That's for a few reasons. Firstly, it was this government that stopped Labor's insidious retiree tax. When the previous Labor speaker talks about supporting retirees, imagine what would have happened if the Labor members opposite had been successful at the election last May and had had the opportunity to implement their insidious retiree tax. It would have cut into retirees' savings at the time when they most needed it. It would have changed the goalposts at a time when they had made investment decisions for their retirement, to look after themselves. They have worked all their lives and have made investment decisions and it would have been the Labor members opposite who would have changed the goalposts on them and ripped that out from underneath them. Imagine if the Labor members opposite had had the opportunity to implement $387 billion of new taxes. Imagine what it would have done to pensioners if, instead of the Morrison/McCormack government reducing power prices and their costs of living, they had the Labor members opposite in government putting up power prices, because they were trying to meet targets for carbon emissions that they didn't know how to cost and they simply couldn't meet. Once again, it is this government that is supporting pensioners more than ever before.

We're also supporting those seeking work. You would have taken from the comments of the previous Labor speaker that they are the only ones out there supporting those who are seeking work. It's this government that's been more successful than any government before it, certainly more successful than the previous Labor government, in helping people seeking work in the way they need it most, which is to find a job. The proportion of working-age Australians depending on welfare has fallen to 13.5 per cent, the lowest level in more than 30 years. For that I really want to commend Minister Ruston and the fantastic work that she and her team are doing.

This bill is important because it demonstrates good government. That is what this administration is all about. Good government is not simply set and forget. It is not simply governing for today, but governing for the future. Good government constantly reviews its processes to see how they can be improved and streamlined and how we can achieve the best possible outcomes for Australians. This bill does exactly that. On this side of the House we are focused on growing the economy, getting more people into work and delivering well-targeted social security funding through a strong budget—social security that acts as a safety net for some of our most vulnerable Australians.

The Morrison government recognises the need for a fair and sustainable welfare system that helps Australians get the support they need when they need it. However, the current system can be complex for recipients when it comes to reporting. Currently recipients must undertake a calculation to report their or their partner's earnings, based on the number of shifts they have worked and the hourly rate, rather than the amount they were actually paid. Under these changes, more than 1.2 million welfare recipients who earn an income each year will be able to report their fortnightly earnings to Centrelink as it appears on their pay slip. This makes for a much easier user experience and will ensure that recipients receive the right amount.

People who work shift work or casual work have found difficulties in reporting the pay they will receive over a proceeding period. Currently the process can be quite difficult for those recipients who were genuinely just trying to access the correct payments. The changes outlined in this bill take the manual component out of the reporting process. It takes the guess work out of the process for recipients, making it easier and less stressful for them to receive the correct payments.

We believe that all Australians have an expectation, as they quite rightly should, that the welfare system should be there to provide financial support to those who are eligible, no more and no less. This change is timely, particularly off the back of new Single Touch Payroll technology. As technology advances, so do we. Through Single Touch Payroll enabled software, employers report employees' payroll information, such as salary, wages and super, to the ATO each time they pay their employees. From July 2020, as proposed under this bill, the ATO will begin providing employment details to Services Australia through the Single Touch Payroll where the recipient has been established as a mutual client. Again, this will eliminate guesswork and ensure greater accuracy in payments.

The streamlining of this process will not only provide a better experience for recipients but also represent significant savings in processing. Through the improvement of this process the government will save $650 million each year, making our system more sustainable well into the future and allowing us to reinvest those savings. It is again important to emphasise for members of this House, particularly given the contribution of those opposite,
that there are no changes to the rate of payments proposed by this bill. It is simply the way we improve accuracy in getting people paid the right amount. On this side of the House, our stable and certain approach to all facets of government is always seeking to improve the way we do things: to help Australians, to make our system fairer and to strengthen our budget.

While we're talking about this good-news story in the bill, when it comes to the betterment of our payment system it would be remiss of me not to also talk about another significant achievement of this government—as I did just a few minutes ago—and that is the drop in welfare dependency. Whilst, importantly, our welfare system exists as a safety net to support those in need, there is no greater achievement than providing opportunities for Australians to get back into the workforce when they are able to do so.

Over 1.4 million jobs have been created since 2013 by this government. With the release of the latest figures, the proportion of working-age Australians dependent on welfare has fallen to 13.5 per cent—the lowest level in more than 30 years. We know that the best form of support is to provide people with a job. It gives meaning to people. It gives support to families. It gives people the opportunity to do better for themselves and for those they love. That's what this government is dedicated to doing: delivering the opportunity for people to get into work by delivering the economic arrangements that are needed to create jobs in this country. We on this side of the chamber believe that, if you have a go, you will get a go, and we are proud to get people off welfare and into work.

In conclusion, these new measures will make it easier and simpler for recipients, make our payments more accurate, ensure our system is fair, provide a significant cost saving to the budget and help maintain our welfare system well into the future. I commend the work of Minister Ruston and her team as well as that of Minister Roberts for delivering this important bill to the House.

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong) (10:37): I rise to speak on the Social Services and Other Legislation Amendment (Simplifying Income Reporting and Other Measures) Bill 2020. I am speaking in support of the bill but also in support of the very sensible second reading amendment that was moved by the shadow minister for families and social services, the member for Barton, which raises serious concerns about the government's ability to implement these changes properly—and I'll come back to that.

In the second reading amendment, the member for Barton has referenced this government's bad faith and ultimately what amounts to casual cruelty through its actions in the social security sector. Much of this bill should objectively improve the accuracy of Centrelink information and social security information; indeed, that's its real purpose. However, it becomes difficult to separate the intentions of this legislation from the reality of the people who will be charged with implementing and executing its promise.

This is not a group of people—and I'm referring to the government—who in recent memory have covered themselves in glory when charged with similar projects of advancing the use of digital technology to make lives easier for Australians—the recent conga line of Liberal governments that this country has endured, right up to the current Morrison government, in particular to the charming but accident-prone Minister for Government Services, Mr Robert. I'm referring to the litany of digital disasters they have presided over. It is a litany, which makes the public realise that this government doesn't have a great record of rolling out new technology. We will be watching closely to ensure that Single Touch Payroll does not enjoy the suite of catastrophes that the Australian public has learned to expect from any Liberal digitisation project.

As this government boldly takes us into the world of Single Touch Payroll and social security, let me remind people about My Health Record. Almost $2 billion was spent on an e-health scheme that many doctors and patients refuse to use because of legitimate privacy concerns, including breaches. Then, of course, there's one of my favourites: the 2016 census. For almost 48 hours, Australians were unable to access the census website, due to a series of denial-of-service attacks, incurring a $30 million cost blowout to the Turnbull government. More recently, there was the 2019 myGov outage where, euphemistically, technical difficulties brought down the entire online government service portal for a day when people tried to access the ATO accounts and lodge financial year tax returns. Australians need access to functional government services, not for taxpayer money to be wasted mopping up mistakes because the Liberals cannot be trusted with digital service delivery.

The bill may contain the term 'simplifying income reporting', but what is this really about? Is it an attempt to cure the disease that this government has concocted in its artificial intelligence laboratory and unleashed on the social security recipients of Australia, better known as robodebt? Perhaps we should call the bill by its real name: the 'Trying to quietly fix our robodebt mess' bill. Some of the measures here should help that cause. They should make government information more accurate, not because—as this bunch of bunglers would have you believe—there are hordes of welfare recipients giving the government inaccurate information; it's quite the opposite. Under
robodebt, the government has been punishing welfare recipients with the government's own inaccurate data and dodgy mathematics.

The government's robodebt scheme unleashed a faulty algorithm against social security recipients who, even if they had reported their income 100 per cent correctly, were slapped with debt notices sometimes in the thousands of dollars. Robodebt used a crude, lazy calculation of averaging annual income and pretending to average that over every fortnight as if all Australians earn the same amount of money every fortnight. This would then discover a discrepancy by comparing it to a Centrelink recipient's reported fortnightly income, which may not conveniently fit into the artificial intelligence of robodebt. Many Australians have lumpy income due to insecure or intermittent work in the gig economy—casualisation, often balanced with study and other commitments. Many Australians rarely have the same number of hours each fortnight, yet robodebt simply assumed they did and, if there was a discrepancy between the reported fortnightly income and the artificial averaging of an income over a year, the person was issued with a debt notice. This was crude accounting at best. The work experience kid could have spotted the fault in the logic; yet, upon these shaky foundations, the whole robodebt edifice was constructed.

Using this dodgy algorithm, a red flag would be created against a person's name and a debt letter would be issued to the recipient. In some cases, a decade had passed since the reporting period in question, leaving many—often former—social security recipients shocked and distressed that they would have to retrieve pay slips from an old employer, who may have gone into liquidation or simply not kept the records, in order to disprove a discrepancy alleged by the government. Others, including vulnerable people on the bread line, were forced to find the money to pay their bank for statements to show what they had known all along—that they had always reported carefully and that no debt had accrued. The government would pretend that this process of issuing debts had human oversight, but it didn't have human oversight where it mattered. There was no checking and no interrogation of the algorithm's results. There was an almost religious faith in the artificial intelligence of the algorithm. Robodebt was king, so why bother worrying about hiring and paying humans to ensure that what it was spinning out was actually just and fair? We believe it is important to provide efficient, user-friendly government services and systems. We don't support the ongoing agenda of cuts to the Public Service and the outsourcing of key government work to labour hire companies.

With robodebt, we have also seen that a great deal of injustice occurred for people. People in the flood zone of Townsville received robodebt letters. We've had parents report that their adult children have taken their own lives because of the stress of robodebt. Figures obtained through the Senate have found that almost 2,000 people died after receiving a robodebt notice. But, unfortunately, all the talk of unfairness over the last three years wasn't enough to stop the government from simply marching ahead. At estimates, it was revealed that the department took money from 73 estates of people who had died.

Following the election, I certainly formed the view that robodebt didn't even have a legal basis. It didn't even have a basis in law giving the government the power to issue these debt notices. So the question is: how long did this government know that it didn't have the power to issue robodebt debt notices based upon the use of the algorithm-averaging system? The minister is at the table, so perhaps he could answer that question.

We have discovered—through a document which the government didn't want released, but Labor and the Greens were able to get the numbers in a Senate committee to put this letter up online—that the chief counsel of the Taxation Office wrote to the Chief Commissioner of Taxation late last year and said, 'Actually, we'd better stop garnishing people's tax bills, because the Department of Social Security has informed us that we don't have the legal power to issue the notices.' Hang on, read that again. This is a smoking gun of a document. What it says is that someone in government's told someone senior in government that we have been told there is no legal authority for what the government has been doing with robodebt. But have we heard from the government how long they knew before that day?

There are only two interpretations of what's happened. Either this government, in a belief in its own superiority, never checked for 3½ years if it had the power to issue robodebt notices—for 3½ half years. Are we seriously to believe that this bunch of incompetent bunglers—and, actually, when you say it is aloud, it is possible—issued notices and never checked to see if they were allowed to issue the notices? This is a scandal. How did we get to a state of affairs in this country where a government, with all of the power of departments, can simply issue debt notices and then at some point, 3½ years after the process started, simply discover, 'Actually we can't do this'?

One interpretation is that they never thought to ask. One interpretation is that they decided: 'We're just going to shame the poor. We're going to say that we are going to have a welfare compliance campaign to prop up our fake budget numbers,' and they didn't care about the detail. That is entirely possible. The alternative is that they knew before 19 November last year and just didn't tell anyone. That would actually be worse. But there's no happy ending for people who, for the last 3½ years, have been subjected to this robodebt scheme.
This single touch legislation is sensible, although we put question marks around the ability of this government to ever implement anything. I wouldn't send this government down the street to the milk bar to get a litre of milk. They'd get that wrong.

Mr Robert: If only you were elected!

Mr Shorten: There goes the minister. I'm going to take his interjection. This bloke is the invisible minister for robodebt. He never goes out in public and explains what happened with robodebt. Instead, he wheels out the poor old department—no medals for bravery for this minister when it comes to facing up to the music.

But let's go back to the real issue here. This government's proposing legislation which, in and of itself, is a net addition. The reason that it is a net addition is that it is going to say that, before we start issuing debts, we're going to make sure that we get the facts right. But what I despise about this arrogant bunch of bunglers is that they have been propping up their budget and shaming the poor. They have a view that, if they can just sting the most vulnerable on Centrelink, they may figure that there's no sympathy from other people. They concocted this idea that everyone on Centrelink is out there cracking open lobster shells while sitting on a banana lounge in some resort and they are all taking money that hardworking people give them. The reality is that Centrelink payments are a safety net that people have a legitimate right to. Every Australian citizen, no matter their circumstances—no matter if they vote for the LNP or for Labor; no matter how much money they have in their bank account; no matter where they live; no matter what their surname is; no matter who they know in the government; and no matter how digitally connected they are—has the right to be treated lawfully by the government.

We have discovered that this government has been sending out debt notices when it didn't have the power to do so. This is a scandal. But, in this responsibility-free, blame-free vacuum which is the government, somehow you can send out hundreds of thousands of notices which are illegal, you can raise hundreds of millions of dollars of unjustly enriched money against our most vulnerable citizens, and no-one's responsible. This is a blame-free vacuum. No blame ever seems to stick to anyone in this government. How do you raise debts against hundreds of thousands of Australians, which we've now found out through government documents—

Ms Bell interjecting—

Mr Shorten: The new member for Moncrieff can complain about what I'm saying, but it's a scandal. You're not allowed to do it. It's not your fault, in particular; you just got elected—but, of course, it's not anyone's fault in this government. The Social Security Act does not authorise the raising of these debts. It's not a matter of going around the Monopoly board once and then trying to retrofit what you did. You weren't allowed to go. This was illegal. Is there no shame left in the government that they can illegally obtain hundreds of millions of dollars off hundreds of thousands of people? The legal advice materialises and it's no shame, digger! No shame here. And the problem is that this government isn't even sorry. As much as the government members may want to stick their heads in that firm, familiar bucket of sand and pretend it hasn't happened, this is outrageous. Maybe it doesn't make the front pages of our media papers all the time, but I know that this government caused misery for hundreds of thousands of Centrelink recipients. I know this government has unjustly enriched itself with tens, if not hundreds, of millions of dollars. I know this government did not have the power to raise a valid debt owed to the Commonwealth and no-one cares on that side. No-one seems to think this is not just business as usual.

You relied on the algorithm. You took the human oversight out of the system. You wanted the money. You thought you could get away with picking on poor people and it has blown up in your face. It doesn't matter about the little eye rolls we get from some of the loyal backbenchers saluting the government flag; your government didn't do the right thing. This legislation is an attempt to fix up some of it, but what I don't like is the fact that 10,000 applicants have got to go to court to force the government to pay them back what the government were never allowed to take in the first place.

Apparently in this bungling, woeful, responsibility-free government they want the limos, they want the pay, they want the office and they want to be called 'the honourable' but the problem is they're not good at their job. In this case what you did is a scandal. You took hundreds of thousands of people down a path you never should have. Shame on you.

Ms Bell (Moncrieff) (10:52): I rise to speak on this Social Services and Other Legislation Amendment (Simplifying Income Reporting and Other Measures) Bill 2020, that will improve the process of reporting employment income to Centrelink and, therefore, strengthen our welfare system.

This government is on the side of Australians who are trying to find work, unlike the Labor Party and those opposite who have abandoned Australian workers. Those opposite are not interested in strengthening Australia's welfare system. They are only interested in politicising every issue of the day. The issue of improving our welfare system should not be politicised. As we saw, they also recently politicised the issue of the bushfires, so they're not really doing their job. They're just politicising issues for their own agenda. We have heard the member for
Maribyrnong barking his rhetoric during the election and the Australian people didn't listen to him then, so I suggest they don't listen to his rhetoric now.

From July 1 2020 social security recipients will report their employment income to Centrelink when it's paid by their employer, instead of when it's earned. The assessment of employment income when paid will make it easier to report income correctly. Around 550,000 people report their income to Centrelink in any given fortnight. Around 1.2 million people report income at least once a year.

The government's priority is for an accurate, fair and simple welfare system. This will better support people receiving the right amount of income support each time it is paid—no more and no less than they are eligible for—reducing the likelihood of overpayments. It will also pave the way for the future prefilling of employment income using Single Touch Payroll information that supports easy reporting arrangements for recipients. Under the current system recipients must do a calculation to report on their or their partner's earnings based on the number and value of shifts they have worked, not what they have actually been paid. Reporting earned amounts can require recipients to do unnecessary, multiple calculations.

Under this change people can refer to their or their partner's pay slip in order to report employment income to Centrelink, making reporting easier and ensuring they get the correct amount of payments. While this method changes the way employment income is assessed, it also aligns it with Single Touch Payroll—STP—data, which is based on when an employee is paid, to make reporting even simpler.

For example, a recipient of youth allowance can work on a Friday night, Saturday morning and Sunday afternoon for the same employer with a different rate of pay for each shift, which is quite complex. It can be difficult to report the correct amount of income if recipients have to factor in varying hours and duties, multiple employers and changing award rates. Over the course of 2017 there were over 15 million corrections to recently reported earnings, where people discovered when they got their pay that they had incorrectly reported their earned income for the previous fortnight.

Through this bill the government will deliver a simpler way for social security recipients to report their employment income. From July 2020 the ATO will provide employment income details to Services Australia where available through STP and where the individual has been established as a mutual client. This information will then be used to assist payment recipients to report accurately—a system made simpler. Where STP data is used, recipients will still be responsible for correctly reporting their income and will have the ability to review, edit or add additional employment income before finalising their report to Centrelink. This will support payment recipients further to accurately report their employment income, ensuring they get paid the right amount from Centrelink the first time. As employers begin reporting additional information through Single Touch Payroll in the next financial year, recipients will start seeing their employment income prefilled in their reporting solutions in the same way that income from interest appears prefilled when completing a tax return. This will mean that for most people reporting income at the end of each fortnight will be a simpler process, a process of confirming that their prefilled income is in fact correct.

The resulting improvements in payment accuracy are expected to deliver savings to the government and the Australian people of $2.1 billion over four years from 2019-20 to 2022-23. This is because some people who begin employment do not contact Centrelink to report their earnings and may inadvertently continue to receive a payment while in receipt of employment income. Some people may underestimate their employment income while remaining on a payment. Some do not report their income. Some report their net earnings rather than their gross earnings.

The government is not reducing payment rates, but simply making it easier for social security payment recipients to report their employment income accurately and, in turn, get paid the correct rate. Over 80 per cent of savings delivered through this reform will be from working-age recipients, because these recipients are shown as the most likely to incorrectly report employment income. Preventing overpayments in this way will contribute to the sustainability of the welfare system. It will mean that these individuals are paid what they are entitled to. The measure will provide additional financial support to people who find work, as they will be able to get government support up until their employer first pays them, removing the current timing gap between starting work and receiving payment.

In conclusion, I make three key points. Accessing social security payments until employment income becomes available will provide greater support to vulnerable Australians transitioning to work. We are helping vulnerable Australians. We are helping those who want to go from unemployment to work. That's what we're here for. That's what the Morrison government does. We help Australians, unlike those opposite, who have abandoned the Labor Party. They have abandoned their own members. They have abandoned the Australian worker. Assessing employment income when paid will contribute to simplification and will deliver modernisation of Australia's
social security system by allowing the use of technology to prevent overpayments before they happen, but without reducing the responsibility of the individual to ensure that they report correctly.

This bill will also help to ensure that Australia's welfare system remains sustainable into the future. I congratulate Ministers Ruston and Robert for their work to strengthen our welfare system. I commend this bill to the House. It will help Australians move from unemployment into work. It will strengthen our system. It will return money to the Australian taxpayer. This's what it's going to do: it's going to save money and it's going to help Australians who currently are trying to find work. I've got people in my own family trying to find work. This will make it easier for them to report what they've been doing and where they have been working. It will all be pre-filled in for them and then they'll have to report. It will be much simpler for an unemployed person who is actively looking for work. This is what the Morrison government does; we help people to transition. This is what the safety net is all about. It's there to help people transition from unemployment into work, and this system that we are proposing will simplify that. It'll make it easier for Australians to be correct with what they write on the form. Therefore, Centrelink will be able to save money, save resources and give that money straight back to the Australian taxpayer.

Those opposite cheer and they laugh and they make faces, but we've heard it all before from them. Australians cannot trust those opposite with our coffers. They cannot trust those opposite. Look at the debt and the deficit that they left. They cannot be trusted with Australians' money. Only a Morrison government can deliver a surplus. The first surplus in 11 years is what we've just delivered for the Australian people, and we will continue to deliver for the Australian people. That's what we on this side believe. We believe in LNP values. We believe in hard work. We believe in moving from welfare to a job. We believe in feeding our families through a job. That's what we believe in. We believe in going to work and building our families. That's what we believe in. We believe in taking people from unemployment into work.

Debate adjourned.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Closing the Gap

Mr MORRISON (Cook—Prime Minister and Minister for the Public Service) (11:01): by leave—I present a copy of the Closing the gap report 2020.

When we meet in this place, we are on Ngunawal land, and I give my thanks and pay my respects to our Ngunawal elders past, present and, importantly, emerging, for our future. I honour all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people here in this House and right across our great continent. I also acknowledge, as I always do, our service men and women and our veterans and particularly acknowledge our Indigenous service men and women and our Indigenous veterans, as we did just last week at the Australian War Memorial—service that, for so long, was not acknowledged, but who served not for recognition but because of their faith in who we could become as a country and as a people. We are still on that journey. And I thank them on behalf of a grateful nation for their service.

I also acknowledge and honour our Indigenous leaders who are also the democratically elected representatives of the Australian people: the member for Hasluck, the Hon. Ken Wyatt, our very first Aboriginal Minister for Indigenous Australians; the member for Barton, the Hon. Linda Burney; Senator Patrick Dodson; Senator Malarndirri McCarthy and Senator Jacqui Lambie. I also welcome convenor, Pat Turner, and all members of the Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations. Welcome, Pat. I thank you for your partnership, for your strength and your leadership.

For 12 years, I have sat in this chamber and listened to Closing the Gap speeches. It's a tale of hope, frustration and disappointment—a tale of good intentions and, indeed, good faith. But the results are not good enough. This is, sadly, still true.

Last year I opened this address with what I believe is a national truth and a national shame—that our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Australia today do not have the same opportunities as all other children growing up in Australia. They never have in Australia. Never. This is the ultimate test of our efforts—that every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boy and girl can grow up in this country with the same opportunities and expectations as any other Australian boy and girl.

Over decades our top-down government-knows-best approach has not delivered the improvements we all yearn for. When it comes to the welfare and advancement of our Indigenous peoples, I don't doubt the good hearts and the goodwill of those in this chamber and those who have served here, including former Prime Minister Rudd, who began this process with the national apology, indeed, the day before I gave my first speech in this place 12 years ago. The national apology was an important milestone, but it did not pretend to be the solution. It was
important for many reasons, but, for me, it was most important because it was important to our First Australians. It mattered to them, and so it mattered to me.

Despite our best intentions, Closing the Gap, as an initiative, fell victim to the same type of thinking that has hampered our efforts in the past. We seem to think that somehow if our aspirations were high enough the rest would just take care of itself. This is not a challenge of aspiration. It's not a contest of earnestness. It's not about who cares more. It's not about symbolism. There's been no shortage of money or will. The Productivity Commission estimates that in 2015-16 total Indigenous-specific expenditure of all levels of government was $6 billion, and the share of mainstream programs that all Australians share was a further $27.4 billion. Over the forward estimates we are providing $5.2 billion for our Indigenous Advancement Strategy, $4.1 billion for targeted efforts to improve Indigenous health as well as significant payments to the states and territories for Indigenous-specific programs.

Closing the Gap is a very practical challenge and a very difficult one. Getting people into jobs so they can lift up their eyes from seeing hopelessness and see a future that they can direct, and ensuring young children are healthy, in school and well-educated to realise their potential—that is how generational change occurs. And by ensuring that Indigenous Australians are safe in their homes and in their communities, where they can have the same expectations of the rule of law to go about their own lives unviolated as any other Australian in any other part of the country.

Having watched and listened, we are now making the change to how we go about this task. It's not a judgement of our past efforts, but is an honest and humble learning. Despite the best intentions—investments and new programs and bipartisan goodwill—Closing the Gap has never really been a partnership with Indigenous people. We perpetuated an ingrained way of thinking, passed down over two centuries and more, and it was the belief that we knew better than our Indigenous peoples. We don't. We also thought we understood their problems better than they did. We don't. They live them. We must see the gap we wish to close, not from our viewpoint, but from the viewpoint of Indigenous Australians before we can hope to close it and make a real difference, and that is the change we are now making, together with Indigenous Australians through this process.

We all have in our own way sought to grapple with the consequences of 2½ centuries of Indigenous disempowerment. What I know is that to rob a person of their right to take responsibility for themselves, to strip them of responsibility and capability to direct their own futures, to make them dependent, is to deny them their liberty, and slowly that person will wither before your eyes. That's what we did to our First Nations peoples, and, mostly, we didn't even know we were doing it. We thought we were helping when we replaced independence with welfare. This must change. We must restore the right to take responsibility, the right to make decisions, the right to step up, the opportunity to own and create Australians' own futures. It must be accompanied by a willingness to push decisions down to the people who are closest to them—where the problems are and where the consequences of decisions are experienced. That is what we must do.

On the afternoon before Australia Day my family and I once again visited a group of Ngunawal elders, this time down by the lake, for a water blessing. It was hot, and there was smoke from the bushfires in the air. I was grateful for the generosity and grace displayed by the Ngunawal people in hosting a Prime Minister and his family at a poignant time when they reflect on their own long history since time immemorial. Yet, on that afternoon, my Ngunawal friends were more concerned about what they called my 'sorry business', my sorry business time, and the recent passing of my father. They were concerned for my girls and their loss. They had words and space for grief, and we sat together. I want to thank Aunty Agnes Shea for her hospitality and her kind words. Be it grief; the protection of our lands against bushfire; an understanding of our native ecosystems; or the intergenerational responsibilities to the land and to each other; there is so much we learn from Indigenous communities and peoples.

So I ask: what have we been too proud to learn? What must we learn so that we can grow together? Our new approach to closing the gap provides some of the answers to this question. It is an approach that is built on partnership; on giving back responsibility; of listening; of empowering; of government providing the capabilities so that Indigenous Australians can make their best choices; of all governments accepting their own accountabilities; and of owning up to a path that, despite the very best of intentions of all governments, hasn't worked.

Today I make the final report of an old approach as well as the first report of a new era. Here, then, are the results against the targets set since 2008. Two of the seven targets are on track to be met this year and in 2025. We are on track to halve the gap in year 12 attainment. That is a tremendous achievement. What that means now and in the future is more Indigenous doctors, nurses, teachers, tradies, police officers, engineers, scientists, mathematicians, farmers, IT specialists, musicians, artists, and CEOs and business leaders—excelling in every field of endeavour, lifting our communities. Indeed, this is the biggest improvement over the past decade. The
proportion of Indigenous Australians reaching this milestone has jumped more than 20 per cent in 12 years. The biggest leap forward has been in our major cities, where 85 per cent of Indigenous 20- to 24-year-olds have attained year 12 or equivalent.

We're already doing more to close that gap. In last year's statement I announced $200 million in extra support for Indigenous students through the Indigenous Youth Education Package. Already, funding agreements for 30 projects valued at $190 million are in place. This year the package will assist over 20,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to stay engaged in secondary school through mentoring, cultural and other supports. We're also working in partnership with local communities in remote and very remote communities to identify community projects that encourage school attendance. These projects are being developed.

This year we are also on track to have 95 per cent of Indigenous four-year-olds enrolled in early childhood education by 2025. The preschool years are so important in preparing kids for their school journey and beyond, and we're seeing more Indigenous kids getting that advantage. In 2018, the figure was 86 per cent, an almost 10 percentage point rise on 2016 and well ahead of where we needed to be to hit that target in five years time. So, at both ends of the school spectrum, we have made great strides in getting more kids into school and through school.

Nothing should diminish how significant these gains are. However, the four expiring targets that were supposed to be met by 2018 were not met: halving the gap in child mortality; closing the gap in school attendance; halving the gap in child literacy and numeracy; halving the gap in employment. The final target, closing the gap in life expectancy within a generation, is not on track to be met by 2031. This is a stark and sobering report that I have tabled. I welcome the gains. I honour the hard work across every front. We must be careful not to speak of our First Australians as a broken people, because they are not. So many of our First Australians are out there, making their way despite the disadvantages that they have faced and overcome: setting goals, making choices, living their lives and bravely showing the way to others.

But I don't shy away from the failures. I see the shortcomings. The targets that were set for Indigenous Australians, not by Indigenous Australians, do not celebrate the strengths, achievements and aspirations of Indigenous people. They don't tell you what's happening on the ground or stirring under it. They don't tell you how realistic or achievable these targets were in the first place. They reinforce the language of failing and falling short and they also mask the real progress that has been made. We must be careful not to adopt a negative mindset, because on most measures we have made progress.

I am saddened that we have not met the target for child mortality, but I draw hope and resolve from the fact that we are making progress in tackling the risk factors. More Indigenous mothers are attending antenatal care in the first trimester and more are going to at least five antenatal sessions. Fewer Indigenous mothers are smoking during pregnancy. We know that if we can shift these risk factors we can keep more Indigenous babies and children alive. We may not be on track to fully close the life expectancy gap in a generation—always an ambitious target—but mortality rates have improved by almost 10 per cent. This is mostly because we've made progress in tackling the leading cause of death, the big circulatory diseases like heart disease and stroke. This is progress. But, as I said, we have not made as much progress as we should have by now.

There remains much to do. We will do it differently: by working together; by moving from a fixation with what is going wrong to a focus on strength; by going from good intentions and sky-high aspirations to local practical action that's driven by local leaders and local needs, with clear accountability and responsibility, with a clear line of sight to the community. We're acting on a commitment by all levels of government to work together; for federal, state, territory and local governments to work together—not just the Indigenous portfolios but whole governments at every point of contact, because every minister in my government is a minister for Indigenous Australians and the Minister for Indigenous Australians is the first amongst equals in this cause—most importantly, for governments to work with local communities in partnership with the coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peaks—known as the Coalition of Peaks—and with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We are making that commitment real.

That is what our Closing The Gap refresh is all about. It is what all governments agreed to at COAG a little over a year ago. It is what we agreed to in March last year, in our unprecedented partnership agreement on closing the gap between the Commonwealth, state and territory governments, the Coalition of Peaks and the Australian Local Government Association. It's what Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been saying for a long time. They want a partnership where we listen, work together and decide together how future policies are developed, especially at a regional and local level, a partnership that respects their expertise and acknowledges their place as the First Nations people of this continent.

So we're bringing more people into the process. We're finalising a new national agreement on closing the gap, a formal agreement between COAG and the Coalition of Peaks. We expect this to be considered in April during
joint council in Western Australia. Just last month, the peaks and I sat around the cabinet table and talked about how we're making this commitment real. Even meeting together like that, I'm advised—the ministers and me, along with the heads of 14 community controlled organisations representing almost 50 different community controlled organisations—was unprecedented. It was historic. But it shouldn't have been. This partnership is generations overdue.

At that meeting, I listened. The Indigenous leaders were telling us where the gaps are, where the needs are, where the strengths are, the success stories, the empowering stories, the stories of hope. Our shared priorities are clear: expanding the opportunities for shared decision-making; building the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled services sector; and making sure all mainstream agencies provide high-quality services to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. In days that some in this chamber will remember, the government had absolute control over Aboriginal people's lives: where they could live, where they could travel, who they could marry. Government files held details—often brutal in their brevity—that the people themselves were not allowed to know. I have one such file here with me from the Department of Native Welfare. File 1690/68: a file of the native welfare department. The file is for a boy, a teenager. In this file there are notes about funding for school uniforms. There is a memo to the Commissioner of Native Welfare about whether the boy should be provided pocket money of 75c a week. It was bureaucrats making decisions for what they paternally called 'a good type of lad'.

Think about a life where even the most basic decision-making is stripped away from you—by governments thinking they know better. Fortunately, that boy was bigger than the times, and I'm honoured that he now sits behind me as the Minister for Indigenous Australians. He knows that responsibility and empowerment are freedom. He is one of almost 800,000 Indigenous Australians—in the west, in the east, in Tasmania and in the Top End.

As I have stated, it is time we define the gap that we want to close from the viewpoint of our Indigenous Australians. They are the Australians who should be setting these goals. A vital part of empowering Indigenous communities is giving them the data and information to inform their decision-making. That's why we've just committed $1.5 million to an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led data project. It's about supporting local decision-making. It's about supporting the Coalition of Peaks in partnership with the Indigenous Data Network at the University of Melbourne to develop regional profiles for Closing the Gap targets. It will mean having richer and more localised data to inform programs designed by and for local communities. It's about commitment of states and territories, all governments, to report publicly on Closing the Gap into the future. These new arrangements underpin the future of Closing the Gap.

One of the things we've learned from the last 12 years is that the way we deliver services matters as much as what's delivered. That's why we changed the funding model for the Indigenous Australians' Health Program. The new design is focused on delivering primary health care that's appropriate to the unique languages, cultures and circumstances of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. I'm very hopeful that a new approach that's more locally led and more collaborative will take us much further down than the top-down, one-size-fits-all, government-led approach ever could.

We know that when Indigenous people have a say in the design of programs, policies and services, the outcomes are better—and lives are changed. For a young mother, it's the difference between antenatal care that's too far away or not culturally competent and getting the care she needs from a local Indigenous service. For a young child, it's the difference between getting a patchy education and getting the right support to stay in school. For a jobseeker, it's the difference between giving up on getting a job and finding a service provider that won't give up on them. For an older person with a chronic health problem, it's the difference between missing treatment and turning up to a friendly face and a familiar touch and getting the care they need in the way they need it. That is our goal: services that make a meaningful difference.

Last year I said we must make an impact on one really important area, and that was education. Get the education right and the skills, jobs, security, health, prosperity and longevity all follow. And it's the area where, as I've already noted, we've been seeing the most encouraging signs. Think about those four-year-olds just starting early childhood education this year—on the very threshold of a whole life of learning. In 2020 the government has committed almost half a billion dollars to preschool education so that every Australian child can have access to quality early childhood programs in the year before school. That includes every Indigenous child.

One program in particular is having an impact on those kids get that good start. The Connected Beginnings Program is in 15 Indigenous communities across Australia. In Alice Springs it's seen more kids actually enrolling in preschool, shifting from around half to three-quarters. In the Jordan River community more Indigenous kids are participating in child care and play groups and more are getting referrals to the health and specialist services they need. In Doomadgee teachers are seeing year 1 students who are now much better
prepared for school. Together we need to accelerate our efforts in these early years to make sure that every Indigenous child across our country grows up safe, resilient and ready to thrive throughout life. That is why I've asked the Minister for Indigenous Australians to lead the development of a national Indigenous early childhood strategy this year, to design a new way of working together to achieve our shared goal; to prioritise these actions, that matter most to parents and carers, the ones who live the experience; to partner with experts, families, frontline services and communities; and to have a more coordinated effort across the Commonwealth and with our state and territory colleagues.

We are also seeing great connectedness between our universities and our young Indigenous students. For school-leavers in regional areas, it's sometimes hard to see where the path leads next. It's harder to go on to further study if that means uprooting from everything you know and trust. That's why regional university centres are so important. They help Indigenous students in regional places take on certificates and degrees through any Australian tertiary institution they choose. In the Northern Territory, the Wuyagiba Bush Hub saw nine students successfully complete their university preparation course this year. Five of them have been offered places at Macquarie University and four at the territory's Bachelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education. In 2020 the bush hub is expanding its applications so that more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students can study on country. It's run by a Wuyagiba Bush Hub Aboriginal Corporation—I apologise if my pronunciations are not accurate. Together with a local elder and an academic from Macquarie, it's a real success story.

Then there's the Indigenous Student Success Program, giving nearly 20,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students access to scholarships, tutoring, mentoring and other cultural support to help them succeed at university. With the support of this program, Griffith University in Queensland has helped more than 300 students get degrees in the last couple of years. It also supports about 160 regional and remote students to succeed. We know that whatever we can do to get more kids in school, finishing school and going on to further study, all helps to set them on a path for a better life.

That path must lead to a job. One of the success stories of recent years has been the government's Indigenous Procurement Policy. This policy is about encouraging Indigenous entrepreneurship and job-producing businesses. In 2018-19, Commonwealth portfolios and their major suppliers awarded contracts to 775 Indigenous businesses, with a total value of $754 million. Since July 2015 the Indigenous Procurement Policy has seen $2.69 billion in contracts awarded to 1,842 Indigenous businesses. This means more jobs, rising incomes and greater economic security for Indigenous communities. From 1 July this year we'll introduce a target of three per cent of the value of Commonwealth contracts to be awarded to Indigenous businesses. This will add to the existing target of three per cent of Commonwealth contracts that go to Indigenous businesses. This is consistent with our belief that strong local economies always underpin healthy communities. It is economic opportunity and a culture of responsibility and empowerment that provide the foundation for the transformation of local communities.

Sadly, in recent years Indigenous youth suicide has taken so many young lives. Indigenous young people are almost four times more likely than their non-Indigenous peers to take their own lives. Tackling suicide, all suicides, is a national priority. In tackling this national priority, we're using targeted strategies. We've unveiled Australia's largest ever youth mental health and suicide prevention package. Two of the 12 trials being funded are for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people specifically. In the last budget we committed $4.5 million for Indigenous leaders to work on an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suicide prevention plan, a plan that recognises the value of community and provides services that are culturally safe and accessible and are well connected to each other and the broader community. Out of that came a body called Gayaa Dhuwi—proud spirit—that will support Indigenous leadership in suicide prevention.

We're also working alongside community members and frontline services who serve their community selflessly with strong and open hearts—rangers and community night patrols, Indigenous liaison officers and Indigenous doctors and nurses. In the last three years, nearly 5,000 people in more than 180 regional and remote communities have completed mental health first aid training, a program we expanded in the last budget. As well, 89 local people were supported to become accredited instructors so they can deliver that training. We are making progress: with solutions that empower and that are local and developed in partnership with Indigenous communities.

Finally, I want to be clear: as Prime Minister, I respect the honest yearn for constitutional recognition. In 2018 the Joint Select Committee on Constitutional Recognition relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples delivered a bipartisan report. Our government adopted the four bipartisan recommendations in the report—in particular, recommendation 1:

In order to design a voice that best meets the needs and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the Committee recommends a process of co-design between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and government be initiated in communities across Australia to design a voice that can help deliver practical outcomes for that community.

This is our government's policy.
It is clear from the committee's report that more work needs to be done on a voice proposal. The government has always supported giving Indigenous people more of a say at the local level. We support the process of co-design of the voice because, if we are going to change the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples on the ground, we need their buy-in on the matters and policies that affect them. The committee did not make recommendations as to the legal form of the voice—constitutional or legislation. It recommended considering this matter after the process of co-design is completed, and that is what we are doing. We support finalising co-design first.

We also support recommendations about truth-telling, Australians are interested in having a fuller understanding of their history—the history, traditions and culture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and also the history of contact between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

Well over half a century ago, Bill Wentworth, a man called by some an 'incorrigible backbencher', began to build the case for a national institute to capture Indigenous languages, art and culture, which he feared would be lost for all time. Ultimately, that vision would become AIATSIS. His belief was that a loss of Indigenous culture was a loss to us all because Indigenous culture embodies our shared humanity. In time, Bill Wentworth would become our first Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. He had a belief that, as Australians began to understand and embrace Indigenous culture and our Indigenous people, it would transform the way Indigenous people see themselves—and, not only that: it would transform the way we see ourselves, as a people who share this continent. This goes to the heart of who we are.

In partnership with Indigenous Australians, with respect for their wisdom and capabilities and with appreciation for their grace towards their fellow Australians, we are beginning this next chapter in closing the gap—to see the gap, to see the challenges, to see the opportunities, to understand the hope, to see the way through Indigenous eyes. It's a chapter which allows us to believe in a day when the Indigenous children of this land have the same opportunities as every other Australian child.

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the Opposition) (11:33): I begin by acknowledging that we meet on the land of the Ngunawal and Ngambri people, land that was, is and always will be Aboriginal land—and I pay my respects to their elders, past, present and emerging. I recognise the many First Nations people in the galleries today, and I acknowledge my First Nations colleagues and fellow parliamentarians: the member for Barton, Linda Burney; Senators Patrick Dodson, Malarndirri McCarthy and Jacqui Lambie; and, of course, Minister Ken Wyatt, the first Aboriginal Minister for Indigenous Australians.

Since 2008 I've sat in this place on this day and I've listened to fine speeches from prime ministers and opposition leaders alike. Afterwards, so often I've heard members of the press gallery say that days like today show the parliament at its best. But if this day adds up to nothing but sentiment and speeches, if this occasion becomes merely a ceremonial renewal of good intentions and a promise to do better next time, that is so far short of parliament at its best and so far short of Australia at our best. In the end it is not the Prime Minister's voice or the opposition leader's voice that should be heard on this day on this issue; it is the voice of the First Australians. It is the voice of over 60,000 years of culture, story, community and kinship. It is the voice articulating the torment of our powerlessness, from the Uluru statement, that must be heard—over 60,000 years of love for this country, their country, our country, the continent that we share.

Enshrining the voice in our Constitution is a great and unifying mission, more than a century overdue. But that recognition is not the end of the road. It must be the clarion bell of a change from what has been. Enshrining the voice to parliament will be the work of one successful referendum, but listening to the voice, ensuring that the voice is heard in this House and the Senate, ensuring that the voice speaks in the design and delivery of policy, ensuring that the voice advocates the rights and interests of First Nations peoples, is a task of national political leadership.

The Coalition of Peaks has already spoken up and said clearly what government needs to do to improve services for our First Nations people. The three reform priorities that they have outlined are: formal partnerships between government and First Nations people on closing the gap; growing First Nations community-controlled services; and improving mainstream service delivery to First Nations people. Change begins with listening. The Closing the Gap statement to parliament commemorates the anniversary of Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's historic apology to the Stolen Generations on behalf of this nation, as the first item of business in this chamber. That day, as Leader of the House of Representatives, remains my proudest day as a member of this parliament, and I know there are people across the chamber who feel exactly the same way. The nation came together in unity. Workplaces paused. Schools assembled. Crowds cheered. Tears were shed. And we were stronger for it.
It was clear that there was inequality and disparity that needed reconciliation, that there were key indicators showing the disadvantage resulting from more than two centuries of dispossession, discrimination, racism and sometimes violent oppression. This was an indictment upon us as a modern nation. There were many gaps, but some appeared more urgent than others. These indicators include life expectancy, child mortality, school attendance, reading and numeracy, employment, early childhood, and the attainment of year 12 or equivalent—practical measures with targets. It is tragic that after 12 years we aren't on track for five of these seven targets, including life expectancy, child mortality and employment. It is an indictment that, of all these targets, we're on track for only two. The problem was not that the targets were too ambitious; they were not. They were modest. And, in the spirit of Paul Keating's 1992 Redfern speech, I will say that the failure to meet the targets is our failure, not theirs.

The fact is that the two targets that are being met are welcome, particularly the finishing of year 12, as the Prime Minister has said. What that shows is that progress is possible, but the fact is that we can—and we must—do better. We speak of closing the gap, but the truth is that, on so many of these measures, there isn't a gap; there's a chasm. And it doesn't end there. Rates of First Nations people in custody are still way too high. First Nations adults are just two per cent of the population, but they make up 27 per cent of the prison population. Suicide, particularly among young people, is still ripping families and communities apart. The number of children being put in out-of-home care is a national shame and is a consequence of policy failure by governments.

We want to work with the government, but we do expect some urgency, passion and diligence to be brought into this space. We cannot keep coming back here, year in, year out, wringing our hands. The new way forward has to be led by First Nations people in meaningful and mutually agreed partnerships. That way forward has been mapped out for us in the Uluru statement—a document of unadorned power to which Labor is fully committed. That way forward is voice, truth-telling and agreement-making. When the member for Hasluck was appointed Minister for Indigenous Australians, Labor welcomed it as the right decision, and we wish him well. Indeed, when I spoke at the Garma festival in East Arnhem Land last year, I expressed the hope that his colleagues would give him the support that he needed and deserved.

I am concerned that this process may end in disappointment. We have before us an opportunity for bipartisanship that we cannot afford to miss. Our international credibility is linked to our integrity with First Nations people. The minister and the Prime Minister have the opportunity to do something that they will be remembered for, and we will support them. However, as Linda Burney has put it, there is a danger that the Uluru statement will end up being remembered as a noble moment but not a turning point, and we cannot allow that to happen. At its most basic level, the denial of a constitutionally enshrined voice is a denial of the Australian instinct for a fair go. Despite all the tests it is put through, the instinct for a fair go remains one of the great defining points of our national character.

The voice is a modest request that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples be consulted about issues and policies that directly affect them: that's what it is. It is not a third chamber. It is not deliberative. It merely seeks to put a structure around what we as Australians would all regard as decency, courtesy and respect—that, where something is going to have an impact on someone else, we talk to them. That's what the voice is—nothing greater than that but also nothing less. It shouldn't be beyond our capacity to take the hand of friendship which has been reached out to us and is waiting to be shaken, because that is an act of extraordinary generosity, given the history of our great nation over the last 200-plus years.

Another element is truth. We must reflect on the truth told to us by Mabo, Wick, Timber Creek, the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, the Bringing them home report and countless other inquiries. The truth told by Prime Minister Keating in the Redfern speech was another powerful acknowledgement of the reality of our history. Until we truly acknowledge our history, we are shackled to its demons. Bit by bit, we are closing the gap between reality and the comforting fictions of colonisation and settlement—a modernity that we’ve created for ourselves. Embarking upon truth-telling will hopefully help us all towards liberation and the betterment of our nation.

We have been moving slowly beyond our era of Indigenous achievement. We are putting behind us what William Stanner called the 'cult of forgetfulness' and the 'great Australian silence'. Look at what Bruce Pascoe has done with Dark Emu and our place in this land. In this one extraordinary book, Bruce has unearthed the knowledge that we already had in our possession but chose to bury along the way. Ignorance feeds in darkness. Bruce has simply reminded us where the light switch is. With the flick of that switch a complex mosaic of ancient nations is suddenly laid out before us in light as bright as those early European explorers first saw it and recorded it.

The voice cannot be the end of the story but must be followed by truth telling and the telling of that truth must be entire. Through it we must come to grips with the realities of our colonial past that began with the arrival of the
First Fleet in 1788. Life could never be the same again. Not for those watching from the shore, the latest in this continent's unbroken line of generations stretching back over so many millennia, the world's oldest, continuing culture. How proud are we of that? Not for the new arrivals, representatives of what they thought of as the old world, sent here in fact to a world that was far older. As two worlds came together that day a series of collisions were set in train. And as a new society slowly and unsteadily rose to its feet a mosaic of ancient societies was brought to its knees. From that point, for our First Nations people it was a history shaped by brutality, a brutality sometimes borne of misunderstanding but more often it was not, a brutality that has echoed darkly through every generation that has followed. Embracing the truth isn't always easy. It is harder to remain wedded to the corrosive illusions of a history that is only part told.

The last documented massacre in Australia was the Coniston massacre in 1928. Its second-last survivor, Mr Japanangka, dancer, singer, craftsman artist, stockman, who lived for a century, only just died on 31 January. May he rest in peace. Until we have told the truth and cast aside the sort of euphemistic language that will soften a massacre into a mere incident there can be no true reconciliation. A country that is not reconciled is not truly whole and until we are whole our true potential as a nation will continue to elude us.

The liberation of truth must be followed by agreement-making, which the Uluru statement expresses as a makarrata commission. Let that great Yolngu word 'makarrata' spread from East Arnhem Land and fill an entire continent. Let everyone feel what those four syllables hold. What does it mean? Conflict resolution, making peace after a dispute, justice, the path to national treaty—agreements that acknowledge the pre-existing rights of a people in a land where sovereignty was never ceded, and we have it within us to do it.

In 1993 the Native Title Act established Indigenous Land Use Agreements. These are voluntary agreements between native title groups and other parties on the use and management of land and waters—controversial at the time, people will recall. At present there are 1,311 land use agreements that are registered by the National Native Title Tribunal and another 16 have been lodged—all of them positive for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

In 2016 Victoria began a process of devising a state level treaty with the Aboriginal peoples of the state. That same year South Australia's Labor government also began making moves towards a treaty. The ACT has been in an agreement with the Ngunawal people for co-management of Namadgi National Park since 1999. When elected Chief Minister of the Northern Territory in 2016 Michael Gunner declared that his government would 'drive public discussions on a treaty between the Territory and Aboriginal peoples'. He has appointed that great Australian Mick Dodson as Treaty Commissioner. Queensland took an important step forward just last weekend, with the tabling of the path to treaty report, outlining recommendations from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the state.

It all brings us back to makarrata. On top of everything else, those four syllables hold within them the hope of self-determination, not top-down but bottom-up change. We will never close the gap until self-determination is at the heart of what we do. There's been a great improvement: to hear governments talk about working with First Nations people not just for them. We heard that again with the Prime Minister's address today. But this must be a starting point, not the conclusion.

First Nations people and organisations under their control should be the ones setting the agenda for how services are delivered, defining the targets and taking the lead in delivering services. The current process with the peaks is a historic opportunity. The government needs to make the most of it and follow up with real investment in services, including in health and in housing. I want to acknowledge the role played by the Coalition of Peaks, led by Pat Turner, who is here with us on the floor of the chamber today.

We need to listen to the concerns of First Nations people, not least about the punitive and unfair CDP program that has caused such hurt in communities across the north. Before last year's election, Labor promised to abolish it and develop a new program with First Nations people—a program that might have some of the same features as the old CDEP, such as proper wages and wages top-up with unexpended funds being reinvested into the local communities; a program run by local community organisations. At Garma, I called for the government to adopt this approach and make it bipartisan. This, in my view, would be consistent with what First Nations people have been calling for and would be perfectly consistent with the elements of the Prime Minister's address here this morning.

We need to enable First Nations people to play their responsible role in their own destinies. We've seen among First Nations people in New Zealand, North America and Scandinavia that self-determination is at the heart of closing the gaps between indigenous and non-indigenous citizens. We see it here too. Let me mention just a few practical examples: The Glen centre, a leading drug and alcohol treatment facility on the Central Coast, and I acknowledge the health minister Greg Hunt's role in making this possible; The Arnhem Land Progress
Association, which employs a large proportion of Aboriginal people and creates jobs right across northern Australia; Waminda, which delivers culturally appropriate services for women and their children on the New South Wales South Coast; the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, which provides social, emotional, cultural and physical health services in Central Australia, improving the lives of Aboriginal people in the process; the Ceduna Koonibba Aboriginal Health Service, the success of which is underlined by the fact that 40 per cent of the people who come through the doors now are non-Aboriginal; the Durri Aboriginal Medical Service in Kempsey on the New South Wales North Coast; and, in Torres Strait, Mura Kosker Sorority is working to make families stronger and keep children safe.

Self-determination isn't just a theory. We can see it in practice. We can see it in terms of its success. And when you have successes to point towards, it encourages the overcoming of the areas where we do need to do better. We see it every day in the successful approaches delivered by Aboriginal community controlled health, housing, child support, legal and family violence prevention services across the nation. We see it in this amazing new generation of young Indigenous doctors, lawyers, managers and community developers, graduating from university and TAFE colleges and fanning out across the country to serve their people.

We have so much potential, if only we can summon the courage to take our next steps forward. To Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, I say: you have been patient, patient beyond any ordinary level of comprehension. Your tenacity and your patience have been tested and your generosity has been truly humbling. As a nation we are tantalisingly close to the cusp of something new—not the reinvention of Australia but the realisation of a greater one, an Australia that draws into its heart the generosity to heal and be healed, to honour and be honoured, to find courage to begin the process of truth-telling and national treaty-making, an Australia that is closing every one of the gaps, every one of the chasms that divide and belittle us all.

When we consider all of our achievements as a nation we should be confident that these challenges are not beyond us. Let us take them up and let our modern nation stand whole, proud and reconciled alongside this continent's many ancient ones. As that great Yolngu man, Galarrwuy Yunupingu, put it:

… at Uluru we started a fire, a fire that we hope burns bright for Australia.

Given recent months, can I say this: it is the one fire that we hope will never go out. Let us come together as a parliament and stoke its flame. I am an optimist. I believe that we can get support for a voice to parliament. It used to be said that we would never get an apology. We did get an apology and we are all the stronger for it. A voice to parliament would make our nation even stronger.

Mr PORTER (Pearce—Attorney-General, Minister for Industrial Relations and Leader of the House) (11:56):

I move:

That the House take note of the document.

Question agreed to.

Debate adjourned.

Reference to Federation Chamber

Mr PORTER (Pearce—Attorney-General, Minister for Industrial Relations and Leader of the House) (11:57):

by leave—I move:

That the order of the day be referred to the Federation Chamber for debate.

Question agreed to.

BILLS

Social Services and Other Legislation Amendment (Simplifying Income Reporting and Other Measures) Bill 2020

Second Reading

Consideration resumed of the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

to which the following amendment was moved:

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

"whilst not declining to give the bill a second reading, the House notes the Government's:

(1) stubborn defence for three years of its failed Robodebt program which frightened thousands of innocent Australians with false or inflated debts; and

(2) repeated attempts to cut the pension and social security".
Ms MURPHY (Dunkley) (12:00): I rise to speak in support of the Social Services and Other Legislation Amendment (Simplifying Income Reporting and Other Measures) Bill and also in support of the second reading amendment moved by the shadow minister. This is a debating chamber, so before I move to the remarks I want to make I'd like to respond to some of the things that have been said by members of the government so far in consideration of this legislation.

The member for Moncrieff spoke, somewhat bizarrely I think, about how Liberals believe in feeding their children. I want to make it clear that everyone believes in feeding their children, no matter which political party they're aligned to, or even if they're not aligned to a political party. But the sad reality in 2020 in Australia is that not everyone can afford to properly feed their children.

Today, news.com.au has a report that everyone should find chilling. Its cost-of-living survey revealed the 'common struggle to make ends meet'. This is what news.com.au says—and those people who have been listening to the concerns that Labor has been raising about the state of the economy and how hard it is for families and individuals to make their way will find some familiar themes:

Soaring expenses, never-ending bills, low wages and inadequate welfare payments are creating a perfect financial storm that has left thousands of Aussies struggling to get by.

That's according to news.com.au readers, who have revealed in their own words just how hard life in Australia can be in 2020. The results, according to news.com.au, are clear: many Australians are barely getting by.

Respondents to the survey were asked to select whether they felt they were on 'Struggle Street', 'barely coping', 'doing okay', or on 'Easy Street', based on how they were faring financially. About 53 per cent of respondents believe they were 'doing okay'—and I'll come back to what 'doing okay' means to these people later—only four per cent of Australians believe they were on 'Easy Street', and the rest were 'feeling the pinch', with 28 per cent on 'Struggle Street' and 14 per cent 'barely coping'.

So why did they feel they were 'barely coping'? Completely relevant to the legislation and the issues we're discussing in this debate today, this is what news.com.au reports about what Australians are saying about why they are doing it tough:

Many of those on government benefits such as the age pension, Newstart, the Disability Support Pension (DSP) and Austudy reported earning an income so meagre they were left with just a few dollars once necessary expenses like rent and bills were paid.

The member for Ryan said a number of times in his contribution to this debate: 'People should be clear—this legislation doesn't change the rate of social services.' No, it doesn't. It doesn't increase any of them, not even Newstart. Where businesses, welfare groups, community groups, and, if the member for Ryan's electorate is anything like mine, people who are struggling day to day to make ends meet are all calling for Newstart to increase. But let's just be clear about this: this bill doesn't do that.

News.com.au has quoted what people have said to that organisation. Again, I know that people on my side of the chamber, Labor members of parliament, hear this from their constituents day in, day out. I would expect that the Liberal members of parliament also hear this from their constituents, but it boggles my mind as to why they don't repeat it or aren't doing anything about it. But here's a quote from news.com.au:

I am on the DSP and it covers my mortgage and then leaves me with $90 to live on.

$90 to live on! Another said: 'Living off Austudy is impossible.' And another said:

Although I get full payment of welfare along with Rent Assistance, more than half of my pay goes to rent and bills every single fortnight. If I’m lucky, I may have $20 to myself.

And I quote from the article:

Another common theme was the impact of 'crippling' bills and other regular, unavoidable costs.

Most respondents blame government policy for cost of living pressures, followed by big business and a shaky global economy.

Too right, government policy. This federal government's policy is letting down Australians.

Interestingly, we hear in this place often from ministers and members of the government about how they have brought down electricity and gas prices—they're personally responsible for it. Well, this Aussie, quoted in news.com.au, says:

The huge increases in the electricity and gas prices have caused a nightmare for me. Also, as (I'm) recently retired and not eligible for a government pension, the land tax increases (and) council rates increases have eaten into my income severely.

Another Aussie said:
It's almost impossible to save any money—every time I get a little stashed away, in comes the electricity bill to take it off me again.

Someone else feels like they:
"are living in the most expensive country in the world," … while others reported "living pay cheque to pay cheque" and being "swamped" by bills, with "nothing left"

Another wrote: 'my gross annual income is $30,863 and (I) am barely holding it together.'

Many others share their agonising fear over how they would handle an emergency when they are living pay cheque to pay cheque: 'I can just cover bills but anything outside normal breaks me.' These aren't my words; these are the words of Aussies who are doing it tough. One might say they're having a go, but it doesn't appear to feel like they're getting a go. One reader said that she only eats every third day when her son is not with her and that she 'can't afford doctors or basic needs (and) rely on help from others ….'. This is happening in Australia in 2020. It really shouldn't be. People who are doing okay describe themselves in this way:

I am not pay cheque to pay cheque and am able to put money away for savings. However, I also do turn down events and occasions because I do not have the funds.

Another person said, 'We're "just managing to keep the bills paid" with "little to no going out," but we're "doing okay." You're right, member for Ryan; this bill doesn't do anything to increase any of the services that anyone relies on. But it should. It really should.

In my office, one of the significant inquiries that we have is from people who are relying on various Centrelink payments. Like everyone else in this place, I have constituents who have been burdened by the government's illegal, pernicious robodebt scheme. I've spoken in this place before about a single mum who came to me because she had had $30,000 garnished out of her bank account, leaving her with less than $50 to survive over a weekend looking after her children. I've also mentioned a first-time young mother who had a wrongful debt raised against her by the robodebt system that she did not owe—not once, but twice. We had to make inquiries and representations to get it waived the second time. Just last week a constituent contacted my office regarding a debt that had been levied against them by Centrelink or—somewhat ironically named—Services Australia, as it's now known. We asked for an investigation.

The local Services Australia—I would say at this point the people working there are terrific. They are working as hard as they can to do the best job they can under really difficult circumstances. These criticisms are not about people who work at government services. They are about the way this federal government runs, or runs down, those services. So I was contacted last week in my office by someone who'd a debt raised against them. The local Services Australia office did an investigation, and, low and behold, it was an incorrect debt. Because she had received a one-off commission payment from some work that she'd done, it had been averaged over the financial year—which is what the algorithm of robodebt does—and she had been levied a debt that she had been told to repay.

Notwithstanding what we now know, that the government knows, that this scheme is illegal, and notwithstanding that we know that serious numbers of people have died after receiving a robodebt notice—some 2,000 people—notwithstanding that we know, through Senate estimates, that the robodebt scheme led the department to take money from 73 estates of people who were dead—amounting to some 225,000 people—notwithstanding all of that, people are still being lumped with debts that they don't owe. It is still happening—why? Why won't the ministers just acknowledge that this shouldn't be happening?

On behalf of my electorate, I am calling for people who have paid a robodebt to get in touch with Gordon Legal and the class action that is happening, because we know that most Australians are good people. They understand that if a government says something to them, they should have faith in the government that the government is correct. So many people have received a robodebt notice and have paid it. Why wouldn't you, if you're a normal Australian who believes and trusts in our system of government? But now we know that, for thousands and thousands of people, that robodebt system wasn't correct. If you're someone that lives in my electorate and you've paid a robodebt and you have concerns—contact my office. We will help you. We will put you forward to see whether or not you can be part of that class action. I'm calling on the government, like many of my Labor colleagues, to just admit the mistake and pay back people the money that they're owed.

Very recently in my electorate, I've also had people come to talk about what seems to be an emerging administrative problem. These are people who have been on Newstart and have applied to be on the disability support pension and are entitled to go on the disability support pension because they have a disability. I have a constituent who applied in January 2019 and only just was transferred to the DSP last week. These are people who can't work because of their disability. I have another constituent who also applied over 12 months ago and was only just granted at the end of the last month. The arrears owed were over $10,000—such a substantial amount
that it had to be paid over a fortnight. In my electorate, people from St Vincent de Paul have come and spoken to me a number of times about the burden that the inadequate state of Newstart is putting on these organisations looking after people in need in my electorate. It's not good enough.

This legislation is welcome. Hopefully, it will make some change. We support this legislation. But, like other Labor colleagues, I'm concerned about this government's capacity to actually role out an IT system and to make sure that it benefits vulnerable people and doesn't just cause them further distress.

We know that this government has a pretty bad record of rolling out IT systems. The My Health Record system, which, in my personal opinion, is a terrific idea and should be something that Australians can rely on—this government has spent almost $2 billion on this e-health scheme, and we have doctors and patients refusing to use it because of legitimate privacy concerns, including breaches. I know from my personal experience, as someone that sees a range of medical professionals and has regular tests, that it's not working as it should, because people aren't uploading the records to it. They aren't confident in the system. Radiology reports aren't being uploaded. Blood tests aren't being uploaded. It is something that should make life so much better for patients in the system, but because people don't trust this government to roll things out properly, it is not fulfilling its potential. I really hope that this legislation does make life better for people that rely on services. But we will wait and see, and we will be vigilant.

I also want to express, in my closing remarks, my profound disappointment that I was in the chamber and a minister of the Crown yelled out at opposition backbenchers and called either me or someone else a goose. We deserve better than that. The Australian public deserves better than that. That's not how you behave when you're a minister. What you actually do is administer a system that makes life better for Australians, and you act like a mature adult, not a child.

Ms PAYNE (Canberra) (12:15): I rise today to speak on the Social Services and Other Legislation Amendment (Simplifying Income Reporting and Other Measures) Bill 2020, and I want to echo the words of my Labor colleagues—our shadow minister, the member for Barton; the member for Maribyrnong; and the member for Dunkley—in the great speeches they've given on this bill this morning.

Labor supports this bill, as we support any measures that will make the social security system easier and more accurate for those who interact with it. This bill will change the way income is reported to Centrelink so that it is reported when a person is paid, not when the income is earned, which will make reporting more accurate. The bill will also enable Centrelink to use Single Touch Payroll information from the ATO to prefill income for Centrelink reporting. The bill will not automate the reporting. Individuals will still be required to check and certify income that is prefilled using the Single Touch Payroll system. These are good changes that, for the majority of payment recipients, should make life easier and avoid under- and overpayments.

But, while we support this, we do have questions. This government has an appalling track record on these sorts of digitisation projects. It has run down Centrelink to the bone, which makes it incredibly difficult for them to administer services in the way they should be administered. We have seen people waiting for hours on the phone, people hanging up, people giving up on trying to get answers to their questions and people waiting months and months just to receive the payments they are eligible for. The worst example is the disgusting robodebt scheme, where hundreds of thousands of Australians who had done the right thing and reported their income correctly were issued debts that were generated simply by an algorithm and, probably most appalling, the onus was put on those recipients to prove that they didn't have that debt. This has of course caused immense harm to people. Some of these amounts related to debts that were supposedly years old. We've all seen in our electorates people who have had shocking experiences. The member for Dunkley was just talking about some of those. So it's really hard to trust this government to get this right. I also want to second what the member for Maribyrnong called for yesterday: that any debts based solely on that algorithm be refunded.

What is at the root of these problems is government's inherent lack of respect for anyone who receives social security and, in fact, for the system itself and the vital role it has played and should play in this country in alleviating poverty and inequality. It in fact goes further than that. They want to attack, at every opportunity, people who receive these payments and downgrade the role of that system as it's seen by the Australian people. It is a system that is majorly failing people who rely on it. Newstart allowance is woefully inadequate, and the only people who won't accept that is this government. We've even had a minister say that if we increase Newstart the money will go into the hands of drug dealers. I think that just shows the incredibly out-of-touch, disrespectful and disgraceful attitudes within this government. The rates of Newstart speak for themselves, and I just want to get them on the record, yet again, because the message doesn't seem to be getting through. Newstart allowance for a single person is $559 per fortnight. That's $280 a week, or around $40 a day. Anyone who pays rent, buys groceries or tries to run a car or even buy bus tickets knows that that is not enough to live on in this country, with rising prices. It's just not. The number speaks for itself.
The other point I want to talk about is the income test on Newstart Allowance, which is also woefully out of touch with the current job market and current prices in Australia. This bill deals with income reporting, but it's not addressing the real problem, which is that when you're on Newstart and you have earned $104 in a fortnight your payment begins to be reduced by 50 cents in the dollar—$104! That's barely one shift. That is not in touch with our current job market. It's not enabling people to live. Their payments are cut as soon as they earn the most meagre amount of money. When you have earned $254 in a fortnight, your payment begins to be reduced by 60 cents in the dollar, until it's gone. This is just inadequate. These are the issues that government needs to be looking at right now. We welcome the changes in this bill, but they are tweaking at the edges of a system that is inherently failing Australians.

I want to use this opportunity to talk about someone from Canberra I met recently. Their situation illustrates how these payments are impossible to live on. I recently spent a day with Financial Counselling Australia's A Day in the Life program, which enabled me to spend a day with financial counsellors who provide a not-for-profit service to people dealing with problems of debt and are getting themselves out of those issues. It is an incredible service they provide. They are at the coalface of dealing with the impacts of this inadequate system and the structural imbalance in our society that is just stacked up against the poor in every way. It is hard to see how people can get through life without a decent safety net to rely on, given some of the challenges that are inherent in the way our economy and our society work.

I spent the day with Care Inc here in Canberra. I want to thank their director, Carmel Franklin, and all the counsellors I spent time with that day. I got to meet one of their clients, whose name I won't use. It was great to actually go step by step through what his experience had been. This was a man who had worked hard all his life and he was battling some serious mental health issues and also a physical injury of an ongoing nature. When he lost someone very close to him, this came to a head. He found he was unable to work anymore and went onto Newstart Allowance. He was doing his best to manage his bills—just normal bills.

One in particular that had become a problem for him was his internet and phone bill—just basic things. The first thing the counsellor worked on with him was budgeting, but this was not an issue, because he was already budgeting so carefully. Another thing that this government doesn't realise is that people trying to live on Newstart have to be incredibly resourceful and disciplined just to get by on that. They are not enjoying life. They are not buying drugs. They are skimping to get the bare minimum, which he was doing. He had some bills come up and he took on a payday loan, which is another thing that, frankly, should not be legal in this country, in my view. These are the loans where you can get some money quickly but you face absolutely exorbitant and unfair interest rates that just drive people into absolute financial crisis.

His debt was growing and growing and they were trying to help him with that. Eventually, two things meant he was able to get back on his feet, as he put it. First, as a long-term unemployed person he was allowed early access to his superannuation, when he got to six months on unemployment. That is a double-edged sword really. He needed that money, but it is basically robbing his future self of something that he had built up. You are allowed to access up to $10,000. But what many don't realise is that it has a tax rate of 22 per cent. So, he lost almost $2,000 of his superannuation tax.

To solve his problems, he took out this meagre amount of money, which he really should have been continuing to invest for his future, and was able to settle his debts. But the thing that really made a difference for him was that, after many months of proving the injury and the mental illness issues that I mentioned, he became eligible for the disability support pension, which, of course, is a higher rate than Newstart. That meant that, as he said, after meeting all the bare essentials he had $30 a fortnight to enjoy. I think those numbers speak for themselves.

As the counsellor said, the problem is not people's ability to budget. It is not always people getting into payday loans or any of these other disgraceful things that go on. It is the fact that people cannot live on these payments. I don't know how much longer we need to keep saying that to this government. So many people are saying it, and those opposite are just deaf to the fact that people are struggling so hard in this country.

We are a rich country. We should treat people better than that. One in six Australian children are living in poverty. That's not good enough. The government needs to acknowledge that these payments are too low. It could do so much for so many people by reviewing and increasing them, by looking at the interactions of Newstart with the job market and by looking at those income tests that I mentioned, which are absolutely ridiculous by today's standards. I again call on the government to please listen to the struggling people in your electorates and increase Newstart.

Mr GEORGANAS (Adelaide) (12:26): I take pleasure in speaking on this particular bill, the Social Services and Other Legislation Amendment (Simplifying Income Reporting and Other Measures) Bill 2020, but perhaps it should have a very different title. As we heard the member for Maribyrnong say earlier, perhaps it should be
called 'trying to fix our robodebt mess', 'trying to fix our robodebt stuff-up', or perhaps 'trying to fix an IT implementation that went badly wrong and took money off innocent Australians who didn't owe any money'.

We will be examining the detail of this particular bill very closely and putting the government on notice to get the implementation of the changes correct this time, unlike with the robodebt implementation, which saw many, many Australians pay money when they didn't have to. We're very concerned at the very high risk of stuffing up the implementation of these changes once again. As I said, given that this government stuffed up robodebt and has run down Centrelink services to the point where pensioners are waiting for months to get the pension, the last thing we want to see is people having their payments cut off or being saddled with unfair debts because Centrelink failed to manage this properly.

If people have questions, they should not be left waiting on the phone for hours. All of us in this House—and, I'm sure, in the other place as well—are run by constituents who have been left on the phone for hours because Centrelink had been cut right down when it comes to staff; it's been run into the ground. The simple fact is that the government doesn't care about people on social security payments. Whether it be pensioners, the unemployed or those with a disability, those opposite do not care. You can see that they don't care from the actions that they've taken.

Since they've held the reins of government, they've tried to cut the pension on a number of occasions. At every single budget they've tried to cut the pension. We hear them say that the best friend that pensioners have is the coalition government. Well, that is absolute rubbish! If you look at the track record of this coalition government, cutting the pension is in its DNA, and the actions of those opposite have proved it. They have tried to cut the pension and increase the pension age to 70 in every single budget, making Australians who have worked all their lives and paid their taxes work longer.

In the 2014 budget they tried to cut the pension indexation, a cut that would have meant pensioners would be forced to live on $80 less a week. This unfair cut would have ripped $23 billion from the pockets of every single pensioner in Australia. Again, in the 2014 budget they cut $1 billion from pensioner concessions, a support designed to help pensioners with the cost of living. How mean and cruel spirited. The people that earn the least amount in our society get the cuts—an $80 cut.

In that same 2014 budget they axed the $900 seniors supplement to self-funded retirees receiving the Commonwealth seniors health card. The Liberals tried to reset the deeming rate threshold in 2014, a cut that would have seen 500,000 part-pensioners made worse off. Then they come in here today and spout this nonsense that the coalition and the Liberal government is the best friend that pensioners have.

In 2015 they did a deal with the Greens to cut the pensions for around 370,000 pensioners by as much as $12,000 a year by changing the pension assets test. If you were a pensioner and you'd saved a bit and had a bit on the side, they lowered the rate of the assets test, meaning that you lost money in your pensions.

In the 2016 budget they tried to cut the pension to around 190,000 pensioners, as part of a plan to limit overseas travel to pensioners to six weeks. We saw the same legislation go through this House before Christmas. How mean to tell a pensioner, who has worked all their life, who has paid their taxes, who has contributed to the building of this nation, that you're only allowed to go overseas for six weeks, no longer, otherwise you get cut off and you have to reapply for your pension. Many people have the absolute right in their pension, in their old age, when they've retired, to go wherever they want for as long as they like. And no-one has the right to tell them that they're not allowed to travel or that they have a time limit on their travel. No-one has that right to tell someone who's worked their entire life, paid their taxes, helped build this country, that they cannot go overseas for a certain period of time. This is just another way to try and cut pensioners' savings, cut pensioners' income, while they give to the big end of town. They're quite happy to spout that and to carry on about it.

These figures are fact. These are things that this government tried to do, so I'm very concerned about this particular bill as well. I've got to say that what we saw with the robodebt disaster was an absolute disaster. Money was taken away from people that didn't owe money. For many constituents that came to see me in my electorate office, we wrote to the minister and asked them to investigate. They went to the appeals and they were deemed not to have owed the amount of money that they were told they had to pay. In fact, we did some calculations, and 80 per cent of people who came to see me in my office either were given money back or had that debt dropped. What about the thousands that paid that money and haven't got it back, or perhaps believe that the government, because it's a letter from the government, from Centrelink which is a government agency, is correct? We have no confidence in this government when it comes to dealing with pensioners and social security.

We saw, as I said, the robodebt scheme unleash this faulty algorithm against the social security recipients who, even if they reported their income 100 per cent correctly, were slapped with debts in the thousands.
This bill, which is named the Social Services and Other Legislation Amendment (Simplifying Income Reporting and Other Measures) Bill 2020, should quite simply have its name as 'Fixing up the robodebt stuff-up that this government didn't have the ability to admit to'. They didn't have the ability to take responsibility and say, 'We were wrong' and drop it. We have been dealing with for at least that two years, and it has been raised in this place continuously.

As I said, we have absolutely no confidence. We'll be watching this bill, scrutinising it, and ensuring that when it goes to the Senate there is a real eye kept on it to make sure that they don't stuff it up again.

Mr LITTLEPROUD (Maranoa—Minister for Agriculture, Drought and Emergency Management and Deputy Leader of the National Party) (12:34): Firstly, I would like to thank those members who have contributed to this debate. This bill is the next step in addressing the issues of unintended multiple superannuation accounts by preventing Australians from being forced into having multiple accounts due to their enterprise bargaining agreement or similar determination. This bill will improve outcomes for members by providing a choice of funds across the superannuation industry. The bill will commence on 1 July 2020. I commend the bill to the House.

The SPEAKER: The original question was that this bill be now read a second time. To this the honourable member for Barton has moved as an amendment that all words after 'That' be omitted with a view to substituting other words. The immediate question before the House is that the amendment moved by the member for Barton be agreed to.

The House divided. [12:39]

(The Speaker—Hon. Tony Smith)

Ayes ......................65
Noes ......................75
Majority ...............10

AYES

Albanese, AN
Bandt, AP
Bowen, CE
Burns, J
Butler, TM
Chalmers, JE
Clare, JD
Coker, EA
Conroy, PM
Elliot, MJ
Freelander, MR
Gorman, P
Hayes, CP
Husic, EN
Kearney, G
Keogh, MJ
King, CF
Leigh, AK
McBride, EM
Mitchell, RG
Murphy, PJ
O'Connor, BPJ
Owens, JA
Perrett, GD
Plibersek, TJ
Rowland, MA
Smith, DPB
Stanley, AM (teller)
Templeman, SR
Thwaites, KL
Watts, TG
Wilkie, AD
Zappia, A

Aly, A
Bird, SL
Burke, AS
Butler, MC
Byrne, AM
Champion, ND
Claydon, SC
Collins, JM
Dick, MD
Fitzgibbon, JA
Georganas, S
Gosling, LJ
Hill, JC
Jones, SP
Kelly, MJ
Khalil, P
King, MMH
Marles, RD
Mitchell, BK
Munino, D
Neumann, SK
O'Neil, CE
Payne, AE
Phillips, FE
Rishworth, AL
Ryan, JC (teller)
Snowdon, WE
Swanson, MJ
Thistlethwaite, MJ
Vamvakinou, M
Wells, AS
Wilson, JH

NOES

Alexander, JG
Andrews, KJ
Archer, BK

Allen, K
Andrews, KL
Bell, AM
NOES

Broadbent, RE
Christensen, GR
Connelly, V
Drum, DK (teller)
Entsch, WG
Fletcher, PW
Frydenberg, JA
Gillespie, DA
Haines, H
Hastie, AW
Hogan, KJ
Hunt, GA
Joyce, BT
Laming, A
Leeson, J
Littleproud, D
Marino, NB
McCormack, MF
McVeigh, JJ
O’Brien, LS
O’Dowd, KD
Pearce, GB
Porter, CC
Ramsey, RE (teller)
Sharkie, RCC
Simmonds, J
Stevens, J
Taylor, AJ
Thompson, P
van Manen, AJ
Wallace, AB
Wicks, LE
Wilson, TR
Wyatt, KG
Zimmerman, T

Buchholz, S
Conaghan, PJ
Coulton, M
Dutton, PC
Evans, TM
Flint, NJ
Gee, AR
Goodenough, IR
Hammond, CM
Hawke, AG
Howarth, LR
Irons, SJ
Kelly, C
Landry, ML
Ley, SP
Liu, G
Martin, FB
McIntosh, MI
Morrison, SJ
O'Brien, T
Pasin, A
Pitt, KJ
Price, ML
Robert, SR
Sharma, DN
Steggall, Z
Sukkar, MS
Tudge, AE
Vasta, RX
Wilson, RJ
Wood, JP
Young, T

Question negatived.
Original question agreed to.
Bill read a second time.
Message from the Governor-General recommending appropriation announced.

Third Reading

Mr LITTLEPROUD (Maranoa—Minister for Agriculture, Drought and Emergency Management and Deputy Leader of the National Party) (12:45): by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

Export Control Bill 2019

Export Control (Consequential Amendments and Transitional Provisions) Bill 2019

Export Charges (Imposition—Customs) Amendment Bill 2019

Export Charges (Imposition—Excise) Amendment Bill 2019

Export Charges (Imposition—General) Amendment Bill 2019

Second Reading

Cognate debate.
Consideration resumed of the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr FITZGIBBON (Hunter) (12:46): The Export Control Bill 2019 is not a controversial bill, but it's an important bill because it goes very much to our capacity to access export markets. It's a great shame that it's taken
the government about five years to get around to it—a point I might return to—but we welcome it just the same. To give members an opportunity to speak more broadly about agricultural issues, because there is lots to talk about, I take this opportunity to move the second reading amendment as circulated in my name:

That all 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 condemns the Government for its lack of a comprehensive plan for agricultural exports, including a plan for ensuring Australian agriculture will reach $100 billion in farm-gate value by 2030".

For those of us in positions of responsibility, as we all are in this place, there's a fine line between talking about the real challenges an industry faces without talking it down. It's always a very important balance. The recent bushfires provided us with a very real example of that. We don't want to be telling our markets, including our export markets, that we've lost our capacity to produce, because those markets might temporarily go elsewhere and never be secured again in the future, but it is necessary to say that the agriculture sector in Australia is in real trouble. In recent times, it's faced the worst drought in our history, and despite the very welcome recent drenching rains in many parts of our country that drought very much remains with us still.

The recent bushfires have had a devastating impact on so many on the land—our growers and producers. The bushfire season has not yet come to an end, and there is a significant risk that those events might not be over. We all hope and pray that they are, but we just don't know. Of course, there will be future bushfire seasons too, and we need to be alert to the need to better adapt to be ready for those fires. Certainly, my own electorate is an example of the impact on our growers, with vigneron having lost significant yield to smoke taint. I thank the minister at the table for engaging with me on this issue and assisting me as best he can to ensure that those vigneron are given every bit of government assistance that can be secured and that we can muster.

We're facing trade wars. We've grown the hope of our agriculture sector off the back of our export markets, and rightly so, but we're living in a very unusual—that might be a good way of putting it—world. Globally, politics have changed significantly. In fact, the shift has been tectonic, and it's going to impact on our major markets. We've seen the tensions between the United States and China on trade. I used to say that when the United States sneezes we catch a cold. I think, due now to the coronavirus, we're starting to learn just how dependent we are on the economy of China. They are changing times and they are all very challenging.

We live with ongoing biosecurity threats and, again, the coronavirus makes us more alert to that. That threat will continue to hang over the heads of our growers and producers. Volumes are down, yields are down and the national herd is at an historic low, and that will take a lengthy rebuilding phase to get us back on track. The sector is enormously challenged by a changing climate, not just drought but beyond that, and all the impacts that a changing climate is having and all the demands it will put on resource allocation.

We are the driest inhabited continent in the world, and we're becoming hotter and drier. Forget the argument about what's causing it. We have to accept that to be a fact, and we have to be ready for that and adapt to it. And our soil resources, while of high quality in expansive areas, are very limited. When you take it as a proportion of our total land mass, our natural soil resources are limited. We have to have a serious debate in this place, in the wake of recent events, about the misallocation of those resources and how we use market based mechanisms to ensure that those resources are allocated to the areas where they secure the highest value return, both for our producers and growers but also for the nation—the people who, in the end, own those natural resources.

Before all these calamities came belong, productivity had already flatlined for around a decade. Profitability has been patchy or, worse, low for a long, long time. According to the ABS, around 59 per cent of our farm entities have turnovers—not profit—of $200,000 or less. Still, 80 per cent of the production or output of our farm sector comes from 20 per cent of the firms. If that is not a sign that some significant restructuring is required in the sector, I don't know what is. Members should reflect on that: 80 per cent of the output from 20 per cent of the firms. It sounds somewhat inefficient, and it does have implications for a natural resource allocation.

Our rate of innovation is poor and has been for a long time. We can often prove ourselves to be quite good at research but we are very poor at both innovation and extension—that capacity to get innovation down onto the farm, inside the farm gate and into the production system. We desperately need to address that. We made it clear, on this side of the House, prior to the election that if we were to be elected we would be heavily revisiting the architecture around the rural RDC's, the research and development corporations. We're proud of the current architecture because it was a Labor initiative, under John Kerin, probably 30 years ago.

But that's the point; it was a long time ago. I've made the point that the world has changed significantly, the opportunities and challenges for the sector have changed significantly and so too should our approach to research and development. Research and development extension dollars are too finite, too scarce, to be wasting one dollar
of any of it, and we need to make sure that that money is spent effectively and efficiently and in a way that provides outcomes for our farm sector.

We've got to start talking more about our forestry and fisheries industries. Fisheries, our seafood industry, are also impacted by drought. In the first instance, it sounds counterintuitive to people who might be listening to the debate, but drought has enormous impacts on the quality of our marine environment and our estuaries, and the flushing of the estuaries aren't present et cetera. You come to realise that the impact can be very, very significant. As I understand it, people in the fisheries sectors aren't eligible for the farm household allowance, for example.

Mr Littleproud: They are, but only wild catch.

Mr FITZGIBBON: Only wild catch. It is something I would ask the minister to reflect on. There might be some improvements capable of being made there. That reminds me that many in the fishing industry have been impacted by the fires too and some are still employed but not being paid. It's an area that the minister might want to reflect on and have a look at as well.

Obviously, the forestry industry has also been impacted by the fires in a very, very significant way. We already had a product supply problem in this country. We've all talked for too long about growing a billion trees. We now need to grow, I think, two billion if we are to make up for the shortfall due to the loss from the fires. I'm very pleased to see Premier Daniel Andrews in Victoria now reflecting on his decision to phase out the hardwood forest industry. That decision was, I thought, a poor one originally and it is a particularly poor one now in light of the resource which has been lost through the fires.

Forestry and fisheries, for some very strange reason, were left out and excluded from the government's 2015 white paper—that now discredited 2015 white paper, which I may return to. It is fair to say that, despite all the significant issues I've raised, the government, after more than six years now in office, has no overarching strategic plan for the agriculture sector. I spoke to a leader of one of the farm groups recently—I won't mention the group or the name. I challenged him to name one significant thing, one big policy area, where the government has provided some advantage for his industry, and, unsurprisingly, he could not. The white paper was much anticipated. According to the member for New England, it was going to change the very face of the agriculture sector. Expectations rose and rose and rose, because it took forever—from the 2013 election through to sometime in 2015—for the white paper to finally arrive, only to leave everyone deflated. It was not what the sector had been promised, and there was widespread disappointment within the sector.

The NFF has a thing called the 2030 Roadmap. In fact, there are two of them—I didn't realise that until today—which basically seem to say the same thing. I'll work that out some time soon. It's a fine document. It's a high-level document, stating, largely, the obvious. The NFF have rightly set themselves some aspirations out to 2030. They have an ambition to grow the industry to $100 billion in value by 2030. That's something that we've all supported. In fact, I was with the minister and made a contribution to the document, in the foreword, when it was released.

We all think it's a wonderful idea to grow the value of the industry to $100 billion. But, having signed up to the prospect, the government needs to demonstrate how it intends to get the sector there—remembering that, after all the calamities we've recently faced, we are going backwards. The starting point was, I think, $60 billion, and we're not going to $100 billion; we're going backwards. That's not all the government's fault—as I said, this was the result of recent disaster events—but the government does need to demonstrate that it has a strategic plan to reach $100 billion. It just can't keep saying, every time it talks about agriculture, that it's backing the National Farmers Federation plan.

That's not a policy; that's a cop-out. That's laziness. That's a government too interested in populism and grants here and there to win votes in National Party electorates but not interested in the hard work of policy—taking on the challenges in the land sector, working out what we're going to do about our changing climate, what we're going to do about natural resource allocation, how we're going to lift productivity, how we're going to lift profitability and how we're going to make sure the farm sector participates more in the carbon economy. These are the hard things that take work. How are we going to make them more resilient in the face of drought. The minister will say, 'We've got our Future Drought Fund of $100 million a year.' It won't be enough. While I have great confidence in Brent Finlay, who's giving guidance to the government on how that money might be spent, I do have concerns that in the end it will be divvied up, pretty evenly and proportionately amongst the states to keep everyone happy. That won't, in the end, keep everyone happy, because it won't deliver the outcomes the sector so desperately needs.

We do have to reflect hard on the extent to which we can continue to meet our aspirations on export markets. Both major political parties in this place can claim credit for free trade agreements. They're not full replacements for multilateral arrangements, but we find ourselves in a global environment in which they are the best we can
achieve. We, on both sides of this House, have an equal commitment to making sure our growers, producers, fishers and others have fair access in some of these enormous Asian markets in particular.

From time to time we should ask ourselves whether we can just continue to increase the volumes we produce, given all the challenges I've talked about, particularly relating to climate and natural resources. We currently grow enough food to feed twice as many people as we have here in Australia; so we're exporting two-thirds of everything we produce. But how long can we keep growing that? It is alright to open the markets, which, by the way, aren't necessarily opening because of ongoing restrictions in non-tariff barriers—some of which are in part addressed in this bill today—but can we produce the goods? Can we continue to grow our product? Are we sufficiently embracing innovation to give us the capacity to grow and produce more? Are we sufficiently talking about innovation around GMOs, for example? That's an important area in which we're still having an ongoing debate in this country and where there are significant differences in this country. Without fully embracing plant breeding techniques, we will not be able to increase our volumes. We will not be able to fill those opportunities we've found for ourselves on export markets.

Again, we have to increase volumes in the face of diminishing natural resources and a more challenging climate. These are big challenges, but where is the discussion about these in the cabinet? I don't hear about them. I don't read about them in the newspaper. It's not good enough to say, 'We're backing the National Farmers Federation document,' and, 'We have secured free trade agreements.' That doesn't make for profitability in the agriculture sector. If you accept that our capacity to increase volumes is limited, then we have to make sure those natural resources are chasing value—that is, niche, premium products. These things are happening, of course, in our economy, but are not widespread, and government is not providing the sort of strategic guidance to encourage people to do so, nor is government encouraging the foreign investment we will require to build the infrastructure we need to take up these opportunities.

I have said it in here too many times before, I suppose, but the current minister for climate change was the key author in a document, backed by the ANZ Bank, which said that to grow to our aspirations by 2050 we needed something like $600 billion of capital investment. As a country of 25 million and therefore 25 million savers, axiomatically we are going to have to have, and continue to have, a heavy reliance on foreign investment. That foreign investment will need to grow, not decline.

The only way we take the Australian people with us on that question—because we all know in this place that there are sensitivities in our community about foreign investment, particularly investment coming from Asia; it seemed it was okay when it was coming from the UK, Canada, the United States and New Zealand, but people are concerned about an over-reliance on Asian foreign investment—and the only way we will be successful in reassuring people that they need not have concerns about that is if we say it together. I appeal to people in this place—and we're not all from One Nation—to stop attempting to build political capital at the expense of those in our agriculture sector who will need significant foreign investment if they are going to make their ventures as successful as they would like them to be.

Guidance is important. When you're talking about foreign investment, investors want to know that the government in the country they are considering is stable—and we haven't had much of that of late. They want to know that the government is focused on making us look like a country where sovereign risk is very low. We need a government that is not lowering thresholds as a signal to our investors that we're not open for business but indeed sending the right messages—that we are open for business, that we need their investment, that we welcome their investment and that the door is well and truly open for them.

But that's not happening. It is not happening in this parliament, it didn't happen in the last parliament and it didn't happen in the parliament before that. Indeed, for much of that time we had a minister, in the member for New England, who was far more interested in using the portfolio to further the aspirations of the National Party than he was in furthering the aspirations of the nation. The white paper I spoke about is exhibit A—a grab bag of initiatives that press every political button out there in rural Australia. But none of those buttons were effective. Most of them no longer exist, because they failed. Multi-peril crop insurance is a perfect example. Every second farmer thinks that the whole world would be just fine if he had multi-peril crop insurance or some form of risk based protection.

But it's a difficult issue. It's a complex issue. The white paper included rebates to farmers to help them secure the consultancies they needed to measure their base risk on their farms. That failed. There were grants for cooperatives. It's good to see the member for Kennedy here. He'd be a fan of cooperatives—as are we all are, as a matter of principle.

Mr Katter: There are none left!
Mr FITZGIBBON: There are none left, he says. The member for New England was going to have a cooperative here, there and everywhere—remember? That was a key element in the white paper, but it didn't happen either. That's history. And the list is long—a very, very disappointing document. Then of course he was going to build dams—100 of them, I think. There was going to be dam here, a dam there, a dam everywhere. Here we are, their seventh year in office, and not a dam to be found—not one.

Ms Landry: Because the state governments won't build them.

Mr FITZGIBBON: I'll take the interjection from the member for Capricornia, because it is so predictable. When things are going well, this government's out there taking all the glory: 'Aren't we amazing!' But when things are going bad: 'It's the states.'

Mr Josh Wilson: Or Labor.

Mr FITZGIBBON: Or Labor. I thank the member for Fremantle. Yes, or Labor: 'Labor, Labor, Labor' was the refrain from the member for New England. Well, I have a message for the Prime Minister and for the member for New England, the member for Riverina, and the member for Maranoa, the current Minister for Agriculture, who I have a deal of respect for. Of course, when he lost his job, temporarily, but has come back now after the loss of Minister McKenzie. He lost his job because he was departing from the National Party textbook. He was thinking too much! He was talking about climate change. He was tough on the live sheep exporters. He was talking about building resilience in our farming communities. In the National Party room they said, 'What! We don't talk about that. What about our preselectors over the other side of the Great Dividing Range? What are they going to say about all that?' So, he was history. But given the dearth of talent on the other side, he is back. I actually welcome him back, because what a disaster it would have been to get the member for New England's hands all over the agriculture portfolio again—a portfolio, by the way, that lost its departmental secretary. Why? Because the member for New England doctored his Hansard, got found out. And when the secretary insisted upon his tidying it up because his professional public servants were being drawn into the mire—just because Mr Grimes stood up to the member for New England—he lost his job. An outstanding well-regarded public servant lost his job because the member for New England doctored his Hansard, wouldn't correct it, wouldn't fess up, and the rest is history. And, by the way, he doctored his Hansard because he misled the House, and he's never corrected that. The mislead on farmhouse household stands in the parliamentary Hansard. Members will recall: 'Oh, you don't have to apply for it, you just get. You just sign up and it's magically in the bank account,' which, of course, was patently untrue.

But the point I was going to was the message to the Prime Minister. The people are onto them. You can't try to take hold of an issue as the Prime Minister tried to do on drought. When he came to the position, he said farmers and the drought would be his priority. But when it got too hard, when he realised that doing something meaningful on drought took some tough decisions and some conviction and courage of leadership, he said, 'It's all a matter for the states.' Remember that back in 2002 a historic thing happened—a new intergovernmental agreement on drought began, was signed, and that was the beginning of drought reform. But when the current government came to office in 2013, the first thing the member for New England did was abolish the COAG committee charged with progressing the reform. And here we are. We still don't have a drought policy. We are still in the worst drought in history. We do not have an overarching strategic drought policy, still. We have a loan here and a loan there and a grant here and all these things, but there is no plan.

Mr Katter: Hear, hear, absolutely right.

Mr FITZGIBBON: I thank the member for Kennedy for confirming my point. There is no overarching plan and there are no dams. There is not much water infrastructure at all, actually. Lots of loans—this is a government that is obsessed with loans. Concessional loans just seem to be the answer for everything. We have seen that most recently with the bushfires.

Ms Swanson: And they've rorted the water.

Mr FITZGIBBON: I thank the member for Paterson for reminding me that they rorted the water grants. But small businesses everywhere, including in my electorate, are telling me that more debt is not the answer to their problems. The Leader of the Opposition was down in Batemans Bay with my colleagues last week, and I could see that he came back shell-shocked by the impact on small business people who just completely lost their businesses. Their customers have just disappeared, or they have been without power for a week or two and just can't deliver for their customers. Telling them that they should go and get a loan is a slap in the face, and we have seen how good this government is at administering loans. I think the small business drought loans were announced in November and maybe opened in January—or, worse than that, it might have been late January. That's before small businesses could even make applications for the loans. And it will be interesting to see, when Senate estimates comes around, how popular they have been and how difficult people have found it to apply for them. I
suspect that whatever's happened to the small business drought loans will be repeated with the small business bushfire loans. You can be pretty certain about that.

This failure to grow the agricultural sector is having impacts on our regional economies, because they are so dependent on them. Out there in the regions, two things are really important to us—lots of things are very important to us, the visitor economy amongst them, particularly in the Hunter region—the farm sector and the mining sector. I stand in this place as a proud supporter of both of them. I want both of those sectors to be very, very strong for many, many decades to come, as I know they will be, as Asia demands our food and fibre and our coal product. That will be a good thing for Australia. There doesn't have to be a clash between the two. We can have a grand compact to make sure they thrive alongside one another.

In Queensland, the gas companies have paid our farmers around $500 million in the last 10 years for the right to access their land to extract coal-seam gas. It's a good thing for the gas companies, it's a good thing for the economy, it's a good thing for consumers and it's a good thing for our farmers. So there are good things we can do together. But we need some strategic guidance from government. We need a plan from government. We need some leadership from government. We don't want a government that just constantly cites the plan of the National Farmers Federation.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Vasta): Is the amendment seconded?

Mr Josh Wilson: The amendment is seconded and I reserve my right to speak.

Dr McVEIGH (Groom) (13:16): This House full well knows that agriculture is a key part of the Australian economy, with around two-thirds of our agricultural produce exported each year, generating over $50 billion in revenue in 2018-19 from our trading partners. The importance of that is jobs in regional Australia and economic activity in regional Australia, including in my electorate of Groom.

Whilst the member for Hunter appeared to not really address this bill at all, he did, quite rightly, in his background note that agriculture in many parts of the country has had a significant challenge of late—drought, floods, bushfire, you name it. Discussions about climate and other sorts of issues continue, but we must remain positive about the focus and the future of agriculture. We must ensure that we remain well regarded globally for the quality and integrity of our produce, and we must ensure that we continue to grow that quality and improve our reputation for safe and high-quality food and fibre products.

The existing legislative framework for ensuring that, for inspection and certification of our export produce, was developed over 36 years ago, including 20 acts and more than 40 legislative instruments. Our government undertook a review in 2015 to ensure that farmers and exporters were supported by contemporary and efficient legislation and that our trading partners continued to have confidence in our produce, because we must be competitive. Based on broad stakeholder feedback, we decided to improve the legislative framework for better support for exporters and facilitating trade now and into the future.

No significant changes to export policy or the baseline of regulation that ensures that integrity that I referred to will be made as a result of the implementation of the new legislative framework. The bill will provide a more consistent and clear framework that is responsive to contemporary and emerging international trade issues in a very clear and modern manner, in so doing enhancing Australia's capacity to gain, maintain and grow global market access for our exports into the future.

This streamlining and consolidation will remove unfortunate duplication and inconsistency that has developed over the years, and it will make requirements for exporting easier to understand and to use for our farmers and those involved throughout the export supply chain. In doing so, the bill replaces the Export Control Act 1982 and certain parts of the Australian Meat and Live-stock Industry Act 1997. It consolidates export related provisions from a number of acts into, as I just said, a single act. It increases the flexibility to respond to changing importing-country requirements and realise opportunities in overseas markets as they arise. That ability to respond and be flexible is so important.

It promotes exports by providing a broader definition and certification of goods and improves options for demonstrating product integrity when required by importing countries. It streamlines administration and at the same time allows the department to better target sanctions and ensure more proportionate responses to noncompliance where that might be required. It includes a provision to approve alternative regulatory arrangements and therefore supports innovation along the entire export supply chain, including in some cases automated decision-making—under very strict conditions—and improved information-sharing provisions. That sharing of information is so important for our entire export supply chain to work together: farmers, shippers, researchers, wholesalers and export companies—you name it.

It's that whole export supply chain that is so critical to regional Australia, and I'm so pleased that this bill takes that approach. The grain, beef, cotton and horticulture exporters in my own electorate of Groom stress that we
must continue to strive to become more competitive in international markets, in terms of both freight and regulation. Indeed, I've been one of them myself, so I know what it's like to have to compete on the world stage. I've spent time, week after week, throughout Asia—for example in Bandung, Yogyakarta and Jakarta, in Indonesia—and elsewhere around the globe in relation to the cotton industry and horticultural exports.

At the same time, we must maintain and enhance our global reputation for safe, clean and quality product. That is, of course, supported by having the sort of streamlined and sensible regulation that is proposed in this bill, but it's equally supported by our sterling R&D efforts right across the country and right across our industries, including fisheries, forestry and all of those broadacre industries—intensive agriculture and horticulture industries—that we are recognised for around the world.

At a time when many across the country and in my own electorate explain to me that the domestic freight component can be more expensive than the international sea freight, I'm pleased to see that we have a Deputy Prime Minister delivering on Inland Rail across our eastern seaboard, for example. So too do we have the government delivering on improved regulation efficiencies and the international confidence that we want to maintain and grow through this very bill.

The member for Hunter might say that we've been taking our time. I'll explain the review process over recent years. His comments draw out the need to contrast our approach to that of those opposite. In the recent election, one would have to say that Labor made a decisive shift away from the Hawke-Keating era of pro-trade support and the longstanding bipartisanism on trade support and growth. What we saw in the Australian Labor Party's last term of government, though, was that the number of Australian exporting businesses fell. For example, crucial negotiations with the Korea, Japan and China stalled, and $100 million was cut from the Export Market Development Grants program, which is so essential to supporting many small to medium-sized enterprises and agribusinesses across the country. In fact, Labor has never started and finished the same trade agreement.

Whereas, since 2014 our government has brought into force free trade agreements with Korea, Japan, China, Hong Kong, Peru and the TPP-11, including Brunei, Dar es Salaam, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, Peru, New Zealand, Singapore and Vietnam. Of course, we do recognise the more recent work with Indonesia, marked in this very chamber earlier this week with the comments from the President of Indonesia and our Prime Minister.

We know Labor's record has been very poor in terms of trade facilitation and growth. The live cattle export trade debacle should never leave the memories of representatives of our country, particularly those of us in regional Australia. It's interesting to note that the then Leader of the Opposition, the member for Maribyrnong, totally did away with the concept of supporting the TPP-11 efforts of our government. He said it was 'the height of delusional absurdity', such is Labor's poor understanding of the importance of trade support going forward.

This bill will support the initiatives of government to modernise the systems underpinning our export industries in terms of agriculture and is therefore critical to the growth of agriculture in our country. It enables exports to be supported now and into the future. Because it's flexible it will remain contemporary.

It is important the parliament supports our agricultural industries so they can, in fact, get ahead, recover and rebuild if necessary, and continue to thrive. That is so important at this time when that is what our agricultural industries are doing, as I said, having dealt in recent years with a very significant drought circumstance and, in more recent months in some cases, bushfire across our nation and, perhaps, in many cases as we're starting to see, flood—but most importantly the flooding that we recognised in North West Queensland last year. So agriculture has had it served up to it. There's no doubt about that. As we often say, the challenges from mother nature are things that we can't manage. We can respond to, we can prepare for, we can try to prevent. And this bill is the government focused on things that we can manage: ensuring the integrity of our export reputation around the country through this bill and streamlining the processes that support our exporters: the certification and inspection of our export produce, whether that's in the beef industry, the grain industry, the horticulture industry, or the food and fibre industries in general. That's what regional Australia is asking for. They are asking for government to get out of the way, to support them to grow their businesses, to provide jobs throughout regional Queensland and regional Australia. And that's as important anywhere else as in my electorate of Groom, which as I humbly say from time to time is—I recognise it, but I think it is recognised by many others—the agribusiness capital of Australia. Thank you.

Mr KATTER (Kennedy) (13:28): I always get the feeling that I'm in a lunatic asylum here. We have had every speaker get up and tell us how wonderful the free trade agreements have been. I'm a primitive person, as you all know. A primitive person says, 'You judge a policy by its outcomes.' Well, let's have a look at the outcomes. There is not much secondary industry left in Australia at all what your free trade agreement has destroyed secondary industry in this country. Let me be very specific. You have closed down the entire motor vehicle industry. Congratulations, Mr Free Marketeers, on both sides. You have closed down the entire petrol
industry. Congratulations, Mr Free Marketeers. You have closed down almost the entire textile, footwear and clothing industry. Congratulations, Mr Free Marketeers. You've even managed—

Mr Pasin: Love it!

Mr KATTER: Wait on; I'll take the interjection. Could I just find who said 'rubbish'?

Mr Pasin: I said 'love it'.

Mr KATTER: Oh, you love it, right? He loves the closure of the motor vehicle industry. He loves the closure of the textile, footwear and clothing industries. Let's go back to your electorate. I'll make sure it gets to the papers there. You loved the closure of the whitegoods industry in Australia and you've even managed to figure out a way to export the electricity industry. That's most certainly a challenge.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Llew O'Brien): The debate is interrupted in accordance with standing order 43. The debate may be resumed at a later hour.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Youth Insearch

Dr MIKE KELLY (Eden-Monaro) (13:30): Congratulations on your elevation, Mr Deputy Speaker. It is a privilege to rise in support of the Youth Insearch charity organisation, which is doing such wonderful work in relation to youth suicide. I'm very proud to have in the chamber with us my fearless leader on the prevention-of-suicide friendship group, the member for Berowra, who has done such wonderful work in this space. This is a very important campaign that Youth Insearch is mounting at the present time. Suicide is the leading cause of death amongst young Australians aged between 15 and 24. They're very keen to launch a campaign involving social media—obviously very effective when we're talking about this particular demographic—and they really want to get the message out that it is a serious threat, that we need to raise awareness of prevention.

Through our committee, which we've been working on for a number of years now, we've tried to emphasise the solutions out there that deal with things at the coalface. In particular we've had presentations from people like Dr Duncan MacKinnon from Bega and his Teen Clinic concept, which is proving very successful, and obviously we need to look at expanding that. But at this time, noting the Closing the Gap issue today, in my region we're dealing with a lot of Aboriginal youth suicide as well, which has a particular focus for us. Also, with these disasters that we've been experiencing, there's going to need to be a lot of effort in our region on those sorts of issues. Well done, Youth Insearch; more strength to your elbow!

SA Volunteer Fire Fighters Museum

Mr PASIN (Barker) (13:32): It has been a devastating start to summer. Unprecedented bushfires across the country have once again put in the spotlight the importance and value of volunteer firefighters. Our firefighting volunteers make up such an important part of so many regional communities across the country. South Australia has a long and proud history of volunteer firefighting. Some time ago a group of dedicated volunteers in the community of Naracoorte, in my electorate, led by Rex Hall, undertook to establish a museum. After many years of planning, including a business case funded by our government via the Building Better Regions Fund in 2017, the museum will officially open this Sunday, on the anniversary of the devastating Ash Wednesday bushfires.

The museum specifically aims to research, record, conserve and promote the history and equipment of South Australia's volunteer fire service. In a way it's also a reminder to all volunteer firefighters, past and present, that we appreciate their dedication and hard work in often dangerous, life-threatening conditions, leaving their own families, homes and sometimes communities to help others. There has never been a better time to pay tribute to our volunteer firefighters, and I'm extremely proud that our government has helped to fund the SA Volunteer Fire Fighters museum in Naracoorte. A huge congratulations to Rex Hall and his team, who were behind the planning and construction of the museum. It's a brilliant initiative and an extremely worthy cause. (Time expired)

Salama, Dr Peter

Mr KHALIL (Wills) (13:33): I am deeply saddened at the passing of Dr Peter Salama in January. Dr Peter Salama was a great Australian, a truly inspirational figure. He lived a life in service of others. He led research that changed people's lives for the better, including vaccine-preventable diseases, HIV, nutrition, war related mortality and violence, and refugee and emergency health. He contributed at the highest levels at the United Nations, the World Health Organization and UNICEF. He was recently executive director of the WHO division for universal health coverage, having joined as executive director for health emergencies. He led UNICEF's global response to Ebola, serving as its representative in Ethiopia and Zimbabwe. He was also chief of health and nutrition in Afghanistan in 2002 and 2004.
No matter what his role, Peter Salama was always working to advance the health of people around the globe. We will remember Dr Salama for his service, compassion and tireless commitment to improving the lives of millions of people. We lost Peter too soon. My thoughts are with his wife and three children and his mother, Vivian. I extend my condolences to them. He will be missed. There will be a memorial service at Xavier College in Melbourne on Sunday 15 March. Here in this place, in the parliament of Australia, I acknowledge a great Australian and thank him for his service to humanity. Rest in peace, Dr Peter Salama.

Redpa Football Club

Mr Pearce (Braddon) (13:35): Congratulations to everybody involved with the Redpa Football Club, which was crowned the 2019 national Good Sports Club of the Year. The club received national recognition for inspiring change and building a healthy family-friendly environment.

For the past 20 years, the Redpa footy club has been working towards shifting its culture from one where alcohol was a key pillar of all events to one that is focused on inclusion, family and their juniors. It's not easy to turn entrenched values around, but the Redpa footy club is a shining example of what can be done when you have great local people acting as excellent role models for our younger generation. Sporting clubs across the north-west coast, the west coast and King Island in Tasmania are often the glue that binds our small regional communities together, and it's important that they are inclusive and safe for all members of the community, across all ages.

Well done to the co-presidents, Shane Hine and Tim McLaren—great leaders, great blokes and great inspirers—vice-president, Zach Bransden, treasurer, Anita Hine, secretary, Sarah Cutherford and all the volunteers, players, officials and nation-building club members involved in this great nation-building club. You embody all that is good with regional sporting clubs. You embody leadership, inspiration and direction.

Mornington Service Centre

Ms Murphy (Dunkley) (13:36): Today I am standing up for the 3,000 low-income households, 11,000 older people, 800 unemployed people, 1,700 single parent families and 12,000 people with a disability who are likely to feel the impact of the minister for social services's decision, made in secret and kept from the community, to close the Mornington Service Centre, with its Centrelink and Medicare services. No-one else is standing up for them, so I am.

There has been no consultation with the community, no consultation with the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council, who call this secret decision a 'kick in the guts', and no consultation with the staff who work there. Astoundingly, apparently there was also no consultation with the minister's fellow cabinet member the Minister for Health and member for Flinders, whose electorate the Mornington Service Centre is in. If it wasn't for the agitation of local Debbie Martin raising this matter on Facebook and with me, and me raising this matter on Friday with the minister—both ministers—and the department on behalf of constituents, we would never have even known until it was too late.

I wrote to the minister for social services on Friday on behalf of the Mornington community and my community asking for answers. We've received none. What are you doing to help vulnerable and elderly people from my electorate and the electorate of Flinders who need these services? And how many more service centres are going to close? I seek leave to table this letter.

Leave not granted.

Youth Insearch

Mr Leeser (Berowra) (13:38): Preventing suicide is one of Australia's great national challenges. We know that eight people die by suicide every single day and that suicide is the leading cause of death for young people aged under 44. Today is Blue Heart Day, a day dedicated to raising awareness about youth suicide. It's part of a campaign by an organisation called Youth Insearch, which is headquartered in the Hills District in Sydney. Since last year's Blue Heart Day, approximately 450 people aged under 25 will have died by suicide.

Youth Insearch is responding to this crisis. Since 1985 it's helped almost 32,000 young people. It began when a counsellor recognised that one-on-one counselling alone couldn't fix the growing scourge of suicide. Relationships, culture change and relational support are what's needed. Youth Insearch provides counselling, as well as weekend workshops and peer support, to young people. Participants have the opportunity to know that they're not alone in their experiences and receive support in a whole range of ways. Last year, 91 per cent of Youth Insearch participants who felt suicidal prior to attending a program no longer felt suicidal by the end.

On this day, Youth Insearch is launching End Youth Suicide, a social media campaign to raise awareness of youth suicide and to fund their work. Across Australia people are wearing a blue heart pin and sharing Youth Insearch posts on social media using the hashtags #endyouthsuicide, #youthinsearch and #rebuildingyounglives. In the words of Youth Insearch: let's spread hope—one heart at a time.
New South Wales: Floods

Ms McBRIEDE (Dobell) (13:39): I'm calling on the New South Wales Premier, the New South Wales emergency services minister and the newly appointed Parliamentary Secretary for the Central Coast to act now and declare floods on the Central Coast of New South Wales a natural disaster. The whole Central Coast community urgently needs the New South Wales government's support in this crisis.

Between 200 and 500 millimetres of rain has fallen on the coast since Friday, flooding homes and isolating residents. Many have been stranded for days. Over 80 local roads have been closed and main roads have been severely impacted. The Pacific Highway remains closed in both directions at Charmhaven. The Charmhaven and Blue Haven communities are still reeling from the severe bushfire that raged through the area on New Year's Day. Now floods have brought down trees and powerlines, and tens of thousands of homes are still without power. The Wyong aged-care facility in Mardi has been isolated, and the New South Wales SES unit at Wyong is transporting staff and supplies via punt. Schools are closed, and people can't safely travel to and from work.

The Central Coast community urgently needs to know what support is available and how to access this help now. The New South Wales government needs to act swiftly to declare a natural disaster so that the Central Coast has access to the support it needs to recover. The New South Wales government needs to step up and act. This is a natural disaster. It is an emergency. My community needs support. Too many people have been stranded and too many people are isolated. We thank the SES, but they need support.

Grey Electorate: Australia Day Awards

Mr RAMSEY (Grey—Government Whip) (13:41): I'd like to pay tribute to those in the electorate of Grey who were recognised for service to community through the Australia Day Awards. Glenise Coulthard AM from Port Augusta is an Aboriginal woman who has worked all her life in the health sector in Port Augusta, delivering for her people. Diana Laube OAM from Port Lincoln has worked long and hard in the area of conservation through the NRM board. Dr Tony Lian-Lloyd OAM from Quorn is one of those doctors—and I just came from a luncheon with the rural doctors—that we're finding so difficult to replace in the country. He is someone who has given a lifetime of service to a single community. Roger McCauley OAM from Moonta has given a lifetime of service to the Uniting Church in South Australia and in his own community. Garry Wellington OAM from Tarlee has worked tirelessly with veterans and their families to bring about better results. In relation to the meritorious service awards, Ken Campbell of Mannanarie received the Australian Fire Service Medal; David Jaensch from Whyalla received the Ambulance Service Medal; Max Coulson from Port Lincoln received the Emergency Services Medal; and Susan Dighton from Port Pirie, who has given 25 years of service, received the Australian Corrections Medal.

I thank all of these people for what they do in their local communities. It is fitting, right and proper that they've been recognised for their significant service.

Closing the Gap

Mr BANDT (Melbourne—Leader of the Australian Greens) (13:42): Today, I want to start by acknowledging the traditional owners of this place and pay respect to, and recognise, elders past, present and emerging. I also want to acknowledge that this place sits on stolen land, that sovereignty was never ceded and that it's time for treaties with our First Nations communities. Today the Prime Minister addressed the House regarding our progress as a nation in closing the gap with our First Nations people. It's deeply saddening that, yet again, we gathered to hear the news that we're not on track and that disadvantage and inequality remain. Simply, in too many respects, we are failing to close the gap.

It's no surprise to see these results today, because, until this government stops discriminating against First Nations people, we cannot close the gap. This is a government that continues to advocate for the discriminatory and punitive cashless debit card, which unfairly targets First Nations communities and restricts their freedom and dignity. You don't address inequality and injustice by removing people's rights. We cannot close the gap until we get serious about acknowledging and addressing the historical injustices upon which our nation is built. The Greens are deeply committed not only to closing the gap but to achieving a voice to parliament, treaties and truth, as First Nations communities have advocated for. This government is failing to close the gap, and every single day that it allows discriminatory and harmful policies to continue to harm First Nations people we'll only get further away from justice and equality in this country.

Wentworth Electorate: Australian Bushfires

Mr SHARMA (Wentworth) (13:46): The last few months have been a difficult and trying time for many families and communities affected by the bushfires right across Australia. My community in Wentworth, like many others, was quick to reach out and lend its support to those affected by the bushfires. I would like to
recognise here and put on the record some of those local groups that worked tirelessly to fundraise, collect and distribute emergency supplies and provide on-the-ground relief.

Thank you to Bondi Surf Bathers Life Saving Club, who helped collect donations of much needed supplies and deliver them to affected communities on the South Coast. Thank you to Our Big Kitchen, and particularly Rabbi Dovid Slavin, for coordinating several bake-for-bushfire sessions. Thank you to Bronte Boardriders for organising a Boards for Bushfires fundraiser and raising almost $35,000 for the South Coast. Thank you to Tamarama Surf Life Saving Club, who held a fundraising barbecue over the Australia Day long weekend, raising $6,000 for the families of affected firefighters. Thank you to the NSW SES Waverley Woollahra Unit, who sent volunteers to help in the firefighting efforts. Thank you also to Bronte Surf Life Saving Club, who sent relief lifesavers to conduct patrols on the South Coast as well as helped with fundraising. I am truly proud of the tremendous compassion and generosity shown by the Wentworth community and, indeed, communities all across Australia in response to this summer of tragedy. We will continue to support our fellow Australians where we can.

Community Sport Infrastructure Grant Program

Mr KEOGH (Burt) (13:45): This government says that if you have a go you get a go, but it seems for the City of Gosnells, in the electorate of Burt, if you have a go you get a kick in the nuts. You see, the City of Gosnells applied for a $500,000 Community Sport—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Llew O'Brien): I remind the member for Burt to use parliamentary language, not unparliamentary language.

Mr KEOGH: The City of Gosnells applied for a $500,000 community grant for Bracadale Way Reserve—currently a drainage area in the middle of Canning Vale—with a plan to make it a community hub that would fill the current void in sporting and recreational facilities. Canning Vale is the most popular suburb in Perth. The reserve was an ideal location, and Sport Australia agreed, listing the City of Gosnells' application in the top 50 nationally supported projects that weren't funded.

This government's politicisation of the sports program stinks. It's a whole community that has missed out. My community deserves better. Then, last week, we heard about sports rorts II. The City of Gosnells was having salt rubbed into its wounds then because it found out that it wasn't even invited to apply for this program, designed to fund swimming pools, because the government only invited applications from marginal target seats that it wanted in the election. The City of Gosnells most certainly would have made an application for a new swimming pool in our community, so it's been dudged by this government. Mr Prime Minister, why won't you give it a go?

Child Safety

Mr SIMMONDS (Ryan) (13:47): I rise today to speak about a very impressive young local, Ella Hussey. Whilst studying at St Peters Lutheran College at Indooroopilly she started To the Moon and Back. To The Moon and Back is an organisation that aims to spread awareness about the very serious and concerning issue of online child sexual exploitation. Together with a few friends, Ella built a website talking about this issue, created social media profiles and began advocating locally. By turning a couple of designs into items of clothing, they are now able to raise funds for their awareness campaign. Today, in the House, I'm wearing a pair of their rocket socks. I'd show the socks to the House, but I am not that limber.

Ella is passionate about reaching out to young people in Australia and globally about the problem of online sexual exploitation and helping them understand the very real danger it presents. All their profits go towards operating and improving child protection system technology that is run by Child Rescue Coalition, a global charity that has prevented over 60,000 cases of abuse. To the Moon and Back's mission is to have a world where online child sexual exploitation is only found in the history books. Ella is an incredible young local in the Ryan electorate, and I encourage everyone to google To the Moon and Back, check out their website and purchase a hoodie or a pair of socks to support this very worthy cause. Congratulations and thank you, Ella.

Macquarie Electorate: Floods

Ms TEMPLEMAN (Macquarie) (13:49): There was barely time to take a breath from fires when our emergency services people were flung full-on into rain, floods, landslides and trees down right across the Blue Mountains and Hawkesbury. As the Hawkesbury saw its bridges shut, with the biggest flood of 28 years, many people were caught on the wrong side of the river. It's certainly a good time to discover what role a new Richmond bridge has in our emergency arrangements.

Evacuation centres opened promptly. I want to thank Windsor RSL and North Richmond Community Centre for making those spaces available and the Red Cross and other volunteers for being there. Hawkesbury's Helping Hands, as always, has assisted many people. In the Blue Mountains the landslip exposed the railway line between Leura and Katoomba. While there are frustrations for many people—those unable to get to work or school and
those unable to get on with daily tasks—I know everyone wants to say the biggest thanks to the Hawkesbury and Blue Mountains SES, RFS and other emergency services for their hard work.

The New South Wales government needs to declare this a natural disaster so that Commonwealth assistance can flow. Upper Colo and the MacDonald Valley look particularly badly hit. They need help now. Many areas are still without power and phones. The local economy is also really suffering. First there were fires and now there are floods. Every government needs to realise that urgent assistance for our local small businesses is needed so that they can stay afloat while things return to normal and the tourists come back. The imminent economic disaster is one we can avoid.

Muecke, Dr James, AM

Mr STEVENS (Sturt) (13:50): I rise today to note that, for the second year in a row, the Australian of the Year is from my electorate of Sturt. It's getting embarrassing, frankly! I do acknowledge and congratulate Dr James Muecke on being made Australian of the Year on Australia Day eve, just a few weeks ago. He follows Dr Richard Harris of Thai cave rescue fame. James Muecke is an ophthalmologist and has had a very eminent career as an eye surgeon in Adelaide. He was acknowledged as the Australian of the Year for the work that he has done around the world through the charity that he and his wife, Mena, established—Sight For All. They have been great pioneers—much like Dr Fred Hollows, another very eminent Australian eye surgeon—in taking their expertise and capability to parts of the world that need that kind of expertise and don't have the economic capacity to provide the same level of treatment that we can in this beautiful country of Australia.

I pay tribute and honour James Muecke for the work that he has done and that he will continue to do in the future. He has made the point that his very clear priority in the coming year as Australian of the Year is to focus on addressing diabetes and sugar in our diet. Diabetes is a very significant cause of repairable blindness. I wish him all the very best and congratulate him on being an Australian of the Year.

Nowra Show

Mrs PHILLIPS (Gilmour) (13:52): Last weekend I had the pleasure of attending the 144th Nowra Show. I've been going to the Nowra Show for as long as I can remember—since before I could walk. I was honoured to attend this year as patron. This year was a little unusual. For starters, it was pouring with rain. But not a single person was complaining. After our horror summer of bushfires, it felt like sweet relief. It didn't keep people away either. Up to 7,000 people came along. It was also free. The Nowra Show Society made the effort to bring our community together after the trauma we have all endured. What better place could there be to announce the Currowan fire, which burned for 74 days, was finally out? It was a true cause for celebration, and celebrate we did. To show our appreciation for all their amazing work, the local RFS brigades took a lap of honour to wrap up the show, accompanied by cheers from the community—well deserved, indeed.

The Nowra Show is one of the many things that make the South Coast community so special. Congratulations to all the stallholders, exhibitors and winners on your amazing efforts at the show and over the year. I want to say a special thanks to President Mark Stewart, Secretary Robyn Nelson and all of the Nowra Show Society for yet another remarkable year. You absolutely achieved your aim this year, giving us something to celebrate. Thank you, and see you next year.

Indigenous Australians

Mr THOMPSON (Herbert) (13:53): I'd like to start by thanking the Prime Minister and the opposition leader on their Closing the Gap speeches just before. I'd also like to thank the Minister for Indigenous Australians, Mr Ken Wyatt, and the shadow minister for Indigenous Australians, Linda Burney, for their powerful advocacy in this place. I want to talk more about a personal experience. My wife is a very strong advocate and proud Aboriginal woman. My mother-in-law is a very proud Aboriginal woman from Palm Island in the electorate of Herbert. She is very vocal to me, which is great. She's with my wife today helping her out. I have a two-year-old daughter, who is a young Aboriginal woman, whether she is pretending she's off the movie The Croods or dancing like Elsa from Frozen. Every day that I'm here and I get to work with people on both sides of this House and in the other place to better support and advocate for our Indigenous Australians, it just brings tears to my eyes, knowing that it's so personal not just for me but for many others. I’d like to really reiterate: we can always do more, and Indigenous Australians should never be used as a political football for political points scoring. I thank the minister for his leadership.

Community Sport Infrastructure Grant Program

Ms WELLS (Lilley) (13:55): This Prime Minister can run but he cannot hide from the thousands of mums and dads and active citizens out there who volunteer hours and hours each year for their sports clubs and who have been betrayed by the actions of this government in the sports rorts saga. Labor will continue to pursue this
scandal. We will pursue it in the parliament, we'll pursue it in the Senate inquiry and I reckon we're going to have to look at pursuing it through the courts as well.

Some outraged lawyers in my electorate of Lilley have written to me to make the very good point that there is a common law offence of misconduct in public office. I think it applies right now. This is an ancient offence—it's 800 years old—but it has been ratified in the Criminal Code and it was used in Greiner v Independent Commission Against Corruption, where Justice Mahoney said:

If a Minister or officer exercises a public power merely to, for example, comply with the wishes of a political party, an employer or a trade union official, that exercise of power, though apparently within the terms of the legislation or office, is wrong and may constitute a crime. If he joins with others to do so, he may be guilty of a criminal conspiracy.

Or, as in this circumstance, she may be guilty of criminal conspiracy.

We Queenslanders know a thing or two about frontier justice. Whether it's through the courts or through the next ballot, we will be throwing the book at you for what you have done: betraying our clubs and volunteers. We're not going to let it rest.

**ConnectGV**

Mr DRUM (Nicholls—Chief Nationals Whip) (13:56): This time last year I was trying to find some money for a disability centre in Shepparton known as ConnectGV. ConnectGV has been operating for 65 years, and their facility is literally falling down around them, their staff and their participants. ConnectGV have raised over $3 million and been supported by people throughout Shepparton and the Goulburn Valley.

As it turned out, I couldn't find the $2 million that I needed for them to build a new facility, but I was able to get an election commitment that if we were to win the election on 18 May then we were going to come good with $2 million. I took that to my political opponent who was running for the Labor Party and I asked him, 'Would you be able to go to your leaders and see if you could get a similar commitment from the Labor Party that, if you win the election, you're going to be able to come good with this money for ConnectGV?'. He went away and, after a couple of days, he came back and said, 'I've tried and I've tried but I cannot get anything out of the Labor Party.'

On 18 May, when we finally won the election, the first phone call I made on that Saturday night was to Carolynne Young, the CEO of ConnectGV, telling her that she had just witnessed an election for the coalition and $2 million was going to be coming her way. A couple of months ago the Deputy Prime Minister signed off on this $2 million that is now going to go to ConnectGV. They're going to start digging the foundations next week. Thanks for nothing!

**Climate Change**

Mr THISTLETHWAITE (Kingsford Smith) (13:58): The Australian people want strong leadership and stronger government action when it comes to tackling climate change and reducing carbon emissions, but all they are getting from the Morrison government are excuses and an ongoing ideological war that is anti-science and denies the reality of a warming planet—the reality that has been thrust upon Australians with the unprecedented drought and devastating bushfires. Despite all of this, the denial continues from those on the opposite side of the chamber. After 6½ years in government they still don't have an energy and climate policy. They abolished the price on carbon emissions. They tried to shut down the Clean Energy Finance Corporation and the Australian Renewable Energy Agency. They've undermined renewable energy at every opportunity. They criticised Labor's electric vehicle policy, yet the Treasurer drives one around, in the ultimate act of hypocrisy.

Now the denial faction in the coalition is pushing for more coal-fired power stations, the largest producers of carbon emissions in the energy sector, and they want the government to underwrite it because the corporate sector won't touch it with a barge pole. The result of all this lack of leadership is that Australians' living standards are suffering. RepuTex today released information that shows the largest companies' carbon pollution has increased by 150 per cent. Prime Minister, when will your government wake up, accept the reality of climate change and take stronger action to combat a warming planet? *(Time expired)*

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

**CONDOLENCES**

**Australian Bushfires**

Report from Federation Chamber

Order of the day returned from the Federation Chamber certified copy presented.

Ordered that the order of the day be considered immediately.

The SPEAKER: The question is that the motion moved by the Hon. Prime Minister be agreed to. As a mark of respect I ask all present to signify their approval by rising in their places.
Question agreed to, honourable members standing in their places.

The SPEAKER: I thank the House.

MINISTERIAL ARRANGEMENTS

Mr MORRISON (Cook—Prime Minister and Minister for the Public Service) (14:01): I inform the House that the Minister for Veterans Affairs will be absent from question time today for medical reasons. The Minister for Education will answer questions on his behalf. I'm sure members of the House will be pleased to know that the member for Gippsland is well, and he is very appreciative of the attention that was provided to him today in the House. There was bipartisan medical support provided, of which he is most grateful. He said, 'Please don't send flowers; have a holiday in East Gippsland.'

The SPEAKER: The Leader of the Opposition, on indulgence.

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the Opposition) (14:02): I want to associate myself and this side of the House, and particularly Dr Freelander, with the comments of the Prime Minister. The member for Gippsland has some political opponents in this House, on both sides, but everyone in this House respects and likes him and we wish him well.

The SPEAKER: I thank both the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Closing the Gap

Ms BURNEY (Barton) (14:02): My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer to the fact that five out of the seven Closing the Gap targets have not been met or are not on track. Will one of the 14 new targets set in April be a justice target?

Mr MORRISON (Cook—Prime Minister and Minister for the Public Service) (14:03): I thank the member for her question and I thank her for her constructive support of the process we are now going through in the establishment of new Closing the Gap targets. As the member would be aware, it is a process that is a cooperative process. It's a process that involves state governments and the Commonwealth government but, more importantly, it is a process which is being driven by the Coalition of Peaks group, led by Pat Turner. So it would be presumptive of me as Prime Minister, as a part of this process, to be seeking to prejudice that process and not listen to what the priorities are to be set by Indigenous Australians—and listening is exactly what we'll be doing.

As I said today in my address on closing the gap, we want to see the gap from the eyes of Indigenous Australians. I want the gaps to be defined by Indigenous Australians. So, to that end, there will be a discussion of these matters in March this year. This is a process that we have been working to for over a year now. I'll be looking to the Coalition of Peaks and Pat Turner, who has demonstrated amazing leadership in bringing all of those groups together. Most recently we met in the cabinet room, as I referred to earlier today. It was a tremendous meeting, and we are making great progress. So I look forward to the shared targets, with the right data that can inform us as to how we're tracking against those targets, where the responsibilities for meeting those targets are clearly articulated. The suggestion that this Commonwealth parliament alone can act to address all these targets is a misplaced notion, because state governments, equally, are part of this process. That's not me saying it; it is Indigenous Australians themselves, through the Coalition of Peaks. That's why this process is a partnership. I intend to respect the partnership with Indigenous Australians.

Closing the Gap

Mr LEESER (Berowra) (14:05): My question is to the Minister for Indigenous Australians. Will the minister inform the House how the Morrison government is working in genuine partnership with Indigenous Australians and state and territory governments to progress closing the gap?

Mr WYATT (Hasluck—Minister for Indigenous Australians) (14:05): I want to thank the member for Berowra for your continued and ongoing support and interest in these areas. The peak organisations came to the Prime Minister and met with him about the way in which we were doing business as Australian governments. I asked if it was possible for Aboriginal people to sit at the table to shape the direction for closing the gap into the future. The Prime Minister undertook that process and met with COAG, and had the first ministers agree to a process in which there would be a tripartite approach to developing the targets—that the Coalition of Peaks would work closely with the Aboriginal community and with state and territory governments and with the Commonwealth. They had their first meeting when Senator Nigel Scullion was the minister responsible. I had the privilege of sitting at the table at the first joint council meeting, in Adelaide. In that meeting, we took forward what was agreed to about the way in which we would shape the future that would leave a legacy of Indigenous involvement in decision-making. The other element to that was that ministers from each state and territory would
sit there and be part of those discussions. It was historic in the sense that both Pat Turner and I as two Indigenous Australians sat there co-chairing a COAG council—unprecedented.

What was done recently was that the Prime Minister invited the peaks into the cabinet room. We talked about what was evolving out of their consultations on the targets. They are doing broad consultation right across the nation. They will come back to us with the final set. They are working with my agency, the National Indigenous Australians Agency, with Professor Ian Anderson. They are having genuine discussions around how we shape the future. In doing that, I reflected on other elements of the work that we're doing. I've asked the agency now to always engage with our people on all initiatives that we do. They are not to tell communities what they need. They are to sit, identify the challenge and work on solutions.

I also want to ask all of us in this chamber to do the same—to engage with our electorates and to listen to the voices of people at the local level. Many of us do it well. For some of us, it depends on time. But if we do this consistently, and we bring into it the feedback of the peaks and the Aboriginal community, then let me say that we will have an outcome that is an exemplar for the future, and we can collectively take credit for the way in which we've engaged in a real way.

First Nations Voice

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the Opposition) (14:09): My question is addressed to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister hold a referendum in this term to enshrine a First Nations voice to parliament in our Constitution?

Mr MORRISON (Cook—Prime Minister and Minister for the Public Service) (14:09): The Leader of the Opposition will be aware of my broad position on this, as I outlined it in my Closing the Gap speech and the aspiration we have there. This process of constitutional recognition has been a long journey. It is yet to arrive at a point, I think we can fairly say, where there is broad agreement as to what the proposition would be. Indeed, there is a large gap between where the opposition stands, on the form of this, and where the government stands. I would have thought there would need to be a real consensus to enable such a referendum to be successful, because what I'm interested in is that such a proposition would be successful. Success is the goal that I would seek in pursuing that agenda, and it's an agenda that I am pursuing and the Minister for Indigenous Australians is pursuing. One of the things I've learned carefully from the First Nations Voice is you need to keep walking together until you can find the point where there is an agreement that would enable such an important recognition to be achieved.

So I am not going to allow any timetables to prevent the successful achievement of this result. I've set out very clearly my position on this matter. Those opposite have a very different view as to the manner and form of this to the view of those in the government. And I think that presents a lack of consensus. What we will do is continue to pursue the bipartisan recommendations of the joint select committee, and I thank the member for Berowra and the other members of the committee who put forward those recommendations and put forward a process of co-design as the way forward. That's what we're doing. That's our policy. We will continue to apply ourselves to that process. I hope we're able to achieve a consensus at an early opportunity.

Ms Catherine King interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Ballarat.

Mr MORRISON: But in the absence of a consensus—

Ms Catherine King interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Ballarat is warned.

Mr MORRISON: I am not going to go down a path that would see something important, such as this, result in a failure.

Energy

Mrs WICKS (Robertson) (14:11): My question is to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister outline to the House how the Morrison government is securing Australia's energy future by keeping the lights on, reducing power prices and meeting our emission reduction commitments? Is the Prime Minister aware of any alternative approaches?

Mr MORRISON (Cook—Prime Minister and Minister for the Public Service) (14:11): The member for Robertson wants to keep the lights on, like every member of this House. The member for Robertson wants to ensure that we don't put taxes on people, that we don't drive up their electricity prices and that we ensure there is reliability in our grid. She also shares the government's passion and commitment to ensuring we meet our emissions reduction targets, those targets that, indeed, we took to the last election to the Australian people, and the
plan that would see us achieve them. And, as the Minister for Energy and Emissions Reduction has reminded the House recently, electricity prices in the past year are down 3½ per cent.

We are the world leaders in renewable energy, with 2.2 million Australian households having rooftop solar panels—the highest rate of uptake in the world. Installed renewable capacity increased by 24 per cent over 2018. Our previous record in renewable generation, in 2019, was up 20 per cent on 2018 levels and is forecast to grow by a further 26 per cent in 2020.

Gas is obviously a critical player in the future of our energy needs in this country, and that's why we were able to strike a deal with the New South Wales government which ensures we're getting the gas from underneath our feet—some 70 petajoules—which will increase the supply of gas alone in New South Wales by around 50 per cent. We're getting the gas. There's 1.4 billion in Snowy 2.0, then there are the Battery of the Nation projects and a billion dollars for the Grid Reliability Fund. We are technology-agnostic about these issues. We're supporting, through Battery of the Nation, the Beetaloo gas project, the CopperString transmission program, and the Collinsville project for new HELE coal and how that applies to a feasibility study.

We on this side of the House have no policy allergies to energy production. But on that side, their energy policies are coughing and sneezing and spluttering all over the place. They are unable to even nominate what their emissions target alternative is for 2030. The member for Hunter has a posse position. The member for Sydney has a position. Who knows what the each-way position is of the Leader of the Opposition.

They have no policy when it comes to sustainable and reliable energy for this nation's future. They are riven with division on this question. The alternative—and what had been pursued by the government—is power generation that can be relied upon to reduce electricity prices, to support industry and manufacturing jobs, and to support industry right across this country, while the opposition—(Time expired)

Indigenous Health

Ms BURNEY (Barton) (14:15): My question is to the Prime Minister: There are Indigenous communities in remote Australia that don't have access to kidney dialysis because they don't have potable water. Prime Minister, I have been to these places. Will you commit to ensuring that all communities in Australia have clean water?

Mr MORRISON (Cook—Prime Minister and Minister for the Public Service) (14:15): I invite the Minister for Health to add to my answer on this very important matter. This was one of the important topics that I discussed with Pat Turner this morning. This is one of the critical things that need to be put in place to support the health and wellbeing of Indigenous peoples right across the country. As she reminded me this morning, that is made more difficult because of recent events around bushfires and drought, which has complicated water potability for Indigenous Australians in so many parts of the country. So I can agree with the member who has put this matter to us that this is absolutely an issue that requires attention, not just from Commonwealth governments but from state governments as well. It will be a matter that will be getting important attention through the process which I outlined in my answer to the earlier question, but it will also be getting attention going forward as we pursue our water policies across the country. I will ask the Minister for Health to add to the answer.

Mr HUNT (Flinders—Minister for Health and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service and Cabinet) (14:16): Thanks to the Prime Minister and the member for Barton. In terms of potable water, the Prime Minister has set out the position, the commitment and the work that we're doing on that front. In terms of kidney dialysis, I had the privilege, with the Minister for Indigenous Australians, of visiting Purple House in Alice Springs, focusing on a $23 million announcement for kidney dialysis. We know that renal failure and renal damage are immensely important issues in Indigenous Australia. Along with eradicating avoidable Indigenous blindness, eradicating avoidable Indigenous deafness and eradicating rheumatic heart disease, we also want to make sure that we help to work towards eradicating avoidable kidney failure. The $23 million to Purple House is our commitment. We will always continue to work with them on their needs, but we know this is important. I have seen the cases. I have visited the site. I have worked with the Minister for Indigenous Australians, as well as with people on all sides. I have to say that Purple House is a great Australian initiative, supported by people on all sides of this House. It is about saving lives and protecting lives of Indigenous Australians.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The SPEAKER (14:17): Before I call the next question, I'd like to acknowledge the presence in the Speaker's gallery this afternoon of Therese Rein, the wife of former prime minister Kevin Rudd.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Tourism

Mr KATTER (Kennedy) (14:18): Tourism minister, last Friday at the Cairns wildlife dome I risked my life flying in a harness only feet above a snapping 4½-metre crocodile without a gun. I know a lot of you would be
rooting for the crocodile! North Queensland tourism is in dire straits. I've done my bit. Would others do theirs by postponing BAS payments for operators? Coronavirus is half the problem, but there is also the overvalued dollar and the lily pad left of Liberal and Labor badmouthing what David Attenborough described as the most magical place on earth: our reef. Surely these latter two matters demand action?

Mr TEHAN (Wannon—Minister for Education) (14:19): I'd like to thank the member for Kennedy for his question, because it's an incredibly important question. The tourism industry is absolutely vital to Australia and in particular to regional and rural Australia. There are many ways that we encourage tourists to Australia and there are many ways that we encourage tourists to regional and rural Australia. The member for Kennedy participated in one of those, and he obviously had a lot of fun. We have a lot of things under consideration to help with the impact the coronavirus is having on local industries and local businesses, including looking at BAS payments. We've done that for the bushfires, and we're looking to see whether we need to expand it for the coronavirus as well.

I know this myself, because there has been a large impact on travellers going to the Great Ocean Road to see the magnificent Twelve Apostles. There's been a huge impact on businesses and industry along there. The ATO is looking at ways it can assist. Also, we've rolled out a $76 million tourism package, which is going to try to help improve domestic tourism so that we can get tourists out of the capital cities and into our regions and our rural areas, and make sure that we get international tourists from other markets coming to our nation.

We want to make sure the tourism industry continues to thrive in this nation. We know that Chinese tourists have been a large contributor to the tourism sector here. We want to make sure that once we're through the coronavirus, once we can welcome Chinese tourists back to our shores, they will know that they're welcome here and that there are wonderful tourism operators who are providing all types of experiences, whether they be for Chinese visitors or for visitors from the rest of the world. We want to make sure we're backing and supporting our tourism operators.

Economy

Ms LIU (Chisholm) (14:21): My question is to the Treasurer. Will the Treasurer please outline to the House how the Morrison government's resilient economy is continuing to help families, including in my seat of Chisholm, to get ahead? Is the Treasurer aware of any threats that will undermine this?

Mr FRYDENBERG (Kooyong—Treasurer) (14:22): I thank the member for Chisholm for her question and congratulate her on the strong contribution she is making in this place and on behalf of her constituents, more than 70,000 of whom are getting tax cuts courtesy of the legislation that we on this side of the House supported. Thousands of small businesses across her electorate and others are also getting the benefit of the extended instant asset write-off and the tax cuts we have legislated through the parliament.

When we came to government, unemployment was rising, investment was falling and the budget was in a mess. Now we have the first current account surplus in more than 40 years, the lowest welfare dependency in more than 30 years, the biggest tax cuts in more than 20 years and the first balanced budget in 11 years. The recent economic data—

Dr Chalmers interjecting—

Mr FRYDENBERG: And these are inconvenient truths for the member for Rankin, who likes to tax a lot, but the December job numbers show that unemployment fell to 5.1 per cent. There were 29,000 new jobs. Of those aged between 15 and 64 years, 74.5 per cent were in work. That was a record high. Household disposable income in the September quarter had its biggest jump in a decade. Building approvals are now up by nearly three per cent year on year. Retail trade volumes in the December quarter were higher than median market expectations and the fastest increase since 2018. Today the Westpac-Melbourne Institute consumer survey had consumer sentiment up by 2.3 per cent. And we know from the governor of the Reserve Bank that household balance sheets are improving. This is what he had to say recently: 'The loan arrears rate is coming down. The number of people who have problems with their personal debt is coming down, so it looks like, across a range of dimensions, balance sheets are in a better position.' He went on to say that public and business balance sheets are in good shape. That's the governor of the Reserve Bank.

On top of that, boosting household incomes, are the tax cuts. More than $6 billion in the first six months of these tax cuts have gone into the pockets of hardworking Australians. And, in relation to electricity prices, as the Minister for Energy and Emissions Reduction and the Prime Minister have said, wholesale prices are down by around 30 per cent on the same time last year. So we on this side of the House are getting on with our economic plan, which is delivering a record number of jobs, a record number of Australians in work and lower taxes for all Australians. It is a great contrast to the high-taxing, high-spending proposals from those opposite.
Workplace Relations

Mr BURKE (Watson—Manager of Opposition Business) (14:25): My question is to the Prime Minister. Yesterday the electricians and plumbers union was ordered to pay a fine for minor paperwork breaches, a fine which is double the amount that celebrity chef George Calombaris's businesses were ordered to pay for stealing the wages of more than 500 workers. Why does the government always have one rule for workers and another for employers?

Mr MORRISON (Cook—Prime Minister and Minister for the Public Service) (14:25): The penalty imposed upon the CEPU was determined by an independent judge of the Federal Court of Australia, applying the Labor government's own laws. What workers care about is being paid the wages they are entitled to. That is what happened in the Calombaris matter. Workers have been paid $7.8 million of wages that they were owed, thanks to the work of the government regulator, the Fair Work Ombudsman.

You may ask, how is that made possible? We have increased funding to the Fair Work Ombudsman by more than $60 million in recent years. Members of the House may want to know why we had to increase funding to the Fair Work Ombudsman by $60 million so they could do their job and ensure that workers who had been dummied of their pay would get their payments. That is because when Labor were in office they cut the Fair Work Ombudsman's funding by almost 20 per cent. The hypocrisy of the Labor Party, who come in here and make these statements while at the same time they are seeking to prevent the government from ensuring that workers' entitlements don't get ripped off by dodgy unions, is amazing. They have it every way, each way, every day.

Inland Rail

Dr McVEIGH (Groom) (14:27): My question is to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Development: Will the Deputy Prime Minister inform the House how the Morrison government is transforming regional Australia through the building of the Inland Rail?

Mr McCORMACK (Riverina—Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Development and Leader of the Nationals) (14:27): I thank the member for Groom for his question. He understands how important this nation-building infrastructure is and how it's going to transform not just his area, but the 1,700 kilometres from Melbourne to Brisbane. That is 1,700 kilometres of commerce—a corridor of commerce; a corridor of hope and optimism. He and I were there at the Allwrights' Good Morning Cereals factory. They were extolling the virtues of the rail to be able to get their product to port quicker, to markets quicker, to other factories quicker, so it can be processed and the goodness from the Darling Downs and the Toowoomba region can be there for all the nation to enjoy. It's the Allwrights' Good Morning Cereals; it's KB Concrete at Narromine, a town of 3½ thousand people, where brothers Ken and Ben Maclean are going to benefit from this.

It is Close the Gap Day. In the Narromine to Parkes section there are 1,500 workers busy working on that line. That includes 283 Indigenous workers. Perhaps even more importantly, it includes nine Indigenous businesses, making sure that they also gain the benefits of the Inland Rail.

Up in the gallery is the mayor of Temora, Councillor Rick Firman. His neighbouring shire of Junee is also going to benefit. Every neighbouring shire right up and down the line is benefiting and is going to benefit from the Inland Rail. It's going to get product to port within 24 hours. This is nation building.

They first started talking about it in 1890. The first plans were drawn up in the early 1900s. The Liberal-National government is getting on and doing it. We turned the first sod on 13 December 2018 at Parkes. Parkes is going to be the centre of the Inland Rail universe. It is already benefiting from concrete, from ballast and from workers tying into this great project. We know just how important it is. Let me tell you, each and every one of the state governments who have signed the intergovernmental agreement knows too the benefits of the Inland Rail. It is nation-building infrastructure. It's all part of the $100 billion infrastructure rollout that we're doing over the next decade.

Every electorate, every community, is benefiting from the wisdom of this government, from the delivery of this government, from the sure and stable economic conditions that it is giving this nation. You can only do this when you're able to balance the books. You can only do this when you get your budget back into surplus. Those opposite don't know the definition of surplus.

Employment

Dr CHALMERS (Rankin) (14:30): My question is to the Treasurer. Can the Treasurer confirm that, under the Morrison government, annual wages growth in every single quarter has been lower than in any quarter under the last Labor government?
Mr FRYDENBERG (Kooyong—Treasurer) (14:31): I can confirm that, today, real wages are growing at 0.6 per cent and that, under Labor, real wages were growing at just 0.4 per cent. The reality is that under Labor the real minimum wage went down in three out of the six years they were in government. Under us, real minimum wages have gone up every year. The way to boost wages is through cutting taxes, and there's only one side of this House that took to the Australian people $387 billion in higher taxes—and it was the genius member for Rankin, together with the member for McMahon, who came up with $387 billion of higher taxes which the member for Rankin said he was proud of and pleased by.

Energy

Dr MARTIN (Reid) (14:32): My question is to the Minister for Energy and Emissions Reduction. Will the minister update the House on the Morrison government's—

Dr Chalmers interjecting—

Mr Frydenberg interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Reid will resume her seat. It's difficult to hear the member for Reid when the member for Rankin and the Treasurer are carrying on their argument. I don't think you'll find it funny if you have to continue it outside.

Dr MARTIN: I will start again. My question is to the Minister for Energy and Emissions Reduction. Will the minister update the House on the Morrison government's plan to lower power prices, reduce emissions and strengthen grid reliability in New South Wales, including in my electorate of Reid? Is the minister aware of any alternative approaches?

Mr TAYLOR (Hume—Minister for Energy and Emissions Reduction) (14:33): I thank the member for Reid for her question and I congratulate her on the extraordinary work she's doing as the new member for Reid. Like all of us on this side of the House, she's focused on driving down energy prices, making sure there's a fair deal for energy for all her constituents while we reduce emissions. That's why we recently announced the landmark state energy deal with the New South Wales government. This is a good deal for the people of New South Wales and it's a good deal for all Australians.

The deal includes adding new supply to the electricity market, whether it's through new generation projects under the underwriting new generation program; making sure there's enough supply for one of the newest and cleanest coal-fired generators in Australia, at Mt Piper; strengthening transmission networks and reliability of the grid through projects like QNI and HumeLink; or dollar-for-dollar matching to support our emissions reduction and clean energy technology investments, particularly focused outside the electricity grid in sectors like agriculture, industry and transport. Importantly, this deal includes a commitment from New South Wales for more than 70 petajoules of gas in a market of only 120. We're already seeing a 35 per cent reduction in the wholesale price of gas, but this is 70 extra petajoules in the New South Wales market.

We are happy to do similar deals with other states, right across Australia. We want this deal to be the first of many, because state governments play a crucial role in working with the federal government to deliver a fair deal on energy and to reduce emissions. But those states must do the right thing. For instance, in Victoria there is a moratorium on onshore gas, conventional and unconventional. There is a blanket moratorium on gas in Victoria. When it comes to these deals, whether it's New South Wales or Victoria the principle is very simple: no gas, no cash. We're delighted to be working with the New South Wales government. We look forward to working with others and we look forward to continuing to drive down the price of energy, drive down emissions and meet our international obligations, working closely with like-minded state governments.

Australian Bushfires

Dr MIKE KELLY (Eden-Monaro) (14:36): My question is to the Prime Minister. Prime Minister, the Liberal member for Bega, Andrew Constance, reflecting my own experience in the region, has stated:

At the forums I've been at over the past two nights, the plea for help from business is about protecting casual employees and the need for a cash injection now. People are reluctant to take out loans.

On Monday the Prime Minister ridiculed Labor for standing up for businesses that don't want to take on more debt. Does the Prime Minister have the same response to the Liberal member for Bega?

Mr MORRISON (Cook—Prime Minister and Minister for the Public Service) (14:36): I can confirm that over 700,000 small businesses in the bushfire affected communities have automatically been provided with deferrals by the ATO. The member for Bega has highlighted the issue of cash flow and the impact on small businesses. Around 90,000 of these small businesses have staff. The ATO has also provided deferrals to 445,000 entities related to these small businesses. These automatic deferrals are in place for another three months, till 28 May. Overall, the ATO is also alleviating cash flow pressures in communities. Overall lodgement and payment...
deferrals have been granted to 3.9 million taxpayers—that's individuals, businesses and self-managed super funds—putting cash flow back into communities. The ATO has also automatically prioritised refunds for bushfire impacted communities over the past few months. From 15 November to 5 February, the ATO issued over 420,000 refunds, to the value of $3.2 billion, to around 348,000 taxpayers in bushfire affected communities, and the ATO emergency support hotline is available to those outside of the identified impact areas who are seeking assistance with lodgement and payment deferrals.

The member would be aware of the grant program that is available for small businesses, and he would be pleased to know that small businesses are now starting to take up those grants, where they are eligible, through the program being administered by the New South Wales government. But the member opposite seems to be suggesting that a different approach should be taken.

Mr Albanese: It's Andrew Constance.

Mr MORRISON: I'm responding to the member's question and the suggestion being made that somehow the government should be providing an insurance for income loss across the country in relation to any natural disaster. If that were to be the case, that would be in stark contrast—

Mr Albanese interjecting—

Mr MORRISON: If the Leader of the Opposition wants to make a contribution, he can wait till after question time or he can ask a question. I'm trying to address the very serious question of supports for small business, which the member has asked me in good faith. It is not the government's policy to provide cash flow assistance for businesses with income loss that have not had a direct impact from natural disasters. That was the policy followed by the Labor government when they were in power, and it is the policy that we applied to other natural disasters, in particular up in North Queensland, whether in Townsville or across the other areas affected by those floods.

In the areas the member is talking about, there are some 165,082 businesses that have employees. If we were to follow the approach that Labor seem to be suggesting, that alone would be some $8 billion, and if we were to apply it to all businesses it would be $22 billion. The opposition cannot be taken seriously when they're suggesting those sorts of proposals. (Time expired)

Energy

Mr BROADBENT (Monash) (14:39): My question is to the Minister for Energy and Emissions Reduction. Will the minister update the House on the role technology will play in the Morrison government's plan to secure Australia's energy future? How will this help keep our economy strong? Is the minister aware of any alternative approaches?

Mr TAYLOR (Hume—Minister for Energy and Emissions Reduction) (14:40): I thank the member for his question. He, like all of us on this side of the House, is focused on reducing emissions whilst maintaining a strong economy. We are absolutely focused on meeting and beating our targets. We have strong targets, we have a clear plan and we have an enviable track record. We expect to beat our Kyoto 2020 targets by 411 million tonnes. To put that in perspective, that's almost a year's worth of emissions we'll beat our 2030 targets.

The pathway to meaningful emissions reduction both before 2030 and beyond is the development and deployment of commercial technologies which strengthen the economy and don't weaken it, which reduce emissions whilst creating jobs. That's why last year at COAG, just before Christmas, we announced, alongside all state and territory governments, our National Hydrogen Strategy. Soon afterwards we committed over $500 million to that strategy. That includes projects like the Latrobe Valley Hydrogen Energy Supply Chain, in itself a $500 million project. We've committed $50 million to get that export supply chain in place for the future not just to reduce emissions in Australia but to reduce emissions around the world. We'll shortly release our technology investment road map, because our focus is on technology, not taxes.

There is an alternative, which is to tax Australians more. We have a real world example of what happens when you try to tax Australians more. It was the carbon tax those opposite had in place before they lost government. I have here a document, which is the projections from 2012 of what Labor—

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: Members on my left might notice that their leader is seeking the call. The Leader of the Opposition, I'm taking, has risen on a serious point of order.

Mr Albanese: Absolutely. You won't be surprised that we want to check the validity of the document, and we ask that it be tabled.
Mr ALBANESE: We don't know whether we can speak on relevance and whether it's real or not.

The SPEAKER: Well I know what the standing orders say, and they're real. You well know you can ask for a document to be tabled only at the end of question time.

Mr TAYLOR: It lays out Labor's plan for their carbon tax. What they forecast back in 2012 was that, by 2020, emissions in Australia would be 637 million tonnes—100 million tonnes higher than they are today—with a carbon tax. (Time expired)

Mr Burke: I would ask the minister to either table or let us know the web address of the document that he referred to.

The SPEAKER: Do you want him to table it or not?

Mr Albanese: Absolutely.

The SPEAKER: Is the minister quoting from a confidential document?

Mr Taylor: No, it's their document.

The SPEAKER: I thank the minister.

Australian Bushfires

Dr MIKE KELLY (Eden-Monaro) (14:44): My question is to the Prime Minister. Can the Prime Minister advise the House how many loans to businesses impacted by the fires nationwide have been approved?

Mr MORRISON (Cook—Prime Minister and Minister for the Public Service) (14:45): As I advised the House only a few days ago, I think, in response to one of the questions that may have been raised directly by the member, the loans program has only recently opened. It was opened, I understand, on 3 February 2020, and 232 applications have been received under the review since that time. They are currently being assessed by the New South Wales government. They haven't approved any at this point; it's only been going since 3 February. In Queensland, concessional loans also opened on 3 February, and there have been two applications received and one has been approved. In South Australia, they have approved the scheme and 60 EOIs have been received. Guidelines are currently being considered by the Victorian government, who have not put in place the assessment processes at this point to provide those loan arrangements. I can confirm that, in the member's home state, 232 applications have been made to access those loans.

Industry, Science and Technology

Dr ALLEN (Higgins) (14:46): My question is to the Minister for Industry, Science and Technology. Will the minister outline to the House how the Morrison government is backing industry to harness and develop technology to create jobs and make our economy stronger? Is the minister aware of any alternative approaches?

Mrs ANDREWS (McPherson—Minister for Industry, Science and Technology) (14:46): I thank the member for her question, and I note that she is a highly qualified medical professional. She is one of my Women in STEM colleagues on this side of the House, and she—along with all of the members on this side of the House—knows that science and technology are the greatest tools that we have to tackle the challenges that we are facing now and into the future. Importantly, they are tools that we can use to enhance our economy, grow our economy and create more jobs. There's enormous opportunity for Australia to punch well above its weight on the international stage. Whether it is with low-emission technologies, the digital economy, AI, alternative energy, advanced manufacturing processes or the space sector, our government knows that the way forward is through technology and innovation.

'Technology' is a very broad term but, essentially, you can categorise it as using scientific knowledge for practical purposes. So it's about developing new and better ways of doing things. That's very different to those opposite, who really only have the one, same old way to deal with issues, and that of course is higher taxes. Labor has really never encountered a challenge that it did not try to solve with higher taxes. That's entirely different to what we try to do here. It's very clear that they are a taxing opposition. They took to the last election $387 billion in higher taxes. In fact, they have taken higher taxes to the last four elections. So they are a pretty unimaginative bunch when you think about it. There's not a lot of innovation happening on that side of the House. It is just tax, tax and tax again and again. We on this side of the House are about technology. We're not about taxes. We are about using technology to solve problems—not dipping into the pay packets of hardworking Australians.

We are using technology in multiple ways. For example, last weekend we invested $20 million for plastics recycling. That includes a plant in Victoria that will be turning hazardous building waste into recycled shoes and new building products. So we're using technology, not taxes. Importantly, by doing this, we are creating the jobs of the future. In fact, nine jobs are created for every 10,000 tonnes of waste that we recycle. Given that there's
around 30 million tonnes of waste that we are yet to recycle each year, the opportunity for job creation is huge. (Time expired)

National Integrity Commission

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the Opposition) (14:49): My question is addressed to the Prime Minister. In 2018, the Prime Minister claimed that he had begun work on a National Integrity Commission at the beginning of that year. It's now 2020. Where is the government's National Integrity Commission legislation?

Mr PORTER (Pearce—Attorney-General, Minister for Industrial Relations and Leader of the House) (14:49): The legislation's with me. It's very well advanced—350 pages at the moment.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr PORTER: Well, the Labor proposition is that because the government wants to take the time to properly design and consult on something as important and as complicated as a Commonwealth Integrity Commission, that somehow the Labor Party is the paragon of integrity—because we want to take the time. The reasons I find that proposition fairly hard to take seriously are three-fold. First, when Labor announced a commitment to an integrity commission, they radically under-funded their proposal, allocating $58.7 million. In our previous budget we allocated $106.7 million, which is on top of the $40.7 million of existing funding.

The second reason I find their proposition hard to take seriously is that they themselves said that this is a complicated matter that would take time to draft and then require time to consult on. Indeed, the member for Maribyrnong said, 'As you would appreciate, a reform of this magnitude is complex and would require extensive consultation and design work.' In their own policy document they said that, if they were elected, a draft would be produced 12 months after the election, which time we are well inside.

The third reason I take with a grain of salt their proposition that they are paragons of integrity is that when this issue was first raised with the shadow A-G he said, 'I'm not convinced there is a need for another integrity officer.' A bit of a problem with a skiing trip was the context of that being raised. They have no model themselves, so that means that they haven't once declined to support the Greens' model but then supported the Greens' model. Another reason I find their proposition difficult to stomach is that the Labor Party themselves have tried to—

The SPEAKER: The Attorney-General will resume his seat. The Leader of the Opposition on a point of order.

Mr Albanese: It was a clear question. It didn't go to alternatives or anything else. It went to their own commitment—

The SPEAKER: I am taking it as a point of order on relevance. The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat. I do have to say that everything the Attorney has been saying goes to the timetable and the reasons for the timetable the government is taking. He's entitled to answer the question that has been asked and be relevant to the question, and every aspect, I have to say, that he has raised goes directly to the timetable and the reasons for the legislation. The Attorney has the call.

Mr PORTER: Of course, then there's the little integrity problem of 10 failed referrals on serious criminal matters, all of which have come back with zero. But, of course, the most interesting thing of all is the way in which the Labor Party has sought to link support for an integrity commission to party political fundraising. Can you believe it? At the time that they announced their commitment to an integrity commission, an email comes out from the Labor Party that begins with the sentence 'Politics is about trust.' So far so good. Then it says, 'Will you pledge your support for a National Integrity Commission?' And how do you do that? By clicking on the little red button that says 'Donate $5 to the Labor Party!' So, in an email where they pretend that they are the only side of politics supporting an integrity commission, they lead people to believe that the only way they can get an integrity commission is to donate money to the Labor Party. And who sent out that email? It was the shadow Attorney-General. The more money you pay, the more integrity you get!

Agriculture Industry

Dr WEBSTER (Mallee) (14:53): My question is to the Minister for Agriculture, Drought and Emergency Management. Will the minister outline to the House how the Morrison/McCormack government is backing the future of farming in Australia to help reach the target of a $100 billion agriculture sector by 2030?

Mr LITTLEPROUD (Maranoa—Minister for Agriculture, Drought and Emergency Management and Deputy Leader of the National Party) (14:54): Can I thank the member for Mallee for her question. The electorate of Mallee is one of the agricultural engine rooms of this nation, producing some of the best grain, grapes and citrus, and is in fact taking advantage of the free trade agreements we put around our primary producers in order to reach that $100 billion goal by 2030.
We all have a role to play in that. As a government, we do as well. We're signing up to that, not only in the here and now and supporting our farmers through some of the worst natural disasters we have seen, the fires and the drought. Over $2 billion is committed for the recovery from fires, and there is the $8 billion in commitments for the drought, ensuring we kick-start the recovery when the rains do come. Rain has come, and, while it is pleasing to see, one shower of rain doesn't break the drought. We will continue to support our farmers through our national drought strategy, through the three pillars: supporting our farmers in the here and now, giving them respect and the dignity of putting food on the table; but also, under the second pillar, supporting the communities that support them and understanding that this drought extends past the farm gate into the communities that support them; and the third pillar is looking to the future. We are the first government to look to the future and understand that the next drought starts the very next day after the rain stops. I am proud to say that last night we tabled, under the Future Drought Fund, a $5 billion investment paying a $100 million dividend every year. Last night we tabled that plan to be implemented on 1 July: a pay-down of $100 million a year to build resilience and kick-start the recovery of agriculture from one of the worst droughts in our nation's history.

But we are not stopping there. We have also made a $3 billion commitment to the states, who have the constitutional responsibility, to go and dig the holes, to plumb the nation, to get the water infrastructure, to drive the growth. We are not shirking our responsibility. We are saying, 'We will go hand in hand with you, with over $3 billion.' But we are saying to them, 'Get moving, because that $100 billion target can only be met with water.' We are going further than that. Our farmers understand more than anyone that the health of the environment and of their land is intrinsically tied to their profit and loss. We're creating a biodiversity stewardship fund to reward our farmers for the good stewardship of their land. They should be rewarded for that.

We're also making sure that we are making one of our biggest investments in one of the biggest assets we have: the precious human capital of people in rural and regional Australia. We've had a generation of young people drained out of rural and regional Australia because agriculture wasn't popular. But it is sexy again. We will create another pillar of agriculture by modernising our research and development to bring our young people home to take up the new jobs in agriculture and understand that they play a significant part in agriculture's future of driving to $100 billion by 2030. We have faith and confidence in agriculture but, more importantly, we have faith and confidence in regional and rural Australia.

**Medicare**

*Mr BOWEN (McMahon) (14:57):* My question is to the Minister for Regional Health, Regional Communications and Local Government. Can the minister confirm that of the 14 regions affected by cuts to Medicare bulk-billing incentives, eight are in Labor electorates, six are in Liberal electorates, but none are in Nationals electorates?

*Mr COULTON (Parkes—Minister for Regional Health, Regional Communications and Local Government) (14:57):* I can confirm there have been no cuts to GP bulk-billing. There has been a change to geographic locations, using information from the Bureau of Statistics. That was an update on information from 30 years ago. Outer metropolitan areas that may have been regional are now part of larger metropolitan areas. They are the ones that are impacted, but GPs in those areas are still eligible for district workforce priority. They can still bulk-bill, and those changes have not happened.

**Western Sydney Airport**

*Mrs McINTOSH (Lindsay) (14:58):* My question is to the Minister for Population, Cities and Urban Infrastructure. Will the minister update the House on how the Morrison government's strong financial position has enabled us to build once-in-a-generation infrastructure projects like the Western Sydney international airport? Is the minister aware of any alternative approaches?

*Mr TUDGE (Aston—Minister for Population, Cities and Urban Infrastructure) (14:59):* I thank the member for Lindsay for her question and her incredible advocacy for the Western Sydney Airport as well as her incredible advocacy for having local jobs for local people, because she knows that hundreds of thousands of people have to leave Western Sydney each day to get jobs elsewhere. She wants to see that changed.

I can confirm that the Western Sydney international airport is on track for take-off in 2026. This huge undertaking is underway because of our $5.3 billion commitment. It is literally transforming the landscape in Western Sydney today. When it's first opened in 2026 this airport will be the size of Adelaide's airport, with full discount airlines and premium airlines going. By 2060 we forecast that this airport will be the size that the Los Angeles airport is today. We're also committed to ensure that there is rail infrastructure and freeway infrastructure in place when it opens. We are rolling out the Western Sydney City Deal around it to take advantage of the economic opportunities it presents.
Also, critically, this project is about jobs, as the member for Lindsay knows. In the construction phase alone 11,000 jobs are being created. In the operational phase, 28,000 direct and indirect jobs will be created from the development of the Western Sydney Airport. What's more, these jobs are local jobs. We set ourselves a target of having 30 per cent of the jobs going to local people. In fact, over half of the jobs are going to local people already, and we hope that will continue.

You can only do these massive nation-building projects if you manage your finances well. The fact is that Labor could not do this, because they didn't have the money. The Leader of the Opposition, as people know, was the infrastructure minister for six long years of the Labor government. In 2009, in the middle of that Labor government, he said in relation to the Western Sydney Airport, 'It is vital that we commence work now.' That was in 2009. What happened? Absolutely nothing. Why did nothing happen? Because they stuffed the budget. They ran out of money. They were spending money on pink batts, overpriced school halls and Green Loans and were giving cash to dead people and farm animals. That is what the Labor Party were doing, whereas we on this side of the House know that to build nation-building infrastructure you have to manage your finances, and that's exactly what we're doing. (Time expired)

Medicare

Mr BOWEN (McMahons) (15:02): My question is to the Minister for Regional Health, Regional Communications and Local Government. I refer to his previous answer, in which he claimed that there have been no cuts to bulk-billing incentives. Can the minister explain to the House what the financial incentive for bulk-billing was in affected areas in dollar terms before the government's change and what it is now?

Mr COULTON (Parkes—Minister for Regional Health, Regional Communications and Local Government) (15:03): I welcome the opportunity to add to my last answer. The changes that were made were geographic. It was not changed by electorate; it was changed by geographical area from the Bureau of Statistics. I think it's important to note that rural bulk-billing incentives go to rural areas. That's the idea. The idea of rural and regional incentives is to support—

Mr Conroy interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The minister will pause. The member for Shortland will leave under standing order 94(a).

Mr COULTON: All doctors who bulk-bill, regardless of their location, will continue to be eligible for bulk-billing incentives. These changes relate to the higher rural bulk-billing incentive. The government delayed the implementation from 1 July 2019 until 1 January 2020 to allow practices to come to terms with these changes. I can inform members that if doctors want to find out more about this they can check their Modified Monash Model classification on the DoctorConnect website.

Housing Affordability

Mr SIMMONDS (Ryan) (15:04): My question is to the Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Housing. Will the minister please update the House on how the Morrison government is building an even stronger Australia by supporting Australians into their first homes in the First Home Loan Deposit Scheme?

Mr SUKKAR (Deakin—Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Housing ) (15:05): I thank the member for Ryan for his question. The member for Ryan is a champion for first home buyers in his electorate, as are all members on this side of the House. The Morrison government's focus and commitment to support first home buyers is successfully helping more Australians get into a home sooner. Indeed, the latest ABS lending indicators highlight that the broad recovery that we're seeing in the Australian property market has been underpinned by first home buyers. They are driving the recovery in housing. Mortgage approvals for first home buyers were up by 6.2 per cent month on month, which is the best outcome in a decade.

I'm pleased to report to the House that it's just over a month since the Morrison government's pre-election commitment to establish the First Home Loan Deposit Scheme was successfully commenced. The First Home Loan Deposit Scheme, importantly, allows prospective first home buyers to purchase a property with a government guarantee with a deposit of as little as five per cent, because we know that for first home buyers one of the biggest struggles is getting the deposit together. More and more, banks are requiring deposits of 20 per cent, which are incredibly difficult to save for. So, with the Morrison government's First Home Loan Deposit Scheme, people can get into the market with as little as a five per cent deposit.

Since the scheme's commencement just over a month ago, nearly 6,000 places under the scheme have been reserved, and 3,000 places have progressed to pre-approval. The member for Ryan would be very pleased to hear that in his home state of Queensland over 700 first home buyers have already received a pre-approved place under the scheme. It's over 1,100 first home buyers in New South Wales, 800 in Victoria, 150 in WA, 150 in South
Australia, over 100 in Tasmania and over 100 in the ACT and the Northern Territory. It's very pleasing that these places have been distributed throughout the country in cities, regional centres and rural areas. Also, the scheme is reaching the Australians our Prime Minister wanted to reach: people on middle incomes. Among those who have obtained a pre-approved place under the scheme, the average income is $67,000 for singles and $110,000 for couples, which means the scheme is really hitting and assisting the areas of the economy that we want it to. So the Morrison government, like all Liberal and Nationals governments, is the best friend of first home buyers, and we will continue to be so. (Time expired)

Medicare

Dr MIKE KELLY (Eden-Monaro) (15:08): My question is to the Minister for Regional Health, Regional Communications and Local Government. Minister, can you explain why the government has cut Medicare bulk-billing incentives in my bushfire-affected electorate, making it harder for doctors to bulk-bill children and pensioners?

Mr COULTON (Parkes—Minister for Regional Health, Regional Communications and Local Government) (15:08): I will remind the member for Eden-Monaro that the changes he is referring to passed this House on 14 October, unopposed.

Mr Bowen: No, that's wrong.

The SPEAKER: The member for McMahon!

Mr COULTON: I welcome the opportunity, on a day like today, to speak about rural health, on the day when we announced another 100 training places for the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine—rural generalist pathways putting doctors into areas such as the honourable member's electorate, servicing those regional areas. There has been no change to the regulation. The changes are an update from the Bureau of Statistics. They were agreed to by both sides of this House. It is important to remember that this policy is to service regional, rural and remote health, and those changes are purely on the demographics of the areas mentioned. There has been no change to bulk-billing.

The SPEAKER: The Manager of Opposition Business on a point of order.

Mr Burke: The minister just referred specifically to a piece of legislation he alleged had passed this House. I ask him to table it. It doesn't exist.

The SPEAKER: Two points: firstly, I'm just going to say to the Manager of Opposition Business that, if he or anyone else has an issue with a minister's answer, they know they can deal with that at the end of question time. Secondly, I'm not going to ask ministers to table legislation that you've got.

Coronavirus

Mr LAMING (Bowman) (15:10): A question for the Minister for Health: will the minister update the House on what actions the Morrison government is taking to protect Australians' health from the outbreak of the coronavirus?

Mr HUNT (Flinders—Minister for Health and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service and Cabinet) (15:11): I thank the member for Bowman, who has been a great advocate for public health and a practitioner of public health all of his life. Earlier today we were provided with the latest figures that there are 44,754 cases of coronavirus worldwide. Sadly, there are now 1,112 people who have lost their lives to coronavirus. In Australia the number of cases remains at 15. As I said previously, five have now cleared the virus, which is a very positive development. In addition to that, there is ongoing testing around the country, where there are any cases which might be suspected or in many cases which are merely possibilities. At the facility at Howard Springs, 13 cases have been tested and found negative. It was a low probability from the outset, but the AUSMAT team, in conjunction with NT Health, was not taking chances. Their view is that they would rather test every single possible case than put anybody at risk of not being treated early. Equally, on Christmas Island we have now had three cases tested. All have been found to be negative. Two have been double-confirmed on that; the third is waiting the double confirmation from the reference laboratory.

The real point here is that we have in place a system in Australia which, at this point—and I stress: at this point—is containing the spread. We have seen in Hubei province some extraordinary human hardship, as well as the loss of life, where it has not been contained. Chinese authorities have moved to contain it to Hubei. We as a country have moved to ensure that we have the strongest containment practices in place. Part of that has been what we have done with our border arrangements, and I thank everybody involved for their work on that front—in particular, our medical professionals, who have acted early. As part of that, we have made available today an additional 300,000 surgical masks to GPs, to medical professionals and to chemists, not for sale, but for their use and for the use of any of their customers whom they believe might be at risk.
For that reason, we've had a great national task, with support from states and territories, with support from medical practitioners and with support from people on all sides, so I thank everybody. I'm also aware that there are those on board cruise ships abroad. With the foreign minister and DFAT we have agreed to set up support for some who may have mental health challenges in this circumstance. Being confined to a small situation can be deeply distressing. They could be fearful about their health. They could be suffering from anxiety or other conditions. So, over the course of the next 24 hours, to get ahead of any risks, we are setting those facilities up. I thank everybody and say that our job is to protect Australians, and we're doing that. (Time expired)

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the Opposition) (15:14): on indulgence—On behalf of the opposition I thank the minister for organising the comprehensive briefing we had yesterday with the Chief Medical Officer, myself and the shadow minister for health. The shadow minister for health has had regular briefings on this matter. This is a critical national interest matter, and I thank the minister for the professional way in which he has conducted himself and his office.

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

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE: ADDITIONAL ANSWERS

Australian Bushfires

Mr MORRISON (Cook—Prime Minister and Minister for the Public Service) (15:14): May I add to an answer. The departmental brief that I received in relation to the member for Eden-Monaro's question about bushfire recovery grants indicated 232 applications were received. I'm advised that that is not the correct figure. I'm having that other figure confirmed, and I will relay that figure to him through the minister.

Medicare

Mr COULTON (Parkes—Minister for Regional Health, Regional Communications and Local Government) (15:15): I would like to add to an answer. I am advised that, in fire affected areas of the electorate of Eden-Monaro, there are no practices under the modified Monash 1 classification. Therefore, all fire affected areas in the member's electorate are eligible for the rural bulk-billing incentive. I can also advise that the number of bulk-billed GP services in Eden-Monaro increased by 180,410, or 37.5 per cent, between 2012 and 2017.

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the Opposition) (15:16): Mr Speaker, I seek leave to give a personal explanation.

The SPEAKER: Does the Leader of the Opposition claim to have been misrepresented?

Mr ALBANESE: I do—

The SPEAKER: The Leader of the Opposition may proceed.

Mr ALBANESE: by the minister for urban infrastructure, in his announcement about the Western Sydney Airport, where he alleged that I made a number of statements in terms of the timing of the construction of the airport. In fact, the aviation white paper was concluded in 2009. The joint study between New South Wales and the Commonwealth was concluded by the New South Wales government only in mid-2011. Therefore, his statement can't possibly be correct.

QUESTIONS TO THE SPEAKER

Parliament House: Events

Mr BURKE (Watson—Manager of Opposition Business) (15:16): Members will be aware—certainly, on our side, through the member for Macquarie—that the Parliamentary Friends of Orchestral Music made sure that yesterday there were moments in this building that were calm. If you walked through the corridors just outside, the Sydney Symphony Orchestra was doing pop-up performances throughout the building. The doors were all shut to make sure that the calm didn't make its way in here! I wanted to thank you as Speaker for facilitating that for all members and people around the building. I also ask: is it possible for that to happen more often? I think it's probably good for the place.

The SPEAKER (15:17): Yes, I think it worked well. I gave approval for it to be just outside the chamber here. It's certainly something we will do again in the future, for sure. I thank the friendship group for the initiative in bringing the orchestra to Canberra, where I think they performed the night before and then at a number of pop-ups on the House of Representatives side.
Mr PORTER (Pearce—Attorney-General, Minister for Industrial Relations and Leader of the House): I have received a letter from the honourable member for Barton proposing that a definite matter of public importance be submitted to the House for discussion, namely:

The Government’s failure to Close the Gap.

I call upon all those honourable 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 BURNEY (Barton): One of the most remarkable days of my life was in February 2008. In this building, the Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, said sorry and announced a decade to close the gap in seven areas. It has been 12 years since we commenced this national effort to close the gap in the quality-of-life outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. It hasn’t happened.

While we have made some progress, these latest results are unacceptable. The target to halve the gap in child mortality by 2018 was not met. The Indigenous child mortality rate is still more than twice that of non-Indigenous children. Tragically, 117 Indigenous children died in 2018. The target to halve the gap in reading, writing and numeracy by 2018 was not met. Reading, writing and maths results and school attendance figures are still nowhere near good enough. One in four Indigenous children are performing below minimum standards for reading and one in five below the minimum standards for numeracy. If kids aren't attending school and if they can't read, write and do maths, they are denied a lifetime of opportunity. This has not been helped by the Liberals having cut billions of dollars of funding from schools that need the most help, including many remote schools with high Indigenous enrolments. I and my colleague the member for Sydney acknowledge that many teachers and many schools are doing terrific work with Indigenous children, but they are getting precious little support from this federal government.

The target to close the gap in school attendance by 2018 was not met. While enrolment for early childhood education was on track, we are concerned about the significant variation between jurisdictions—in particular, Queensland, the Northern Territory and New South Wales. While attendance rates in early education remain favourable, we are particularly concerned that the Northern Territory rate is almost 20 percentage points behind, at 73.1 per cent. It is deeply concerning, but unfortunately not surprising, that out-of-pocket costs are listed as a barrier to access to early education for Indigenous children. We know that out-of-pocket costs are soaring under the Morrison government, and it is often vulnerable and disadvantaged children who are most severely impacted. This disparity is more pronounced in remote and very remote areas.

The target to halve the gap in employment by 2018 was not met. At the expiration of this target, the Indigenous employment rate was 49 per cent, compared to 75 per cent for non-Indigenous Australians. In the decade to 2018, this gap has barely changed.

The target to close the gap in life expectancy—a gap which cannot be understood in a country like Australia—by 2031 is not on track. Indigenous Australians live eight years less than other Australians, and this gap is even wider—absolutely a chasm, as Anthony Albanese said this morning—in remote and regional areas. Alarmingly, Indigenous cancer mortality rates, well understood by our shadow minister for health, are worsening. Indigenous cancer survival is actually going backwards in absolute terms—not just in comparison to non-Indigenous Australians. This year's result is virtually the same as last year—and it is just not good enough.

These are not statistics; these are people. They are sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, aunties and uncles. The first Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander justice commissioner, Mick Dodson, said it perfectly. He said: A certain kind of industrial deafness has developed. The meaning of these figures is not heard—or felt. The statistics of infant and perinatal mortality are our babies and children who die in our arms.

The statistics of shortened life expectancy are our mothers and fathers, uncles, aunties and elders who live diminished lives and die before their gifts of knowledge and experience are passed on. We die silently under these statistics. We have all heard them—the figures of death, and of disability. Every few years, figures are repeated and excite attention. But I suspect that most Australians accept them as being almost inevitable.

The human element in this is not recognised. The meaning of these figures is not heard—or felt.
The Leader of the Opposition today spoke about truth-telling. Most of us on this side of the House and, I am sure on the other side of the House have heard the minister speak about the extraordinary truth-telling of the Myall Creek massacre. On 10 June 1838, a gang of 11 stockmen, led by a squatter, brutally slaughtered a group of some 28 Aboriginal men, women and children who were camped peacefully next to the station huts on the Myall Creek cattle station near the Gwydir River in central New South Wales.

Even though the Myall Creek massacre was just one of the countless massacres that took place right across this country, from the earliest days of British settlement in 1788 and, as we heard today, right through to Coniston in 1928, it stands alone in its historical significance. It is significant because it is the only time in Australian history that white men were arrested, charged and hung for the massacre of Aboriginal people. Because the massacre was so thoroughly investigated and documented, it provided irrefutable documentary evidence not just of this massacre but also of how commonplace such massacres were at the time.

The consequences of past wrongs have transcended generations, and they can still be felt today. We can see it in the child who doesn't have a safe roof to live under. I have visited remote communities where the town has literally run out of water, let alone clean water. I have seen dams empty and children given soft drinks instead of water. These disparities plague First Nations people right across this continent, including the islands of the Torres Strait, but it is in our remote and regional areas where the disparity is particularly pronounced, where the significant obstacles to closing the social and health gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians are most felt—and I'm sure the member for Lingiari will speak about that. Mick Dodson went on to say this about social justice:

Social Justice is what faces you in the morning. It is awakening in a house with an adequate water supply, cooking facilities and sanitation. It is the ability to nourish your children and send them to school where their education not only equips them for employment but reinforces their knowledge and appreciation of their cultural inheritance. It is the prospect of genuine employment and good health: a life of choices and opportunity. A life free from discrimination.

Understanding this truth is critical to understanding the challenges, the disparity and the gap that we can see today. It is also critical that we understand that First Nations people best understand the challenges and solutions to the issues affecting them. It is for this reason that Labor supports the three components of the Uluru Statement in full. We also welcome the partnership that the minister spoke about today between the Coalition of Peaks and the government.

Labor looks forward to supporting new and ambitious targets to close the gap, including, as our leader indicated today, the important area of justice. We also want to see targets around child removal and out-of-home care. A direct and secure voice to decision-makers will build on the work of the peaks and ensure that the issues and perspectives of First Nations people are not left to languish on the fringes. Genuine commitment means that services and programs are adequately resourced and properly funded. It is difficult to accept a commitment as genuine when half a billion dollars has been cut from the Indigenous affairs budget by the present government. We are only halfway through the original target for closing the gap in life expectancy, but these failures are not inevitable so long as there is a genuine commitment from government to listen and lead.

Once again, we offer bipartisanship from this side of the House. There are differences on issues, particularly around a voice to the parliament, but we all understand that we cannot grow as a nation—we cannot call ourselves a complete nation—when the disparity that I've outlined, the disparity that we all understand, the disparity that we see in our electorates exists for First Nations people, the first peoples, as the High Court reiterated yesterday, of this land.

Mr WYATT (Hasluck—Minister for Indigenous Australians) (15:28): I thank the member for Barton for bringing forward this MPI on a very important day, but on critical issues. There are many seminal moments in the history of this nation, and the 10 reports on Closing the Gap are seminal moments. What they have done since the commencement of this process is heighten the awareness amongst mainstream Australia of the level of the disparity. Given my age, I have read numerous reports that identify the chasms of the past, in terms of outcomes, when the difference in life expectancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians was a far greater chasm. But, as we've progressed over the 10 years of Closing the Gap, we've succeeded in many areas of activity that are seeing improvements occurring at the local level.

The issue we have is with the aggregation of data. When you aggregate, you don't get a sense of where success sits across this nation. I celebrate many successes when I'm out in communities. Whilst my colleague from the other side does raise matters to do with potable water and elements that are important in the quality of life, we are working with good intention. Whilst established with good intention, the government of the day failed to acknowledge the critical role that Indigenous Australians play in the process.

Since I've been in this place I've seen a quantum shift in the way in which so many members in this chamber now engage with Indigenous Australians and have conversations with them in respect to what it is that they are
seeking, and then they champion those causes. If we've had that impact in this chamber then the impact is greater outside as well in addressing the disparities, but we have not done the implementation process well either. It doesn't matter at which level we address this. As the Prime Minister stated earlier today:

Over decades, our top down, government knows best approach has not delivered the improvements we all yearn for. For too long, governments of all persuasions have done things to our people, not with them.

Today is an opportunity to collectively take forward the different paradigm. The engagement of Indigenous Australians through the peak bodies with our government has developed an awareness that is significant, and that significance is not lost on the broader Indigenous community, but we've got to get better at it at every level. Now is the time to lead, to recognise our collective failings and to reach out to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians to work with them, to walk with them, to listen to them and to welcome them to the table so that together we can realise what we all aspire to. This is equality between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. I'm heartened by the gains, including in early childhood education and its long-term impact, but I equally acknowledge there are still gaps that we have much to do in.

I listened to my colleague opposite raise some issues in the lunchtime session that are part of the dialogue that the Coalition of Peaks are having with our people within the community on the ground. That is an important phase in the way that we move forward. I am reassured that the commitment to working with our people is genuine and that the process will lead to greater involvement across this nation in a way that we've not seen before.

We acknowledge that the past 10 years have not delivered the results we should have had, and there is no way of shying away from the responsibility we share to get to the next 10 and the 10 after that. This shared accountability and shared responsibility with governments, Indigenous Australians and their communities and organisations is paramount to the way in which we turn the dial from failure to potential successes in key and critical areas. That will include our government continuing to engage with ministers for Indigenous Australians, as I have been doing, across this nation, talking about areas that are important to all of us in the way in which we focus on tangible and real outcomes that change the quality of life for young people. We have issued a call to all governments to continue to work together on national priorities for collective action, supporting local communities to set their own priorities and tailor services to this unique context.

My discussions with, in many senses, my peers at each state and territory level have been very welcoming in the way in which they are now engaging with Indigenous Australians. Steven Marshall, who has responsibility in South Australia for Indigenous Australians, now brings his advisory body into the inner sanctum of government and has his ministers sitting with the Indigenous people on that body to talk about those things that impact on people living in South Australia. And there are others who are doing things differently. They are now involving and listening to Indigenous Australians around this nation.

We will continue to work together through the COAG process. The Prime Minister, as you heard today, is very strongly committed. He made this comment to the peaks: 'I am about listening and working with you, not about our government doing things to you anymore.' I know that in the discussions that he and Pat have had, they have been genuine in their commitment to making sure that we take a different paradigm of working and sharing and making decisions together.

Indigenous Australians at local, regional and national engagements are embedding knowledge and leadership into those discussions. My colleague across the table and I have, for 40 years, been on the outside fighting inwardly to reflect and achieve changes that would make a long-term sustainable difference. Now that we're in here, we have the opportunity of ensuring that, collectively, we engage and bring our people to the table and that we bring them to the deliberations of their aspiration in changing the way in which we work together. There is an important need to be bipartisan. There will be times in which we will have our differences, but the bottom line has to be for the greater good of all Indigenous people across this country. It has to be that every tier of government needs to play its role in making sure that the people at the table are equal partners.

I was in Geraldton when the native title handover occurred, and in the address I gave I made the comment that native title and Indigenous Land Use Agreements change the context of engagement, negotiation and agreed decision-making, and realise a benefit that is not just a superficial benefit but a long-term one in the economic, sustainable directions that they wish to achieve. We also have to think about that as well, because, when we talk about traditional owners, we're going to have to engage with them differently as well. But let me say that we are as one in what we say in terms of our people sitting at the table and talking.

All of us have failed in the Closing the Gap journey over the last 10 years. The intent has been great and good, but we also have to look at the model as a model that had intent but is broken. By having our people sit at the table in all of the Closing the Gap refresh approaches means that we will have a better ownership at the local level, a
better ownership between governments and Indigenous Australians, but, more importantly, the engagement of mainstream Australia in the aspirations that communities seek.

Those areas of detriment in rural and remote areas still have a way to go. But we will work collectively to make sure that that occurs, and we will work with those communities. That's a commitment that both the Morrison government and I commit to in the way we will change the paradigm for the next 10 years, in which we will build a relationship and a partnership that are based on joint and shared decision-making, joint ownership and joint accountability and our capacity to reach out and use the skills within our Indigenous leadership and communities and, equally, the skills of non-Indigenous Australians in that journey forward to a better future. I hope that all of us in this chamber—the whole 150 of us—leave a legacy that marks today.

Mr SNOWDON (Lingiari) (15:38): I thank the member for Barton and the Minister for Indigenous Australians for their speeches. I do want to take up some of the issues which are raised by the minister. Minister, I don't doubt the sincerity of what you say about your intent to walk with Aboriginal people and to listen to them.

We heard the Prime Minister this morning say that he wanted to listen to Aboriginal people and he wanted to push decision-making down. He said, 'What have we been too proud to learn?' and, later, during question time, he said, 'We need to look through the eyes of Indigenous Australians'. Well, yes; that's true. Why hasn't he done it?

On one hand, we see what I think is a very progressive step in working with the Coalition of Peaks in the way in which it has been described, and that's a very important advancement. But, on the other hand, in contradiction to that, we see a blindness and a deafness to what Aboriginal people have been saying to this government for some time: Why won't you listen to us? The two examples that I can give right now are the government's insistence on making the cashless debit card mandatory throughout the Northern Territory when Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory have said vehemently, 'We don't want it.' There's no understanding of the implications of this card on those people. They know, and they've asked the government not to do it. But the government seems intent on doing so regardless—where is the listening—as it is around the CDP program, which Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory say has hurt them immeasurably. There is a deafness. The government doesn't want to hear these things. And, when it doesn't hear, it doesn't listen. And, when it doesn't listen, it doesn't take note and it doesn't change. That's a problem.

This report is a sad indictment on all of us, not just the government but all of us in this place, that, over a decade, we collectively—Labor, Liberal, Nationals and Greens and everyone else—haven't been able to achieve the results we should be achieving. And I say this from the perspective of Aboriginal people who live in the remote part of the Northern Territory. What this report says is an absolute bloody indictment. It points out very clearly that over the decade things have been getting comparatively worse. Life expectancy for an Indigenous male in a very remote part of Australia is nearly 17 years less than it is for non-Aboriginal Australians, and eight years less than for Aboriginal Australians living in metropolitan areas. There is a problem here.

The minister says the gaps have come down—but the disparity is growing. There's no question that there have been measures which have made changes, absolutely. That's all been down to the drive of Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services, largely, throughout Australia. There's one that has had outstanding success which we all know about. It's the Institute for Urban Indigenous Health in Brisbane. There's no question about that. But it's come from the community. At one point the Institute for Urban Indigenous Health—remember this?—were provided resources, $100 million by the Gillard government, for an antismoking campaign, and Joe Hockey said it was a waste of money. Pleasingly, although sadly, the government then took $500 million out of the budget.

We now acknowledge—even the government acknowledges—the importance of these programs. This is because Aboriginal people have been running them and achieving success themselves, despite what we do. We have a lesson here. The lesson is that, if we want to walk with people, we've got to talk with them, listen to them and pay attention to what they say. In the case of people who live in very remote parts of this country, we have not been listening, because, had we been listening, changes would have resulted in a definite improvement. Housing, is just one example—as is water, as the shadow minister said. There are many, many areas we need to collectively improve on.

I accept the hand of friendship across the table. I want to work with you, Minister, as we all do, but, if we don't work together, listen, learn and do what Aboriginal people ask, we won't achieve a positive outcome.

Mrs MARINO (Forrest—Assistant Minister for Regional Development and Territories) (15:44): In my comments today I wanted to focus on those who are working so hard to close the gap, and I wanted to start with the minister at the table, the Minister for Indigenous Australians, and acknowledge the efforts of the minister and the member for Barton in this space. I really wanted to acknowledge the fact that the minister was born at Roelands mission in my electorate. He was six weeks premature and ended up in the Bunbury Hospital as a result. He is, of course, of Noongar, Yamatji, Wongi heritage and grew up in Corrigin in the west.
To his great credit, he became a teacher and progressed onto senior roles in health—he was a director in health—and education in New South Wales and Western Australia. He was awarded the Centenary of Federation Medal for 'his efforts and contribution to improving the quality of life for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and mainstream Australian society in education and health'.

I think we are all particularly proud of his appointment to this particular role. He brings dignity to the role. He is the first-ever Indigenous minister for Indigenous affairs. He sits at the cabinet table. He represents Indigenous people every time he does so and every day of his life. I want to acknowledge his efforts in this place and the respect with which he's held. He's one of the people totally focused on closing the gap.

There is a group in my part of the world that works very well on closing the gap in health. It is the only Aboriginal community controlled health organisation in Wardandi boodja—24,000 square kilometres of the south-west. The South West Aboriginal Medical Service is a brilliant, local not-for-profit organisation. They do a fantastic job. They are founded on the principles of self-determination, which the minister talks about; empowerment; and freedom of choice. They focus on physical and mental health. They pursue best practice and provide culturally appropriate holistic health services to the Indigenous community in our south-west. They are improving the health of Aboriginal people and are providing incredible support. They call it 'Our health, our way'. That's exactly what they're doing.

Minister Wyatt, you've been there and you understand what they're offering. Ernie Hill is their chair. Lesley Nelson is doing a fantastic job as their CEO, as you know so well. The Aboriginal and Indigenous population in the south-west is close to 4,000, and this organisation has delivered nearly 26,000 episodes of health care. What a great job they're doing. I want to acknowledge all of their efforts. They have outreach into areas like Busselton, Collie, Manjimup and Harvey. I want to acknowledge Lesley Ugle, who won the Harvey Community Citizen of the Year award. She is a Harvey Aboriginal community elder. She was acknowledged as a deadly yorga, which is a great compliment in the local Noongar culture. It's roughly equivalent to 'an amazing woman'. She's delivering outreach for SWAMS in Harvey. It's a fantastic job that she is doing as part of SWAMS.

Minister Wyatt, you came to SWAMS last year and launched the world's first Aboriginal television health network. It's a federally funded network providing culturally safe health info online to help build stronger communities and close the gap. Along with SWAMS there are other organisations out there. I want to acknowledge the efforts of all those working day in and day out in Aboriginal and Indigenous communities right around Australia. Their focus absolutely is on improving the health and wellbeing of Indigenous people.

I really want to acknowledge the member for Barton and Minister Wyatt, who are at the table, in their efforts and willingness to work together. Minister, I think you've highlighted the walking together and listening in all of your remarks. One of the great things we have here is the great respect with which both of you at the table are held, not only in this parliament but wherever you are received around Australia. That's a really important part of what's ahead in closing the gap.

Ms PAYNE (Canberra) (15:49): Today is an incredibly important day for this parliament and this nation, when we monitor the progress against the Closing the Gap targets that were set in 2008 following the national apology by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd. Sadly, today we know that five of those seven targets are far from on track. One of those targets was to halve the gap in child mortality by 2018. Tragically, the rate of child mortality for Indigenous children remains twice that of other Australian children. We wanted to halve the gap in reading, writing and numeracy by 2018. This is well behind, with one in four Indigenous children not meeting minimum standards for reading, and one in five for numeracy. These children are being robbed of a lifetime of opportunity. We wanted to close the gap in school attendance by 2018 and halve the gap in employment, and to close the gap in life expectancy by 2031. On this, Indigenous Australians remain eight years behind non-Indigenous Australians. That is worse in remote and regional areas. Very concerning, cancer mortality rates for Indigenous Australians are actually worsening in absolute terms, not only when compared with non-Indigenous Australians.

We as a nation cannot accept this. This is the same as last year and it is simply not good enough. If we want to see real change and progress in closing the gap we must properly understand that the dispossession and separation of families did not stay in the past. The generational trauma continues on. We have to recognise this. The consequences of past wrongs have transcended generations and can still be felt today. We need to confront our history. We need truth-telling. It is also critical that we understand that First Nations people understand best the challenges and solutions to the issues affecting them. First Nations people need to be central to the decisions that affect them, and it is for these reasons that Labor supports the Uluru statement in full. As outlined in the Uluru Statement from the Heart, delivered in 2017, three years ago now, those gathered at the National Constitutional Convention, coming from all around this country, said:

... we are the most incarcerated people on the planet … Our children are aliened from their families at unprecedented rates … our youth languish in detention in obscene numbers.
… to empower our people and take a rightful place in our own country … have power over our destiny … We call for the establishment of a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution.

Makarrata … the coming together after a struggle.

Labor wants to see this implemented. Here we are, three years on, still waiting to see a voice to the parliament enshrined so that we can meaningfully listen. We must stop repeating the mistakes of the past. We must genuinely listen to First Nations Australians. We welcome the partnership between the Coalition of Peaks and the government, and Labor hopes to support new and ambitious targets to close the gap, including in the important areas of justice, child removal and out-of-home care. There are things that just must simply be addressed. As the member for Barton has again drawn attention to in this parliament, there are communities that don't have clean water for kidney dialysis, let alone drinking. We as a nation cannot accept this. A genuine commitment means services and programs need to be adequately resourced and properly funded. We question that commitment as genuine when this government has cut half a billion dollars from Indigenous Affairs. We look forward to working with the government to close the gap, but, as the member for Barton has also said, bipartisanship must not be a race to the bottom. We must be ambitious. We must genuinely listen and genuinely close the gap.

Mr Leeser (Berowra) (15:53): It's fair to say that this Closing the gap report presents a mixed range of results. We should acknowledge that there are two important successes in the report. The target in relation to early childhood development and education is on track. That is not something to be sneezed at. We know from the work of Professor James Heckman at the University of Chicago that early childhood education and development are absolutely paramount to somebody's future.

The second success of the report is the fact that school completion rates are on track. We know that, when somebody completes year 12, many options open to them that weren't available to them but for their completing year 12, whether it's further education or employment opportunities. We know as well that for those that go on from year 12 to university and complete a bachelor's degree there is absolutely no gap between Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people. But we also have to be realistic that, other than those two targets, for all the other targets we are not on track.

I want to particularly focus on the target in relation to employment, because this particular report shows that there's been no substantial improvement since 2008. Although the targets are about to change, I think the employment outcomes demonstrate the need for new approaches, which the government, under the leadership of this minister, have embarked upon. Between 2008 and 2018-19 the national Indigenous employment rate increased only slightly, from 48.2 per cent to 49.1 per cent. The employment rate for non-Indigenous Australians over the same period remained relatively stable, at around 75 per cent.

There's an interesting point in the report about remoteness and employment too. In 2018-19 the Indigenous employment rate was highest in major cities, around 59 per cent, and lowest in very remote areas, around 35 per cent. That's a very small employment outcome for Indigenous people. There are a couple of interesting exceptions here. They particularly note that the remote employment rate for Indigenous employment in remote South Australia is at 67 per cent, which is an interesting and high outcome; similarly, in inner regional Queensland the rate is around 60 per cent. Those particular differences and results deserve further study.

One of the things that Minister Wyatt has done since being minister has been to commission the House Indigenous Affairs committee—which I chair and which includes, among other people, the member for Lingiari, who's my deputy chair—to look at new approaches to getting more Indigenous people into work and into small businesses. The committee held its first hearings this week, and early submissions show the huge growth that there has been, in recent years, in Indigenous people starting their own businesses.

I think today's report is a reminder of why the inquiry that the minister has established is important. Achievements in education demonstrate that employment outcomes should improve over the medium to long term. As I said, there's no gap with Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people who finish a university bachelor's degree. Evidence submitted in our inquiry indicates the Indigenous business sector has trebled over the last decade, and in the minerals industry—one industry that's led the way in making Indigenous training and employment part of their business as usual—there are 2½ times more Indigenous people working today than there were in the early 2000s. But across all industries, the submissions tell us, we need to have better links between training and employment. Also, we've seen, in the wake of bushfires, there is a greater desire in a range of industries to use Aboriginal expertise in dealing with environmental challenges. Those are the sorts of issues that have come through in some of the submissions in these early days. I think this report presents us with a challenge to reimagine and re-envision how we deal with a thorny problem: getting more Indigenous people into work.
I want to acknowledge the comments of my deputy chair, the member for Lingiari, in relation to the government needing to listen more. I'm sorry he's not in the chamber, but I just wanted to note that Minister Ruston has been in the Northern Territory in recent weeks, and she's been going around talking to communities who are subject to the cashless debit card and listening to those communities. What she brings from that listening and consultation forward to government will be a matter for her, and it's something that I know all members will be interested in examining. In conclusion, I think the new approach to closing the gap, with the new targets, is going to be something—(Time expired)

Dr FREELANDER (Macarthur) (15:59): First of all, I'd like to acknowledge the member for Barton and the minister for their comments. For the record, I consider them two of the finest parliamentarians we have in this place, and I thank them for their input. I want to acknowledge, to start with, not only the Ngunawal and Ngambri people on whose lands we are speaking but also the Dharawal people of my own electorate. In particular I'd like to acknowledge the Tharawal Aboriginal Medical Service, led by Darryl Wright, and my medical colleagues and the other staff there, who are doing a wonderful job to close the gap and to improve the health and other outcomes for our Indigenous population. I'd also like to mention Uncle Ivan Wellington, a senior Aboriginal elder in my electorate, and the wonderful job he's doing, particularly with the younger people in my electorate.

The handing down of the Closing the Gap report is a significant event in our national calendar. It's already been stated that tomorrow will be the 12th anniversary of the national apology. Since 2008 we've been recording and reporting our progress in closing the gap. I know there are many good things that are happening in Aboriginal health, but the Closing the Gap report is certainly extremely disappointing. Even the targets that are on track are fairly modest ones, and those that are not on track are not just a hiccup; they are shameful.

Before going on to the Closing the Gap targets, I'd just like to point out the fact that, in 2020, there are Aboriginal people with diabetes who have no access to power to keep their insulin at the appropriate temperature and Aboriginal people who require dialysis who don't have access to clean water, and rheumatic fever and rheumatic heart disease are seen almost exclusively in our Indigenous population. This is absolutely shameful and should not be acceptable on any level. If it were in any other population in our country, it would be seen as a national emergency. The fact that we have had an epidemic of syphilis in northern Australia and it is not seen as a national emergency—we've actually had babies born with congenital syphilis—is absolutely disgraceful in 2020.

The failure to meet the majority of the Closing the Gap targets is symptomatic of a government that is failing to act. The results before us are beyond disappointing, and they serve as a stark reminder of how far we have to go and that we must act actively and aggressively pursue change in this area. In my electorate of Macarthur, we have the Reiby Juvenile Justice Centre. Although Indigenous people make up only around three to four per cent of our population, overwhelmingly the population of Reiby is made up of Indigenous children, and that is shameful. As the Leader of the Opposition remarked, this day cannot and must not add up to nothing more than sentiment and fine words. We can and we must do better. The reality is that the coalition government has failed to close the gap, and the report is proof of that. Also, some of the speeches that have been given by those on the other side have been remarkably paternalistic. The fact that they support the cashless debit guard and they don't support the Uluru statement or constitutional recognition is demonstration of their inability to understand the importance of this issue.

Today we have again been told we're not on track to address the gap in life expectancy. In fact, for remote Indigenous people the gap in life expectancy is even bigger than it used to be; it can be over 15 years for Indigenous men in remote areas. That is disgraceful. It's upsetting that we are also far off achieving closing the gap in child mortality. Again, this is something that is shameful. These are our children. We must make sure that we close the gap in these areas. It's a crying shame, and we should not leave such an atrocious legacy to future generations. This day, this report, provides a valuable voice for our First Australians, and we must act. It's a sad voice and a reminder that we have a long way to go. It's not a day for political opportunism; nor is it a day for us to pat ourselves on the back. In many ways, the Closing the Gap targets that we've met have been led by Indigenous Australians, and they've done a fantastic job. But we must do better.

Mr THOMPSON (Herbert) (16:04): I'd like to start by thanking the Prime Minister and the opposition leader for their Closing the Gap speeches today. I'd also like to thank the Minister for Indigenous Australians, Ken Wyatt, and the shadow minister for Indigenous Australians, Linda Burney. I stand with everyone in this place to congratulate and honour your leadership in this space. I know that this is not a time for political pointscoring or mudslinging. This is a time when we need to be working together.

I come from Townsville, in Herbert. I have a lot of Indigenous Australians in my electorate. More importantly, my wife is a very proud Indigenous Aboriginal woman. My mother-in-law was born on Palm Island, moved to Yarrabah and now lives in Cairns. She is also a very passionate person, who likes to keep me in check. It doesn't matter what the topic is—she will call me and let me know. She's with my wife this week helping out, because I
have a two-year-old. I also have another daughter on the way, who's due in April. So I have some very proud Aboriginal women in my life. Whether it's my daughter running around, dancing or pretending to be Elsa from Frozen or just watching TV and being trouble, she can really wrap her dad around her little finger.

I honestly believe that we need to work together in this space because, when I look around and look at the shadow minister, I see a leader and I see a role model for my daughter. I see a role model for my daughter from all the very strong independent, powerful women in this place, because I want her to grow up and have a future, not just in Townsville, not just because she's a very proud Aboriginal woman, but because in this place we all work together for our First Nations people. I would like my future daughter, who is on the way, to think and feel the same.

In the electorate of Herbert we have Great Palm Island. The people that live there will definitely let you know how they feel and what they want and what we can do better. For a while now Palm Island hasn't had clean drinking water. I know the minister is working very closely with his counterpart at the state level, Jackie Trad, because this isn't about federal government or state government or coalition or people in the opposition fighting each other or going to the media and saying, 'Look at what we're doing; we do things better than you.' I don't believe that is the case, nor should it be.

I know that the shadow minister keeps the minister to account. I have seen the shadow minister walk the hallways over there in the blue carpet. So she should, because that's the role of the opposition. It's the role of the state governments and the federal government and every person in my electorate. Palm Island is close and dear to my heart. I'm there next week. But we need to be always doing better. We can always do better. It doesn't matter if you're reading a report and you think it's excellent; there's always something else. There's always something more where we can work together as Australians: First Nations, not First Nations, people who have come from other countries and who call Australia home now. We are all Australians, and we should be working together. I know that that's the most important thing in this country. People don't like us fighting, throwing mud at each other, pointing fingers. There's a difference between holding people to account and just slingling mud. Our First Nations people and Indigenous Australians are one thing that we should definitely not be using for political point scoring at all.

I would like the shadow minister to come to Townsville and we can go to Palm Island together. Of course the Minister's been up multiple times and he'll come back. This is when we stand next to each other and talk about the great things we can be doing, not just in my electorate, but in all of Australia. It is just more personal for me, obviously because that's where I'm from and my family is there. This is the time where we stand side by side. I understand that people aren't happy with certain things in the reports. That's fine. But this is the time when all Australians and every person in this place has a duty to stand next to each other, to work together, to ensure that our First Nations people have the best lives they deserve. I thank the minister and the shadow minister for allowing me time to speak on this.

Mr GOSLING (Solomon) (16:09): We know that five of the seven targets for closing this gap—this chasm—are not on track. We are failing in those areas—child mortality, reading, writing and numeracy, school attendance, employment, life expectancy. There are some areas that are on track, as we have heard. It's great that early childhood education is improving. But, having spoken with some people from the sector this morning, they are concerned that maybe that is coming off a bit. That is a concern for all of us. We need to keep that trajectory going in the right direction. And it is cause for celebration that year 12 attainment is on track. But for too many First Australians, we are failing.

As the member for Barton said, these are not just statistics; these are Australians—our brothers and sisters, sons, daughters, aunties and uncles. If we want to see real change and progress, I think we need to acknowledge the past wrongs that have transcended into today—that intergenerational trauma, in particular; the dispossession, the killings. Understanding this truth is critical. When I went to school, I had no idea that a First Nations person in this country ever had a house. We were just led to believe that First Nations people were just wandering around. I had the great fortune, with some of my colleagues from both sides of the House, to have some conversations with Bruce Pascoe last night. Through his research of the accounts of the first explorers into different regions of Australia, he states:

Houses and villages were observed from the far Kimberley to Cape York, from Hutt River to Tasmania, from Brewarrina to Hamilton. Permanent housing was a feature of the pre-contact Aboriginal economy, and marked the movement towards agricultural reliance.

We weren't taught this stuff. Massacres are another one. I went to a presentation today about the massacres. As the member for Lingiari informed us, one of the very last survivors of the Coniston massacre recently passed. There's only one left. But understanding this truth is important.
Another truth that is important to understand is that the government seems to be backing away from housing investment in First Nations communities. I hope that's not true. But there is a concern about it and our medical friend, the member for Macarthur, will be one of the first ones to tell people about the link between proper housing, health and education. So, there needs to continue to be a serious commitment to assisting with the diabolical situation with housing. Of course, poverty is then linked. As Northern Territory Senator Malarndirri McCarthy has said, there is massive concern about the connection of some of the policies of the Morrison government. In terms of the CDP program, that needs to be moving towards the CDEP—more like that. The cashless debit card—we wait to see what the minister is going to say about her travels around the north. There is real concern that without honest consultation with First Nations people—not just talking about it, but actually doing it and reflecting that in government policy—we'll see more grinding poverty, meaning we aren't able to close these gaps.

When it comes to health, we have some serious work to do. The more that community-controlled organisations are supported to do that work, the better. I support the work that's happening with the peaks having a greater say. That is going to be vital. If we don't listen to First Nations people, we will not be able to see the advances that we need to in this nation.

Mr CONAGHAN (Cowper) (16:14): The Closing the Gap initiative is as important to me as I believe it is to all Australians. In my electorate of Cowper, 6.1 per cent of people are Indigenous. It's Dhanggati, Birrbay and Gumbaynggirr country. In my home town of Kempsey, approximately 14 per cent of people are Indigenous. I grew up and went to school with Indigenous kids. Although we didn't understand or see what we see now, it was clear to most of us that those kids did it tough, being forced to be part of a system that did not acknowledge or recognise that they were this nation's first people. My father, who was a doctor there for 30 years and who I spoke of in my first speech, despaired about man's inhumanity to man. I recall that on almost a nightly occasion people would come to our front door infirm, sick or looking for assistance, and many of those people were Indigenous. He didn't see black or white; he saw a person in need. It is a basic human right to have access to health services, education and employment. We have not met these ambitious targets. This is despite the efforts by this government, hand in hand with local Indigenous communities.

We as a government have been doing all we can to close the gap, but as yet we are only on track to meet two of the seven targets. Therefore, we must accept that we must do much, much more. The inability to reach these targets was acknowledged by the Prime Minister in his speech this morning. So much more needs to be done on addressing the other five targets. I welcome the Prime Minister's direction of a new approach to the programs that are locally led and more collaborative. Indigenous Australians must have a greater level of influence in the Close the Gap programs if we are to meet our targets in the future.

The year 2020 marks the next stage in an unprecedented partnership between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak organisations and the Australian government and the states and territories. The Morrison-McCormack government, through the leadership of the Prime Minister, is bringing together COAG and the Coalition of Peaks to deliver the new partnership agreement. Our Closing the Gap refresh will deliver shared responsibility and accountability, and I am confident this new approach will make strides. I have seen examples in my electorate of Cowper where collaborative programs have delivered positive improvements to the health and wellbeing of Indigenous people. I choose the following example not to be morbid but to acknowledge that today is the start, the launch, of the Youth Insearch campaign to end suicide.

My home town of Kempsey has a higher rate of death by suicide than the state average. A study by the North Coast Primary Health Network found that in Kempsey and the Nambucca area 12.6 per cent of people per 100,000 had died by suicide from 2008 to 2016. The state average was 9.8 people in every 100,000. Sadly, the rate of suicide among Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders in my area was higher still. So, in March last year, the Kempsey Community Suicide Prevention Action Plan was launched at the Macleay Vocational College. I recognise the hard work of Mr Mark Morrison in his remarkable efforts for the college.

While the Kempsey Community Suicide Prevention Action Plan was not funded specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suicide prevention, the health practitioners delivering it worked with the local community to build into the plan the history, culture and experiences of the Dhanggati people. Speakers including doctors, mental health professionals and men with lived experience covered topics like diabetes, ageing and culturally-connected service and support. A total of 73 people attended this free forum, and I'm told it helped many Indigenous men on a path to better health.

It is through locally-led initiatives like this that we will work better to close the gap in the future and meet all seven targets.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Llew O'Brien): The discussion has concluded.
BILLS
Export Control Bill 2019
Second Reading

Consideration resumed of the motion:
That this bill be now read a second time.

to which the following amendment was moved:

That all words after "That" be omitted with a view to substituting the following words:
"whilst not declining to give the bill a second reading, the House condemns the Government for its lack of a comprehensive plan for agricultural exports, including a plan for ensuring Australian agriculture will reach $100 billion in farm-gate value by 2030".

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Llew O'Brien): I call the member for Kennedy.

Mr KATTER (Kennedy) (16:19): In addressing the Export Control Bill 2019, the previous speaker—the member for Groom—made a very big point of saying that the government have done a lot for jobs in rural Australia and that they were needed to promote rural Australia. Well, they've been the government for 26 out of the last 31 or 32 years, and there has never been a bigger population surge away from rural Australia. I'm not proud, either, as the member for Kennedy, to be presiding over the greatest loss of population from rural Australia in the nation's history. The population is going, going, gone.

But let me come back to the basic premise of this bill. Let's get back to the free marketeers. I've said previously that it's like living in a lunatic asylum here—I hope I'm not one of the contributors! But if you continue to do what you're doing the same way that you're doing it and it's wrong then, to quote the great Wayne Bennett, that is the definition of insanity. Well, this place has launched a policy of free markets, and every speaker from the mainstream parties has got up and said, 'Isn't it wonderful?' I'll tell you how wonderful it is: you've destroyed every secondary industry in the country! You've closed down the whole motor vehicle industry. You've closed down the entire petrol industry. You've closed down almost all of the textile, footwear and clothing industry. You've closed down all of the whitegoods industry. Where the hell is the benefit? Two speakers, one from Rockhampton and one from Toowoomba, said: 'In agriculture.' And I thought I was the resident clown here! You're not trying to steal my thunder, are you? I mean—agriculture!

I'll give you the figures for agriculture because you're too dumb and lazy to find them out for yourselves. We had 172 million sheep before you free marketeers—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Llew O'Brien): Member for Kennedy, I'll just remind you to not use unparliamentary language.

Mr KATTER: I'm sorry; it's uncharacteristic of me. I'm usually very polite, so I will take that into account. There were 172 million sheep here. There are now 66 million sheep. Geez, that was a wonderful success story—free marketing in the wool industry! There aren't any sheep left in North Queensland. Well, there are 50,000 or 60,000 when we had 20 million sheep. We had 32 million cattle when we had government-to-government agreements with Great Britain and with Japan. Shame, shock, horror—fancy restricting trade like that! All I can tell you is that we had 33 million head of cattle then. We now have 22 million head of cattle under your free markets.

If we look at the sugar industry—and this is a great success of your free markets!—there's no sugar going to the biggest market in the world, which is the EU. There's no sugar going to the second-biggest market in the world, which is the USA. The third-biggest market in the world is China. There's only $60-or-something million worth of sugar—nothing—going to China. There's nothing going to India, the fourth-biggest market in the world. The seventh-biggest market in the world, Brazil—there's no sugar going there. Where are your free markets? I'm not talking about a little, small, irrelevant industry here. As you would know, Deputy Speaker Llew O'Brien, with three exceptions out of the 30 or 40 towns and cities north of Nambour, they are all sugar towns—every single one of them. Whether it's Ingham, Tully, Ayr, Home Hill, Townsville, Cairns, Mackay, Bundaberg or Maryborough, they're all sugar cities. It is one of the big-four rural industries of Australia, and it can't get into any market on earth. So much for your free trade!

We went over and did this wonderful free trade deal with the United States. I read the newspapers, and the newspapers said that we were there to get three things: dairy access, beef access and sugar access. Well, quite frankly, I think the Americans have always been good, as far as beef goes. We really have had free access, so, basically, there was no change in beef. But for the other two—nothing at all. They were wiped like a dirty rag on the other two. They wanted phytosanitary requirements, and they've got half of the quarantine decisions. Half of the panel now is the United States. And they got what they wanted in pharmaceuticals as well. They had two
objectives and the senior senator overseeing those negotiations said, 'We got a marvellous deal.' He said, 'I don't want to say that Australia came out of it bad, because they didn't really.' That's a verbatim comment from the Senate debates in the United States. So there's your sheep—they're gone. There's your cattle—a third of them are gone. Now, let's get to dairy.

Before you deregulated dairy, we had over 15,000 dairy farmers and now we have a little over 6,000 dairy farmers, and we all know that a lot of them exited in the worst way possible. I unfortunately had one of the biggest dairy areas in Australia. We had about 290 dairy farmers. They were all very big farms, milking 5,000 to 6,000 cows—that's very big. It was a very prosperous area. Last time I looked we had 49 dairy farmers. In Queensland we had over 5,000 dairy farmers and now we have 360 dairy farmers. Geez, that was a wonderful success story! The price went up for the consumers. 'Don't worry about one line with Coles; think about the 12 lines that are on the shelves everywhere in Australia.' But the price went up almost 30 per cent within two or three years straight after the federal government did the inquiry. They held it down and then, as soon as the inquiry was over, it went up.

The consumers were screwed to the tune of about 30 per cent and the farmers were screwed by 30 per cent. Let me give you the exact figures. My farmers got a letter from the dairy factory saying, 'You are now on 59½c, but on Monday you'll be on 39c, in keeping with pricing in other states and as a result of the deregulation.' So you people took one-third of the income of every dairy farmer in this country—and you people over here did as well. At least the people on this side now are asking for a minimum price scheme. The National Party and the Liberals are completely isolated. They do not have a single political party in this country on their side. They do not have a single group in Australia on their side. They come in here as the representatives of Woolworths and Coles, who are making over $1,000 million over the dead bodies, quite literally, of the dairy farmers. Everyone says that, for every dairy farmer, you've got four or five who follow on in labour—that is, they are not on the farm itself—and you've got three or four contractors. For every dairy farmer, you've got 20 or 30 people whose livelihoods depended upon that production, which is now no longer there. Nothing has replaced it. We've just got some moo cows not worth two bob walking around on what were once very productive dairy farms. Dairy farms are in high-rainfall areas and they're usually in very mountainous areas. The dairy areas in Far North Queensland are 100-inch rainfall areas and they're shaped like that. We can't do anything else with that land except dairy. Now we're just fattening cattle which are not worth two bob.

We are a net importer of fruit and vegetables. You people are all in here advocating free markets. Do you realise that no-one in this country agrees with you? If you're looking around, you're not realising that there are now six seats over here. Soon it will be 10 seats, and you won't get them back. Before I came to this place, I checked it out, and no independent or small party person had ever been re-elected—not ever. Now we almost could guarantee a re-election. We're just eating away at you. All of the western third of New South Wales is now held by our troops—the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party. Almost all of North Queensland is now held by our battalions. In central Sydney you've lost the heartland of your support. Can't you understand that the Australian people are sick and tired of you closing down industry after industry after industry and then preaching to us about the success of the free market. Where the hell is it? I represent export industries. I represent coal, copper, zinc, lead and silver. I represent the cattle industry. All of my industries are export industries. I have seen no benefit flow to us in any of these areas, and I have seen untold, unprecedented destruction.

Let me say something about the 'golden nulla nulla', as I call it. You, Deputy Speaker Llew O'Brien, would be well aware of this and I think you would sympathise with my view. If you take out the golden nulla nulla, which is a little 100-kilometre-wide strip starting at Cairns and coming down the coast to Sydney, Melbourne and around to Adelaide and a little dot around Perth, you've still got a map of Australia. Ninety three per cent of the landmass is still there. There are less than a million people living there. Guess where all the coal is? Guess where all the iron ore is? Guess where all the water is?

Do you seriously think, in a fair and rational world, that the world is going to sit aside and let us sit on this treasure trove? Read the little black book that was given to everyone in the Japanese southern army. The Europeans are sitting on a treasure trove of riches and wealth which should belong to the people of Asia. Read the document. Every single soldier in the southern army had it in his pocket, and here we are—arrogant Europeans—telling China and India that they're not allowed to have any coal because we are morally righteous, we colonials, and they are simple Asians and they don't understand the bigger picture. You'll understand real quick, because when the deputy leader of the Labor Party was stupid enough to lose the election by going on the front of The Australian newspaper saying, 'Coal is to wither away,' you kissed goodbye to the election.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Llew O'Brien): The member for Kennedy needs to be reminded not to make comments reflecting on members in that manner.
Mr KATTER: I'm sorry, Mr Deputy Speaker. I am terribly sorry. I reiterate: you wiped out secondary industry. The motor vehicle industry has gone; the petrol industry has gone; textiles, footwear and clothing has almost totally gone; the whitegoods industry has gone completely. But how could you export the electricity industry? (Time expired)

Mr GEE (Calare—Minister Assisting the Minister for Trade and Investment and Minister for Decentralisation and Regional Education) (16:33): The Export Control Bill 2019 is part of the legislative package developed to consolidate and replace the existing agricultural export legislative framework. The legislative package contains the Export Control Bill 2019, the Export Control (Consequential Amendments and Transitional Provisions) Bill 2019, the Export Charges (Imposition—Customs) Amendment Bill 2019, the Export Charges (Imposition—Excise) Amendment Bill 2019 and the Export Charges (Imposition—General) Amendment Bill 2019. The bill will incorporate and consolidate common principles from the existing Export Control Act 1982, export control orders and relevant parts of other acts, including the Australian Meat and Livestock Industry Act 1997.

Similar to the existing framework, the bill will give authority to the Australian government to regulate the export of agricultural goods and food from Australia. The bill will also provide for official certification to accompany goods and provide improved mechanisms to certify a broader range of agricultural commodities. The bill will provide assurances to trading partners that our exported goods meet their requirements. This streamlining and consolidation will remove duplication and inconsistency in the existing legislative framework. This will make the requirements for exporting easier to understand and also to use. The bill will enable the secretary to make and amend Export Control Rules. This allows for swifter government responses to changes in market conditions for Australian exports and facilitates the uptake of innovation within the industry into the future.

The bill and improvements to the framework were driven by those it serves, Australia's agricultural industry. The Australian government has consulted extensively and conclusively with stakeholders to develop the bill and will continue to do so. The bill provides the confidence for existing and potential exporters to pursue lucrative export opportunities, particularly for those involved with new and emerging industries. The bill provides the foundation for a strong legislative framework that supports the effective regulation of agricultural exports. This will allow for more targeted sanctions and ensure more proportionate responses to noncompliance so that Australia's trading reputation and export industries are protected.

This bill provides greater assurance about the integrity of the system and enhances Australia's capacity to gain, maintain and grow global market access for our exports into the future. Being able to access a broad range of markets creates more export opportunities and potentially higher profits for Australian farmers, producers and export businesses.

The bill will support the initiatives of the government to modernise the system's underpinning agricultural exports and will be crucial to growing the Australian agricultural industry. The bill ensures that agricultural exports are supported now and into the future, and it is important that parliament supports the industry so it can continue to thrive.

The Export Control (Consequential Amendments and Transitional Provisions) Bill 2019, the consequential and transitional bill, will facilitate the smooth transition from the Export Control Act 1982, the Export Charges (Collection) Act 2015 and the Australian Meat and Livestock Industry Act 1997 to the new legislative framework. The consequential and transitional bill will do this by ensuring that arrangements to manage the export of goods are transitioned appropriately without disruption to exporters, to industry or to trade.

The Export Charges (Imposition—Customs) Amendment Bill 2019, the Export Charges (Imposition—Excise) Amendment Bill 2019 and the Export Charges (Imposition—General) Amendment Bill 2019 will make amendments to the current charging legislation to reflect the Export Control Bill 2019. These bills will allow the Commonwealth to continue to impose charges that appropriately reflect the cost of administering the export control system, both now and into the future. I commend the bills to the House.

The SPEAKER: The original question was that this bill be read a second time. To this the honourable member for Hunter has moved an amendment that all words after 'That' be omitted with a view to substituting other words. The immediate question before the House is that the amendment moved by the member for Hunter be agreed to.

The House divided. [16:41]

(The Speaker—Hon. Tony Smith)

Ayes .................. 65
Noes ................... 75
Majority ............... 10
AYES

Aly, A
Bird, SL
Burke, AS
Burns, J
Butler, TM
Champion, ND
Claydon, SC
Collins, JM
Dick, MD
Elliot, MJ
Freelander, MR
Giles, AJ
Hayes, CP
Husic, EN
Kearney, G
Keogh, MJ
King, CF
Leigh, AK
McBride, EM
Mitchell, RG
Murphy, PJ
O'Connor, BPJ
Owens, JA
Perrett, GD
Plibersek, TJ
Rowland, MA
Shorten, WR
Snowdon, WE
Swanson, MJ
Thistlethwaite, MJ
Vamvakionou, M
Wells, AS
Zappia, A

Bandt, AP
Bowen, CE
Burney, LJ
Butler, MC
Chalmers, JE
Clare, JD
Coker, EA
Conroy, PM
Dreyfus, MA
Fitzgibbon, JA
Georganas, S
Gosling, LJ
Hill, JC
Jones, SP
Kelly, MJ
Khalil, P
King, MMH
Marles, RD
Mitchell, BK
Mulin, D
Neumann, SK
O'Neil, CE
Payne, AE
Phillips, FE
Rishworth, AL
Ryan, JC (teller)
Smith, DPB
Stanley, AM (teller)
Templeman, SR
Thwaites, KL
Watts, TG
Wilson, JH

NOES

Alexander, JG
Andrews, KJ
Archer, BK
Broadbent, RE
Christensen, GR
Connelly, V
Drum, DK (teller)
Entsch, WG
Faliniski, JG
Flint, NJ
Gee, AR
Haines, H
Hastie, AW
Hogan, KJ
Hunt, GA
Joyce, BT
Laming, A
Leesar, J
Littleproud, D
Marino, NB
McCormack, MF
McVeigh, JJ
O'Brien, LS
O'Dowd, KD
Pearce, GB
Porter, CC
Ramsey, RE (teller)
Sharkie, RCC
Simmonds, J
Stevens, J
Taylor, AJ
Thompson, P

Allen, K
Andrews, KL
Bell, AM
Buchholz, S
Conaghan, PJ
Coulton, M
Dutton, PC
Evans, TM
Fletcher, PW
Frydenberg, JA
Gillespie, DA
Hammond, CM
Hawke, AG
Howarth, LR
Irons, SJ
Kelly, C
Landry, ML
Ley, SP
Liu, G
Martin, FB
McIntosh, MI
Morrison, SJ
O'Brien, T
Pasin, A
Pitt, KJ
Price, ML
Robert, SR
Sharma, DN
Steggall, Z
Sukkar, MS
Tchan, DT
Tudge, AE
Question negatived.
Original question agreed to.
Bill read a second time.

Third Reading

Mr GEE (Calare—Minister Assisting the Minister for Trade and Investment and Minister for Decentralisation and Regional Education) (16:47): by leave—I move:
That this bill be now read a third time.
Question agreed to.
Bill read a third time.

Export Control (Consequential Amendments and Transitional Provisions) Bill 2019

Second Reading

Consideration resumed of the motion:
That this bill be now read a second time.
Question agreed to.
Bill read a second time.

Third Reading

Mr GEE (Calare—Minister Assisting the Minister for Trade and Investment and Minister for Decentralisation and Regional Education) (16:48): by leave—I move:
That this bill be now read a third time.
Question agreed to.
Bill read a third time.

Export Charges (Imposition—Customs) Amendment Bill 2019

Second Reading

Consideration resumed of the motion:
That this bill be now read a second time.
Question agreed to.
Bill read a second time.

Third Reading

Mr GEE (Calare—Minister Assisting the Minister for Trade and Investment and Minister for Decentralisation and Regional Education) (16:49): by leave—I move:
That this bill be now read a third time.
Question agreed to.
Bill read a third time.

Export Charges (Imposition—Excise) Amendment Bill 2019

Second Reading

Consideration resumed of the motion:
That this bill be now read a second time.
Question agreed to.
Bill read a second time.
Third Reading

Mr GEE (Calare—Minister Assisting the Minister for Trade and Investment and Minister for Decentralisation and Regional Education) (16:50): by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

Export Charges (Imposition—General) Amendment Bill 2019

Second Reading

Consideration resumed of the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Third Reading

Mr GEE (Calare—Minister Assisting the Minister for Trade and Investment and Minister for Decentralisation and Regional Education) (16:51): by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

Migration Amendment (Regulation of Migration Agents) Bill 2019

Migration Agents Registration Application Charge Amendment (Rates of Charge) Bill 2019

Second Reading

Cognate debate.

Consideration resumed of the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr GILES (Scullin) (16:51): I rise to speak on the Migration Amendment (Regulation of Migration Agents) Bill 2019 and the Migration Agents Registration Application Charge Amendment (Rates of Charge) Bill 2019. Labor will not oppose the passage of these bills in this House, although I will be putting before the House a second reading amendment highlighting some matters that we wish to consider and wish to see considered through the Senate committee process before finalising our position on these bills, which do serve an important public policy purpose. It will highlight that this is an area where the government could and should have acted much more expeditiously.

The Migration Amendment (Regulation of Migration Agents) Bill 2019—perhaps I might refer to the first bill as the substantive bill—would have the effect of amending the Migration Act 1958 to deregulate an important aspect of the migration advice industry—in particular, the current treatment of lawyers—by removing those lawyers who hold unrestricted practising certificates from regulation by the migration agents registration body. Lawyers would, accordingly, no longer be required or able to register as migration agents and would be registered in accordance with the requirements of their particular professional body. The second bill is a consequential piece of legislation, amending the Migration Agents Registration Application Charge Act to ensure that migration agents who paid the non-commercial registration application charge in circumstances corresponding to their current period of registration but who give immigration assistance otherwise than on a non-commercial basis are liable to pay an adjusted charge. Almost all of my remarks will go to the first bill, the substantive bill.

These bills were introduced into the House on 21 June 2017, but they have a history which goes some way beyond that. Indeed, they go back to recommendations made by the Productivity Commission in 2010, but substantively to 2014. These bills, in fact, contain recommendations from the 2014 independent review of the Office of the Migration Agents Registration Authority, the Kendall review. The review was designed, as you would probably be very well aware, to improve the effectiveness of the regulatory scheme governing migration agents, a scheme which has had quite a history. I don't propose to go through all of that now.

What I will touch upon is that of course this bill is about a deregulation proposal. It is a broadly sensible deregulation proposal, but it is one that's taken the government quite some time to get around to giving effect to. In fact, I've been in this place long enough to remember when the now Treasurer trumpeted the bonfire of deregulation—the time also, of course, of the horror budget of 2014.
But on this area, an area that is fundamentally important to an immigration nation like Australia, the government has failed to act. And one of the main reasons I'm putting forward a second reading amendment, and why the opposition wants to consider in detail its position on the bill through the Senate committee process, is that there are some aspects of the government's own process of consideration of this bill that remain outstanding—in particular, a response to the work of a Senate committee commissioned by the former minister responsible for this, the former Assistant Minister for Immigration and Border Protection, the member for Mitchell.

The review that is the genesis of this—although I will again briefly touch on the Productivity Commission's work as well—recommended the removal of lawyers from the Migration Agents Registration Authority scheme. This is part 1 of the review, and this bill would partially give effect to that recommendation. Again, it is a recommendation that has been before this government for more than five years now. Indeed, it has sat before this House for some time and then was not put to a vote in the Senate prior to the dissolution of the last parliament. As I've said, the bill would amend the act to remove the requirement for lawyers who hold full practising certificates to register as migration agents when providing immigration assistance to their clients. By being removed from that regulation scheme, lawyers can't register as migration agents and would be entirely regulated by their state or territory professional bodies when providing this advice as well.

It also ensures the time period in which a person can be considered an applicant for repeat registration as a migration agent and removes the 12-month limit within which a person must apply for registration following completion of a prescribed course. The bill requires the agency to refuse an application to become a registered migration agent where that applicant has been required to but has failed to provide information or answer questions in respect of their application. In respect of the transitional arrangements for legal practitioners with unrestricted certificates, the bill would require them to be removed from the scheme with automatic effect from the commencement of schedule 1 to the bill.

The bill also includes amendments to allow the agency the power to refuse an application, as I've touched on previously. I also touched on the relationship between the substantive bill and the bill dealing with charges, which also makes certain other amendments. When this change was first recommended, many years ago now, Labor supported it, and we still support the principle. But, for the reasons I've outlined previously, I seek now to move the second reading amendment I foreshadowed, and that is:

That all 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 recommendations that informed this bill were made in the 2014 Independent Review of the Office of the Migration Agents Registration Authority;

(2) the Government first introduced these measures in 2017, but let them lapse at the end of the 45th Parliament; and

(3) for over half a decade, the Government has failed to properly manage the laws relating to migration agents in Australia, to the detriment of the industry and those that rely on it".

And we do, in Labor, think it's prudent and proper to have a thorough examination of this legislation, which carries very significant consequences for hundreds of thousands of Australians and their family members.

Things have changed in this area. This is a very dynamic area of public policy, and regulation needs to be equally dynamic. I note that a number of submitters to the previous bill inquiry in 2017 haven't yet put forward views on the bill that's presently before the parliament. One that I'd like to highlight in particular—one of the reasons I think this change in regulation is important—is to better enable pro bono migration assistance to be provided by registered legal practitioners. That was a matter that was highlighted by the Refugee Council of Australia back in 2017. I note that they haven't put forward a submission on the present bill, but this issue of access to justice is one of the important reasons that, in principle, this sort of approach should be pursued, in Labor's view. It's a matter that I would like to see confirmed in the course of this.

One of the key issues before us in seeking to get the right regulatory environment in place is to ensure that consumers are protected. All of us in this place know that too many Australian consumers who are so vulnerable when it comes to these immigration questions have not been protected when it comes to the work of migration agents—work that, often, they personally are unable to warrant. They are very vulnerable as consumers. So it's vitally important not only that we get the regulatory framework right in terms of consumer protection but that we can provide confidence to those consumers too, and it's for that reason as well that this bill should be subject to a proper review.

One of the reasons we know that the environment within which this bill operates has changed is that we've now had the report of the inquiry into the efficacy of the current regulation of Australian migration and education agents. In that very report, the assistant minister who introduced this bill, the member for Latrobe, said that there is exploitation and that a loophole is being exercised by organised crime to come into the country, an observation
by the minister who introduced this bill into the House, no less. So Labor does believe that these laws deserve a proper inquiry. As I understand it, the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee will report its findings by 18 March 2020. On this side of the House, we await the findings of that process.

We will not be opposing these bills in the House today. We will wait and see the result of the Senate inquiry. We will give all the stakeholders and the wider Australian community an opportunity to be heard, particularly those who are personally directly connected to the migration industry and are personally affected by the regulatory arrangement that goes to migration agents and lawyers who operate in the field as well. We want to make sure their views are properly heard and properly considered and that the principles that underpin this bill—principles that have been supported by the Productivity Commission in 2010, the Kendall review in 2014 and Labor for quite some time—are properly put into law so that all of us in Australia who depend on the efficacy of such a system can have confidence in it, going forward, and in these fundamental questions of access to justice, consumer confidence and consumer protection being upheld. So I urge members opposite in particular to consider carefully the second reading amendment and the obligation all of us have to have regard to those views before finally determining this piece of legislation.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr S Georganas): Is the amendment seconded?

Ms Burney: The amendment is seconded, and I reserve my right to speak.

Mr CONAGHAN (Cowper) (17:03): I'm happy to rise today to speak to both the Migration Amendment (Regulation of Migration Agents) Bill 2019 and the Migration Agents Registration Application Charge Amendment (Rates of Charge) Bill 2019. It is good to see that this government is making good on its promise to cut red tape and unnecessary costly duplication, as well as streamlining the process for restricted and unrestricted legal practitioners. By doing so, this government reaffirms its commitment to deregulation across industry sectors. I have experienced firsthand, as a lawyer and a registered migration agent for a number of years, the convoluted registration practices and mandatory continuing legal education and migration agent compulsory education and, on top of this, the unnecessary additional cost imposed on sole practitioners and small practices.

Currently, lawyers across the nation are governed by the strict regulatory rules of each state's law society. Legal practitioners are either considered restricted or unrestricted. All legal practitioners are considered restricted within the first two years of admission, and must be under the direct supervision and employ of an unrestricted legal practitioner. The restricted practitioner is required to be registered within the Law Society, under the professional indemnity insurance of the practitioner, to ensure not only the highest standards of service but the proper protection for both client and lawyer.

Following the restricted period, a practitioner may apply for an unrestricted certificate. However, they must complete the relevant state's Law Society's unrestricted practising certificate course and obtain the relevant registrations and insurances prior to being declared unrestricted. All unrestricted and restricted legal practitioners must complete 10 units of continuing legal education each year at, sometimes, a cost in excess of $5,000 per year. Any firm that employs a solicitor must bear that cost on behalf of the employee. This puts additional pressure on small businesses of two to five solicitors.

Currently, should a legal practitioner train and provide migration advice and services, they are required to do so under a completely separate registration stream. These bills seek to remove that. This stream requires registration and regulation of restricted and unrestricted legal practitioners by the Migration Agents Registration Authority. In effect, it requires additional costs, training and further specialised compulsory continuing legal education, which could only be described as burdensome and duplicitous. The bill will ensure the removal of these unnecessary and costly requirements by recognising that the dual regulation of restricted and unrestricted legal practitioners is an unnecessary administrative burden in circumstances where a strict, professional regulatory regime already exists and which is subject to annual and random audit processes.

Under schedule 1, this bill will immediately remove lawyers who hold unrestricted practising certificates from regulation under the Migration Agents Registration Authority and continue to be regulated by the relevant state's Law Society. Those legal practitioners who hold restricted practising certificates will have an eligible period of two years in which they may both be registered migration agents and restricted legal practitioners. This period is provided for these practitioners to make any necessary changes to their business affairs and certification. Once the eligible period has expired, these practitioners will also be removed from the MARA regulations, providing they complete the required programs to be eligible for an unrestricted practising certificate.

It is important to note that these changes under this bill will not water down any consumer protections. The government particularly recognises the need for strong regulatory protections for the consumer, particularly for those not engaging legal practitioners, but, rather, registered migration agents. I qualify this statement by...
acknowledging that the vast majority of registered migration agents work to the highest standards and requirements for the provision of competent migration advice.

In 2018, the Graduate Diploma in Australian Migration Law and Practice was introduced, giving real and meaningful credibility to the qualification. Previously, those wishing to become an agent were only required to complete a five-day course. This recent qualification seeks to ensure that only high standards of applicants can obtain the registration, to mitigate the risk of neglect or poor advice.

Accordingly, under schedule 2 of this bill, the period that an individual has to apply for repeat registration following the completion of the required qualification will be set in the legislation, which complements the introduction of the graduate diploma, which qualifications will never lapse—unlike the previous system. It is also pleasing to see that this bill seeks to protect the rights of eligible applicants for registration as migration agents in that it no longer simply refuses applications in the event of a failure to provide further information. As we can appreciate, there are often circumstances out of our control which affect the ability to answer in a timely fashion. This bill recognises that, and rather than simply slamming the door shut it now allows incomplete applications to remain unfinished for an indefinite period, saving hundreds of dollars in application costs.

Furthermore, this bill seeks to repeal certain provisions to reflect the consolidation of the OMARA into the Department of Home Affairs—once again, removing and slashing unnecessary red tape.

Finally, the Migration Agents Registration Application Charge Amendment (Rates of Charge) Bill 2019, read alongside the regulation of migration agents bill, seeks to provide for an adjusted registration charge for registered migration agents who have paid the fee to provide migration advice on a non-commercial basis or a pro bono basis for the current period of registration but gives immigration assistance on a commercial basis at any time during this period. This reflects the policy's intention that, in order to be eligible to pay the lower non-commercial application charge, migration advice must be provided solely on a non-commercial basis or a not-for-profit basis for the benefit of the Australian community. This will reflect the pro bono basis for those who are in need or for those who are unable to pay for migration services. These two bills are welcomed by legal practitioners and migration agents alike. I commend both bills to the House.

Dr ALY (Cowan) (17:11): I rise also to speak on these two bills that are before us: the Migration Amendment (Regulation of Migration Agents) Bill and the Migration Agents Registration Application Charge Amendment (Rates of Charge) Bill 2019. Before I get to the bills, I would like to acknowledge the work that migration agents do. It is no understatement for me to say that the majority of cases that come before me in my electorate office are in relation to visas. Often it is people who have spent tens of thousands of dollars using the services of migration agents to get a visa, sometimes for their parents, sometimes for their partners, sometimes for their children, sometimes for members of their families and sometimes for themselves. Often they come to me at a point of frustration—frustration with the delays in the visa approval system. As I mentioned, at that point they have often exhausted all the avenues before them. That again points to the important work that migration agents around Australia do in circumstances where we have a visa system that has some pretty incredible delays.

Just the other day I took a phone call from one of my constituents whose parents have been here for 12 years. They are applying for a visa. They are paying $110,000 for their parents’ visas. They have been told it is a 51-month wait, and that in that 51-month period they could be deported. So, obviously, this individual who called me was in a very desperate state.

Considering the valuable contribution which immigrants make to Australia, as well as those on temporary visas of all kinds, I think it is vitally important that the right immigration advice is given to visa applicants. This bill certainly won’t solve the kinds of issues that we see, particularly with delays around visa applications, but it will go some way to adding some regulation to the industry of migration agents.

The member for Scullin outlined Labor’s position on the bill. As the shadow minister, he moved an amendment to the bill, which I will talk about in a minute. In conjunction, both bills seek to do a number of things. Most importantly, they seek to amend the Migration Act to remove the requirement for lawyers who hold a practising certificate from also having to register as a migration agent when providing immigration assistance to their clients. In that regard, it really does away with the dual registration requirements for lawyers who are providing immigration advice. That’s going to be achieved by removing them from the regulatory scheme that governs migration agents, meaning that lawyers cannot register as migration agents and are entirely regulated by their own state and territory legal professional bodies when providing advice. I think it’s a good thing not just to regulate the industry but also to ensure that lawyers are able to give that kind of timely and essential advice to people in need. Because it also ensures that the time period in which a person can be considered an applicant for repeat registration as a migration agent, it removes the 12-month time limit in which a person must apply for registration following completion of a prescribed course. Another thing that the bill will do, which I would like to mention, is
ensure that the definitions of 'immigration assistance' and 'immigration representations' include assisting a person in relation to a request to the minister to exercise his or her power under the section of the Migration Act to revoke character related visa refusal or cancellation decisions.

As the shadow minister and the member for Scullin pointed out, Labor will not oppose this bill in the House, but it is important to note—and the member for Scullin made this point—that this bill is long overdue. In fact, the bills before the chamber today contain measures from recommendations of the 2014 Independent review of the Office of the Migration Agents Registration Authority to improve effectiveness of the regulatory scheme governing migration agents. That was five years ago.

The bill was originally introduced in 2017 and the government allowed it to lapse. Considering the importance of this industry and considering the importance of this field of expertise to Australia, to Australia's immigration intake, to tourism in Australia and to education, for example, for people looking for student visas to come to Australia to study—considering the importance of this industry for a whole range of areas—I find it quite perplexing that the government should take five years to pass this essential bill, which will streamline the process and remove the dual regulation requirements that currently exist. The amendments that were moved by the member for Scullin and shadow minister recognise this. They recognise the incredibly long time lapse between when the recommendations were first made followed by when the bill was first introduced and followed by what we have before us now. In doing so, they also recognise that the situation may have changed. In doing the due diligence for these bills, I think it's important that we scrutinise the bills in more detail, as the situation has changed and the context in which these bills are now introduced may have changed over the last five years or even the last three years.

In conclusion, I reiterate the position of Labor in that we will not oppose this bill in the House, but I support the amendments moved by the member for Scullin, to ensure that this bill is thoroughly scrutinised through a Senate process.

Mr KHALIL: I rise also to speak on this Migration Amendment (Registration of Migration Agents) Bill 2019 and Migration Agents Registration Application Charge Amendment (Rates of Charge) Bill 2019. What's the purpose of this bill? What is it? What's it about? Well, it's a bill you could say the purpose of which is to partially implement recommendation 1 of the 2014 review of the OMARA, which recommended the removal of lawyers from the Migration Agents Registration Authority's regulatory scheme. This was specifically to allow legal practitioners to be registered as migration agents. We've heard from the previous speakers that we supported this bill several years ago when this legislation was first moved.

Mr Neumann: We've supported it many, many times.

Mr KHALIL: Well, I'm getting to that, the member for Blair. You're quite right. We've supported it many, many times, and we will support it now. However, we think these laws—and this was eloquently put by the previous speaker, the member for Cowan—deserve a proper inquiry, and we will wait and see the result of the Senate inquiry. Why? Because we did support it. We supported it six years ago. That's a long time. We supported this back in 2014. The bill contained recommendations from the 2014 Independent review of the Office of the Migration Agents Registration Authority, and six years later the government is trying to pass a bill implementing the changes from a report six years ago—it's remarkable!

Tony Abbott was the Prime Minister six years ago. And the government made a set of recommendations about migration agents when he was Prime Minister. Since then, we've had two Liberal prime ministers. They did introduce the bill again in 2017, not to pass it, but they let it sit on the Notice Paper in the Senate for years. It was not moved upon or acted upon by this government; it was just sitting there. I think it's probably an apt illustration of the kind of effort this government makes around important bills. It also demonstrates a pattern of this government. Not only does this demonstrate that they sit on things for years and years and fail to pass them; it also demonstrates real failures, particularly in the migration and immigration portfolio.

What has this government been doing since 2014? They're constantly spending their time infighting and tearing each other apart. I mentioned that they've gone through—what, two, three prime ministers? We've seen this week that it was all about themselves again. The National Party were tearing themselves apart. It overshadowed the visit of President Widodo. Last week on Monday, their leadership spill overshadowed what was a very important day, a day when this parliament was entirely focused on, or should have been entirely focused on: the bushfires, the victims, their families, and the firefighters that are still fighting those fires. And yet this government spent that time on themselves, fighting themselves. But that's a pattern. We've seen this happen over the last six years. This bill is just an example of what happens when they continually follow this pattern. It's all about themselves.

It's all about them and their leadership and their changes and who gets what. While all this is happening, bills sit untended for three or four years. That describes it probably better than anything I can say. That kind of inaction
is the best descriptor of this government and the way they do business—or don't do business. They're too busy watching over their own shoulders and fighting themselves to be bothered with the passage of laws. Unless of course, they're trying to further delay processing times for visas. This Morrison government has consistently failed when it comes to migration. It's not a surprise that it has taken this long to progress these bills.

On that point—and we've heard a bit about this from previous speakers as well with respect to processing for the permanent resident program. No wonder there are delays in this, given that inaction, given that self-centredness and given the fact they are solely focused on themselves rather than doing their job. The delays are severe when it comes to the permanent resident program and people waiting to receive citizenship or partner visas. It was not only that; the government actually went about making it harder and making it take longer for permanent residents to become citizens. I often ask myself: why? These are permanent residents who have been here for years and years in this country, who pay their taxes, who contribute to the community, who make a wonderful contribution to the society that they live in, the home that they have come to, to settle into, sometimes from very far away parts of the world. They've sacrificed their lives back in those countries of origin to settle in Australia. They've made a commitment. What does this government do for those people? It makes it harder for them. It makes it more difficult for them to actually move to the citizenship that they require and that they want so they can fully become part of Australia and feel like real Australians. They've probably been here five or 10 years.

I know families that have been here for over 10 years, and they're still waiting—and waiting—for their citizenship because of these delays. It isn't good enough. It's not just inaction, it's not just incompetence, it's not just a focus on their own leadership battles and their positions and all the rest of it; it's more than that: it's a deliberate effort to delay, obstruct and obfuscate. And the people they're delaying are the ones we want to become new Australians. They are the ones who have made a commitment and a contribution to this country, and this government is making it harder for them. It's a disgrace. There is also the parent visa—the program that makes people choose between sets of parents. I mean, it's difficult enough with your in-laws; can you imagine having to make a decision between mum and dad? This government forces people to make that decision.

There was a departmental review that was never released—a multimillion-dollar strategic review into the Department of Home Affairs. It was finalised last year. Maybe it had some answers to some of the questions we're posing. Maybe it could have shed some light on the inaction, the delay, the inefficiency and the incompetence—maybe—but we'll never know, because it wasn't released; it was never made public. What are they hiding? What is the department hiding? What is the government hiding? I would say to them: don't worry; we already know that you're incompetent, we already know that you're inefficient, we already know that you're focused on yourselves rather than the people of Australia or doing your job, so you might as well release the report. It will confirm what we already know.

The other thing that really disturbs me, particularly in this portfolio, is the pattern we've seen of not only inaction but also deliberate attempts to delay and make things difficult. We saw it with the 457 visas. The Morrison government is putting out the line, 'Oh, Australia is full,' blaming the congestion of our cities on the migration program—which has, I think, a net migration of some 160,000 or 170,000—and fixating on asylum seekers and boat people, yet all the while we have over two million people on temporary work visas in this country. So when the Minister for Home Affairs—or the Prime Minister—laments about the strain on our capital cities' infrastructure and how the cities are becoming 'overcrowded', his own department is contributing to that strain whilst making it harder for local workers to find jobs.

It's like a shell game. It's like a scam. It's pulling the wool over people's eyes. And don't get me started on the lack of infrastructure spending that this federal government has been guilty of, particularly in my state of Victoria, which has some of the lowest per capita. So, again, this pattern is consistent. It's a pattern of inaction, inefficiency and delay. Part of it is possibly largely because of the incompetence of this government, because they are focused so much on their own leadership squabbles and internal politics, but the other part of it is a very deliberate positioning on some of these issues. There's a very deliberate effort to delay. I can't find any other explanation for it. Maybe the report, if we ever get to see it, will shed light on that.

Then—this is a good one, another failure—there is the chaos of this government's bid to privatise Australia's visa system. It would be a disaster. Many organisations have warned of the effects of doing this. The CPSU has warned that the Morrison government's plan to privatise the visa system could effectively lead to another robodebt. That was another debacle! We saw how the robodebt went: pinging the most vulnerable people in our society, innocent people, with debts that they didn't owe. It's throwing out the fish-net and catching all the dolphins with the sharks. That's what this government is about. They don't care. It's like collective punishment. If they go down this path of privatisation of the visa system, we may get a similar debacle. Then we have the close mate of the Prime Minister, Scott Briggs, who donated to the Liberal Party a total of $300,000, putting in a bid to win this visa-processing contract.
I don't think anyone but the department should be making decisions about our borders, our border security and our migration program. You don't outsource that. It's a basic principle in a democratic country like ours, where we understand that the Commonwealth has responsibilities that it needs to fulfil. That's why taxpayers pay taxes. Defence, education, health care, border security, migration, immigration processing—you don't outsource that. I think it's not too much to say that these steps would lead to a real compromise of Australia's national security. Even Tony Abbott's former chief of staff, Peta Credlin, has been critical of this proposal.

I've outlined the pattern of this government: inaction, inefficiency, incompetence. They are focused on themselves, fighting each other all the time, squabbling and dropping the ball, effectively—dropping the ball when it comes to their primary responsibilities. But coupled with that is a very real effort to delay and obstruct that is purposeful and deliberative.

With something like the immigration program, which has been of such importance to this country, we shouldn't be privatising parts of it. The government should be doing their job to make sure that permanent residents can move smoothly into citizenship because they've made that commitment to this country. They should be rewarded, not punished. We're a successful multicultural nation because the people who have come here, like my parents, made a commitment to this country and contributed to this country. My parents said to me as I was growing up, 'Australia's not the lucky country. We are the lucky ones to be Australian. Make sure you give something back to this country, because it's given us such a great opportunity for a life of security, peace and prosperity through our hard work.' That should be rewarded, yet we have a government which is doing the opposite—partly because they're too busy fighting themselves and they're incompetent and dropping the ball, and partly because they're deliberately slowing things down for the very people that we want to make sure we make citizens of this country.

In conclusion, we will support this bill, like we did six years ago and like we did back in 2017. We want the government to embrace and recognise the strength of multicultural Australia, and the strength of that immigration program and the important part that it's played in building this country and making it such a wonderful country to live in. We will listen to that. We listen to people in the community. We hope the government does as well.

Mr WOOD (La Trobe—Assistant Minister for Customs, Community Safety and Multicultural Affairs) (17:33): I thank all members for contributing to the debate. This package of amendments contains two bills, the Migration Amendment (Regulation of Migration Agents) Bill 2019 and the Migration Agents Registration Application Charge Amendment (Rates of Charges) Bill 2019. The 2014 independent review of the Office of the Migration Agents Registration Authority, otherwise known as AMARA, recommended, amongst other things, that legal practitioners be removed from the regulatory scheme governing migration agents. The regulation of migration agents bill draws from this recommendation. The bill removes from the AMARA scheme legal practitioners with unrestricted practising certificates. Eligible legal practitioners with a restricted practising certificate will be able to register with AMARA during a two-year period, which can be extended for a total period of up to four years.

The bill reflects the government's deregulation agenda and commitment to establishing a world-class migration advice industry and removes the unnecessary administration burden of dual regulation of these legal practitioners, who are already subject to a strict professional regulatory regime. The regulation of migration agents bill also allows the OMARA to refuse an application for registration as a migration agent if the migration agent does not provide further information. This will remedy the current situation—where the application will remain open and unfinalised indefinitely while there is a failure by an agent to provide the information sought.

The bill will also complement amendments to fees and charges in the rates of charge bill and make other minor amendments. The rates of charge bill ensures that a person who paid the non-commercial application charge, in relation to their current period of registration, but gives immigration assistance other than on a non-commercial basis is liable to pay an adjusted charge.

In summary, we are committed to a strong but practical migration advice industry that works in the best interests of Australia. I believe that the bill package deserves the support of all members and I commend the bills to the chamber.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Claydon): I thank the assistant minister.

The SPEAKER: The original question was that this bill be now read a second time. To this the honourable member for Scullin has moved as an amendment that all words after 'That' be omitted with a view to substituting other words. The immediate question before the House is that the amendment moved by the member for Scullin be agreed to.

The House divided. [17:40]

(The Speaker—Hon. Tony Smith)
Noes .................. 76
Majority ................ 10

AYES

Albanese, AN
Bandt, AP
Burke, AS
Burns, J
Butler, TM
Chalmers, JE
Clare, JD
Coker, EA
Conroy, PM
Dreyfuis, MA
Fitzgibbon, JA
Georganas, S
Gosling, LJ
Husic, EN
Keaney, G
Keogh, MJ
King, CF
Leigh, AK
McBride, EM
Mitchell, RG
Murphy, PJ
O’Connor, BPJ
Owens, JA
Perrett, GD
Pliibersek, TJ
Rowland, MA
Shorten, WR
Snowdon, WE
Swanson, MJ
Thistlethwaite, MJ
Vamvakoumba, M
Wells, AS
Wilson, JH

Aly, A
Bird, SL
Burney, LJ
Butler, MC
Byrne, AM
Champion, ND
Claydon, SC
Collins, JM
Dick, MD
Elliott, MJ
Freelander, MR
Giles, AJ
Hill, JC
Jones, SP
Kelly, MJ
Khalil, P
King, MMH
Marles, RD
Mitchell, BK
Mulino, D
Neumann, SK
Payne, AE
Phillips, FE
Rishworth, AL
Ryan, JC (teller)
Smith, DPB
Stanley, AM (teller)
Templeman, SR
Thwaites, KL
Watts, TG
Wilkie, AD
Zappia, A

NOES

Alexander, JG
Andrews, KJ
Archer, BK
Broadbent, RE
Christensen, GR
Connelly, V
Drum, DK (teller)
Entsch, WG
Falinski, JG
Flint, NJ
Gee, AR
Haines, H
Hastie, AW
Hogan, KJ
Hunt, GA
Joyce, BT
Kelly, C
Landry, ML
Ley, SP
Liu, G
Martin, FB
McIntosh, MI
Morrison, SJ
O’Brien, T
Pasin, A
Pitt, KJ
Price, ML
Robert, SR
Sharma, DN
Steggall, Z

Allen, K
Andrews, KL
Bell, AM
Buchholz, S
Conaghan, PJ
Coulton, M
Dutton, PC
Evans, TM
Fletcher, PW
Frydenberg, JA
Gillespie, DA
Hammond, CM
Hawke, AG
Howarth, LR
Irons, SJ
Katter, RC
Laming, A
Leeser, J
Littleproud, D
Marino, NB
McCormack, MF
McVeigh, JJ
O’Brien, LS
O’Dowd, KD
Pearce, GB
Porter, CC
Ramsey, RE (teller)
Sharkie, RCC
Simmonds, J
Stevens, J
Question negatived.
Original question agreed to.
Bill read a second time.

Third Reading

Mr WOOD (La Trobe—Assistant Minister for Customs, Community Safety and Multicultural Affairs) (17:45): by leave—I move:
That this bill be now read a third time.
Question agreed to.
Bill read a third time.

Migration Agents Registration Application Charge Amendment (Rates of Charge) Bill 2019

Second Reading

Consideration resumed of the motion:
That this bill be now read a second time.
Question agreed to.
Bill read a second time.

Third Reading

Mr WOOD (La Trobe—Assistant Minister for Customs, Community Safety and Multicultural Affairs) (17:46): by leave—I move:
That this bill be now read a third time.
Question agreed to.
Bill read a third time.

Commonwealth Registers Bill 2019

Treasury Laws Amendment (Registries Modernisation and Other Measures) Bill 2019
Business Names Registration (Fees) Amendment (Registries Modernisation) Bill 2019
Corporations (Fees) Amendment (Registries Modernisation) Bill 2019
National Consumer Credit Protection (Fees) Amendment (Registries Modernisation) Bill 2019

Second Reading

Cognate debate.
Consideration resumed of the motion:
That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr STEPHEN JONES (Whitlam) (17:47): I'm pleased to be speaking on the Commonwealth Registers Bill 2019 and the second reading amendment that has been circulated in my name, which I now formally move:
That all 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:
(1) congratulates the Government for finally taking action to implement a Director Identification Number and tackle illegal phoenixing, nearly three years after Labor first committed to the policy; and
(2) calls on the Government to accelerate the modernisation of business registers project".

It's good to see this bill return to the House, albeit in a different form. It's a bit like the return of an old friend—once spurned but comes back and is loved by all. It was back in November last year that I introduced amendments to the coalition's creatively titled Treasury Laws Amendment (Combating Illegal Phoenixing) Bill 2019 which
would modernise business registers. The bill before the House today has picked up my schedule and introduced it. I don't know whether it was because of intransigence or just downright stubbornness that the Assistant Treasurer, who at that point in time spoke against my bill, has now got the liquid paper out and has moved it again in the government's name. I don't care. What I'm concerned about is ensuring that we take effective action against illegal phoenixing in this country.

If people want to know why I moved that schedule, it was after receiving numerous representations from Labor MPs who had had come to them businesses or creditors who had lost money through the immoral, illegal activity of bad operators—thousands and thousands of dollars. In fact, the explanatory memorandum to this bill tells us that anywhere between $3 billion and $5 billion per annum is being lost to bad operators through illegal phoenixing. But a real motivator came in the form of a woman by the name of Tara Teo, a young mum who attempted to start a family business in my electorate. Tara's story made national headlines last year when *A Current Affair* told the story of her attempts to start a business. She was one of many, many people who were caught up in the collapse of an organisation known as JUMP! Swim Schools, a franchise system operating throughout the country. I caught up with Tara last week, and I told her that I was going to raise her matter in parliament. I do that today to honour her and the thousands of people like her. But I was very keen to say: I cannot give you hope that you're going to recover the monies that were lost to you. The ACCC is currently pursuing the matter. I've written to the ACCC and asked what plans are afoot to ensure that some of the creditors might benefit from any of the penalties that may be awarded against the business, JUMP! Swim Schools. But I don't want to give false. That's a long and drawn out process. She's lost a lot of money. Thousands of other people have lost a lot of money as well.

Tara entered into an agreement with JUMP! Swim Schools two years ago to purchase a swim school franchise, which she intended to operate in Albion Park, in my electorate. Her initial investment of $150,000—a lot of money!—was to build the facility and get the business started. She wasn't a fool. Often we think about people in these circumstances as being gullible, perhaps, and not reading the fine print. But Tara had done her due diligence. She did the research. She looked into the company at the time. JUMP! Swim Schools had 66 trading sites throughout Australia. She'd invested her money, but a year later nothing had been built. When she chased things up she was shocked to discover that the company had been trading insolvent since March 2016. The company went into liquidation, and Tara lost everything. Meanwhile—and here's the rub—the CEO of the company, a bloke by the name of Ian Campbell, was able to go to the United States and open 11 new franchises in another jurisdiction, and not just in the United States of America; his company has operated franchises in New Zealand, Brazil and Singapore. I take this opportunity to send a message to the regulators in those countries to watch this fellow. He's got form. I hope that there isn't another round of victims in New Zealand, Brazil, Singapore or the United States because of the immoral actions of this bad operator.

I urge other members of the public to listen to people like Tara in their electorates and to hear about the real harm being done by dodgy, phoenixing business. We know it's a big drag on the economy, but the numbers belie the personal costs. There's the cost to the family from the emotional stress they go through when they not only lose their hopes and their livelihoods but are left with a crippling debt—Tara's husband is now working night shift in the steelworks—and no immediate means to repay it.

I am genuinely pleased to see that this bill is before the House. It's about the establishment of a modernised legislative regime for Australia's business registers, which are currently woefully outdated and running on a range of ancient systems. This is a commitment that the government first made back in 2016. It arises out of a recommendation from the Productivity Commission which dates back to September 2015, when they issued their final report, entitled *Business set-up, transfer and closure*. So it's taken us a long time to get from that Productivity Commission recommendation to this bill being before the House today. One can only imagine—in fact, we don't have to imagine; we can calculate. If PricewaterhouseCoopers are right and the annual cost of illegal phoenixing in this country is somewhere between $3 billion and $5 billion a year, the five years of inaction by this government has cost the economy—those small businesses, those creditors—somewhere close to $25 billion. That is immoral. That is unconscionable.

I'm pleased to see the bill before the House. It's probably worth explaining some of the reasons why this is so important. It might surprise many members of this place, who jumped on a plane to travel down here to Canberra to attend this session of parliament, that you actually have to go through more identity checks to buy a plane ticket than you do to set up a business and become a company director in this country. Let me say that again: you need more identity checks to get on a plane to come to Canberra than you do to establish yourself as a director of a company.

Under the current arrangements, no individual verification of the identity of directors is occurring in a way that can stop the recidivist phoenix operators, the bad operators, doing again and again and again what they've done to
people like Tara Teo and her family. This legislation will put in place the machinery to ensure that that loophole is closed down. It is not before time. It was a commitment made as part of the government's so-called National Business Simplification Initiative, which was intended to reduce the time businesses spend interacting with governments so they can get on with the business of keeping the economy moving. We say that that is a worthy goal.

Perhaps the fact that this bill has been delayed for so long since its announcement has been because the government in this area, as in so many other areas, are just incapable of making decisions and then making those decisions operative. In every critical area in our economy we see the same pattern of behaviour: announcements are made, but they are not followed through because of the divisions and incompetence of the governing parties—divided among themselves, unable to make a decision in their party room and then unable to make that decision operative. We have multiple examples of that before the House at the moment.

It is also worth pointing out that the government has assigned $60 million in funding for this project, a project for a major IT upgrade that is going to involve a significant upgrade of a number of outdated IT systems. When we've consulted with industry and others who have some expertise in the rollout and upgrade of systems such as this they say that that is woefully inadequate. So I'd invite the minister responsible, when he comes back to the dispatch box to sum up in the debate, to say what contingency they have put in place to ensure that they have allocated sufficient funds to ensure that this essential project gets up and running, so that the reality matches the rhetoric; so that businesses have the systems in the background to enliven this legislation. If they are unable to satisfactorily answer that question, what we'll have is just another example of the government making a big announcement but, through their own incompetence and inability to follow through on these things, that being insufficiently executed.

I want to say something about director identification numbers. This is an important feature of this bill. It's absolutely critical. Everyone from the Australian Institute of Company Directors to the small business associations and the small business ombudsman have said, 'This is absolutely critical to addressing the issue of phoenixing.' A director identification number will provide a unique identifier for directors of Australian companies, providing traceability over time. Suppose you put your hand up and say, 'I want to register with ASIC as a company director.' ASIC provides you with a unique director identification number. Like your tax file number, that stays with you for life.

What that enables ASIC to do, and what that enables creditors, shareholders and others to do, is track a particular shareholder, particularly if they've been involved in recidivist activity, to ensure that the full force of the law can be brought down upon them if they are barred—that they're not able to re-register, because the systems are in place to stop that. I welcome the fact that the government is putting this legislation into the House as well, called for by business, called for by Labor, committed to by Labor at the last election, an integral part of the bill.

We have a serious problem with phoenixing in this country. We do want to ensure that this bill is implemented, that it passes this House and that it passes swiftly in the other place. But we also want to ensure that the money, the funding, is set aside to ensure that the systems can be upgraded and that the work can be underway swiftly, to ensure that the director identification number and the registry upgrades—something this country sorely needs and something that corporate Australia sorely needs—can be put into place. In so many ways, the government has failed.

With those brief comments, I put the minister on notice. When he comes back to sum up, I want him to be able to explain to the House how $60 million is going to be sufficient for this significant IT upgrade, this significant registry upgrade to be completed, and what contingencies the government has put in place to ensure that this critical change, to stamp down on phoenixing in this country, can be delivered. With those comments, I commend the bill to the House.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Claydon): Can I check that this amendment is seconded?

Mr Giles: Of course it is, but I reserve my right to speak.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The original question was that this bill be now read a second time. To this, the honourable member for Whitlam has moved as an amendment that all words after 'That' be omitted with a view to substituting other words. The question now is that the amendment be agreed to.

Before I invite other speakers, I understand that it is the wish of this House to debate this order of the day concurrently with the four related bills, as they appear on the program. I believe there is no objection. There being no objection, I will now allow that course to be followed. So the question, I repeat now, is that the amendment be agreed to.
Mr PEARCE (Braddon) (18:03): It's an honour to rise today and speak in favour of this motion and about how it relates my great electorate of Braddon on the north-west and west coasts and King Island in Tasmania. My electorate is home to a number of small to medium businesses that are significant on a global scale. It is also home to around 9½ thousand small businesses that add to Tasmania's positive GDP growth. All of Braddon's great businesses are playing a critical role in driving our economy forward. These small businesses provide the engine room of our economy in Tasmania.

As a small business owner myself I understand the challenges and risks that business sectors face each and every day. I understand what it's like to borrow too much money and to have to employ people week in, week out and ensure that they are gainfully employed through slack periods in one's business. I understand the burden of compliance and the levels of bureaucracy that are placed around small businesses and that sometimes appear critical and crippling to those small-business operators.

In my first speech in this place, I said that this was a particular issue I wanted to fight and support. I made a commitment to my electorate and to those small to medium business owners that I would do everything I could to ensure that those businesses right across Australia, including those in Braddon, are given the room to grow, the room to expand, to flourish and to employ more people and create even more jobs. As a small business man I understand and I value the efficiencies and the streamlined processes within government departments. I also understand that reducing the regulatory burdens imposed on businesses allows them to focus on what's important to them, which is running their business. They've got enough to do, running their own show, without worrying about government bureaucracy and interdepartmental glitches.

We need to think about the human side and how these regulatory burdens stifle business growth—how they impact those mum-and-dad businesses on the ground. Once again, they've got enough to do, running their own show, without having to worry about red and green tape. I know that most nights most mums and dads who run these businesses are locked away in their home offices, trying to negotiate through unnecessary and complex bureaucratic paperwork, instead of spending precious time with their kids and their families and instead of looking after themselves and their own wellbeing. That's why this legislation is important.

The Commonwealth Registers Bill 2019 and associated bills fulfil the government's 2018-19 budget commitment to reduce regulatory burdens imposed on businesses. Currently there are 34 legal registers that are administered by the Australian Securities and Investments Commission and the Australian Business Register. These registers include but are not limited to the entity name, identity and information; registers of banned or disqualified persons; business name registers; managed investment scheme registers; and registers of disqualified company directors—just to name a few.

Another inefficiency with the current system is that business owners often have to provide the same information time and time again. It does their head in. The duplicative nature of going to one department and explaining your life, only to have to go to another department, must cripple businesses and their confidence. Amongst other things, it certainly would frustrate them. This is because 32 existing registers aren't linked, despite them holding exactly the same information and data. This is an issue that business owners in Braddon raise with me almost daily. It's frustrating, it's time-wasting and it costs the business owner their bottom line. It's nonsensical.

The bill addresses this problem and will integrate the current 32 business registers into one single, efficient platform. The Morrison government is one that delivers on its promises and does what is needed to streamline how businesses engage with government, and this is important on so many levels. This bill modernises business registers to address registry fragmentation and improves business user experience. Protecting Braddon's small businesses from unscrupulous company directors is also important to me. As a former company director I understand this full well, as does the Morrison government. I've listened to the advice from the Australian Institute of Company Directors and the Business Council of Co-operatives and Mutuals and I've heard firsthand the examples they provide of this unscrupulous aspect creeping into boards of directors, only to have this fall into the lap of honest, hardworking folk who are getting about this business every day. Loopholes that allow current corrupt company directors to avoid paying what they owe to our honest, hardworking business owners by shutting down their debt ridden companies and transferring their assets to another company must be closed.

It's estimated that the cost to Australian businesses and to the economy as a result of this dishonest practice is between $2.9 billion and $5 billion annually. But what this dishonest practice does in terms of destroying business confidence, and those hardworking folk that run these businesses, is immeasurable. We can't measure the burden that that places on them.

With this in mind, I welcome the introduction of the director identification number, the DIN. The DIN is a unique identifier that a director will keep forever. This means that going forward a director's profile and
relationships across companies will be traceable. This will provide greater insights to regulators, to businesses and to individuals to identify affiliated directors and prevent them from fictitious identities. It will also provide a means by which we can control unscrupulous fiduciary requirements being mislaid or not carried out on the part of company directors. This acts as further deterrent—to detect and address unlawful behaviour. It protects our small business operators. This will result in yet another important protection for our businesses right across the electorate of Braddon, and, in fact, right across Australia, and for that I commend this bill to the House.

Mr THISTLETHWAITE (Kingsford Smith) (18:11): We're supporting this bill principally because it adopts a Labor policy that Labor's been campaigning on for many years now, and we're glad to see the Morrison government finally adopt it because it's sensible policy, and that of course is the introduction of director identification numbers for company directors.

The package of these bills delivers two outcomes. It creates a new Commonwealth business registries regime, allowing ASIC and other business registers to be up to date and meet modern requirements. As I mentioned earlier, it also introduces a new director identification number requirement, requiring company directors to provide proof of identification before registering their companies. The introduction of director identification numbers will improve the ability of regulators to combat illegal phoening, which costs the Australian economy billions of dollars every year. Dodgy phoening companies impose an enormous cost on ordinary, hardworking Australians.

Phoening of a company occurs when dodgy directors deliberately burn a company in an attempt to avoid their obligations to employees, taxpayers and honest businesses. It occurs, unfortunately, in a number of industries in Australia. You see it quite often when a particular company has a liability to creditors—maybe for loans, maybe for other areas related to insurance, maybe for rectification works—and they shut the company down owing creditors all of this money, owing average working Australians liabilities. They simply go away and establish a company under another name. And because you can't pierce the corporate veil under Australian corporate law and go directly after those directors, because of the notion of limited liability in corporation law, they get away with it.

It is one of the most despicable acts that anyone can undertake. But, unfortunately, in a lot of circumstances it is legal in Australia. It's hoped that, with this new requirement for directors to have a number associated with them as they apply for the establishment of businesses and become directors of businesses, this problem will be ameliorated in Australia.

Phoening has effects that reach across the community, ruining innocent people's lives and livelihoods. Labor first committed to director identification numbers back in 2017, and has previously moved amendments in the House of Representatives to force the government to vote for a director identification number. Unfortunately, they voted against it. They voted against Labor's proposal to establish director identification numbers. One suspects purely because it was put forward by the Labor Party, not because it wasn't good policy, not because it didn't make sense, not because the Australian people didn't want them, purely because it was put forward by the Labor Party, and that is quite sad. It is quite infantile really when you think about it. It is quite childish and sad. And that's evident in the fact that they have now put it forward in this bill, that it's an integral part of this bill. There is basically no difference between Labor's proposal and this one, but, in what was only an infantile act, they chose to vote against it when it was put forward by the Labor Party. A

Labor's previous amendment to the introduction of a director identification number had widespread support from the Australian Council of Trade Unions, the Australian Institute of Company Directors, the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and, of course, the Small Business Ombudsman. The Master Builders Association and various stakeholders, particularly in the building industry, and the small business sector were also supportive of Labor's policy. Stakeholders agree that a director identification number is crucial in helping to combat illegal phoening in Australia. The director identification number reform will require directors to actually provide 100 points of identification, allowing regulators to properly tackle the problem at its heart and keep track of people when they attempt to close down companies with liabilities to creditors, and just move on and establish a new corporate entity and hope the whole issue will go away and that nothing will go wrong. Less identification is needed to start a company than to open a bank account. That's a problem in Australia that has led to unfair and unjust outcomes. That needs to be rectified. Thankfully, the government is heeding Labor's advice and doing that through this bill. It's been too easy to fraudulently register directors and too hard to track individuals who regularly engage in fraudulent phoening.

Action must be taken to ensure that dodgy directors are accountable. They simply can't be left to continue shutting down companies in order to swindle entitlements from workers and leave suppliers and tradies in the lurch. Make no mistake: these directors have put in place deliberate strategies that are specifically designed not only to defeat their creditors but also to defeat the Australian Taxation Office. Unfortunately, some of them are
very adept at it and have been getting away with it for years. It's not uncommon to hear stories of people doing this two and three times.

The Morrison government has finally come to the table on this issue. We support giving new powers to regulators to combat illegal phoenixing. Labor's pressure on the government has seen them backflip and look to implement the DIN and modernise business registries. After campaigning against Labor's policy, it is clear the Morrison government has now accepted the wisdom of Labor's policy and has done the right thing by providing this legislation to the parliament.

I wish to pay tribute to the member for Fenner, who has put a lot of work into this issue and has led the debate and has campaigned for this as part of Labor's economic team. Without the concerted campaign and efforts of people like the member for Fenner and the current shadow Treasurer and the current shadow minister for health, we wouldn't have seen such vocal opposition to what phoenixing amounts to in our economy and what it does to our economy, nor had the spotlight shone on it. I congratulate them. The Treasurer knows he needs to act to protect customers, but he's been dragging his feet. The Liberals have always been slow to act when it comes to this issue. But, thankfully, they are now adopting Labor's policy and have introduced this legislation. It is time the government focused on protecting the vast majority of scrupulous businesses from the harm caused by the dodgy few, rather than avoiding any responsibility.

This bill provides, finally, for the director identification number, with 100 points of identification required prior to being registered under the director identification number system. It will ensure that regulators can keep track of directors when they are doing the wrong thing, not only by their employees—importantly, by their employees—but also by creditors and their customers, and those who have business dealings with them.

The bill also provides for a new Commonwealth business registries regime, allowing ASIC and other business registers to be updated to meet modern requirements. This is an area with a fast pace related to technological change and modernisation of business registries. This will allow ASIC and other business registers to be updated to meet those requirements.

On the whole, I commend the bill to the House. I thank those on the Labor side who campaigned for director identification numbers, and I thank the federal government for finally listening to the Labor Party and the Australian people and implementing this much-needed reform.

Mr TIM WILSON (Goldstein) (18:20): Goldstein, as a community, wants to make sure that we have proper financial regulation for our country and that businesses, small businesses and directors live up to their responsibilities and obligations to the Australian people. I don't think it's particularly different to any other electorate around the country.

What we have in the Commonwealth Registers Bill 2019 is a sensible and pragmatic approach by this government to address a couple of things. Most importantly, it addresses wrongdoing and problems that occurred in the past when directors engaged in phoenixing and used it as an opportunity to cleanse themselves of their directorial history. The simple process of establishing a director identification number will play an important and critical role in making sure that those who do the right thing—who fulfil their duties and obligations, consistent with the law and the purpose of an organisation—are respected and that those who do the wrong thing by workers, by creditors and by those people with whom they have engaged in business are held to account. Of course, the opposition are standing up and claiming credit and everything else. Well, in the end, they had the chance to do many of these things before, when they were in government, and they chose not to. It's taken this government to get on with the job of making sure that dodgy directors out there are held to account. That's what we're doing. We don't talk the talk, as they like to; we walk the walk. That's what we're focusing on: making sure that we get the right outcomes.

We want Australians to have a high degree of trust in people who are engaged in enterprise, who are innovating, who are putting their capital, their energy and their labour on the line to build a more successful country. We want people to engage in an economic environment anchored around trust because that's the pathway to more investment and more money going into growing businesses to create jobs. That's the very fulfilment of the Liberal ideal—that, through shared participation, innovation and reward for effort, through a trust based system anchored around property rights and contracts, we get economic development, which advantages everybody. That's what this bill, in its own, small, modest way, contributes to. It makes sure that dodgy directors are held to account. If they have engaged in conduct for which they should be held to account, just because the business has closed down does not mean they should be able to operate other businesses or other directorships without regard to their past misconduct. It is incredibly important that we hold to account people who do the wrong thing by Australians.
The other thing this bill does, which is very important, is make sure that the registers of the Australian Business Register and ASIC are harmonised to integrate 32 existing business registers into a single platform to be administered by the Australian Business Registrar. This is a relatively straightforward measure, when you look at it in terms of the engagement that Australian people have around business registrations, but it's incredibly important for streamlining so many of the processes used when engaging with government. We'll be able to use the power of technology in a very simple and straightforward way to remove burdens, barriers and hurdles for everyday Australians who want to make good wicket and good stick out of their lives. We want people to register businesses. If they're registering businesses then, in the words of the Prime Minister, they're having a go; they're taking the risk because they can see the potential for growth into the future. While this isn't going to dramatically change people's behaviour, it's one small barrier that can be streamlined to the advantage of investment and growth and to remove complexity and hurdles from people's lives. Of course, to do so, the government is putting in place the IT infrastructure that underpins Australia's business registry services which need to be addressed to meet demand for registry services now and into the future. To facilitate the implementation of the new registries system a legislative package has been drafted that creates a new regime that is flexible, technology neutral and governance neutral—in short, designed to make sure that Australians can do what they need to do best.

Mr Simmonds: Hear, hear!

Mr TIM WILSON: Exactly, there you go! I'm very happy to see the member for Ryan endorsing this very strongly. We haven't had a word yet from the member for Longman about whether he shares that sentiment, but I cannot imagine that he would take a different view.

Mr Young: Hear, hear, hear!

Mr TIM WILSON: There you go; he is on board as well. It seems even the opposition is on board with such a proposal. That is a welcome thing. Maybe there is a time where we can find a point to unite, though I have no doubt that somehow there will be some sort of rubbish amendment put forward by the opposition with the objective of simply trying to virtue-signal or draw attention to themselves, to the detriment of getting outcomes in this parliament. We have seen a fair bit of that in this parliament already.

Mr Keogh: You would know about virtue-signalling.

Mr TIM WILSON: I see some members are exercised when I say such things, but the reality is that past behaviour certainly does inform future behaviour. In any case, the minister can appoint an existing body to the registrar. Different registrars can be appointed for different functions and powers under the legislation. The registrar will make data standards that determine what information will be collected, how it will be collected and the manner in which the information will be maintained—simple, dry, boring, impactful public policy.

Mr Hill: Stop talking about yourself.

Mr TIM WILSON: Sometimes what the government needs to do is actually find pathways to remove barriers so people are able to get on with their lives. Technology empowers us to do that in a way that hasn't always been done in the past. Doing that with business registers and harmonisation enables us to implement the values of our government, clearly encouraging more people to invest in enterprise, to have a go and, as the Prime Minister says, to get a go. The other point, around the introduction of director identification numbers, is exactly the same thing. Freedom comes, as the Prime Minister said in a different context today, with responsibility and empowerment.

Mr Hill: Freedom boy!

Mr TIM WILSON: There is another component to it, which is that responsibility begets and depends on accountability. The point around director identification numbers is to implement a simple and straightforward means by which people can be held accountable for their past conduct. At every point, this simple administrative piece of legislation empowers and enlivens the spirit of this government and of liberal values to be implemented in law, and the member for—I can't even remember what your electorate is. Which one is it? Is it Holt?

Mr Hill interjecting—

Mr TIM WILSON: The member for Holt is interjecting and causing challenges and problems because he knows deep down in his heart that it's true—that this government is getting on with the job of implementing these important but simple reforms. That is why I, and people on this side of the chamber, support the legislation. Maybe, in time, members of the opposition will grow up and be able to support this legislation too.

Mr KEOGH (Burt) (18:28): What we have just seen here is history-breaking. The member for Goldstein has never seen a regulation that he didn't want to abolish, and he has just stood in the chamber right now, before us all, supporting the introduction of new regulation. I urge all members present to take down this date. It is a red-letter day. Mark it in your diary. I suggest to us all that we might even celebrate the anniversary of this date in a year's time, because I suspect we will never hear anything of that like again. Then, to end that amazing contribution to
this debate, he urged the Labor Party, we here in the opposition, to support our own policy. We are so grateful that you have finally dragged yourselves out of your abyss of not wanting to support any consumer protection regulation in financial services and corporations and have actually decided to support our policy in this area.

Just to be very clear, this legislation does two very important things. Firstly, it modernises a whole range of registers and registries that are kept by ASIC and others, which are important for our corporate regulation, our consumer protection, and are important for regulating a number of licensee-holders et cetera.

But much more important than that is that this legislation will introduce a company director identification number. That is something that we on our side, the Labor side, have been calling for for years. It is something that I, as a member of the Joint Committee on Corporations and Financial Services, was strongly pushing the government towards in the last parliament. ASIC itself has been calling for this for a very long time. This is strongly supported. It is particularly supported because of the problem that we see in phoenixing activity in corporate Australia. Australia is not alone in phoeinising activity, but it is a particularly pernicious activity that we see in corporate Australia because of those who are left high and dry as a result of it.

It's important to explain the issue. People might think, 'Director identification number—that's pretty straightforward, that makes sense, why do we need this?' It's quite important to understand that right now, under the way our corporations are governed, if a person is registered as a director as John Smith, and then they go on the register as a director of another company as J Smith, they are two different people as far as ASIC is concerned. There are discrepancies all over the place in these registers. The director register is but one, but it is the most important one. Fixing this up, having a clear identification number so that there is one entry and it is very clear what company someone is a director of and their identity is clear, is so important for being able to manage the regulation of our corporations. It serves an important purpose not just for the regulator, but for investors, for shareholders, for creditors and for employees.

So we are very keen to support this legislation and this critical change. This change has been urged by a number of industry professionals for a long period of time to assist in cracking down on illegal phoenixing activity. I can tell you, as a former corporate prosecutor, that it is actually incredibly difficult to get into the space of prosecuting people for phoenixing. There's no offence of phoenixing, of course, but there are offences around shadow directors, and there are offences around people setting up companies and becoming a director of a company when they have been banned and prohibited from being a director of a company. What we see with phoenixing is where people deliberately remove assets from a business, transferring them into another one, winding that business down, leaving it full of debts, leaving it with its obligations to its creditors and employees. So often I have people coming to my office complaining about someone who has done precisely this, leaving them or their loved one with unpaid wages, unpaid superannuation, often for years, and who has set up business again but is completely off the hook when it comes to their obligations to their creditors to and, more importantly, to their employees.

So it is particularly important that we find ways of cracking down on this. Director identification numbers are a very important part of how we do this, so that we know when a director is involved in companies that are being wound up, especially where they're involved in winding up multiple companies, so that we know if it's the same director or the same group of directors. It's important that when they try to set up companies in the future, the corporate regulator is able to make sure that they are not going down that same pathway again. It's important that if they've been banned from being a director we are able to make sure that they don't pop up again and do this to some other unsuspecting creditors and employees.

Just to give an example: in 2018 a Western Australian business owner was sentenced to five years jail in relation to illegal phoeinising activity and ordered to pay back $890,000 in fraudulently obtained money. This related to 20 charges relating to his labour hire operations, which he had been operating from the late 1990s to 2009. In court the ATO alleged that he intentionally accumulated debt over this time, liquidated his businesses to avoid paying the bills and then set up operations through different corporate entities each time.

The capacity to track this is completely fraught because of the way our registers are currently managed. This has a damaging impact. As you can tell from that example, it's not just creditors and employees who are left ripped off: it's all of us. The ATO is often the biggest creditor that is left unpaid as a result of these activities. Indeed, the government has estimated that phoenixing activity costs the economy up to $5.1 billion a year. That is staggering.

The Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman, Kate Carnell, has said that they support the director ID number. It has received unanimous support as a policy that is key to weeding out shonky directors from corporate Australia. Also over many years numerous committee reports in this parliament have called for this to happen. But it's just like we've seen with the implementation—or rather I should say 'lack of
implementation—of the recommendations of the Hayne royal commission. I'm sure members present and those listening will remember the Hayne banking royal commission. That was the royal commission that the government tried for several years to avoid holding.

Mr Giles: They voted against it.

Mr KEOGH: That's right; they voted against it 26 times. Now, two years after this legislation was promised, we're finally getting around to debating it.

The other issue that arises with this—and ASIC flagged this when it gave evidence to parliamentary committees, and it's related to this whole suite of legislation—is that we're not ready to go yet. We can't just update the existing registers. It's not just about the legislative framework. Literally the computer databases that the existing registers are running on are about to fall over. We can't just update them. ASIC needs to upgrade all of its systems to accommodate this very important change in our corporate regulatory framework.

I know that Assistant Minister Buchholz, who is at the table, is aware of this because we have sat on committees that have looked into these things. It's really important in this context that the government makes sure that ASIC is properly funded to quickly deliver, on the most recent technology, the upgrades that it needs to its registers and databases to deal with the significant changes around the director identification number. It's all very good and well us standing in this place supporting such important legislation, but, even if we get the frameworks right, if the regulator is not empowered and empowered financially to get on with the job then we will still be confronted with this same issue for many years to come. For two years we have been waiting for this legislation to be brought on by this government, but it has obfuscated. I think about the number of employees who have walked into my office—and I daresay they have walked into the offices of nearly every member of parliament here—to complain about their being the victim of phoenixing activity, with lost wages and lost superannuation.

Small businesses in our electorates have been left with unpaid bills. They are facing cash flow shortages. They acquired materials to do whatever work they were doing for that business. They supplied that business with goods and services and they have been left high and dry. That's why there's that $5 billion cost to our economy every year. We have been waiting two years for this legislation to come forward. That's $10.2 billion that has been lost to the Australian economy through illegal phoenixing. That could have been significantly reduced by having the director identification numbers introduced.

ASIC has been crying out for it for years. Parliamentary committees, in parliament upon parliament, have been saying we need to get on and deal with this. Industry groups, those involved in regulation and those involved in law enforcement in the corporate space, such as me, have been saying that this is such an obvious problem that needs to be solved. It's very good that the government is now finally getting on with the job of resolving it. We're very happy to see the government pick up this policy, which was ours. We wholeheartedly support this happening. We urge the government to make sure that they properly fund ASIC to deliver on this commitment and that it is able to do it soon.

Mr YOUNG (Longman) (18:38): I rise in support of the Commonwealth Registers Bill 2019 and the related bills. We are surrounded by Australians with new and innovative business ideas and ventures that they dream of starting from the ground up. Every day we drive past local businesses that are just looking for the confidence to invest. They want to help their business and the community they love grow and thrive. They just want to give back to our strong Australian economy. We see businesses that would love to employ more staff or even buy some new equipment so that they can provide a quicker service to their customers and a safer environment for their employees. We see businesses take on apprentices or trainees to give them a leg-up in their career in the industry by helping them to develop new skills, or we see businesses reskilling their current employees.

Every single one of these businesses provides us with a service we probably wouldn't be able to live without, even if we don't realise that right now. This is why the Morrison government has always stood behind and backed our Australian businesses every step of the way. The Morrison government remains committed to rewarding the aspiration of every Australian business, encouraging them to get out there and invest, giving them opportunities to grow our economy even further through their business. When Australian businesses gain the confidence they need and are encouraged to get out there and invest, the economy flows. This means that businesses can employ more staff, build a stronger and more assured workforce, provide even better goods and services to their customers, create much-needed jobs in the local community and help everyday Australians embark on their chosen career path.

As a business owner of 19 years I know only too well how important it is to have a thriving and confident business with a team of experienced and skilled employees and employers running them, and a coalition government that will back them all the way. Strong and confident businesses go hand in hand with a booming
economy that's gathering more and more strength every day, which will create more jobs for employees and endless opportunities for businesses across Australia.

That is what these bills are about. They are about cutting the red tape for all Australian businesses so that it is simpler to do business in Australia. This, in turn, will help businesses across the country thrive, grow and feel much more confident as they invest in doing business. When you provide businesses with a simpler way of doing business and an easier way to guide them on their journey, to achieve their business goals, they don't get caught up in all that red tape. They are able to get out there, thrive, grow and achieve their goals. This is what we want for our Australian businesses. We want our businesses to grow, we want them to be more confident, we want them to achieve success, we want them to be able to provide employment, we want them to boast a strong workforce, to skill our employees and we want them to invest, because this is what makes our economy flow.

Making it simpler to do business will also create more and new innovative businesses that could benefit the everyday Australian and our economy. We have millions of Australians out there with unique and creative ideas who might be wondering if they'll be able to create a business out of their idea or go into business. But when you start a business, it can be hard to know what to do first or how to go about sharing your idea with the world. As a result, many business ideas get tossed aside because it's too hard to get started. They're being told that it's not the right time to start a business or it's too complicated to get the business set up. It would be a shame, if we don't simplify the way we do business, to miss out on a great business initiative in Australia or to have the idea taken overseas, where a business is easier to set up. Our economy would miss out on reaping the benefits of this brand new business, and so would we, which would be a real pity.

When we make it simpler to do business it will lead to an increase in profits, allowing a business to reinvest in their business by hiring new staff and purchasing new equipment. It will allow businesses to create more value and will support them in developing and reskilling employees. Creating an experienced and trained workforce allows them the opportunity to grow and make a difference, to give back to our strong economy, to get out there and help our community. It will inspire businesses to get updated with the latest technology and acquainted with the digital world. Simplifying the way an Australian does business will also allow employers to spend more time at front of house in their business, encouraging their employees and finding more innovative ways of growing, and bringing in business and connecting with customers, instead of spending hours and hours going through things like paying invoices and checking up on the back end of their business.

In short, embracing the act of making it simpler to do business in Australia will be a huge win for our businesses across the nation. Many businesses are unable to get off the ground, are in danger of closing—or have closed—or don't have the confidence to invest and take on more employees. One reason for this is all the rules and regulations surrounding business practices. These need to be trimmed and simplified if we want to continue to back and provide more opportunities for Australian businesses.

How will our businesses continue to expand and grow if they don't have the confidence to invest or take on new employees because of all these rules and regulations? So let's simplify some things and allow Australian businesses the breathing space to grow, expand and thrive. Australia is one of the most exciting places in the world to do business, start a new business or invest. Let's keep it that way. Let's reward Australian businesses and their aspirations by making it simpler, faster and smarter to do business. Our business community is truly the backbone of Australia's economy, and they deserve to be given the confidence to achieve their goals and continue to provide their customers with fantastic goods and services, and their employees with benefits, opportunities to develop their skills and great wages.

For example, the Treasury Laws Amendment (Registries Modernisation and Other Measures) Bill 2019 will, one, provide the legislative flexibility for the government to fulfil its 2018-19 budget commitment to modernise the Australian Securities and Investments Commission business registers and the Australian Business Register, and will integrate the 32 existing business registers into one platform to be administered by the Australian Business Register. Two, modernising the business registers will address registry fragmentation, improve business user experience, reduce risks of ongoing operating, foster data driven innovation and enable better use of registry data. Three, the IT infrastructure underpinning Australia's business registry services needs to be addressed to meet demand for registry services now and into the future. Four, to facilitate the implementation of a new registry system a legislative package has been drafted that creates a new regime that is flexible, technology neutral and governance neutral. Five, the registrar will make data standards that determine what information will be collected, how the information will be collected and the manner in which information will be maintained. And, finally, the registrar can make a disclosure framework to provide the basis for disclosing protected information to the public. The disclosure framework is designed to replace a one-size-fits-all approach to publicly available data to one where information is disclosed using a risk based approach.
Australia currently has more than three million small and medium size businesses that employ around seven million Australians. The electorate of Longman has 13,146 small to medium businesses as of April 2019, all of whom are giving back to their community where and when they can and providing important economic significance.

The Morrison government has already reaffirmed its commitment to backing small businesses and its plan for a strong economy with this year's announcement of an agreement to establish the $540 million Australian Business Growth Fund with the four major banks, HSBC and the Macquarie Group. The fund will provide equity funding for small and medium size businesses, helping them to grow and fulfil their potential by accessing capital to create more jobs, a stronger workforce and to grow and expand.

The Morrison government has always invested in our small and medium businesses. This is evident by the fact that business confidence from traders across Australia increased after the result of last year's federal election. Not to mention that the Morrison government's achievements in reducing unemployment and creating jobs in the past few years have helped businesses as more people have disposable income.

The personal tax cuts for 2018-19 have assisted people to reduce credit card debt and discretionary spending. I have seen what the Morrison government has achieved for local businesses over the years. As a business owner I know how important it is to have governments who will always back our Australian enterprises; believe in their value; reward them for their aspirations; equip Australians with the skills that Australian businesses need to boost their success, deliver better wages and more jobs; and keep encouraging investment and keep our economy flowing. We must continue to support and inspire confidence in a sector that drives our economy by making it simpler for our Australian businesses to do business on a daily basis. I commend the

Dr Leigh (Fenner) (18:48): When Megan was seven years old her dad lost his job. Megan told me that she kind of enjoyed it at the time. Rather than having to go to work every day, he would stay home and help her organise her toys. She'd get to walk to school with him, which she only realised later was because the family couldn't afford the petrol. Megan's dad had been the victim of phoenixing in which a dodgy director had shifted the assets out of the company, shut the firm down and caused him to lose his job.

The impact of phoenixing on the Australian economy is massive. PwC estimated that in 2016-17 the impact was at least $5 billion a year. That's $3.2 billion in unpaid bills, $300 million in unpaid employee entitlements, $1.7 billion in unpaid taxes and compliance costs. The stories of phoenix activity are legion. There were suggestions that phoenixing was one of the reasons for delays in the building works recently conducted at Parliament House. I have spoken to tradies on the Gold Coast, in Canberra, in Melbourne, in Sydney and in Western Australia who've told me they've been the victims of illegal phoenixing activities. Phoenixing erodes the very bedrock of business, which is trust. Who wants to get into business with a handshake if there's a risk that the person you're dealing with could ultimately rip you off? Phoenixing is a huge risk for Australia's tradies, who stand to lose the most.

At the heart of this problem—and the point that the Melbourne university and Monash University team made when they were looking at phoenixing several years ago—is that it is currently extraordinarily easy to register as a company director. It's so easy, in fact, that—as one expert told the Senate committee—you can almost register your dog as a company director. The tax commissioner told a senator on a Senate estimates committee:

I could appoint you as a company director without you even knowing …

The problem came to light a few years ago when a Liberal backbencher turned out to have three listings on the director registry with three different birthdays. I'll accept that that was likely inadvertence rather than malice, but it does illustrate the problems in our director identification system.

It's currently much harder to open a bank account than it is to register as a company director. If you want to open a bank account, you've got to pass the 100-point ID check. If you want to register as a director, you simply sign up. That's a problem that many people in business have said needs to be changed. The list of those who want a director identification number includes the Institute of Company Directors, the Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman, the Productivity Commission, the Tax Justice Network, the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Master Builders Australia, the Australian Council of Trade Unions, the Australian Restructuring Insolvency and Turnaround Association and, of course, the phoenix project at Monash and Melbourne universities.

That's why, three years ago, the member for Gorton, Senator Gallagher and myself announced that Labor supported a director identification number. We believed that it was critical to move from this outdated system and to put in place a director identification number that recognised the scourge that phoenix activity imposes on the economy; yet the government has failed to act. Three years on—if you believe PwC's estimates to the cost—means we're now $15 billion on. That's $15 billion that's been ripped out of the pockets of tradies, taxpayers and
workers as a result of the Abbott-Turnbull-Morrison government's go-slow on implementing a director identification number. The problem was so serious that the Australian Restructuring Insolvency and Turnaround Association noted that the bill had lapsed after the May election. In the words of ARITA chief executive, John Winter:

Despite the claims of action by government, unfortunately, almost nothing is really being done. Phoenixing activity is like tanking in sport. We see allegations of tanking in the AFL, Major League Baseball, Olympic badminton, Asian soccer and the National Hockey League, and it never fails to elicit outrage from sports fans. In the same way, if you mention phoenixing to tradies, they'll immediately tell you about times when they've been ripped off, when they've done the work and haven't been paid for it.

The government has taken three years just to get this bill to the parliament. I worry that the implementation may take longer. The government has taken two worthy projects and bolted them together. The worthy project of modernising business registers is worth doing. We have over 30 business registers. They are outdated, they need to be updated and linked together. But as I understand it—and I hope the Assistant Treasurer will correct me if I'm wrong—that project has been tied to the project of implementing a director identification number, with the two jobs being tendered together. A director identification number is a straightforward measure.

Mr Sukkar interjecting—

Dr LEIGH: I'll take the interjection from the minister. The minister is saying you shouldn't have to pay twice. The thing is, Minister, if you delay this by a single year, you may save a few bucks for the taxpayer—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mrs Wicks): Order! The member for Fenner will direct his remarks through the chair.

Dr LEIGH: Thank you, Deputy Speaker. Minister, you may save a few bucks for the taxpayer, but you will cost tradies, workers and taxpayers $5 billion. That's the annual cost of delaying this measure. So if you think that you are able to delay for a year and save taxpayers, say, $100 million, you've missed the fact that, of the compliance costs, $1.7 billion are in unpaid taxes. So the taxpayer will be worse off, because phoenixing will go on for another year, taxpayers will lose another $1.7 billion—PwC's own numbers, commissioned by the government—and any savings made by tying the simple director identification number project to the complicated business register project will be lost.

It's Labor that has consistently led this debate; Labor that has consistently called for action on a director identification number. We are pleased to see this bill finally before the House today—three years late—and we urge the government to move with all possible speed. We had all sorts of delays with the previous minister. Minister Kelly O'Dwyer, when she had the portfolio, was talking about using biometrics to do it, suggesting that the minister just hadn't thought through the implementation in detail. The government announced that it was going to do this at the beginning of last year, but then didn't move after the election to take action. Australian tradies, workers and taxpayers deserve better.

Mr SUKKAR (Deakin—Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Housing ) (18:56): I thank all those who contributed to the debate on this legislation. This legislative package does very important work. It creates a new act, called the Commonwealth Restructuring Act, and makes related amendments to a suite of existing laws to create a new Commonwealth business registry regime. This set of bills will introduce a single business register that will fundamentally improve and streamline how businesses engage with government.

To facilitate the implementation of a modernised registry system, new legislation has been drafted that is technology neutral and governance neutral. Schedule one of the Treasury Laws Amendment (Registries Modernisation and Other Measures) Bill 2019 will provide the legislative flexibility for the government to modernise Australian business registers into a single platform to be administered by the Australian business registrar. Modernising the business registers will address registry fragmentation, improve business user experience, reduce risks of ongoing operation, foster data driven innovation and enable better use of registry data.

The IT infrastructure underpinning Australia's business registry services urgently needs to be upgraded to meet current and future demands. The modernising business register legislative regime will allow a registrar, a Commonwealth body appointed by the minister, to create data standards and disclosure frameworks to assist them in carrying out their registry functions and powers. Director identification numbers are being progressed, as has been noted by many, as part of the MBR program, to ensure that it's integrated with other important registry data.

Schedule 2 of the Treasury Laws Amendment (Registries Modernisation and Other Measures) Bill provides for the introduction of a legal framework for director identification numbers, which will require all directors and alternate directors of registered bodies to have a unique identifier. Importantly, once a director has been issued with a director identification number, that unique number will remain with them forever—meaning their
directorships across companies and over time can easily be tracked. This will assist regulators and external administrators investigate a director's involvement in what may be unlawful activity, including illegal phoenixing activity, which has been a problem for successive governments. Beyond helping to combat illegal phoenixing, simple and more effective tracking of directors and their corporate history will have a range of attendant benefits, including reducing time and cost for administrators and liquidators; thereby improving the efficiency of the insolvency process. In addition, it will help businesses identify who they are dealing with or potentially thinking about doing business with.

I would say in relation to some of the remarks made during the debate that, as helpful as the shadow Assistant Treasurer has tried to be, firstly, in plagiarising the government in moving amendments originally by lifting our original bill as an amendment, they got caught out, sadly, when they did that because their amendments which were lifted from the government cross-referenced bills weren't part of the bill that they were seeking to amend. That was a bit embarrassing for the shadow Assistant Treasurer, but we give him a little bit of leeway there.

In relation to the point that was just made about the importance of ensuring that we do the job once, that we do it properly and that taxpayers certainly aren't forced to do it twice in a costly way or in a way that's not effective, the director identification numbers—for those on the other side who don't understand—only work when they are linked to the company registers. We know there are 32 registers. It only works if they are linked to those. When we're dealing with legacy systems that desperately need upgrading, you must upgrade those systems simultaneously with the implementation of the DIN, and that is what we are doing. That is what these bills seek to do. I, therefore, commend the bills to the House.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mrs Wicks): The original question was that this bill be now read a second time. To this, the honourable member for Whitlam has moved as an amendment that all words after 'That' be omitted with a view to substituting other words. The immediate question is that the amendment be agreed to.

Question negatived.
Original question agreed to.

Third Reading

Mr SUKKAR (Deakin—Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Housing ) (19:01): by leave—I move:
That this bill be now read a third time.
Question agreed to.
Bill read a third time.

Treasury Laws Amendment (Registries Modernisation and Other Measures) Bill 2019

Second Reading

Consideration resumed of the motion:
That this bill be now read a second time.
Question agreed to.
Bill read a second time.

Third Reading

Mr SUKKAR (Deakin—Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Housing ) (19:03): by leave—I move:
That this bill be now read a third time.
Question agreed to.
Bill read a third time.

Business Names Registration (Fees) Amendment (Registries Modernisation) Bill 2019

Second Reading

Consideration resumed of the motion:
That this bill be now read a second time.
Question agreed to.
Bill read a second time.

Third Reading

Mr SUKKAR (Deakin—Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Housing ) (19:04): by leave—I move:
That this bill be now read a third time.
Question agreed to.
Bill read a third time.

**Corporations (Fees) Amendment (Registries Modernisation) Bill 2019**

**Second Reading**

Consideration resumed of the motion:
That this bill be now read a second time.
Question agreed to.
Bill read a second time.

**Third Reading**

Mr SUKKAR (Deakin—Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Housing) (19:05): by leave—I move:
That this bill be now read a third time.
Question agreed to.
Bill read a third time.

**National Consumer Credit Protection (Fees) Amendment (Registries Modernisation) Bill 2019**

**Second Reading**

Consideration resumed of the motion:
That this bill be now read a second time.
Question agreed to.
Bill read a second time.

**Third Reading**

Mr SUKKAR (Deakin—Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Housing) (19:06): by leave—I move:
That this bill be now read a third time.
Question agreed to.
Bill read a third time.

**COMMITTEES**

**Corporations and Financial Services Committee**

**Reporting Date**

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mrs Wicks) (19:07): The Speaker has received a message from the Senate informing the House that the Senate has agreed to the following resolution:
That the time for the presentation of the report of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Corporations and Financial Services on its inquiry into the regulation of auditing in Australia be extended to 1 September 2020.

**BILLS**

**National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Amendment Bill 2019**

**Second Reading**

Mr IRONS (Swan—Assistant Minister for Vocational Education, Training and Apprenticeships) (19:07): I present the explanatory memorandum to this bill and move:
That this bill be now read a second time.

Today I introduce the National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Amendment Bill 2019. The Australian vocational education and training, or VET, sector delivers outstanding education and training for a variety of institutions through public and private registered training organisations within universities and schools. It is a dynamic and responsive sector that supports millions of students to obtain the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in an ever-changing economy. It provides flexible opportunities to engage in education and training as a starting point to a career pathway or as a solution to upskill or reskill.

That is why last year this government committed $18.1 million to support reform of the national VET regulator, the Australian Skills Quality Authority, or ASQA, to improve its engagement with the sector and increase its focus on training excellence over a minimum standards compliance regulatory approach.

This bill is the first tranche of changes to ASQA as we move the agency towards a more transparent and balanced regulator that builds quality and capacity in the VET sector. ASQA has a wide range of legislative
responsibilities important to the success of the Australian VET sector, including registering and monitoring some 4,000 RTOs, accrediting courses, undertaking compliance audits, collecting and distributing information about VET, and taking appropriate re-entry actions. It is important that we have a trusted, respected and independent regulator that takes action to protect students and ensure confidence in the quality of training.

This bill responds to recommendations from both the 2018 Braithwaite review into ASQA’s primary legislation and the 2019 Joyce review into vocational education and training, to ensure the legislation is fit-for-purpose and supports ASQA and the sector in delivering quality VET services. To this end, the bill strengthens registration requirements for RTOs, to ensure only those RTOs genuinely committed and adequately resourced are able to operate in the sector. As such, organisations applying to ASQA to become registered will be aware of the high expectations placed on them and the need to show they are prepared and committed to providing high quality training from the first day their doors open and throughout their registration.

Further, the bill introduces a new requirement on RTOs to notify ASQA when significant changes to their businesses are likely to occur. This will ensure ASQA has better and more timely information about an RTO's operations and assist ASQA to mitigate risks to students and to VET quality.

Where ASQA must cancel an RTO's registration for noncompliance with the VET Quality Framework, the amendments provide ASQA with flexibility and discretion in determining when cancellation or refusal of registration takes effect, so as to minimise the impact on students. In practice, the amendments will allow providers in some circumstances to continue operating for a period while students complete their training or arrange to transfer to another provider.

It is critical for ASQA to follow standard regulatory procedures so RTOs are afforded the principles of natural justice and that decisions are supported by sound evidence. There are existing natural justice requirements in the NVETR Act that ensure providers are notified of ASQA's intention to cancel and provide time for RTOs to respond to the notice. These remain unchanged by these amendments, and RTOs will continue to have access to appeals processes.

Improving the transparency of ASQA's regulatory actions will ensure the sector has confidence in the ability of the regulator to make appropriate, consistent and proportionate regulatory decisions. To achieve this, the bill provides for publication of audit reports, expands information entered on the publicly available national register, as well as enabling ASQA to share information electronically with others responsible for administering laws relating to VET.

ASQA will also be able to authorise a National Centre for Vocational Education Research, NCVER, to disclose information that would reasonably inform a person's choice to enrol in VET and that would encourage compliance or improvement in training quality.

In addition, the secretary of the department responsible for VET will be able to release information on students' and employers' experiences of training provided by RTOs. This information will assist students in making informed enrolment decisions and provide employers with better information about training quality.

Combined, these measures will ensure students are informed and protected through the availability of consistent and transparent information about RTO services and ASQA's regulatory assessments of training organisations.

To improve the efficiency and effectiveness of ASQA's operations, the bill makes amendments to enable ASQA to request documents in electronic form and expands its powers to use enforceable undertakings to take action against an RTO where it deems an undertaking is more effective, aligning it with similar powers of other regulatory regimes. In addition, ASQA will have powers to stay regulatory decisions if an RTO seeks internal review by ASQA, providing flexibility to support training delivery so students' studies are not interrupted during a review process.

To ensure the minister responsible for VET is able to respond effectively to sector issues, the bill clarifies the nature of directions the minister may issue to ASQA to improve its regulatory processes. This will assist the minister to support and direct ASQA, without impinging on the statutory independence of the regulator.

Improvements to the efficiency of the NVETR Act will enable a simpler and faster acting appointment process for ASQA commissioners.

The chief commissioner is ASQA's chief executive officer, so there is a high risk of complications if unexpected circumstances mean that there is a vacancy in that office. The bill will enable the minister to appoint a commissioner to act as deputy chief commissioner during a vacancy in the office or whilst the deputy chief commissioner is absent from duty. As a result, the deputy or acting deputy chief commissioner will automatically act as the chief commissioner where there is a vacancy in the office of the chief commissioner. Further, the
minister may also appoint an acting commissioner. These changes will improve appointment time frames to ensure ASQA can continue to operate effectively and with a quorum.

The bill also aligns ASQA reporting requirements with broader Commonwealth requirements. Currently information required in the annual operational plan is also required in the corporate plan, pursuant to the Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013. The bill will remove the duplication, allow the corporate plan to reflect the most current information and allow for the plan to take effect from 1 July annually. The bill also makes minor administrative changes to update definitions and streamline the operation of the act.

The quality vocational education and training sector protects students. It is responsive to industry, has a strong and balanced regulator and supports students to obtain the skills they need to succeed in a modern economy. This bill is a critical element in the government's reform to ASQA's regulatory approach and will improve confidence in the regulation of training across the sector. It will ensure ASQA has legislative support to continue to be an effective and responsive regulator. Streamlining processes, increasing scrutiny of new entrants to the market and ensuring ongoing capacity to deliver quality training will benefit Australia's VET sector. Improvements to transparency of information and access will assist VET students to make informed decisions about their future and will provide better oversight for ASQA to monitor RTO activities. This bill supports the continuous commitment of this government to improve the regulation and quality of the VET sector.

Ms PLIBERSEK (Sydney) (19:16): Of course, Labor won't be opposing this bill, because we've always supported a strong, transparent and properly resourced regulatory framework for ASQA. This bill largely implements recommendations from the independent Joyce and Braithwaite reviews into Australia's vocational education and training sector. It addresses some of the frustrations that have been expressed by registered training organisations within the existing system, particularly in terms of transparency in ASQA's audit process and the move towards a more informative and educative approach to compliance.

These are broadly sensible changes, and we'll support them, just as we support any changes that make the system more responsive to students, to employers and to industry. But we do have a few concerns with the way the legislation is drafted. Firstly, the move to a full cost recovery model for auditing actually contradicts what the Joyce review suggested. The Joyce review suggested:

… there is an understood difference between parts of the regulator’s activity that should be directly funded by the regulated through cost recovery arrangements versus what are broader activities for the 'public good', and should therefore be government funded.

I am a little bit concerned about how broadly this move to full cost recovery might affect some of the other compliance arrangements that ASQA has. We're very concerned that the funding arrangements might push some providers to put additional costs onto students, and anything that increases the price of training is something that we wouldn't want to see.

The government needs to actively monitor the situation to make sure that this isn't a result of this legislation, to make sure that these changes don't impact on student costs and to make sure that ASQA is adequately funded to meet its public good obligations. We also need to make sure that reforms to ASQA, to the audit process, don't allow any drop in quality. We accept that there's room for some changes here, but what we don't want to see is a rush to the bottom on quality. We want to make sure that our training system continues to deliver high-quality training to students, benefiting employers.

In the past, we've seen the government very slow to act on quality issues as concerns have emerged with the industry. That has done very significant harm: significant harm to the students, if they get a substandard education; significant harm to employers that can't rely on the quality of the training given to their employees or prospective employees; and, of course, very significant harm to the good players in the system, the people who are doing the right thing, the organisations who are delivering high quality, as the reputation of the whole system has suffered.

So we won't oppose measures that enhance student protections or address provider concerns. But this bill, in many senses, is working at the edges of the real dysfunction in many parts of the vocational education and training system. The TAFE and training system has been undermined by the repeated cuts this government has made and by a lack of attention over many years. These changes don't come close to addressing the skills crisis that the government has created and has so far failed to address.

Our country sits on the doorstep of a region going through one of history's greatest economic transformations. Australia is absolutely perfectly positioned to benefit from this extraordinary growth, but to take full advantage of our situation we need to be smart and proactive. We need to train Australians in the skills and qualifications that are required to meet these amazing opportunities. Unfortunately we've got a government that has spent the last seven years doing exactly the opposite of that. We have a government that has spent seven years neglecting our
TAFE and training system. We have a government that has spent the last seven years cutting funding to TAFE and training—not just cutting funding, but also even underspending the funding that they have left. We have seen seven years of a government ignoring the vital role that TAFE plays in the growth of our young people, in our workers who are retraining as their industries change, and the vital role that TAFE and training play in our economy.

The numbers involved truly are shocking. We learned last year, from the federal education department's own data, that the Liberal government has failed to spend $919 million of the money that they set aside in the TAFE and training budget over the last five years. In the 2018-19 financial year there was a $214 million underspend. In the 2017-18 financial year there was a $202 million underspend. The year before that it was a $118 million underspend. The year before that it was a $247 million underspend, and in 2014-15 it was a $138 million underspend. That money, which could have been doing such good in our neglected TAFE and training system, is instead sitting in a bank account somewhere. It should have been supporting students to get a great education. It should have been supporting employers to get the trained staff they need. Instead, it is sitting there unspent.

That comes on top of the more than $3 billion that's been deliberately cut in successive budgets by this government. We have TAFE campuses falling apart across the country. We've got state governments closing campuses and ending courses. I have seen some magnificent TAFE facilities in some states and I've seen some pretty bedraggled ones too. We have $919 million sitting, begging to be spent on upgrading these facilities. It has not been done.

When we ask why this money wasn't spent, the response really tells its own story. The government says that there was less demand than forecast, apparently, every year since the Liberals and Nationals came to office. Actually, this is what neglect looks like. It's not just decaying campuses and shrinking course options; it's a loss of faith in the system.

The Prime Minister is pretending that there are a whole lot of young people and their parents out there turning their noses up at vocational education. That is so not true. I cannot tell you how many young people I speak to who say they would love an apprenticeship, they would love to do an apprenticeship, and they would love to study at their local TAFE college, if it offered a course that could help them get a job in the industries that are relevant in their local community. This is not about a lack of interest, a lack of demand or a lack of enthusiasm for vocational education and the great jobs that it can lead to; this is about government neglect and the misdesign and maladministration of programs, making them so unappealing that students don't want to do them and employers don't want to use them. It's a loss of faith in the system because of years of abandonment by this government.

Too many Australians have been locked out of TAFE or they've lost faith in the basic promise of a vocational education. The consequences of this are being felt throughout our nation and they're being felt most profoundly in the decline in apprentice and trainee numbers. Stunnningly, we now have fewer apprentices and trainees than when Tony Abbott—the former member for Warringah—first became Prime Minister. It doesn't happen by accident. That billion dollar underspend included program areas which provide incentives for businesses to take on apprentices, support to help people finish their apprenticeships and a fund designed to train Australians in areas of need. This money had a clear purpose. It is obviously much needed in the system and yet you've got programs so poorly designed and a lack of faith in the system because of the $3 billion cut by this government. We see that money not helping in the way that it could have and should have.

The National Centre for Vocational Education Research recently found that, over the past year, 20 per cent fewer people were signing up to a trade apprenticeship or traineeship and it's even more extreme in a number of essential trades. Australians are starting an apprenticeship or a traineeship in construction, including carpentry, bricklaying or plumbing. The number or the proportion starting an apprenticeship in key trades like this dropped an alarming 40 per cent. I don't know if many of you have tried to get a plumber, a carpenter or a bricklayer recently. I can tell you it's not easy. And, depending on where in Australia you live, it can be very difficult indeed. That will get more difficult when we enter the huge reconstruction phase after these terrible bushfires and terrible floods. We're going to need these tradespeople more than ever. They're good jobs. But, instead of seeing the number of people signing up for these good jobs rise, we're seeing it plummet.

These programs are absolutely vital for young Australians looking for their first job, looking for a career that can help them support a family and buy a home. But they're also critical for mature Australians who are looking to retrain, upskill or learn something new. We've seen massive economic changes in our nation in recent years. These massive changes that have led to very widespread dislocation in some communities in some types of work. These people should have the opportunity to retrain as well.

Of course, if you talk to businesses, you will find that so many different types of businesses in so many parts of Australia simply can't find the skilled staff they need. They are crying out for skilled staff, for qualified workers,
to do the work they need done to expand their businesses. In September last year, an Australian Industry Group survey found that 75 per cent of businesses surveyed were struggling to find the qualified workers they needed. That is three-quarters of Australian businesses say that they can't find the trained Australians they need with the relevant skills.

Debate interrupted.

**ADJOURNMENT**

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mrs Wicks) (19:30): Order! It being 7.30 pm, I propose the question:

That the House do now adjourn.

**Closing the Gap**

Ms PLIBERSEK (Sydney) (19:30): Education is at the heart of closing the gap. I want to make a few remarks today about the Closing the Gap statement as it relates to education. Four of the Closing the Gap report's seven goals directly measure our education system, and the other three closely track its performance. Sadly, this year's report—of course, it has some positive elements to it—again contains more disappointment than encouragement. Of course, we all welcome the growth in year 12 attainment. We also welcome the development in year 3 reading and numeracy. This is particularly important because we know that, if children are struggling by the time they're eight years old, they very rarely catch up.

The early-year literacy and numeracy gains are great, and we're delighted to see them. They are improvements, and we have to look at how and why we've improved so that we can spread that improvement to other areas. However, overall, the results in reading, writing and maths are still nowhere near good enough. About one in four Indigenous children remain below minimum standards in reading, and about one in five Indigenous children remain below minimum standards in numeracy. School attendance has actually gotten worse over the last two years. If kids aren't going to school, they can't read, they can't write, they can't do maths—they are being denied a lifetime of opportunity.

Now in their third term, in their seventh year of government, the Liberals and Nationals have done nothing to turn this situation around. It's not the fault of the original Closing the Gap plan. It's not that we aimed too high. It's in meeting the targets that we have failed. It's not the fault of the students. It's not the fault of the dedicated teachers in school communities. In truth, we actually had a road map laid out to meet these challenges, and, when elected, those opposite tore up that road map. They chose to cut $500 million from programs aimed at reversing Indigenous disadvantage. The government chose to cut billions from our schools, particularly our public schools, including remote schools with very high Indigenous enrolments. In fact, the Northern Territory school system—the most disadvantaged in the country, with the highest percentage of Indigenous enrolments—was hit the hardest by this government's education cuts.

The sad thing is that we've got teachers, principals and school communities doing terrific work, but they're not getting the support they need. I've seen it myself, travelling around the country. I saw it at the Sadadeen Primary School in Alice Springs, a school with 130 students, over 90 per cent of whom are Indigenous. The teachers at that school have a motto: 'We work as a team, we aim high, we question and wonder and we are proud.' They're beautiful words, and they help shape that school's practice. It's inspiring to watch, and I've seen it in so many schools. The school runs a music program, cooking lessons, fitness and health classes—all integrated with a really intensive focus on literacy and numeracy. Sadadeen's principal, Elizabeth Verstappen, retired just last week, and we thank her for her wonderful service during her career.

Communities like this around Australia are harnessing their own creativity and energy, but they need resources to properly realise their plans. That's why funding matters so profoundly and why every dollar cut from education makes fixing disadvantage more difficult. Education underpins everything else. It's the platform that we build so many successes upon. As today's report acknowledges, when you cut the gap in higher education you also eliminate the gap in employment, which makes it all the more harmful when this government cuts money from programs that help achieve this. Four-year-old preschool, public schooling, universities, vocational education—all of them have seen cuts or uncertainty.

These are the building blocks of progress. They are the building blocks of success—individual success and our community's success—and each one has been undermined. If the coalition government is serious about turning around these trends and if it's serious about closing the gap, it needs to acknowledge this truth and it needs to fund education properly. Education is the key to success for every individual. We want every Australian child to get a great education.
Telecommunications

Dr GILLESPIE (Lyne) (19:35): I want to highlight all the amazing things that the Morrison coalition government has been doing to promote cybersafety and cybersecurity and to make the internet a much safer place for business, individuals and children. The number of initiatives is extensive. In fact, we're a world leader in this space. In 2015 we announced the creation of the eSafety Commissioner. As you can understand, in the modern digital era connectivity is critical, but it comes with problems. We have committed $100 million to support online safety initiatives. We have given the commissioner reporting and take-down mechanisms to address cyberbullying and the streaming of abhorrent, violent or extremist material. We have the Online Safety Grants Program, including training for parents and guardians of children. We also have a funding program to facilitate online safety learnings for elderly Australians, who can be taken in with so much internet fraud.

Digital connectivity is a standard by which countries are judged. We have rolled out the NBN six to eight years sooner than was originally planned by the opposition. We have got over 10.5 million houses that can be connected and over 6.5 million houses and businesses already connected. We have been doing things for our Asia-Pacific neighbours. We have put through a cable to connect the Pacific islands to the internet.

It's a pleasure to see the latest mobile phone technology, 5G, being rolled out in the country. At the moment we're doing an inquiry into all the amazing possibilities that 5G delivers. One remembers the step increase in the capability of mobile devices when we moved from 3G to 4G, but the expansion into the 5G space, with smaller frequency and lower levels of energy, will deliver a massive increase in the capability to deliver extra data at extra high speeds and very low latency. That means you won't be on your phone waiting for the next page to pop up. Some people haven't been able to get an NBN connection, and 5G connections in the almost 50 places where it has been rolled out are delivering competitive speeds to the NBN.

It also enables the Internet of Things, the connection of machines to other machines; autonomous driving; high-performance computing; cloud based computing; big data analytics; use of artificial intelligence; and faster blockchain technology. Australia is at the forefront of all of these things. We're also at the forefront of researching and developing quantum computing. There is large government backing of quantum computing across many universities.

As I mentioned, the Coral Sea undersea cable is a way of us helping our Pacific neighbours be connected to the digital world. Just like the digital world can let internet businesses thrive in regional and remote Australia, the capability and the economic boost to our Pacific neighbours will also make the internet a winner for them for tourism, for marketing and for all of the benefits of high-speed internet and commercial activities that come from that.

There is another problem. We have huge market power in the digital platforms. As a world leader, the Australian Morrison government initiated the digital platforms review by the ACCC. The whole world has been looking at what we are recommending the giants of the internet do to give everyone free—(Time expired)

People with Disability

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong) (19:40): Congratulations, Deputy Speaker, on your position. The member for Eden-Monaro, Mike Kelly, asked me in my capacity as shadow spokesperson for government services and disability to visit Nardy House in Quaama, in the Bega Valley. It was a privilege. Nardy House at Quaama is a facility which provides respite and also permanent care for four fantastic people who have severe and profound disabilities. I've visited many facilities for people with disabilities, and this is a special place, with the views of the Bega Valley countryside that people with disabilities don't get to see. It's a great facility with dedicated staff. They're facing challenges with the way the current government is managing the NDIS, but on New Year's Eve they were burdened with the additional, unthinkable, deadly challenge of fire.

Fire ripped through the South Coast and surrounded Nardy House and its precious residents. Australia is a First World country. We're lucky—even in our troubles we're still a lucky country. We have a great quality of life and a great society, but we need to improve our involvement with people with disability in the mainstream of civic life. We're so much better at this than we used to be. Just think about the progress that we've made in disability, from buildings, to the celebration of great athletes like Kurt Fearnley and Dylan Alcott and to the existence of the national project which is the NDIS.

Ten years ago, when I was the parliamentary secretary, there was no NDIS. Now there is. It shows that you can achieve change in politics. The NDIS is not a finished project, but we'll only be a fully inclusive society when Australians with a disability are included in our public plans and when they're part of our public imagination. If we don't plan for the approximately four million people who live with mild to severe disability then we're not providing for all Australians, because people with disability could be any of us. It may seem an abstract point, but it was brought home to me in a very concrete way in my discussions with the great people at Nardy House,
including the CEO, Denise Redmond, and the care service manager, Jane MacGregor, while we were talking, surrounded by the scorched forests of the Bega Valley.

We're used to being confronted by bushfires, although not at the scale that we've just seen. We've learned some excellent strategies around firefighting, and the volunteer firefighters on New Year's Eve were amazing and were no doubt one of the reasons the people at Nardy House managed to get through. From water bombing to evacuation, we've learnt a lot. But with evacuation, both at Nardy House and elsewhere, disability care workers have made it clear to me that we don't have evacuation plans adequately designed for people with disability or for older Australians who might be living with dementia. The people at Nardy House were very lucky that things didn't end more tragically that night.

The fire rolled through the valley. It came scorchingly close. There were four precious souls unable to move themselves. They were helped into vehicles and escorted by the New South Wales Rural Fire Service south along the highway, through the blaze, right through at McLeod Hill to Bega, where staff helped them go to the South East Regional Hospital. With help, the clients were brought to that Bega hospital, but the hospital was struggling to cope and the residents of Nardy House—people with profound and severe disability—were turned away. This is sad. It's undignified. The hospital was doing a tremendous job; it's not the hospital's fault. But what we have learnt, at Nardy House and elsewhere, from these bushfires is that our evacuation plans assume the people being evacuated, by and large, are able-bodied and clear of mind. Nardy House's CEO, Denise, said that the clients could not evacuate anywhere in the area apart from the hospital due to the high levels of medical need, but when they arrived they were told to go to the Bega Showground. One of the house's residents, a child, was eventually admitted to the hospital, but the other three adults had to be taken to Eden until the fire moved north from the Victorian border and encroached on that town. They had to be relocated and then they were brought to Canberra.

My point is not to criticise. The RFS were brilliant. The staff were brilliant; people were brave. But this is not ideal. It could've been so much worse. And I hear the same thing from other people on the South Coast. Let us learn. People living with dementia, older Australians, people who are not ambulatory, people with profound and severe disabilities—they need to be part of our evacuation plans. We've got to make sure that we put people with disability and other Australians who are frail front of mind.

### Stirling Electorate: Australia Day Awards

**Mr CONNELLY (Stirling) (19:45):** Today I'd like to reflect on some of the challenges that Australia faces, but do this within the context of a reflection on what makes Australia prosperous and resilient. We began this year in the throes of a devastating fire season, which saw the deaths of 33 people, the loss of almost 3,000 homes and the destruction of almost 10 million hectares of land. We've also been responding to a global health emergency and, of course, ever shifting geopolitical challenges. But I remain completely confident that Australia and Australians will effectively manage these challenges and more. It's in our DNA to fight and to win. And we do this best when we do it together.

This Australia Day, I attended my first citizenship ceremony, including award ceremony, as a member of parliament. Before it kicked off, I was talking to a couple of Irish, now Australian, brothers, Mick and Oliver. Mick was saying to me, 'Wow, Vince, I cannot fathom how much effort everyone has gone to here.' For those 240 new citizens there was a huge marquee, live music, food and, of course, some speeches. In total, these new citizens came from 60 different countries, and we welcomed them all with open arms.

I was joined there by the City of Stirling mayor, Mark Irwin, other councillors and state members of parliament. As a wonderful example to those new Australians, award winners were presented on stage with their awards. A 2020 Australia Day ambassador, Jenny Lam, gave the keynote address. Jenny is a Vietnamese-born migrant who was a contestant on 2018 MasterChef and who went on to open her own Vietnamese street food restaurant. Jenny shared with us her experience, and it wasn't all smooth sailing as she tried to succeed here in Australia and ensure that her business became profitable. At one stage, Jenny said, she broke down in tears. She cried and she said to her mother, 'Mum, it's so hard. I can't seem to make it work; I'm thinking of giving up.' Well, Jenny's mum—who was also there listening in to the speech—she yelled at Jenny. She said, 'You stop crying. You get out there, and you make it work.' Jenny's mum told Jenny that her parents had it far harder in Vietnam, and then as new migrants—even going as far as to threaten to disown Jenny if she did give up. Talk about tough love! Jenny credits her mother with turning things around—with giving her the inspiration and giving her the comfort that in Australia perseverance is rewarded with prosperity.

The Senior Community Citizen of the Year was Rae Kolb. I know Rae very well. She runs the Stirling Natural Environment Coastcare. Their mission is to replace weed vegetation with Indigenous vegetation to stabilise the dunes and to improve beach access and safety. I've physically supported Rae and the team on the ground, helping pull out invasive weeds, so I know they do a great job. The Young Community Citizen of the Year, Naomi Blitz,
has been a key stakeholder in the City of Stirling's youth framework, helping develop the strategy for events, including the NAIDOC Mirrabooka event and Groundswell 2019, which sees families come together at Scarborough Beach, play basketball and have a surfing competition and a skating competition. The Community Citizen of the Year went to Ken Shorto. Ken has been instrumental in Fee Free Football at Balga Soccer Club. This involves parents donating their time in lieu of paying fees and has been a great win for the club. Noongar elder, and my great friend, Len Yarran, representing the Wajuk people, provided a beautiful welcome to country. Len made the case that, whatever the future holds, it's important that, as Australians, we walk the path together. I called on all those new citizens present to do the same, to volunteer, whether it's at the local sports club or anywhere else, and to walk together for the benefit of all Australians. (Time expired)

Community Sport Infrastructure Grant Program

Mr DAVID SMITH (Bean) (19:50): You either have integrity or you don't, and this government simply doesn't. On this side we know it, and even some on the other side of the chamber know it. Unless you've been living under a rock, you'd know the details, but here is a quick recap: 'Marginal seat candidate, not an MP, holds up oversized cheque awarding funding to sports club. Auditor-General asked to investigate community sport infrastructure program. Auditor-General releases scathing report, basically finding that money meant for local sport clubs across the country used by coalition to pork-barrel key marginal seats. More than 400 grassroots sports clubs had their applications, highly regarded by Sports Australia, overlooked. Clubs that put in grants, thinking it was a fair process, vent their deep frustrations. PM says: "Hey, it was all the minister. Don't blame me, don't blame my staff." Media organisations run story after story about the maladministration of the program. Prime Minister defends allocating funding to various projects, including women's change rooms for club without a women's team. Under pressure, commissions his former chief of staff, now head of Prime Minister and Cabinet, to have a look at the program. Under further media pressure, arrogantly dismisses the Public Service and Sports Australia officials. Video appears of PM staffer calling for recipients to vote Liberal to say thanks to ScoMo for the grant—not making this up! PM admits that maybe his staff had some part, "All we did was provide information based on the representations made to us." Report from PM&C comes, drafted by his former chief, and what does it find? It finds a technicality against the minister but nothing wrong with how the program has been run. Said whitewashed PM&C report is declared cabinet-in-confidence to avoid any kind of public or parliamentary scrutiny.' What a sad and sorry joke!

One of the most audacious defences for the sports rort affair was the Prime Minister's suggestion that, because members of parliament live and breathe in their communities, they have a better sense of what is needed than public servants. The public servants the Prime Minister seeks to belittle work with sporting organisations across the country every day, from grassroots clubs to elite sporting organisations. They work together with the broader sports industry and have expertise that is built up over decades. We do not have the expertise of these public servants, nor the visibility of competing areas of need across other electorates. This is a convenient position to hold, as it allows the Prime Minister to ignore public policy expertise across all areas of government business. Yes, we live and breathe in our communities, but this does not absolve members of parliament from being accountable for our actions.

I commend the contribution of Michael Keating, a former head of Prime Minister and Cabinet, who called out the poor saga for what it is. He noted that the PM&C report into Minister McKenzie's handling of the Community Sport Infrastructure Grants fails to address key questions and raises serious concerns about the relationship between government and Public Service. He rightfully notes that the findings are difficult to reconcile with the evidence provided by the Auditor-General. This is compounded by the failure to release the report, which undermines transparency and confidence in the process. Ministers, in exercising ministerial discretion, are not released from a code of conduct that requires them to act with due regard for integrity, fairness, accountability, responsibility and the public interest. The secretary of Prime Minister and Cabinet is also not released from his responsibility, as head of the Public Service, to uphold its values and integrity, remaining apolitical, serving not only the government but also the parliament and the Australian public. As the secretary of PM&C he has let that organisation down and undermined confidence in a critical foundation of our democracy. If we want to rebuild trust in public life it can only be done by starting with a commitment to a federal integrity body with teeth; valuing public service expertise, whether it starts with sports or it relates to climate change; and the resignation of the secretary of Prime Minister and Cabinet.

Forde Electorate

Mr VAN MANEN (Forde—Chief Government Whip) (19:55): Given that this is my first time speaking in the chamber since you have been elected to your position, my congratulations, Deputy Speaker Llew O'Brien, on your elevation to the deputy speakership.
It would be very tempting to respond to comments of members opposite, but I have far more important things to speak about and far more positive stuff to speak about in relation to my electorate of Forde. Firstly, I'd like to recognise the efforts of one of the young people in my community who each and every year puts his best foot forward in trying to raise supplies for kids who are going back to school who maybe can't meet the requirements or get the supplies that they need. What it shows is that young people are capable of many great things when empowered and given the opportunity to do so.

This is certainly the case for Samuel Glancy, who lives in Shailer Park in my electorate of Forde. At the age of just 12 years old he has made a greater impact on our community than most. Over this year he has collected over 23,000 items of school supplies to help disadvantaged students across 13 schools in Logan to get the necessities for their proper learning and development as part of his Kids4Kids school supply drive. Sam started his donation campaign four years ago, and in that time he has collected more than 70,000 school supplies for children in Logan. Each year he raises donations from local offices, businesses and organisations and takes them to Calvary Christian College where local volunteers, chaplains and welfare officers help pack supply bags to distribute them to the schools.

His mother, Tanya, told me the story of how it all started when Sam emptied his piggy bank to buy a Lighthouse Care voucher for a young family who he knew needed a helping hand. One day he was emptying his old school bag and he noticed he had spare supplies that he wanted to donate to that family but also to others in need. His generosity transcends boundaries, and now Sam is coordinating separate school supply drives to assist the women's resource centre in the bushfire affected Bega Valley shire fill their buddy packs for school children in those fire affected communities returning to school. I want to take this opportunity to give Sam a great and enormous thanks for his fabulous contribution, not only to our community in Forde but to many other communities that he has touched through his compassion.

In that vein, I think it's well worth recognising the efforts of a number of other young contributors to our community across Forde for their positive attitude, application and determination. These attributes have been amply displayed by youths such as Corah Francis, Isabella Oxenbridge, and Haydn and George Li. Corah Francis is a member of the Australian Budgerigar Society in Beenleigh. She's recently been nominated for the Eagleby young achiever of the year award. Corah is just 10 years old and is the first ever junior exhibitor in Australia to win a class at the National Budgerigar Championship Show a few months ago, winning the 2019 crested class for her full circle spangle cinnamon hen. Whilst I have the privilege of being the patron of the Australian Budgerigar Society I have no idea what that means. She beat dozens of high-profile breeders in the category and has since been inundated with congratulatory messages from budgerigar breeders all over the world.

Isabella in year 5 together with Haydn in year 6 and George in year 3 formed the Trio Bellissimo ensemble at Canterbury College and have started the year on a high note, having been selected to perform at the 5th International Stage4Kids festival in Hamburg, Germany this month. I wish them every success. I know they will represent the school and our community proudly on the international stage.

Congratulations again to Corah, Isabella, Haydn and George, and also to Samuel, for the wonderful work they do across the community of Forde.

House adjourned at 20:00

NOTICES

The following notices were given:

Mr Littleproud to present a Bill for an Act to amend the Farm Household Support Act 2014, and for related purposes. (Farm Household Support Amendment (Relief Measures) Bill (No. 1) 2020)

Mr Hunt to present a Bill for an Act to amend the law in relation to home care payments, and for related purposes. (Aged Care Legislation Amendment (Improved Home Care Payment Administration No. 1) Bill 2020)

Mr D. J. Chester to present a Bill for an Act to amend the law relating to defence, and for related purposes. (Defence Legislation Amendment (Miscellaneous Measures) Bill 2020)

Mr Pitt to present a Bill for an Act to amend the National Radioactive Waste Management Act 2012, and for related purposes. (National Radioactive Waste Management Amendment (Site Specification, Community Fund and Other Measures) Bill 2020)

Mr Irons to present a Bill for an Act to amend the National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Act 2011, and for related purposes. (National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Amendment (Governance and Other Matters) Bill 2020)

Mr Sukkar to present a Bill for an Act to amend the law relating to superannuation, and for related purposes. (Superannuation Amendment (PSSAP Membership) Bill 2020)
Mr Shorten to move:

That this House:

(1) notes that:

(a) on 11 February 2020 the interim report by the Senate Community Affairs References Committee inquiry into Centrelink's compliance program was tabled in the Senate; and
(b) the interim report recommended that there be laid on the table by the Minister representing the Minister for Government Services no later than 10 am on 24 February 2020, responses to all questions placed on notice by Senators Stewart and O'Neill relating to legal advice and Centrelink's compliance program, including, but not limited to, questions about:

(i) meetings and/or briefings between the Minister and Services Australia in relation to the current legal proceedings regarding Centrelink's compliance program;
(ii) the frequency and dates of legal advice obtained by Services Australia from the Solicitor-General, Australian Government Solicitor, departmental lawyers, and external counsel and/or solicitors in relation to any aspect of the compliance program and, specifically, whether a debt or debt components is able to be founded on extrapolations from Australian Taxation Office (ATO) records;
(iii) legal advice about the lawfulness of debt or debt components solely based on extrapolations from ATO records;
(iv) legal advice in relation to liability for the death of any Australian who received a debt notice under the compliance program; and
(v) the cost of legal advice in relation to the compliance program;

(2) further notes that:

(a) in relation to Government's Income Compliance Program, or 'robodebt' scheme, the Federal Court made orders, agreed to by both parties, in the matter of Amato v the Commonwealth that the averaging process using ATO income data to calculate Deanna Amato's robodebt was unlawful;
(b) the outcome of the Amato case confirms that a compliance debt calculated using only averaging of ATO income data is unlawful;
(c) the Government conceded its robodebt scheme is unlawful through its action to suspend income averaging as a sole proof point to raise debts in November 2019;
(d) email correspondence between departmental legal counsel, made public through the Centrelink's compliance program inquiry, confirms the Government is aware the robodebt scheme has no legal basis; and
(e) the Government has failed to sufficiently outline grounds for public interest immunity on the basis of legal professional privilege, and should release legal advices obtained by the Commonwealth and related details in connection with the Income Compliance Program; and

(3) calls on the Government to:

(a) acknowledge it made a mistake by designing and administering the robodebt scheme over the past three years without valid legal authority;
(b) apologise to those affected by the unlawful aspects of the program; and
(c) outline its plan to remediate those affected Australians.

Mr Shorten to move:

That this House:

(1) notes that:

(a) on 20 January 2020 the final report from the review of the National Disability Insurance Scheme Act 2013 was handed down by Mr David Tune AO PSM; and
(b) the report made 29 recommendations that have been endorsed by the disability sector, including people with disability, service providers and carers;

(2) calls on the Government to act on the recommendations of the review as soon as possible.

Mr Shorten to move:

That this House:

(1) notes that:

(a) on 3 February 2020 changes to National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) transport funding were welcomed by the disability sector, including people with disability, service providers and carers;
(b) there was insufficient information available about these changes in the immediate period following the announcement, including details about who was eligible, how providers would be able to process claims, and general implementation; and
(c) the failure to provide supporting information is consistent with previous announcements made by the National Disability Insurance Agency and the Minister for the National Disability Insurance Scheme; and

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(2) calls on the Government to:
   (a) ensure that further information about these changes is made available as soon as possible; and
   (b) communicate supplementary information about future NDIS changes to providers, participants and disability sector stakeholders immediately following their announcement.
The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Llew O'Brien) took the chair at 10:00.

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

Coalition Government

Mr ROB MITCHELL (McClen—Second Deputy Speaker) (10:00): It's hardly surprising that across Australia people have turned off politics. We've had six years of a chaotic, self-serving government preaching stability but losing control of their own actual ship. They have no plan to govern. At a time of crisis, Australians want a leader who will put the national interests first. Instead, in PM Morrison—

A division having been called in the House of Representatives—

Sitting suspended from 10:00 to 10:12

Mr ROB MITCHELL: The coalition government has been overrun by personal ambition, infighting and corrupt processes. Nothing exhibits this rot more than when the PM commissioned his mate and former chief of staff to investigate the conduct of one of his ministers. A politically appointed public servant with what could easily be described as a potential conflict of interest was investigating a minister with a conflict of interest. In what was a shock to everyone, I'm sure, the Morrison-directed Gaetjens report apparently found that the respected Auditor-General's report was wrong; all is good with the rorted Community Sport Infrastructure grant program. How do we know that he arrived at this conclusion? We don't, because the Prime Minister refuses to release the report, which even the Senate has ordered him to do. But, no, the old ad man tells us: 'There's nothing to see here. All is good.' It's like setting the fox to guard the henhouse.

This is a government that has such little respect for the electorate and the parliament that it can't even pretend it's being transparent. It has denied all FOI requests for the report's release, claiming cabinet confidentiality, even though cabinet did not actually instigate it. This government is not being honest with the Australian people. That's why Labor has been calling for a federal ICAC.

Australians are being crippled under the weight of falling real wages. Real wage growth is going backwards. Job security is fast becoming an unreachable dream. The cost of feeding the family and paying the bills is getting higher and higher, and theideshow government has shown it does not care. Power prices have been surging in outer suburbs like ours, despite promises from the embattled energy minister, Angus Taylor, that he would get electricity prices under control. Like a new Comical Ali, he's been out there with his scripted mendacious claims, saying that power prices are going down and all is good. Great job, Angus! Well done! Fantastic! This is totally opposite to the truth. Last month we received letters from providers telling us about more price hikes, which are hurting Australian families. To be fair, he's been too distracted seeing his own backside to look out for the people who put him here in the first place. Instead of focusing on the issues that actually matter for the everyday Australian, what this government is busy focusing on is fighting themselves and rorting taxpayer moneys for their own political gain. Enough is enough.

On a brighter note, I want to congratulate two incredible young basketballers, Maddi Condron and Tess Barnes, who both played a huge part in an amazing win over New South Wales here at the AIS in Canberra. The hard work these girls put in to win at the finals is a source of inspiration for many young people in our communities. They should be very, very proud of their achievements, just as we are proud of them. It's a stunning achievement by two local girls from our very own electorate of McClen. Ultimately, it's young champions like these the government should be delivering for, not friends in high places who need protection rackets to survive.

Groom Electorate: Community Sport Infrastructure Program

Dr McVEIGH (Groom) (10:14): I'm very pleased to say that the Groom electorate attracted more than $250,000 under round 1 and round 2 of the Community Sport Infrastructure grants program. In February 2019, I joined the President of the North Toowoomba Bowls Club, Cameron King, to announce $65,800 under the program to help build a 15 metre by six metre outdoor undercover area in between the club's two bowling greens. The pavilion was completed and officially opened in August 2019. The new pavilion is a great success, attracting more events, more players and more interest in lawn bowls for the North Toowoomba Bowls Club and facilitating regional tournaments for young and old, I'm pleased to say. This facility also houses the practices of the Harlaxton RSL Brass Band, providing significant community benefits indeed.

In April, I joined representatives of Football Queensland South West to announce $190,000 in funding for the organisation to complete installation of lighting at Captain Cook oval. These new lights, installed and commissioned just before Christmas, will open up many new opportunities for participation in football in the
Toowoomba region. Snow Green from Football Queensland South West recently said that the new lights presented ‘fantastic opportunities’ for the local football community. He said they would help the representative side with training at night and support the local over 35s competition with night-time training. The organisation is looking forward to using the lights to support quite a large multicultural event later this year. I'm pleased to see the engagement of youth from across South-West Queensland, particularly Indigenous youth, in football activities in our city.

This important grassroots program was designed to support greater community participation in sport and physical activity and safer and more inclusive sporting hubs. That's exactly what we've been able to achieve in Toowoomba, and I'm pleased to confirm that to the House. I encourage people to apply for such programs. I will continue to do so and I will advocate for their applications when they're made. I'd like to address some misconceptions about Toowoomba Regional Council's application for some $500,000, I understand, for the Nellie Robinson facilities in South Toowoomba. This was an application that I unfortunately was not aware of, but I've spoken to the mayor about that, and he is now certainly aware that I'm in a position to advocate for programs that meet the needs of our community. I'll continue to do that. I'll champion sporting activities, in particular, and I assure all organisations that, together, we can continue to deliver for the Toowoomba region. (Time expired)

**Fraser Electorate: Lunar New Year**

Dr MULINO (Fraser) (10:18): I rise to acknowledge the celebration of the Lunar New Year in my electorate. 2020 is the Year of the Rat, the first animal in the Vietnamese zodiac. The rat is an animal that symbolises intelligence and resilience. According to some legends, the Jade Emperor called on the animals of the zodiac to race to his presence, and the rat, through cunning and intelligence, managed to be the first animal to reach his foot, and the Emperor therefore chose the rat to be the first animal in the zodiac. So this is a very important year for Vietnam, as well as for many other countries in East Asia.

The Lunar New Year is the biggest event on the calendar for many countries in South-East Asia. There are two celebrations, in particular, in my electorate that I would like to acknowledge. One is the celebration in the Quang Minh Temple in Braybrook, which attracts tens of thousands of visitors every year, and the other is the celebration in Alfrieda Street organised by many volunteers in that community as well as the St Albans Business Group Association. Both of these celebrations host an incredible amount of Vietnamese cuisine and food from other countries. They have a packed entertainment schedule, with traditional dancing and singing as well as, of course, fireworks displays, which singed a number of local politicians and other dignitaries, much to the delight of the crowd.

These are very, very important celebrations within the local community, and I want to acknowledge the leaders of the Vietnamese community for organising these but also the many, many unthanked volunteers who put in hundreds of hours to make sure that these events happen every year. I also want to acknowledge the fact that at this year's celebrations, in addition to celebrating the new year, so many people in the community came together to support our broader community and those who have experienced so much loss during the bushfires. For example, at the St Albans Vietnamese New Year celebrations on Alfrieda, over $20,000 was raised for victims of the bushfire. This was just one component of many different fundraising efforts organised by the St Albans business traders and many volunteers at the Quang Minh Temple and more broadly.

I also acknowledge the Keilor Gift athletics carnival, which is going to be held this coming weekend. This is a major community event in my electorate. It's been held dating back to February 1933. In its early years, the Keilor Gift featured horse events, cycling and woodchopping, and it has now become one of the most important professional running events on the circuit. I'm very pleased to host the woodchopping program this year, but I can stress that I won't be a participant—much to the disappointment of the crowd, I'm sure! I wish all participants good luck. (Time expired)

**Coronavirus**

Ms LIU (Chisholm) (10:21): The coronavirus has created some tough times for Australians, both at home and overseas. I want to update the House on the amazing work that volunteers are doing in looking after their fellow Australians. In order to stop coronavirus in Australia, the Morrison government implemented a 14-day self-isolation period. Despite the inconvenience it may have caused, most of those coming back from overseas stayed in self-isolation as it was the right thing to do.

The wonderful thing is that, in tough times, Australians stick together. A number of community based volunteer groups have emerged to help those in need. I want to commend their work today. The Melbourne Grocery Delivery Squad volunteer group was set up in the last 12 days to assist members of our community with shopping for groceries and everyday essential items. The Melbourne Grocery Delivery Squad has more than 170 volunteers,
covering 60 suburbs in Victoria. Many of them are in my electorate of Chisholm. People in quarantine can make a list of items they need and send it to an area coordinator, who will then organise shoppers to deliver goods right to the person's door. These people and the volunteers will not meet each other face to face. After leaving the groceries at the door, the volunteers will send a message or simply wave at the people in the house. This is an incredible effort of selflessness for someone you may never see again. The work of these volunteers may seem minor at face value, as they are only doing someone's shopping. However, as small as the gesture may be, the impact for those who are in stressful situations, worrying about the welfare of their families overseas, as well as their families here in Australia, is truly great. Thank you, Jason Yang, Elsa Du and the whole delivery squad. You have helped more than 1,000 families.

The 14-day self-isolation period is a necessary step that ensures the coronavirus does not spread here in Australia. This government has made sure that we are all safe to go about our daily activities. With this in mind, I ask my constituents in Chisholm to join me shopping at the Glen or going to Box Hill Central for some lunch. Please come down and support our local businesses.

**Schools**

Mr BANDT (Melbourne—Leader of the Australian Greens) (10:24): Fifty-seven thousand, eight hundred and eighty-five dollars—that's how much it costs in this country, on average, to give a child a public education from prep to year 12. When you take into account not just the materials, equipment and uniforms but also the fees that are now being regularly charged in primary school, you can be spending $3,945 a year to send your child to school. When they grow up, it skyrockets to $5,045. Public schools are being forced to charge parents many hundreds of dollars a year to bridge funding gaps because they are radically underfunded in this country.

The coalition has cut billions from school funding and passed hundreds, millions and billions in tax cuts for millionaires. The result is that parents are forced to pay for what should be a publicly funded essential service—the education of their children. Recently, my office participated in a grants program offered by the federal government for schools in my electorate. The funding was for capital grants but also for education initiatives. Ideally, the federal government would fund schools properly instead of doling out ad hoc amounts for projects. I expressed these views to the schools but wanted to ensure that they could capitalise on the grant opportunity.

Unfortunately, it was not possible to fund every worthwhile project that we received—and we received many. But what will stick in my mind are the four applications I received requesting funding from the grants program for air conditioning. A school in Australia should not have to apply to a competitive fund in order for their kids and staff to be comfortable. All schools should be designed in a way that keeps people comfortable. Although my views differ from those of the government on many things, including the amount of funding the Commonwealth should provide to schools, I would have thought that we could agree that every school in this country should let students and staff learn and teach in relative comfort.

This just drives home the point that the consequences of underfunding schools are not just higher school fees but also a lack of investment in critical public infrastructure. If we don't make a big investment in public education just 13 per cent of public schools will have the funding to meet their minimum needs by 2023, while 65 per cent of non-government schools will be overfunded. Not only do parents have to pay thousands of dollars to bridge the funding gap in public schools but so do teachers. Ninety-three per cent of public schoolteachers dip into their own pockets to buy stationery and classroom equipment to make up for the lack of government funding.

So when the Greens talk about ending unfair tax breaks for the very wealthy, about getting big corporations to pay their fair share of tax, closing loopholes and reversing huge personal income tax cuts for millionaires, it's not just an abstract call. And it's not a small gap. We took a policy to the last election to invest $24 billion in public schools over the next decade, because that's what we think they're going to need to lift every public school to 100 per cent of the Schoo ling Resource Standard by 2023. That's why we need a Green New Deal—a government-led plan of investment and action to build a clean economy and a caring society.

**Internet Safety Day**

Dr MARTIN (Reid) (10:27): Yesterday was Internet Safety Day, and I want to take this opportunity to talk about this incredibly important issue.

Reid is made up of many families with young children, and as a developmental and educational psychologist—and also as a mother—I have seen just how difficult it can be for parents to grapple with the challenges and risks of technology when keeping their kids safe online. Social media, technology and communications move at such a rapid pace, and often it seems impossible to understand the tools that our children are using online. While parental controls exist, they can sometimes be hard to navigate. Whether it's Facebook, Instagram or TikTok, our kids are vulnerable to predator exploitation, inappropriate content and a whole range of concerns.
Yesterday, the government’s eSafety Commissioner launched a new initiative for parents, carers and teachers of children under the age of five to encourage them to ‘start the chat’ with their kids about safe internet usage. Having these conversations is really important, and helps to equip children with the necessary skills to stay safe online. One of the major functions of the eSafety Commissioner is to operate the world-first reporting tool for online bullying, working closely with some of the biggest social media providers to keep kids safe from online bullying.

There is also an online image based abuse portal to assist Australians who have had their internet images or videos shared without their consent. The portal supports victims of image based abuse, as well as providing guidance on how to request the content to be removed. Another program, Cyber Report, is the first line of defence against illegal online content, taking reports from the public and all levels of law enforcement to remove child sex abuse material from Australia and around the world.

The Morrison government is at the forefront of online safety policy, so we will continue to invest in the resources needed to prioritise the protection of all Australians in the online world, just as we do in the physical world. The content through the eSafety Commission is audience specific and highly targeted, to empower all age groups to take control of their online safety image—from schools, through teenagers and all the way to older Australians. There are also great resources for teachers to guide students to become responsible digital citizens. This Safer Internet Day, I particularly encourage parents, carers and teachers to access the information available on the eSafety website. The range of free resources offer practical advice about how you can help the next generation of Australians to stay safe online.

Aged Care

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (10:30): A 90-year-old man who is blind, deaf and incontinent, with heart disease and poor circulation, was assessed three years ago as needing a home care level 3 package but was in receipt of a level 1 package. He eventually got a level 2 package in 2019, when it was urgent. When I wrote to the minister about this, it took him three months to respond to my letter and he said, ‘There'll be a likely waiting time of nine to 12 months for the respective and necessary level 3 package.’ This is one of many, many examples I could give about how my electors in Blair—in Ipswich, Somerset and the Karana Downs region—are being disadvantaged by this government. The recent alarming figures reveal older Australians, particularly in my electorate, are waiting for higher level home care packages for up to three years, and that example is yet another one.

There have been over $3 billion in cuts and four ministers in six years for aged care. This is a government of inaction, and it now wants to privatisate ACAT assessments. There are about a thousand workers in this space. It's absolutely outrageous for their jobs. They're professionals—registered nurses, occupational therapists and physiotherapists. And guess what? This government gives excuse after excuse about not taking action when it comes to the recommendations of the royal commission. It's got report after report sitting on the minister's table and being taken from one ministerial office to another when it keeps changing ministers with rapidity. And guess what? Nothing has been done.

The figures show shocking waiting times—a median wait time of 152 days to get into a nursing home. That's shameful! And guess what they did last year? When we needed 110,000 packages for home care, they decided to give 10,000—we need 110,000 and they give 10,000! This is a government who look at bandaid solutions. Privatisation does nothing with respect of caring for older Australians, particularly in my electorate. The government are incompetent. Their inaction and idleness across this space is an indictment of their lack of care for older Australians. Their members would have example after example they could give, but I never hear any of them get up to give their examples like I did today about the failings of this government when it comes to aged care—residential aged care or home care. Their addiction to privatisation makes them a shameful government when it comes to aged care.

Lindsay Electorate: Emergency Services

Robar, Mr Malcolm

Mrs McIntosh (Lindsay) (10:33): From bushfires to torrential rain and localised flooding, our local RFS and State Emergency Service personnel have been on the frontline, protecting our community and our fellow Australians across the state. The Penrith State Emergency Service were out in force over the weekend working through over 470 requests for assistance, clearing trees and debris on the roads, and they completed 15 flood rescues, including of one man who was clinging to a tree after being washed away in his car at the Kingsway at St Marys.

I have talked a lot about the community spirit in Lindsay, particularly over this challenging summer, and for good reason. While the Australian Defence Force, RFS and SES have gone above and beyond their duty to help their fellow Australians, many other people in Western Sydney have stood up and asked, ‘What can I do to help?’ It has been overwhelming to see donations coming in to assemble our community care kits and to deliver them
where they're needed most after people have been impacted by these terrible bushfires—home kits, school kits and fireys' kits.

It is appropriate that, among the fires, torrential rain and localised flooding, on Australia Day this year Malcolm Robar was named Penrith Citizen of the Year. Malcolm has dedicated his life, and continues to do so, to helping others, especially in times of crisis. Malcolm has served his country and community as a member of the Australian Federal Police, the New South Wales State Emergency Service, the New South Wales Rural Fire Service and Marine Rescue New South Wales. For over a decade people in my electorate of Lindsay and across New South Wales have called out for help, and Malcolm Robar has been there where help is needed most.

Malcolm is not the only outstanding member of our community who was rightly recognised on Australia Day this year. A number of outstanding citizens were recognised, including Captain of the Orchard Hills RFS for 17 years, Greg Speed; local tennis legend and life member of the Nepean District Tennis Association, Dennis Sales; Malcolm Towle, Superintendent of St John Ambulance for 23 years; and Paralympian and five-time world champion rower, Erik Horrie. All of these local residents were awarded an Order of Australia. I would also like to congratulate those who were awarded Australia Day honours from Penrith City Council.

Lindsay is truly filled to the brim and overflowing with community spirit, and, with people like these in our community, you can see why. Whether it has been responding to the bushfires that have been impacting our state or whether it has been getting out and lending a helping hand when people have needed help over the weekend with localised flooding, I couldn't be prouder of my community of Lindsay.

MURWILLUMBAH: HEALTH CARE

Mrs ELLIOT (Richmond) (10:36): I rise today on behalf of my community to speak on an incredibly important issue facing the regional township of Murwillumbah in my electorate of Richmond. Recent changes under the Modified Monash Model have seen the Morrison government change the classification of Murwillumbah from a regional area to a metropolitan area. So Murwillumbah, which is a regional town of 9,000 people, is now classified in the same category as major cities like Sydney, Melbourne or Brisbane. This is truly absurd. The fact is that Murwillumbah is not a major city, and my local community are rightly concerned and angry about this unfair classification.

The direct result of this government's actions will have severe implications for Murwillumbah, including, firstly, the reduction of incentives for medical professionals, including rural bulk-billing incentives, the Workforce Incentive Program and the Bonded Medical Program. The reclassification to metropolitan also means that medical practices in Murwillumbah will only be available to general-pathway registrars and no longer to rural-pathway registrars. That means that young doctors who choose the rural pathway can no longer train in medical practices in Murwillumbah. Incentives that attracted and maintained medical practitioners in our area have now been completely removed. Make no mistake: this decision will mean less bulk-billing and fewer doctors in Murwillumbah, so I urgently request that the government reclassify Murwillumbah back to regional.

It's important to note that there's a very high proportion of elderly people in the town and surrounding areas, so of course they have more complex healthcare needs and require more intensive levels of ongoing care. There's also a huge lack of public transport in Murwillumbah and on the North Coast generally, so, quite simply, these locals just can't get to GPs in other areas.

I have spoken in the House many times before about this government's harsh cuts to our healthcare services, and this change in classification will make it extremely difficult to attract new GPs to Murwillumbah, as those incentive payments just aren't there. The GPs are an integral part of the town in Murwillumbah. Their skills reflect the specific needs of people in the area. It's also important to note that Murwillumbah is renowned as an excellent centre for training our young doctors, and the town has an outstanding local hospital, which must be maintained.

As I often say, National Party choices hurt, and this decision by the Liberal-National government will really hurt my community in Murwillumbah. In this case, it's clear that this reclassification of Murwillumbah from regional to metropolitan is unfair, damaging and, quite frankly, makes no sense. I urgently request that the Morrison government change the classification of Murwillumbah back to regional to attract those incentives.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Goodenough): If no member objects, three-minute constituency statements may continue until 10.55 am.

Mr LEESER (Berowra) (10:39): The year 2020 marks 25 years of softball in the Hornsby Shire. The Hornsby District Softball Association started in 1995 to give women in the shire the opportunity to play softball. The association runs competitions for players of all ages, from T-ballers as young as four participating in the Batter Up program to senior social softball in the afternoons. They also have state, national and international representative
players. In 2007, the association relocated to Hayes Park in Galston. When they first arrived, two back nets had already been constructed, but since then the HDSA has been working hard to raise funds to fund the construction of bat nets on the remaining two softball diamonds to complete their field. The first of those was erected in September 2018.

I was pleased to have been able to present the HDSA with $9,000 as part of the Stronger Communities Program towards their fourth and final softball diamond, which was finished at the end of last year. I was delighted to cut the ribbon and throw out the first pitch at their newly constructed softball back net and dugout at their last game for 2019. It was great to see so many players from the nine affiliated clubs across our region—the Hills Hawks, the Hornsby Wildcats, the North Rocks, the Rouse Hill Rams, the Thornleigh Blue Jays, the Epping Eastwood Tigers, Stealers Softball, the Greenway Giants and Mount St Benedict College—all on the field making the most of the new addition. Now that all four corners of Hayes Park have permanent back nets, the association has the opportunity to market Hayes Park as the premier softball field in the shire and promote softball in our local community. The HDSA is looking forward to focusing on the grassroots to grow the sport of softball.

The Australian women's softball team is going to the Tokyo Olympics. This presents a fantastic opportunity to promote softball as a sport in our area. I want to thank the hardworking, dynamic president of the association, Paige Hyslop, and the executive for the work they've done to enable women to play softball socially and competitively in our region. I'd also like to acknowledge the men who helped upgrade the grounds—Richard Gatt, Simon Fitzhenry, Simon Tilley and David Dunk—and who coordinated the fencing contractor, ensured the diamond measurements were correct and put hours into relocating existing pitch and home plate mats.

Finally, let me acknowledge the HDSA's numerous representatives who competed over the summer in championships around the country—Chelsea Gleeson, Madeline Kemp, Hannah MacKean and Caitlyn Wilde—who were members of winning teams in their respective competitions and age groups, as well as John Neilson and Damaras Clarkson, who coached and assisted the under-18 New South Wales women's team to their victory. Let me also congratulate Jacinta Eisermann, Annalise Kemp, Gisele Petalio Conte and Teoni Lamb, who represented the HDSA, as well as Aiden Kajan, Hayden Matthews, Liam O'Leary and Kieren O'Leary, who represented the Hornsby district for the new men's team. I look forward to seeing a bright future for softball in my area as the association goes from strength to strength over the next quarter century.

Holt Community Spirit and Leadership Awards

Mr BYRNE: (Holt) (10:42): On Monday 16 December last year, at the Cranbourne Community Theatre we honoured students who had made a difference to their community at the 18th annual Holt Community Spirit and Leadership Awards. These awards were commissioned by me a number of years ago because I wanted to highlight the achievements of young people in our community. We hear a lot about what's wrong with our young people. I use this ceremony as an opportunity to remind people in our community about what the good kids of our community do. There are so many good kids and they need to be remembered. Our community needs to be reminded that our young people do a lot of good. We honoured 32 students from 30 schools. It was quite an emotional ceremony. The parents were rightly proud of the young people, as I was, as we heard about their achievements.

I will read into the Hansard the names of the students who were honoured at this ceremony: Ben Myors, Jesel Johnson, Ershad Alimi, Tayleah Murphy, Aania Rehman, Malia Renee de Thierry, Nethylene Liyanage, Leigh Gibson, Belle Charles, Sarah New, Bowen Lu, Manmeet Kaur Singh, Juhee Kim, Grace Jemison, Amy Pisotsky, Devmika Bogahapitya, Nyachristmas Kuach, Tycen Heeger, Joshua Appelman, Bernice Ramos, Sophie Jackson, Montanna McGuinness, Anthony Krotwaar, Guneet Kaur, Ronit Verma, Brendon Quintal, Khushi Thakar, Nethra Saravanan, Sara Tong, Megan Rojales and Lachlan Derix.

An honourable member interjecting—

Mr BYRNE: A good crew. Thank you very much. There were 32 outstanding young people. There's one in particular that I want to mention briefly: Ben Myors. He received an award. He was nominated by Alkira Secondary College in particular for the work that he did in the establishment of the Chloe Clash, which was a fundraising event for the Royal Children's Hospital.

In 2012, Ben's sister, Chloe, was taken away from him—the family's daughter was taken away—when she suffered a brain aneurysm. Ben wanted to give something back to the community by fundraising, so he devised an annual event called the Chloe Clash. It's a 24-hour non-stop marathon sports game—part netball, part basketball—integrating Ben's favourite sport with that of his sister's, Chloe. He has raised over $22,000 for the Royal Children's Hospital over two years. Ben is just one example of what our kids do. There's so much negativity in social media about our young children. We've got to remember what's good about what they do. And that's what I was trying to do on 16 December last year.
Forrest Electorate: Community Events

Mrs MARINO (Forrest—Assistant Minister for Regional Development and Territories) (10:45): I want to talk about a major running event in my electorate, the WesTrac Bunbury Geographe Gift, which will be held on 29 February and 1 March this year. It's the third consecutive year of this event and there are a whole lot of volunteers involved—wonderful local volunteers. This 120-metre gift is the second-richest footrace and running carnival in Australia. It has equal prize money for men and women, with $14,000 as the first prize. We've previously had an abundance of national talent, including Jack Hale, Trae Williams, Riley Day, Celeste Mucci, Genavive La Caze and Ryan Gregson. This year we have one of WA's best Tokyo 2020 Olympics chances in Matt Ramsden. He will be joined by Sarah Billings, who is one of Australia's best middle-distance runners.

Equally, the Bunbury Street Pole Vault event was held recently. It's the only event of its kind in the country—apparently, we were told, in the Southern Hemisphere. It had Australia's best pole vaulters, including Commonwealth Games gold medallist Kurtis Marschall, Commonwealth Games bronze medallist Nina Kennedy and two other Commonwealth Games competitors. We know that Kurtis Marschall qualified for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics the week after the Bunbury event. We had an international contingent from Finland, including the three-time Finnish national champion, Tomas Wecksten. There was also much interest in our local Bunbury junior pole vaulter, Indiana West—a 13-year-old young lady who's recently won gold in the schools championships. This was a great opportunity for locals as well as those who come from around Australia.

Over the course of the afternoon, the event attracted approximately 4,500 people into Bunbury's central business district, and many businesses adjacent to the event actually reported great interest and more patronage as a result, which is really good—record sales. There was a social media competition, with over 150 entries, showcasing the event, with Bunbury's iconic landmarks in the background. The ambition is to continue to grow the event, as you would understand. I want to congratulate Dylan Panizza for organising the event. There are a few others who have done an enormous job on both of these events over time, including the Piacentini family, and Tom Dillon, who I couldn't afford not to mention.

Congratulations also to the number of volunteers who recently helped with the Busselton Jetty Swim. This is an amazing event, with over 3,000 participants and 7,500 spectators. This 3.6-kilometre swim has recently had its 25th anniversary. What a great job by everyone.

Lalor Electorate: Community Events

Ms RYAN (Lalor—Opposition Whip) (10:48): After a busy sitting week last week, it was wonderful to return to my seat and celebrate the incredible multicultural and inclusive events across Wyndham over the weekend. I attended the Lunar New Year Festival in Point Cook. This is organised by the Point Cook Cultural Committee, led by president Bob Fairclough and his hardworking team. It was wonderful to join them in their celebrations and great to see the community come together to celebrate lunar new year this year, particularly in light of much talk about the coronavirus. It also gave me the opportunity to meet with Vietnamese and Chinese Australians who live in our great city of Wyndham, many in Point Cook.

On Friday I joined the state Treasurer, Tim Pallas, member for Werribee; our mayor; and Vicki Sutton, CEO of the Melbourne City Mission, to turn a sod on the Melbourne City Mission youth refuge, which will be built in Werribee. I think this is a fantastic project, and it was great to be involved. On Sunday, Wyndham City Council welcomed the Midsumma Festival to Werribee at the Park Lounge. I want to give a shout-out to all of those involved, particularly to Wyndham City Council for supporting our local LGBTQI community.

It was also a pleasure to attend the Virgin Mary Mosque on the weekend. They held a bushfire fundraiser. I had the opportunity to spend some time with our vibrant Muslim community. I want to thank Sheikh Abdulla Hawari, Khaled Ajaj, Dr Seyed Alavi Sherifideen and the hardworking Fatima and her incredible crew. They raised over $12,000 for bushfire recovery. It was an incredible day. There were lots and lots of people. I always love to spend time at that mosque, particularly as they're involved in supporting other people in our community. So a big thank you to everyone who was there and everyone who made a donation.

I'd also, on the same theme, like to acknowledge the Hoppers Crossing Club, who, at the height of the Victorian bushfires, held a fundraiser at the Hoppers Crossing Club and raised funds for our local brigades. They raised, in one evening, $4,444—and, yes, it's an interesting amount!—which meant that they could donate $1,111 to four of our local brigades. It was a fabulous weekend to go home. It reminds me, constantly, about the incredibly multicultural, multifaith, multifaceted and, most importantly, inclusive community that I represent.

Braddon Electorate: Devonport High School

Mr PEARCE (Braddon) (10:51): I'm here today to congratulate the students and staff of Devonport High School in my electorate of Braddon, who were recently announced as the 2019 national Anzac Day Schools'
Awards winners. Devonport High's Anzac Day assembly was entitled 'It Touched us All', and it began with Mrs Jolly and her drama students reading letters from the front line. The realism of what families, soldiers and loved ones would have been feeling helped the audience to connect with the experiences of all involved.

Two grade 10 students, Jaden Armstrong and Elyjah Slater, were army and navy cadets themselves. They formed a catafalque party. They marched from the rear of the assembled group and raised the national flag in the spotlight on the stage. They stood to attention and proudly recited for the remainder of the assembly.

The student representative council performed a welcome to country, introduced the national anthem singers and went on to explain the significance of Anzac Day. Two students, Dylan Boys and Bronte Dykstra, then performed the Red gum classic 'I was only 19', which was heartfelt and moving. This was followed by the inaugural performance of the junior band playing 'On The March', led by Mrs Gail Elliott. Class captains then laid rosemary and poppies under a wreath on behalf of their classmates. The significance of the rosemary, the poppies and 'The Last Post' were relayed to the audience, and this was well received. 'The Last Post' was then performed and 'The Ode' from For The Fallen was read before students and staff shared their stories on how their lives had been impacted by war.

Student Bronte Dykstra then introduced her grandmother—and my own dear friend and former colleague—Mrs Libby Perkins, who told her story of being a decoder in the Vietnam War at age 17. Mrs Perkins detailed the secrecy surrounding her role and her recognition, 30 years after the event, that saw her go on to become head of the RSL in the local league and be invited to lay a wreath at Villers-Bretonneux on behalf of Australia on Anzac Day this year.

The Grade 10 dance class then brought the assembly to an emotional end, performing 'And The Band Played Waltzing Matilda'. The judges praised the school's entry as a 'heartwarming performance, captured in song, poetry and storytelling.' They went on to say that they were 'impressed at the commemoration, and this was evident in the student driven and beautifully captured two-minute presentation.' As an ex-serviceman myself, I was overwhelmed and deeply proud and touched by how this younger generation is embracing and demonstrating active care and selfless sacrifice for the defence of our nation. Congratulations, Devonport High, and lest we forget.

Sitting suspended from 10:55 to 12:02

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Bird): In accordance with standing order 193, the time for members' constituency statements has concluded.

CONDOLENCES
Australian Bushfires

Consideration resumed of the motion:
That the House:

(1) acknowledge the devastation across our nation occasioned by the bushfire season including the loss of 33 lives, the destruction of over 3,000 homes, the unimaginable loss of so much wildlife and the devastating impact on regional economies across Australia;

(2) extend its deepest sympathies to families who have lost loved ones and to those who have suffered injuries or loss;

(3) place on record its gratitude for the service of David Moresi, Geoffrey Keaton, Andrew O'Dwyer, Samuel McPaul, Bill Slade, Mat Kavanagh, Ian McBeth, Paul Hudson and Rick DeMorgan Jr, fire-fighters who lost their lives during the fires and extend its deepest condolences to their families;

(4) recognise the contribution of thousands of volunteer and career fire-fighters and the dedication of emergency services personnel across Australia;

(5) honour the contribution of 6,500 Australian Defence Force personnel, including 3,000 ADF reservists, and the work of Emergency Management Australia throughout the summer;

(6) recognise the generosity of individuals, families, schools, churches and religious groups, service clubs and businesses from across Australia and elsewhere in the world during the evacuations and following the fires;

(7) express its gratitude to Australia's friends, allies and neighbours who provided or offered support;

(8) recognise the unceasing efforts and close cooperation between state and local governments, demonstrating the strength of our Federation;

(9) commit itself to learning any lessons from this fire season; and

(10) pledge the full support of the Australian Parliament to assist affected areas to recover and rebuild.

Mr ZAPPIA (Makin) (12:02): I join with colleagues in endorsing the words of this motion and expressing my condolences and sorrow to the families and friends of those who died, who were injured, who stared death in the face, who watched their homes and all their worldly possessions burn, who saw animals suffer and die, who have
been left traumatised and shattered or whose lives have been changed in any way whatsoever by the fires that have swept across Australia since September or even prior to that in some parts. Your hurt, your suffering and your grief has touched the hearts of so many of your fellow Australians, and people from around the world have responded with so many offers of help and words of comfort.

In parts of the country the fires still burn. The situation would have been worse but for the extraordinary efforts of firefighters, ADF personnel, SES crews, medical teams, police officers, vets and animal rescue workers, council workers and so many others—the list goes on—who were on the front line of the response efforts right across the country. To them and to all those people who in any way contributed to relief efforts I say thank you. I spoke with so many of them in South Australia. I visited the emergency relief centre at Highbury, just outside of my electorate. They are all deserving of the nation's gratitude. I also say thank you to the South Australian media crews, particularly the ABC, through radio station 891, and 5AA, radio station 1395, for their continuous coverage and information about the South Australian bushfires.

Our priority for those areas where the fires have passed is now to help people and communities rebuild their lives and their futures. It will be an enormous task, and it will take time because the losses are extensive. Even despite extraordinary fire response efforts and the use of the most modern firefighting technology that we have ever had, some 33 lives have been lost, three from my home state of South Australia. From my calculations, 19 million hectares have been burnt if we include the Northern Territory fires. Nearly 3,000 houses; thousands of sheds, motor vehicles, farm machinery, public infrastructure, plantations, wineries; kilometres of fencing; and over a billion wildlife and livestock have been lost. The economic cost to the nation will be in the billions of dollars. In reality, the full cost will never be known, because the long-term health impacts—including psychological effects and smoke inhalation—the ecological destruction and the flow-on economic costs will carry on for years to come.

The immediate question that arises when I speak to people throughout the community is: how do we better prepare for next time? Because there will be a next time. We can only do that if we accept the science—accept that the climate is changing and factor that into the fuel loads and weather conditions that climate change will create.

As I speak to people in my community, four immediate questions arise that I hope will be addressed as part of the reviews that are currently underway into these fires. Firstly, there are concerns about whether the donations will find their way to the victims of these fires. There is a real concern that that may not be the case. Secondly, could we and should we in future be able to call on and draw upon the ADF much earlier and in a much more coordinated way? Thirdly, is our nation well enough equipped with firefighting aircraft? And, fourthly, is the national building code, particularly as it relates to fire-prone areas, adequate and should fire shelters be made mandatory in those areas? Those are questions that I hope will be addressed in the reviews that will take place both at state and national levels.

I also noted that last week we brought into this place bushfires tax assistance legislation and the Business Council of Australia set up a trust fund for volunteer firefighters who have been injured or killed. I didn't get a chance to speak in that debate, but I ask the question: does that fund also cover overseas firefighters who may be here in Australia and also may have been injured or, as we saw, killed? Those are matters that, again, I hope will be considered.

The extraordinary generosity of Australians was evident in my own community. I thank them all for their kindness and compassion. It is simply not possible for me to acknowledge them all individually, and there are more events still to come which I will be attending over the days and weeks ahead. But I want to refer to three examples of that generosity, because I think they encapsulate the spirit I saw in and around my community.

Firstly, Adelaide's Afghan Australian Hazara community raised approximately $80,000 through a joint fundraising effort with the Baba Mazari Foundation and the Wali E Asr Centre. A young refugee boy who came to this country as an infant, Murtaza Hussain, gave all of his savings since his arrival here in 2013 to the fire victims. Secondly, in another initiative, 10-year-old Imogen Stevens, with the support of her family, set up a weekend cafe at her Salisbury East home and raised hundreds of dollars by selling coffee and tea to locals. I can vouch for the quality of the coffee because I had one and it was great! Lastly, my office was used as a collection point for backpacks for schoolkids affected by fire. The goodwill and donations were overwhelming, and I thank all of those people who donated.

In closing, the fires were horrific, but they brought out the best in Australians. I hope that the nation's response will lift the spirits of fire victims.

Mr BRIAN MITCHELL (Lyons) (12:09): It gives me no great pleasure, of course, to be here speaking on this condolence motion, but it gives me a great deal of pride. The bushfires have taken a terrible toll in this nation,
and for six days now members of this parliament from across the political spectrum have been on their feet to talk about the great sacrifice—one would have hoped an unnecessary sacrifice, but a great sacrifice, the ultimate sacrifice—made by so many people who gave their lives in service of their nation. Indeed, it was not just their nation; we had those visiting airmen from the US who came to give a hand here in Australia and lost their lives as a result. So we pay great tribute to them.

It's also an opportunity for us to pay tribute to the many thousands of Australians who have helped during this terrible summer of bushfires across the nation, from the east coast to the west coast and down into Tasmania. We've had our small share. Luckily there have been no fatalities in Tasmania this year, but we've certainly had our share of bushfires. There are thousands of volunteers who support our firefighters and our emergency services personnel. We've got to give a shout-out to the people who make the sandwiches or donate the funds, including the children who have created donation funds. A young man in Hobart was raising funds for bushfire relief out the front of his house, and I came across his Facebook posts because it used to be my house. I don't know the family but I did have a little sense of pride. It is wonderful that a house I used to own is now lived in by a wonderful young boy and his family who have gone out of their way to do their small part to help the relief effort.

It's been an incredible time this summer, a terrible summer in terms of loss, but this summer has also shown the Australian spirit at its very best. I know many members and senators have spoken about this, about how this terrible tragedy, this terrible event in Australia—not the first and certainly not the last—has helped forged a greater Australian spirit. Australians have come together in their millions to pay tribute to and to support our firefighters and our emergency services personnel. The comedian Celeste Barber has overseen an outpouring of support for bushfire relief—$30 million, I think, at last look, in $5 and $10 donations from Australians, many of whom are doing it tough themselves but are putting their hand in their pocket to do their small part to help this incredible national relief effort. We pay tribute to them.

In my electorate I've got fire brigades who have helped out in the fires that have broken out not just in my electorate but across Tasmania. But brigades who have been fighting fires in Tasmania—and this is not a unique story; I know that—have travelled from Tasmania to the mainland to help out here. Just last week, indeed, Rick Birch and his team from the Orielton fire brigade and the Tea Tree fire brigade were out on the South Coast, down Batemans Bay way and around Bega, doing their bit. I'm pleased to say they were caught up in the rain, so they probably had a little bit of an easier time of it than they were expecting, and I'm sure they would have very much welcomed that. They have now flown back to Tasmania. But here I was in Canberra for work here, and there Rick and the team from Tasmania were, volunteering—not being paid but volunteering—to come and fight fires for their fellow Australians.

I pay tribute to all those who have done such magnificent work over this summer—the volunteers, the support personnel, the men, women and children of Australia. I know this has consumed people over the summer. Lessons are to be learned out of it. We do hope that next summer we'll be better prepared and that we can acknowledge that this is probably here to stay and perhaps have a better nationally coordinated response. That is absolutely no criticism of the fire and emergency services organisations that we have now, but I certainly think we can do much better in terms of resourcing those organisations and those people to make sure they have every single bit of support they need. I say thank you to all those volunteers and personnel over the summer and for the next few weeks and months ahead. On behalf of the people of Lyons, thank you.

Ms CLAYDON (Newcastle) (12:14): It's an absolute honour to be able to make a brief contribution in the limited time available today to this condolence motion relating to the bushfires—the 'summer of dread', as it's become known by many people in Australia. Having spent my early years in primary school at Bermagui public, I'm quite familiar with the South Coast. I returned there to work in a disability service later in my life too, in Bega. So I have many friends still living on the South Coast and I remained in touch with them throughout the bushfire period, and I hope to come back to some of those messages briefly, in a little while.

The extent of Australia's summer of dread is quite overwhelming for most people to contemplate. Over a five-month period, the bushfires that raged along the entire south-east coast of Australia burnt an area that is larger than the country of Ireland. Sometimes that's an easier way for people to picture the magnitude of these fires. These fires have taken 33 lives. They have damaged almost 3,000 homes. The smoke that descended upon our cities and towns left us in a toxic environment; many people who weren't even facing the full brunt of the fires lived under the cloud of toxic smoke that came across their communities. And the fires have absolutely devastated the utterly unique flora and fauna for which Australia is renowned internationally. I think we are still really struggling to fathom just how much damage has been done, and I do acknowledge the efforts of the shadow minister, Terri Butler, in her call for an environmental audit. People are estimating that one billion animals are now dead. It is pretty unfathomable. Some 7.7 million hectares of bush has been burnt. So there is a lot to take stock of.

FEDERATION CHAMBER
I'd like to spend some time thanking people in our communities, people who often regard themselves as quite ordinary, for stepping up and being the most extraordinary human beings in a time of crisis. I really do want to give a big shout-out to New South Wales Rural Fire Service Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons, who we watched day in and day out, multiple times a day, reporting on the state of the fires and dealing with the terrible grief when firefighters lost their lives, and when people died defending their properties and other people lost everything. He showed extraordinary leadership, and I really want to extend a very personal thank you to him.

I also want to thank all of the extraoridinary broadcasters on ABC emergency radio that kept everyone, many who were literally in the dark, in touch with events and in such a detailed manner, who maintained calm and the information flow into those communities when they had no alternative sources of communication.

I'd also like to acknowledge upfront the amazing efforts of our Pacific neighbours. We've often been called on to deliver aid and support to our Pacific neighbours in times of emergency. I'm sure, like many members of this parliament, my heart just melted when I saw those photographs of young people in Lae in Papua New Guinea pushing a wheelbarrow around and getting donations for Australians. The idea that people who are amongst our poorest nations in the world would give cash donations is just extraordinary, and it says a lot. And it wasn't just the people of Lae. There were fabulous efforts in Vanuatu as well. But I hope that people in this House remember that in times to come. When this parliament deliberates on overseas development assistance issues, I hope Members remember why it is important that we should be good neighbours in our region, because, when our house was quite literally burning down, our Pacific neighbours were there to support us.

I'd also like to acknowledge their warm condolences to Australia. I was here in Canberra from 13 to 15 January because we were hosting the Asia Pacific Parliamentary Forum. In fact, I was chairing the climate change session at that forum. I would like to convey to the House that every single nation at the table for that discussion offered their profound condolences to Australia before making any further remarks. They were in Canberra at a time when that toxic smoke was hanging right over the top of this city, so they had a very good feel for what Australians were contending with at the time. They offered their condolences to Australia and asked how they might support us, going into the future, in trying to make efforts to ensure that we are doing absolutely everything we can to look at not just mitigation and adaptation but also real, long-term solutions for the climate change issues that we as a region are facing. They were very, very alive to those issues and are looking very carefully at Australia to see what steps we will be taking on those matters.

As I said, seemingly ordinary people stepped up to do extraordinary things in all of our communities, and I would like to take some time to acknowledge a few of those people now. Newcastle artist Sally Bourke, who's a volunteer and a member of the Animal Rescue Cooperative, was initially driven to respond by those North Coast fires that took place later last year. She's part of a series of hubs or collectives of people that were collecting donations for animal food, water, medicines and other items that wildlife carers across the country need. So a big thankyou to the Animal Rescue Cooperative. The people in Newcastle did some terrific work around making and providing bedding and support for native animals who'd been devastated by the fires. Likewise, there was Merewether's Beach Hotel supervisor, Claire Hamilton, who was hosting 'sewing bees' at the pub to make pouches for animals injured in the fires.

There were incredible donation drives across the Newcastle community. Novocastrians donated approximately $50,000 worth of food, drink and health products in a big drive organised by Gillian Summers. The items were then loaded into five seven-tonne trucks and a one-tonne ute and driven to the Shoalhaven emergency management centre, the Hunter Valley Fire Control Centre in Bulga and the Lower Hunter Fire Control Centre in East Maitland. Gillian doesn't like to take credit for that work herself and has acknowledged a number of the volunteers who worked with her. I'd like to give a shout-out to those people now, including those who loaned and drove the trucks: Allan Woodham, Oliver Coakes, Mark Trenter, Luke Orton, James Ferguson, Ian Bamford, Greg Kerr, Mitchell Vajda and Samantha Phillips. Thank you all.

Newcastle ArtSpace in Islington held a fantastic art sale, with proceeds going to the bushfire charities, including the New South Wales Rural Fire Service, WIRES and the Red Cross. I understand that almost 50 Hunter Region based artists took part in that event, raising about $7,500 from the sale of their works. The Newcastle Surf Life Saving Club raised $24,700 in a bushfire appeal event they conducted, with that money going to four different charities. The Newcastle Pride, Timber Productions and Heaps Gay presented a 'queer bushfire fundraiser' at the Mayfield Bowling Club. Again this was great support from our LGBTIQI community in Newcastle. The bushfire relief gig at Lizzotte's last week raised more money, with a fabulous rocall of local musicians, including our perhaps most famous export John Paul Young. In January, Big Dog Comedy was fundraising at The Happy Wombat. Last week Nicholas Connors and Ahlia Williams put on a rock'n'roll barbecue bushfire fundraiser, at a very infamous live music venue in Newcastle called The Lass O'Gowrie. Again, all proceeds go to the RFS and WIRES. The Prince at Merewether held an Australian Day sausage sizzle. On
Australia Day most of the pubs in Newcastle, including Mayfield's Stag and Hunter, were all fundraising for the fire victims.

You have great community groups like the Newcastle Greek Orthodox community, whose Blessing of the Waters Ceremony was dedicated to those affected by the bushfire crisis. The Newcastle mosque has been doing fantastic work—again, handing over much-needed cash that is required by these communities now. There are too many more to mention.

I know many other members have acknowledged this in the past; but, when you're in a time of crisis, you really see the most remarkable responses from our community members. My conversations with people on the South Coast during that period of fire also reminded me how people who would otherwise regard themselves as very ordinary people in their communities showed tremendous leadership when that was needed, and they are acutely aware of the need to now rebuild their communities and the important role that each of them will be playing in that rebuild. They want all of us in this parliament to work collaboratively towards that endeavour.

Many of these people know there are some long-term issues to be addressed in terms of how we better prepare for these seemingly more frequent and more intense fire seasons. People are looking into the future and wondering about how this parliament will respond to these very real issues of climate change. They don't want to see a retreat into the climate wars within this parliament. That has been made acutely clear. It has been the worst habit of this parliament for the last 10 years, this parliament not being able to deal with the very real issues of climate change and reform that have to happen in this nation. I hope that there is an opportunity for everyone in this parliament to rise to the occasion and to meet the expectations of the community. Yes, there is a lot of rebuilding and healing work to be done in all of these bushfire affected communities that are feeling intense trauma, but we cannot walk away from those tough conversations that must happen in this place if we are to address the issues that are driving these profound changes in Australia's climate.

Ms O'NEIL (Hotham) (12:29): I'm really grateful to the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition for securing this time in the parliament for us to say something about this extraordinary disaster that occurred right around the country throughout this summer period. It was appropriate, of course, that the main contributors to this debate were those with electorates where there were immediate impacts of fire around the country throughout this summer period. It was appropriate that the main contributors to this debate were those with electorates where there were immediate impacts of fire and loss of life. I thank the members for Gilmore, Eden-Monaro and Gippsland and the others who were mainly affected by these tragedies for their really incredible contributions in this debate.

I want to take the opportunity to say something on behalf of my community. This was a national tragedy, one that no Australian was untouched by over the summer. The first thing I want to do is express in the most sincere terms how devastated the people I represent were by the things that they saw over this summer, particularly the loss of life. We lost so many Australians. The fact that so many of the people who died were volunteers who died in the effort of protecting their communities is an extraordinary thing. I know there's not a single person in my electorate who wasn't affected by the news of those deaths. It was striking how many of the people who died had young children or had partners and wives who were pregnant. You can't imagine anything more terrible for a child than growing up without ever knowing their father. On behalf of the people I represent, I want to say how much we're thinking of the families that have lost a loved one. Our hearts are going to remain with you while you deal with this grief. Please know that the nation is so united in its gratitude to the person in your family who died trying to protect others. It's a thing of enormous honour.

One of the things that was a little bit unusual about this disaster was that, as I said, it was experienced by all Australians in different ways. One of the things that was distinctive was how much visual imagery and how many pictures were created. I think they will be forever associated in my brain with the disaster that befell our people over the summer. There were the images of Mallacoota: the eeriness of red blackness covering a town in the middle of the day; hundreds of people crowded on a beach where the only place to go to keep safe was out into the ocean. These are gut-wrenching images that I know all Australians will carry with them. I think of another image I saw of a mum on the South Coast of New South Wales. She was sitting on the footpath. Everything she had been able to take from her house was in a shopping cart. She had two kids with her. They were just running around and she was trying to look after them on this street. She was just absolutely spent, without any means of processing what was going on for her. There were the images of Allison Marion's son Finn as he steered the boat carrying his family members out into the ocean to escape the fire that was coming towards them. There were images of the charred remains of farm animals and wildlife that had been absolutely defenceless in the face of the walls of flames that they had faced.

When I spoke to my community about how this affected them over the summer, what they told me was that, even though they weren't in the line of fire, this absolutely defined the summer of 2019-20. It defined the quality of the time that they spent with their family. What a lot of people have said to me is that they were not able to enjoy summer in that carefree way that we love to do as Australians because they knew the whole time there were
people in other parts of the country who were literally facing crisis. I know that so many Australians have donated to the recovery efforts. My electorate is no exception there. I just want to say how proud and grateful I am to every Australian who has dug deep and found a way to make a contribution to the rebuilding efforts.

Crisis like this are horrible things. No-one would wish this on a country. They do show us some of the darker things about what we deal with as Australians, but, of course, it always brings forth the greatest beauty that exists in our community, and this was no exception. One of the things that I really noticed over the summer was this sense of abiding connection that Australians who live in the cities feel and share with Australians who live in the bush. I think there are people around the country, some of whom work in this parliament, who try to stoke division and make people feel like we can't be one country. But the truth is that the people I represent—I represent a city electorate—feel so much for country Australians. When there's a drought, we talk about it, we think about it and we worry about it. I think we really saw that in the way that people reacted over the summer. So it's really important that we remember that there is so much that unites the beautiful people that we represent, and this feeling, affection and care between the country and the city is very much a part of things.

One of the other very much abiding and recurring themes I gleaned from talking to my constituents was just how important our national broadcaster is to us in Australia. It was obviously something that my constituents relied on completely to keep in touch with their fellow Australians over the summer as they faced these incredible moments of crisis. I think, in a time of such polarisation, it's so important that we get to experience things like that and understand them as they're happening.

I know many people in my community who spent days and weeks—literally 24 hours a day—listening to the ABC. They were watching the coverage on the news and listening to the coverage on the radio. The quality of that service was just extraordinary—to share with the rest of the country the actual voices and the stories of people in these communities experiencing such crisis, and, of course, to fulfil that critical role of actual communication about what was happening around the country as the disaster panned out. It was an extraordinary thing that the ABC did. It gave us a way to walk alongside people who were in crisis. It was essential as a line of communication to people who were experiencing that crisis.

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A division having been called in the House of Representatives—

Sitting suspended from 12:35 to 12:47

Ms O’NEIL: Again, it's a privilege to contribute on behalf of my electorate of Hotham to this important debate about the horrible bushfires that have affected the lives of so many Australians. I've talked a bit about the sorrow that my community has felt for the families and communities most affected by this disaster. One of the most important things that has come out of the conversations that I've had with my constituents has been in relation to climate change and how the bushfires have absolutely sharpened the urgency for us to take action, to take calm, clear action that sits right in front of us as a parliament, to address the issue of carbon emissions in our environment.

When I talk to my constituents, they don't talk to me about the Paris Agreement and different targets that may lie ahead for us. What they say to me is: 'Something has to change. We cannot go on like this.' We've had now almost seven years of continental drift on climate policy, and instead of going down, our emissions were under the previous government, our emissions were going up. Some of the other speakers in this debate have talked about the need for us to be bipartisan in our approach to this. We are ready for that conversation. This is not about which political party you're in. It's not about which part of the country you represent. It is about the sort of country that we are going to leave to our children and grandchildren. It is absolutely the case that every politician of my generation is going to be judged on how we deal with this issue. Something has to change, and I'm very hopeful that we as a parliament are going to be able to have a better conversation about this.

One of the reasons for that is that if this last summer showed us anything it is how much we as a country have to lose if the world continues to do very little to combat global warming. One of the things that's been so clear in this summer is that the Australian summer is iconic. This is the time in the year that the families in my community live for. This is what we wait for. I think about the summers of my childhood when we played cricket on the beach. We went to the beach as much as we could. We just revelled in the natural environment almost every day, and I fear that my children and my grandchildren are not going to be able to experience that with their own kids. The truth is that my kids and my constituents' children couldn't have that sort of experience this summer. One of the reasons for that was the air quality. I don't in any way equate anything that we experienced with the horrible bushfire crisis areas. I'm not attempting to do that. I just want to make the point that millions of people breathed in air for over a month that was not good-quality air. In Melbourne, the world's most liveable city, there were days when we had the poorest quality air in the world. If this is not a clarion call to action then I don't know what else needs to happen for us to see the urgency of taking action on this issue.
I want to make the commitment to my constituents that, as I have been doing every day that I have been a member of parliament, I am ready to make a change and do something serious about this problem so that we meet our responsibilities as public leaders and as Australians and do what we know needs to be done to arrest this problem.

I want to finish by just expressing my deepest condolences to the families of those who lost their lives in the fires. We're not going to forget that this happened to you and your loved ones. I just want those families to know that we're with them now and will always be as they deal with this grieving process.

Dr MULINO (Fraser) (12:51): I rise to echo the words of so many on all sides of the chamber over the last several weeks. While the fires may not have burnt in Fraser, my community has been touched, as so many others have. We have witnessed with great sadness the loss of life and property of our fellow Australians. I send the thoughts and prayers of my whole community to those who have experienced loss. We have seen the incomprehensible destruction of our natural environment—millions of hectares of bushland and, as earlier speakers have indicated, a billion animals. It's almost too much to comprehend. We have been inspired by the bravery of thousands of volunteers who put their lives at risk and, in too many cases, made the ultimate sacrifice. I specifically acknowledge the CFA, Victoria's other emergency services personnel and the brave firefighters from other states, including the Rural Fire Service in New South Wales.

Like so many communities across the nation, Fraser has rallied in support of those who have experienced loss. An outpouring of generosity has occurred right across my community. At the Lunar New Year festivals, people celebrated the Year of the Rat and then immediately turned their attention to how to help those in other communities. At the Quang Minh temple in Braybrook, funds were raised. At the St Albans new year festival, over $20,000 was raised in one day. Businesses throughout Fraser organised fundraising efforts. A good example was the St Albans Traders Association. Schools throughout Fraser have organised events, raised money and have sent messages of support, and the not-for-profit organisations, of which there are too many to mention, have also done so much.

In addition to making overarching comments indicating the support that my community feels for those who have suffered such great loss in the whole of Australia, I also want to make some personal observations. My father lives in Batemans Bay and I was with him on New Year's Eve and the days that followed. People huddled on beaches as a wall of smoke and fire approached. Neighbours went door to door, making sure that no-one was left isolated and vulnerable. And, as so many speakers have already mentioned, when mobile phones lost coverage, when power was out and people were literally in darkness, the ABC provided people with information, with clarity and with at least some comfort in the midst of all the chaos—a lifeline to the rest of the community. My family was in Eden as thousands of Victorians escaped the fires in Mallacoota and the east of Victoria. We saw the desperation and fear of the many people streaming across the border and also how a town opened itself to welcome them and provide them with refuge. My family was in Ulladulla when the roads to the north were blocked. We benefited from the generosity of being given accommodation and food from a stranger as we waited for the roads to clear. My family will never forget the generous gesture that the family made for us over the days that we spent there.

The eloquent and powerful speeches of the members for Gilmore, Eden-Monaro and Macquarie, amongst many others, including the members for Gippsland and Monash of my own state of Victoria, reflect the experiences of hundreds of thousands of people who had similar experiences to my family. The speech from the member for Gilmore resonated very powerfully given that my family, my father, is her constituent. I saw firsthand that particular community coming together in a powerful show of sacrifice and resilience. Hundreds of thousands of people experienced fires or the threat of fires over a sustained period, week after week over many months, draining people's reserves of energy and optimism. It was the sense of community that helped people persevere and, ultimately, overcome these incredible challenges. To all those who have lost so much, I offer condolences on behalf of my entire community; to all those still experiencing challenging times, our community remains ready to help.

Ms STEGGALL (Warringah) (12:55): I join with my parliamentary colleagues in expressing heartfelt condolences for the devastating loss of life, property and innocence in the bushfires that have ravaged our nation. The statistics are heartbreaking: 33 lives lost, more than 3,000 homes destroyed, over one billion animals killed, and almost 12 million hectares burnt across our nation.

To the families and friends of those grieving the loss of their loved ones, I extend my heartfelt sympathies. To lose someone in such horrific and unexpected circumstances is heartbreaking, and the public nature of the loss can compound those emotions. In particular, to the families of the nine firefighters, on behalf of all the people of Warringah, I thank you for their service and for their ultimate sacrifice. The nation grieves with you at the loss of these young men, who represented the best of human spirit. That spirit and that sense of selflessness and
compassion for others was constantly on display during this crisis, from families opening up their homes to strangers, to volunteers rescuing injured wildlife, from surf club members turning their clubhouses into evacuation stations, to volunteers working three days straight to distribute care packs, the best of humanity constantly came to the fore, and as Australians we can stand rightly proud of that.

In New South Wales, much of the focus has been on the South Coast and the devastation to communities there. We have seen heartbreaking scenes of evacuations, loss of property and complete towns wiped out. But it is important that we don't forget those regions on the North Coast, where this crisis first started unfolding in August. Those communities also experienced devastating loss of life and property, and they need our support as they start the slow process of recovery. I, for one, will be encouraging members of my community in Warringah to visit our sister city of Glen Innes as we support Mayor Carol Sparks and her community to get back on their feet after devastating losses there in November.

Reflecting on the North Coast fires is also a reminder of just how long the bushfire season has gone. We have had more than six months of the fires and I have no doubt that no-one is feeling it more acutely than those on the front line, who have battled the conditions. Like many other Australians, I have nothing but the highest level of admiration, even awe, for the men and women of our firefighting services, both volunteers and paid professionals. Due to some incredible mobile phone video footage, for the first time we went inside those trucks with the firefighters, and it was terrifying. As they drove through scenes that can only be described as pure hell, we looked out the window with them at 60-metre flames, we drove through ember attacks with them, we heard the howl of the flames and the wind above the wails of the sirens; yet, all the time these men and women remained calm, giving instructions on radios, focusing on the road ahead, driven by a sense of duty to get the job done.

At this stage, I'd like to pay a special tribute to the Rural Fire Service crews in my own area of Warringah, although we were fortunate enough to avoid any bushfires ourselves. The men and women of our local units constantly stepped forward and were deployed to various locations across the state, and they did us proud. To Inspector George Sheppard, and to the men and women of the Northern Beaches District of the NSW Rural Fire Service, I say thank you. The individual units are Beacon Hill, Belrose, Coal and Candle, Coasters Retreat, Cottage Point and Davidson—and here, I would especially like to commend the actions and the volunteerism of my predecessor, Tony Abbott—Duffy's Forest, Ingleside, Mackerel Beach, Scotland Island, Terry Hills, Tumbledown Dick, Warringah and West Pittwater.

Our nation has experienced bushfires before, with devastating loss of lives and property. Bushfires are part of our nation's history and character, and that can't be denied. But this year was different; we all know that, even those who won't admit it publicly. They know this year was different. The scale, the intensity and the reach of these fires was different. The fact that fires burned in so many states at the same time was different. The firefighters are telling us that it was different and that the fire behaved differently. Flames were more intense and the fires created their own unique weather patterns. The people of towns that were burnt to the ground are telling us that this was different. The experts are telling us that this was different. Therefore, our reaction and our response, especially from those of us here in this place, must also be different.

I welcome the fact that governments at various levels are prepared to investigate these fires, but we must not become bogged down in more red tape. The various inquiries and royal commissions will look into all the factors that contributed to the severity of the disaster, and I encourage those and look forward to reading the various terms of reference. I intend to help by listening and by finding solutions to prevent future disasters. As a member of the House's Environment and Energy Committee, I look forward to constructive discussion as we carry out our inquiry into the efficacy of past and current vegetation and land management policy, practice and legislation and their effect on the intensity and frequency of bushfires.

This disaster will provide many lessons about Indigenous land management practices, about resourcing and, of course, about the impacts of climate change. In that respect, I wholeheartedly support the comments made by the member for Bennelong, in his very moving condolence speech, that today is a day for commemoration, not politics. One thing I would like to mention is the need to recognise that these fires are not a warning about climate change; they are climate change. The Leader of the Opposition mentioned that this is not normal. I fear this is actually the new normal. I for one refuse to accept this new normal and I know many others inside and outside of this place who refuse to accept it as well. I will be doing all I can to ensure that that is not the legacy we are leaving for future generations.

We all know that bushfires lead to new growth—to rebirth. It's what has been happening for tens of thousands of years. My hope is that these bushfires, which in many ways have galvanised our community, will lead to a new growth in our discourse and to a rebirth and reset of climate change policy in Australia.
Mr PERRETT (Moreton) (13:02): I rise to speak on this important motion of condolence and commemoration. This has been a summer of horror for way too many Australians—in fact, for all Australians. Many have lost loved ones, and I honour them all today. Tragically, 33 people have lost their lives. Children have lost fathers and mothers. Wives have lost husbands; husbands have lost wives. Parents have lost daughters and sons. Some died as they were battling to save the lives and homes of the rest of their community. They are true heroes and we'll never forget their service. Brave firefighters—some young and enthusiastic, some veterans who had outrun many a heaving mass of flames—put their lives on the line only to have them snatched away.

On Kangaroo Island, Dick Lang and his son Clayton Lang had been fighting the fires side by side for two days before they lost the fight. Sadly, three Americans who travelled to our burning country to help us perished when their Lockheed C-130 Hercules air tanker crashed. Many Australians have lost homes. Three thousand or so homes have been destroyed by fire. All their possessions and all those happy family memories, built up over a lifetime, have gone up in flames. A billion animals have perished. It is hard to even contemplate the enormity of that carnage now and the legacy to follow. Our precious wildlife may never recover completely from this loss.

As a nation, we've been shocked to see our fellow Australians grappling with an inferno that could not be contained. So, too, the world has been shocked to see those images. We were shocked to see families with nowhere to go sheltering on the beach as the smoke turned day into night, the sea their only form of escape. Even those of us who have homes far from the bushfires have seen, smelt and breathed the effect of these conflagrations. Australia's air quality on some days over that 'black summer' was the worst in the world. This 'black summer' has been devastating. It has been heartbreaking. Australians are tough people. We've been through disasters before, but this 'black summer' has tested even the toughest of us.

Some of the toughest are the brave firefighters who've worked their guts out for months—some every single day without a break, for weeks at a time. Some are professional firefighters, remunerated well, whose skills have been utilised to the fullest in the biggest test of their career so far, I would suggest, for many. Other firefighters are volunteers, part of the important Rural Fire Service that stretches across the country. These firefighters have day jobs as well. They have to balance time off work not for a day or two but for weeks and months. The businesses that employ these volunteers deserve credit as well. The volunteers can't put all of their energies into fighting bushfires if they're worried about losing their jobs. And I understand the concerns bosses would have, especially in small businesses.

We also need to remember these brave firefighters working day and night have carried on even when some of their own—their friends, their colleagues and even their family members—have lost their lives in the line of duty. That must be so difficult, and yet they have carried on with true courage. They face down the personal fear, the exhaustion and the sheer emotion of seeing lives and properties destroyed around them. They've shown us what true courage is. They've shown us what selfless service really looks like. We'll be forever in the debt of every single one of those brave firefighters who fought the largest and fiercest fires that this nation has ever seen. The worst of times so often brings out the best in people.

These fires have been the worst of times, and in my community on the south side of Brisbane there have been many who've risen to the occasion. I'll just name a few—I know I'll be missing some! The Islamic Council of Queensland raised $55,000, which they donated to the Country Women's Association to help bushfire victims. I just love the balance of that—the Islamic Council of Queensland giving money to the Country Women's Association. The CWA was a big part of my youth, and now I have a big Islamic community. I love that link. The Tamil community in Brisbane used their Pongal Festival as an opportunity to fundraise for bushfire victims in other states. The Ipswich City Symphony Orchestra performed at Graceville Uniting Church in Moreton to fundraise for the Red Cross bushfire appeal—and a big shout-out to the Red Cross for the wonderful work they do. Coming up this Sunday, the Annerley community's Facebook page is hosting a community screening of the Fire Fight Australia concert at Souths Rugby Union Club in Annerley to raise funds for Queensland firefighters and Brisbane based wildlife carers. And there were many other fundraising efforts, but I'm not going to name all of them.

Even though Moreton was obviously well out of the reach of the flames, local community groups stepped up to help in the wake of these dreadful bushfires. That is true Australian community spirit. It's been a summer of darkness, but it will be years of rebuilding—rebuilding homes that have been destroyed, rebuilding lives that have been broken, rebuilding our native habitats that are essential to the survival of many native species that were already threatened and now may be right on the brink of extinction. As the weeks and months of recovery roll on, it is important that we remember to ask those who have been impacted if they are okay. Putting on a brave face is all well and good, but everyone needs to feel supported, especially those who have endured these traumatic circumstances. That is something that all Australians can do: we can support each other.
The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Bird): I understand it is the wish of honourable members to signify at this stage their respect and sympathy by rising in their places, and I ask all present to do so.

Honourable members having stood in their places—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I thank members.

Mr RICK WILSON (O'Connor) (13:08): by leave—I move:

That further proceedings be conducted in the House.

Question agreed to.

Sitting suspended from 13:09 to 16:00

COMMITTEES

Environment and Energy Committee

Report

Consideration resumed of the motion:

That the House take note of the report.

Mr JOSH WILSON (Fremantle) (16:00): I'm glad to make some comments on the tabling of this Environment and Energy Committee report, which covers the inquiry we were tasked with by the Minister for Energy and Emissions Reduction to look into the prerequisites for a nuclear power industry in Australia. I should be absolutely clear at the outset, for those who might not listen too far into this speech, in saying that there was no testimony or evidence to the inquiry that supported a change to Australia's existing bipartisan moratorium on nuclear energy.

More than 10 years on from the Switkowski review, nuclear energy continues to be expensive, slow, inflexible, uninsurable, toxic and dangerous. In evidence to our inquiry, Dr Switkowski, who conducted the review for the Howard government, said there is 'no coherent business case to finance an Australian nuclear industry'. Dr Switkowski also said:

… one of the things that have changed over the last decade or so is that nuclear power has got more expensive rather than less expensive.

So it is frankly bizarre that Liberal and National members of the committee have recommended that the moratorium on nuclear power—the bipartisan and longstanding moratorium on nuclear power in Australia—should be lifted, and, what's more, that considerable government and agency resources should be expended to pave the way for that to occur. In itself, that would be madness. But, in the circumstances we find ourselves in in this country, with the challenges we have before ourselves with respect to climate change and our energy system more broadly, to waste those resources on a nuclear frolic would be nothing short of ridiculous, especially when you consider that it is the record of this government to cut funding to the CSIRO and to cut funding to the Australian Renewable Energy Agency.

The clearest, most sensible and most consistently supported proposition to emerge from the evidence to our inquiry was that Australia's highest priority should be the design and settlement of a national energy policy. Almost every expert who appeared before us made that point. I will quote one of them, Ian Macfarlane, a member of a previous coalition government.

It was put to him:

… would you agree with Dr Switkowski that the No. 1 priority in Australia is a settled national energy policy framework?

Mr Macfarlane said:

Of course I would, having been the longest serving energy minister in Australia and seeing the various and diverging views. Until we settle on a single energy policy you'll continue to have the investor uncertainty that is creating all sorts of issues combined with the unreliability of the grid, due to different mixes of energy which don't sustain the frequency and, therefore, are prone to blackouts and shortages of energy at certain peak periods. So it would be, in my opinion, a great outcome to achieve a single national energy policy.

Yet that is the one core task of the government, particularly in this portfolio area, that they can't bring themselves to focus on. We don't have a national energy policy to guide Australia at a significant time of change, when our electricity system is being transformed and reconfigured. That's an abject failure of this government. It's cost them multiple leaders. We're onto our third prime minister, largely because they cannot get their act together on that front. Yet, when Labor members of the committee recommended quite simply that government should work towards the design and settlement of a national energy policy, they wouldn't have that, and government members of the committee said they wouldn't have that because they thought it would reflect badly on the government.

I want to address some of the key myths that underpin the strange recommendations in this inquiry report. The first is that we need to lift a moratorium on nuclear power in order to have a conversation about nuclear power.
We're having a conversation about nuclear power right now. I spent four or five months, as you did, Deputy Speaker Zimmerman, and as did other members present, having a conversation about nuclear power. Of course, it follows on, at the federal level, from the Switkowski review 10 years ago. In the meantime, there was the royal commission in South Australia. There is currently a Victorian upper house inquiry. We have done nothing other than have conversation after conversation after conversation about nuclear power. That is an utter furphy.

The second myth is—notwithstanding all its other failures: that it's slow, that it's dangerous, that we don't know what to do with the waste, that it doesn't suit the emerging needs of our energy system—that somehow nuclear power is cheap. Nothing could be further from the truth. The GenCost report by CSIRO and AEMO originally found that nuclear, in terms of capital cost, was far and away the most expensive form of new generation. That was updated in December. I know there were members of the committee who didn't want to accept the original report. It was updated in December, and it repeats the findings of the earlier report that nuclear power is far and away the most expensive form of new energy.

We had evidence from countless experts, including AEMO, about the way that we should go with respect to new generation in our system. The chair of AEMO said:

What we find today at current technology cost is that unfirm ed renewables in the form of wind and solar are effectively the cheapest form of energy production. If we look at firmed renewables, for example wind and solar firmed with pumped hydro energy storage, that cost, at current cost, is roughly comparable to new build gas or new build coal-fired generation. Given the learning rate effect that we have just discussed, our expectation is that renewables will further decrease in their cost, and therefore firmed renewables will well and truly become the lowest cost of generation for the NEM.

That's not just what our experts find in Australia; that is what is happening around the world. In the previous decade, levelised cost estimates for utility-scale solar dropped by 88 per cent and wind by 69 per cent, while nuclear increased by 23 per cent. Remember that the evidence from Dr Switkowski, who undertook a review for the Howard government, previously found that, in the years that have since elapsed, nuclear has only got more expensive.

Myth No. 3: we can never get a zero emissions electricity system without nuclear energy. That has also been shown to be wrong. I put it to Professor Blakers of the ANU that some people believe that maybe 60 or 70 per cent renewables is the most that we can get. Professor Blakers said:

No, you can never get beyond 100 per cent, and 100 per cent is technically straightforward. It's also not very difficult economically.

That's what Professor Blakers, an expert in new energy technology, said to the inquiry.

Myth No. 4: the rest of the world is going big in nuclear and Australia is somehow missing out. Again, nothing could be further from the truth. The World Nuclear Industry Status Report makes it clear that nuclear power generation peaked in 2006. The number of reactors peaked in 2002. The share of nuclear power in the electricity mix worldwide peaked in 1996. The number of reactors under construction peaked in 1979. The share of nuclear power in the world has dropped from its peak in 1996 of 17 per cent to 10 per cent today. Countries that were big in nuclear, like France, have committed to reducing their current reliance by a third. Countries like Korea that were looking at building nuclear in their own country have decided not to do that. Nuclear is a dead industry, and the idea that we would take it up is, frankly, absurd.

The fifth myth is that nuclear is now safe and no longer a problem, so we should build nuclear plants in coastal cities around Australia. This industry likes to tell fairytales at every turn, and the fairytale is always that the nightmares of the past have been magically fixed by the nuclear fairy and we don't have to worry about that anymore. That was said after Three Mile Island. Then we had Chernobyl. It was said after Chernobyl. Then we had Fukushima. In Fukushima, 40,000 people continue to be displaced. Nuclear radiation is pouring into the ocean with every day. It has cost the Japanese government $200 billion. The Japanese government estimate is that the final cost will be between $450 billion and $650 billion. Our own agencies, ANSTO and ARPANSA, say that nuclear should never and can never be considered safe. We have a plan, even in New South Wales, in relation to the very small ANSTO facility that ensures that there's sufficient iodine kept for the possibility of some sort of nuclear accident. It's the same in France; it's the same in all developed countries.

It's absurd that, when we should be talking about the big priorities in this country in relation to energy and emissions, we have been sent off on another nuclear frolic and some people are taking that as the basis for floating all kinds of nuclear thought bubbles. We don't have a settled energy policy in this country. Our emissions are not falling and we are not taking on the challenges when it comes to transmission and grid design that we desperately need. Nuclear power should never occur in Australia, and anyone who argues that has their head in the sand.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question is that the document be noted. I call the member for Goldstein.
Mr TIM WILSON (Goldstein) (16:10): The member for Fremantle and I may share the same surname and I may occasionally joke that he is my cousin—since apparently you can now go back to just about any generation and claim cousins, which the member has accused me of at times in the past—but I can, sure as hell, tell you that we do not share the same views on the future of our great country. I say that because I have never heard so much rubbish as we just heard from the member for Fremantle. Why are the Australian Labor Party opposed to the future? Why are they so anti science, so anti technology and so anti the potential of what we can do for this great country?

We have an enormous challenge in confronting the transition of our energy market. Why would they close down viable technologies—even a discussion, even a consultation, even a pathway about what we could do to deliver a lower carbon future? They are so anti science that they would shut down a pathway or a discussion around one energy generation model. It is simply absurd. But it's what we've come to expect from the Australian Labor Party, because they're anti science and they're not interested in technological solutions. The only thing they're interested in—and, of course, the minister made this point in question time today—are new taxes. They love new taxes. They don't see the solution to our challenges around climate change, around reducing our emissions or around transitioning our energy grid through the prism of what we can build for the future; they put it on the basis of how they can tax it for themselves. No answers; no solutions. That's why they sit on the other side of this chamber.

What we got from this report, expertly led by the wonderful member for Fairfax, was a good and serious consideration of the important issues that we need to discuss if we are to consider nuclear energy. Labor's answer is simply to dissent and say, 'No go.' We're working with the community to make sure that we can have viable options to consider the future generation challenge that Australia needs. It actually came back with a series of expert recommendations. I think that is an excellent consideration and should be fully supported and endorsed.

Mr Josh Wilson interjecting—

Mr TIM WILSON: The member for Fremantle again indulges himself by throwing out propositions in his antiscience crusade and antiscience agenda. Some of us are going to stand by the science, stand by the technology and stand by the ideas that will help build the future of this country. If you want to stay, member of Fremantle, on your continued antiscience, antitechnology and antifuture agenda, then I just hope that the good people of the electorate of Fremantle know the consequences of your antiscience, antitechnology and antifuture agenda. We on this side of the chamber are about the future. So, what are we doing? We're looking at making sure that there is serious consideration of different options of lower emissions technology to generate future energy investment. Of course, it has to be done strategically to make sure that we take the Australian community with us.

We agree, fundamentally, that old-school reactors that created problems in the past—with low-grade technology, with low-grade regulations, and with serious challenges regarding environmental factors or human health—should not be considered. We start from that very basic proposition. That's what this report proposes as well. But, when it comes to new technology and innovation, the merits of proposals should be properly considered and not just ruled out by the anti-science, anti-technology, anti-future member for Fremantle and many other members of the Labor Party on the other side of the chamber—and the Greens, mind you. If they really believe a lot of their rhetoric then they should be having a proper discussion about technology solutions and they should not be having closed minds.

Mr Josh Wilson interjecting—

Mr TIM WILSON: The member for Fremantle's asking what it is I'm calling him. I'm calling you technology bigots. You have closed minds. You are technology bigots about the future of this country and what can be achieved through things like a discussion around nuclear power.

We need to make sure we have the regulations in place so that we can fully consider it. We need to make sure we have in place assistance for and development of proposals by ANSTO to make sure that they can fully consider it and so there's a proper assessment about the viability, if we're going to go down the pathway to nuclear power. We had a discussion, and the committee made a particular recommendation, around commissioning the Productivity Commission or other equivalent expert reviewer to undertake an independent assessment to inform the discussion on things like the contribution that can be made by nuclear power. Of course, we also have to make sure that, if there is any consideration in the future, it maintains a moratorium on old, outdated technology that won't have any value in the future of the energy grid in this country.

But the approach of the member for Fairfax and the committee that he led—open-minded, forward-looking and interested in the power of technology to contribute to the future building of this country—is such an important part of this discussion. The technology bigotry that we hear from the opposition benches is so disappointing but completely unsurprising. So rarely have we seen an example of a solution from them when there are serious
challenges we face. The Labor Party like to talk about the challenge of climate change, as I do, but, when it comes down to it, I look for answers and solutions. That's because I actually take it seriously. No-one can look at the challenge of reducing our greenhouse gas emissions, while trying to deliver reliable and affordable power to households, and then take whole options off the table without any proper consideration of the technological changes that make them viable. This is the big part—

**Mr Josh Wilson interjecting**—

The **DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Zimmerman): Order!

**Mr TIM WILSON**: If the member for Fremantle wants to dismiss these important propositions as part of that discussion then he is selling out his own constituents and the people of Australia. He's selling out the health of our environment and our climate so that he can make partisan political points in this chamber and in the House of Representatives. That is why so little credence is given to the narrow-minded, technology-bigoted approach of the Australian Labor Party towards nuclear power. Let's face it: we know that even their own supporters don't agree with them. The CFMMEU wrote a letter, published in newspapers only recently, talking about why Labor's technology bigotry should end around these issues of nuclear power.

The reality is that there are opportunities and there are jobs, depending on what pathway we go down.

**Mr Josh Wilson interjecting**—

The **DEPUTY SPEAKER**: Order! I warn the member for Fremantle.

**Mr TIM WILSON**: When we have the Labor Party's technology bigotry and anti-science, anti-technology, anti-future agenda—with not just the member for Fremantle but all other members of the opposition as well not prepared to look seriously at the challenges and opportunities that can come out of a discussion around nuclear power—what we're seeing is a close-minded approach. That's what this report specifically tries to prise open—a serious discussion around the issues.

In the Goldstein electorate, we're actually interested in these challenges around technology. We're very fortunate that, recently, the member for Fairfax, who led this important inquiry, came to the Goldstein community to have a discussion with community representatives and people who are interested in this topic, on Thursday 13 January 2020. In fact, he had two discussions. During the community forum, we had 50 locals express an interest in the issues of nuclear power and energy generation. One of the people who attended—it was wonderful to see him there—was Ian Hore-Lacey, who is a senior adviser to the London based World Nuclear Association. He categorically destroyed many of the arguments, through simple facts, evidence and reason about the potential safety of the technology and what it can do, and he made sure that there was a proper discussion with the member for Fairfax about the complexity of the issues.

Sitting behind him more than anything else when community representatives came forward—and there were pro and negative people on the issue—were genuine concerns, about health and safety and environmental management, around long-term issues around the storage of spent uranium. They came forward and said, 'Raise those concerns and put to people the facts, particularly around where storage solutions occur.' But the one thing that became abundantly clear was that people's concerns were genuine but they were often also based on misinformation. It's the sort of misinformation that we heard from the member for Fremantle and I've no doubt we'll hear from other members of the Labor Party. They're always very excited about running a scare campaign. They don't actually like to deal with the facts. That's going to be our great challenge: how to make sure the misinformation from the Australian Labor Party towards nuclear power that leads to scaring people—as they so often do, and they have a long track record of doing so—does not mislead the Australian people.

**Ms STANLEY** (Werriwa—Opposition Whip) (16:20): I rise to make my contribution on the House of Representatives Standing Committee on the Environment and Energy's report Not without your approval: a way forward for nuclear technology in Australia. I acknowledge the work done by the secretariat and members and thank all those who made contributions to this report.

I think it would be fair to say that I find the recommendations of the report to be disappointing and not a reasonable conclusion in the second decade of the 21st century. I acknowledge and concur with the dissenting report compiled by Labor members and the remarks by the member for Fremantle in this place today. I was privileged to be a member of the House of Representatives environment and energy committee in the 45th Parliament. I note with interest that the expert contributors to this report are still in agreement that it is the uncertainty of energy policy which needs to be addressed by this government. That was the first recommendation of a report by this committee in the 45th Parliament entitled Powering our future: inquiry into modernising Australia's electricity grid. I further note, with disappointment, that three years later the government has still to respond to that report.
The government frequently lectures about its economic credentials, yet it has not taken expert advice that has one clear message: providing energy security, certainty and stability in the grid will in turn drive down prices. Certainly Mr Ian Macfarlane, Chief Executive of the Queensland Resources Council and a former energy minister, agreed in the evidence he gave to the committee for this report. He said:

Until we settle on a single energy policy you'll continue to have the investor uncertainty that is creating all sorts of issues combined with the unreliability of the grid, due to different mixes of energy which don't sustain the frequency and, therefore, are prone to blackouts and shortages of energy at certain peak periods. So it would be, in my opinion, a great outcome to achieve a single national energy policy.

The government is continually hampered by the many contrary views within its ranks. It seems as though the need to ensure the numbers in its party room has this government too paralysed to do anything at all.

Nuclear power does not provide the circuit-breaker the government is looking for. It will not enhance the government's economic credentials. Nuclear is not a cheaper alternative. The committee heard evidence from Dr Ziggy Switkowski—it is in the committee Hansard of 29 August 2019, page 2—that 'there is no coherent business case to finance an Australian nuclear industry'. He further added that 'one of the things that has changed over the last decade or so is that nuclear power has got more expensive rather than less expensive'.

Honourable members interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Zimmerman): Order! There is too much chatter in the chamber. I ask you to be more respectful of the speaker, please.

Ms STANLEY: Small modular reactors do not exist anywhere in the world, and the committee heard evidence from academics that paper based designs are always the most efficient. And they're right: everything works on paper, and it's cheaper too. But experts suggest it is conceivable that it could well be into the 2040s before such a plant would be ready for generation, because there is not currently a ready-made workforce in Australia to provide the sort of expertise that is required to plan and build such a plant, let alone the time it will take to consider where that plant might be located, as I'm sure much of the Australian population will not want one in their neighbourhood.

Nuclear power is in decline all over the world. Countries like Germany and France have been planning to and starting to decommission their plants. For them, the risk of accident or nuclear leakage and the damage that it in turn does to all life is too high, and quite obviously there is no economic advantage to keeping their plants operating.

Renewables like wind and solar, combined with technology that provides battery and base-load power, are a much cheaper alternative. In fact, that's what we see now in South Australia. The Tesla battery has saved South Australian consumers $40 million each year since development. That number's set to increase by a further $47 million as its energy output increases and it supports the grid during times of peak supply deficit.

Nuclear power is not a cheaper energy source. Without even looking at the operating expenditure, waste management and further infrastructure, the last power plant built in Canada cost Can$14.5 billion—and that was just under 20 years ago. In fact, Hinkley Point C in the UK will cost the British public between 55 billion and 91 billion pounds in government subsidies over its lifetime. We all know who would shoulder the burden of investing into a dated and expensive energy source: it would be the Australian taxpayers. A nuclear power plant has only ever been delivered through heavy government financial support. The only thing that will assist the power grid and support cheaper power in Australia is a proper energy policy that will give investors and governments certainty into the future. Certainty attracts and harnesses investment.

Nowhere in the world has truly found a safe and permanent way of dealing with the waste generated by nuclear facilities. Since the Three Mile Island disaster in 1979, there have been at least 19 incidents at or involving nuclear power stations. The most recent in Fukushima was caused not by human error but by a natural disaster, and no amount of planning and safety protocols can keep a nuclear power plant safe in these circumstances. We've just seen over the last few months how widespread a single natural disaster can be. Nine years after Fukushima, the area cannot be accessed and much of the population—human, flora and fauna—are starting to be affected by the radiation that leaked after that earthquake and continues to do so.

Nuclear won't just drain taxpayer funds; it will drain our most precious resource, water. Nuclear power production uses an extensive amount of water, and while this country continues to suffer longer and more extensive droughts, nuclear energy would simply further deplete the extremely limited water resources in our regional areas.

Nuclear power is not the answer for the rest of the world. Belgium, Germany and Switzerland are already in stages of decommissioning their reactors. Of Germany's total power generation mix in 2017, 38.5 per cent was
from renewable resources. In the same year, nuclear made up 13 per cent of the total power generation mix, and Germany's use of coal was just 15 per cent.

It's time this government developed a plan for something. It has been warned for years about the need for a national energy policy, but, as usual, it doesn't listen to the experts. Let's actually be smart about our energy future and develop the framework needed to transition Australia to a lower-cost, lower-emission, higher-tech industry that will create jobs for years.

We don't have to talk about Paris agreements or targets, or whether we're going to meet them. But what we do know after the disastrous summer is that we have to reduce our impact on this planet, its resources and the climate, and we need to do it now. It's time for the name-calling and blame-apportioning to go. We just need to resolve to provide energy by cleaner and greener means. And, if it's not for ourselves, then it's for the future of our children and grandchildren. Nuclear does not provide that solution.

**Dr ALLEN (Higgins) (16:28):** I rise in support of this document, which I am pleased to say has had a huge amount of consideration. I'd like to congratulate the member for Fairfax for chairing the committee that presented this very fine report. And I would like to note that in my first speech I stated that I believe in climate action, that I know that climate change is real and that, as a scientist, I was very sure that as a community we need to think about all forms of technology going forward.

For me, it's not just an environmental imperative to have climate action; it's an economic imperative. In fact, with the world transitioning to a carbon-neutral future, it's also an economic inevitability. Australia is at that tipping point where we can be part of the technological revolution. As a scientist, to hear that we are considering, with an open mind, the many options that are available to us is absolutely fantastic.

I wanted to address some of the information that was passed from the other side of this House. Firstly, I think it's very important to delineate that this report from the House Standing Committee on the Environment and Energy, *Not without your approval: a way forward for nuclear technology in Australia*, was a very carefully worded title—that is, we need to understand the community's view on new nuclear. The report made very clear the difference between first- and second-generation nuclear and third- and fourth-generation nuclear.

I won't disagree with some of the things that were said by the other side in this chamber about first- and second-generation nuclear. In fact, much, if not all, of their debate was about first- and second-generation nuclear. That's actually unhelpful and extremely disappointing. With the greatest respect, I've heard a lot from the other side that they would like to see a bipartisan way forward. What we're talking about here is a discussion that's a sensible discussion based on the sensible proposition that third- and fourth-generation nuclear is in the future. It hasn't been commercialised. It's not yet scalable. It's an opportunity for Australia to consider.

The report said that, in order to even consider a partial lift of the moratorium on the environment protection act, four things would need to occur. Firstly, we'd need to have a technological assessment, and that would need to be undertaken by ANSTO. Secondly, we would need a readiness assessment, and that would be undertaken by ARPANSA. The reason we'd need a readiness assessment is that, unfortunately, we don't have a large body of nuclear physicists or nuclear engineers and we'd need to look into things like facilities that may be required to build a new nuclear industry. Thirdly, it talked about the Productivity Commission looking into the economics of new nuclear—third- and fourth-generation nuclear. Fourthly, it said there'd need to be bipartisan support and a public willingness to explore this as an option.

To me, as a scientist, that is incredibly sensible, very practical and very tangible. It doesn't say, 'Let's get in there, boots and all.' What it says is that we need to think about this in a considered and open-minded way. That's why I'm very disappointed that the opposite side of the benches have just come in and started talking about all these things which are true for first- and second-generation nuclear, but, if they read the report—which I did very carefully—the report was very careful to delineate between old nuclear and new nuclear.

I have a strong commitment to climate action. The people of Higgins have told me that they have a strong commitment to climate action. But the issue with climate action is that it is highly unlikely for there to be one silver bullet on energy. We know this because we know already that the world is transitioning to a carbon-neutral future, but there are different energy mixes in each country. We do know that many of those countries that already have carbon neutral 2050 targets—particularly larger economies—have nuclear in their mix.

To be fair, the nuclear that is in their mix is second-generation nuclear, and some of those are closing shop because of—quite rightly, as the opposition has said—the safety concerns around first- and second-generation nuclear. Chernobyl and Fukushima were first- and second-generation nuclear effectively, and that old technology has issues with large amounts of waste. It has concerns around nuclear proliferation. It has concerns about cost. And of course there are concerns about waste disposal. Many of those things have not been solved.
However, third- and fourth-generation nuclear has had massive investment by social good ventures—such as the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, which has invested billions of dollars into this technology—because this new technology is based on a completely different technological underpinning. This is because the accidents that occurred, like the Japanese accident, were based on this old technology where, if there was an explosion or a natural disaster, the energy activation that occurred was not halted. The exciting possibility about new nuclear is that, if an accident were to happen, it actually, through gravity, disconnects the mechanism, dropping that modular reactor into a nuclear bunker and therefore immediately stopping it and protecting safety.

This is a really different way of thinking about things, and it's amazing it wasn't thought of with first and second generation, but there are new technologies coming all the time. New nuclear, which includes small modular reactors and molten salt reactors, has a very different way of using and being safe—from the point of view of the actual chemical reaction itself. It is also based, more often, on different types of compounds. With new nuclear, molten salt reactors use thorium, for instance, and thorium is abundant everywhere in the world, it's a highly abundant natural element, and it doesn't have the same association with nuclear proliferation, so the risks of nuclear proliferation are not the same as they are for uranium based nuclear, for instance.

When we talk about waste—and I am not a technocrat when it comes to nuclear; I am a medical researcher, so I don't know as much about the technical details—what I understand is the production of waste is much smaller with new nuclear than old nuclear, so the requirement for the storage of waste is much smaller than it is for old nuclear. We know in Australia—and a previous federal minister for health, the Hon. Michael Wooldridge, likes to tell me about this—that when we first talked about using nuclear medicine in Australia there was a very large reaction from the community, a very negative one, quite frankly. Michael likes to tell me, 'We changed the framing of the words so that people could understand how this technology would benefit them.' Now we know that nearly one in two Australians are using some form of nuclear medicine in their diagnosis and treatments for things like cancer—and people are so much more accepting, because they understand how it benefits them. If we're going to have a strong reaction from the opposition using terminologies that relate to an old form of technology, I personally think that's very unhelpful for an open-minded discussion about how we're going to get to a carbon-neutral future.

To get back to what we're trying to achieve: we want to move to a carbon-neutral future and we're very committed to climate action, but what we need to do is be open-minded about the technologies that might be available. As a scientist, I know that it's sometimes very difficult to predict the future of science and technology development. I can give you a number of examples. I was involved in gene therapy and stem cell research, and it's very hard to predict the benefits that will come out of those sorts of technologies. At the turn of the century, for instance, we thought that we would have gene therapy available for treatment for patients. The technology that was developed in mice has resulted in something called transgenic mice models, and the result of that is helping the development of medicines, each and every day, for patients. It's helping the development of biological models, which are incredibly powerful. We would never have been able to predict that in 1999, but in 2020 we know that transgenic mice and gene therapy in these sorts of models have been incredibly effective and very useful for humankind. I would argue the same is true for new technologies, particularly in this area of energy. Being a scientist, I am quite well connected to the global scientific community, and there are massive amounts of investments in this new energy area.

A division having been called in the House of Representatives—

Sitting suspended from 16:37 to 16:50

Dr ALLEN: I'd like to highlight that today, Australia's Chief Scientist, Alan Finkel, delivered a very important speech at the National Press Club. I'd like to quote directly from his speech:

I want you to imagine a highway exclusively devoted to delivering the world's energy. Each lane is restricted to trucks that carry one of the world's seven large-scale sources of primary energy: coal, oil, natural gas, nuclear, hydro, solar and wind—note that hydrogen is a storage; it's not an energy—

Our current energy security comes at a price, the carbon dioxide emissions from the trucks in the three busiest lanes: the ones for coal, oil and natural gas. We can't just put up roadblocks overnight to stop these trucks; they are carrying the overwhelming majority of the world's energy supply. But, what if we expand clean electricity production carried by the trucks in the solar and wind lanes — three or four times over — into an economically efficient clean energy future.

Alan Finkel is talking about imagination, openness and possibility. We need to focus on harnessing the power of new technology, including new nuclear, in my view. It's worth keeping an open mind to developing new opportunities. (Time expired)

Mrs PHILLIPS (Gilmore) (16:51): I'm pleased to have the opportunity to speak on this report today as a supplementary member on the nuclear inquiry. I stand today in steadfast opposition to the inquiry's report. I
strongly oppose the lifting of the moratorium on nuclear energy and a shift towards nuclear power. In my very first speech in this place, I spoke about nuclear energy. I talked about how the government needed to turn its attention away from nuclear energy proposals, and I made a commitment to my community that I would fight against any plan to pursue this. Today, I want to reassure my community that I stand by that commitment.

I will never accept a nuclear power plant being built in our community. The risks are simply too great. There are risks to our beautiful coastline, to our health, to the reputation of our primary producers and to the hospitality and tourism industries that thrive on our environment. We know that accidents happen. We have seen that.

We also know all too well at the moment that natural disasters happen. Already, this year, we have seen unprecedented bushfires and the devastation they have caused. Sadly, just this week, my community has also seen the damage that floods can do. We cannot afford to add nuclear power risks to our precious environment.

Risks aside, there is simply no evidence for nuclear power in Australia. I do not believe that we need to undertake further investigations into the science and economics of nuclear energy as the second recommendation in this report states. As far as I am concerned, this is already settled and putting more resources into this is a costly and wasteful distraction. There is already so much evidence against this.

Nuclear power has been in decline across the world for years. According to the World Nuclear Industry Status Report 2019, nuclear energy produces less power now than 10 years ago, while wind and solar continue to grow. The capital cost of nuclear energy per kilowatt hour has increased, not decreased, as you would expect of an industry that has been around for 60 years.

The New Delhi Energy and Resources Institute’s senior director of electricity and fuel division called nuclear energy ‘frightfully expensive’ and stated that it has only ever been delivered through very considerable government financial support. The Australian Energy Market Operator and the CSIRO found in their GenCost 2018 report that nuclear energy was hugely expensive—both large and small-scale. What did the market operator instead tell the committee? That the cheapest form of energy production was unverified wind and solar—renewables.

Dr Switkowski, a nuclear physicist and Chancellor of RMIT told the committee:

There is no coherent business case to finance an Australian nuclear industry.

Dr Switkowski also made clear that nuclear power is getting more expensive, not less expensive. I could go on. Submission after submission, expert after expert, clearly saying that nuclear power is not the way to go. Instead, what we need to be doing and what we should be talking about is renewable energy. It is absolutely clear that we need more investment in renewables. We need cleaner, cheaper power—and that cannot be found in nuclear energy, but it can be found in renewables.

This whole discussion, this whole report, is merely a distraction so the government can hide from the fact they are taking no action to move Australia forward in the renewable energy space. We don't even have a national energy policy, something the experts continually pointed out during these hearings as well. While the government spends time talking about nuclear energy, we are wasting the opportunities that renewables can provide.

My electorate on the New South Wales South Coast has the lowest workforce participation rate in Australia. We have the highest youth unemployment rate in New South Wales. We need jobs and we need them now. A renewable energy hub in our region would create jobs that we desperately need—and I believe this is where our future lies—jobs in industries like engineering, construction and maintenance of renewable energy infrastructure; jobs in battery manufacturing and installation, logistics and distribution. The list goes on. Local community groups like the Southcoast Health and Sustainability Alliance and Repower Shoalhaven have already seen that potential in renewables. These groups are helping the individuals, businesses and community groups invest in solar energy, reducing power bills and helping the transition to cleaner, cheaper power. My concern is the damage that proposals like nuclear energy can make and will make to the potential of those jobs.

Tim Buckley, the director of Energy Finance Studies at the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis told the committee about the harm lifting the moratorium could do to regional investment and jobs. He told us about the likely negative investor reaction to the suggestion that Australia might lift the moratorium. I will quote Mr Buckley's reasoning for this. He said:

… this would cause significant community debate over an extended period of time, and if it were eventually passed, the presumption would be that the Government was proposing to then provide a massive multi-decade capital subsidy towards nuclear generation capacity. After a decade of energy policy chaos and a trebling of gas and electricity prices, a further delay to debate this issue would further lift investor uncertainty in Australian electricity markets.

Mr Buckley went on:
If successful, this would then crowd out private capital investment in lower cost alternatives, and with a 10-20 year construction timetable, the Australian people and Australian industry would have to continue carrying the burden of higher energy prices while we wait.

Instead, Mr Buckley suggested that a wind or solar project could be built 10 times faster in one or two years. Not only will nuclear power be unsafe, costly and slow but it will also put investment in renewables and the jobs this can create at risk. I simply will not accept that. The New South Wales South Coast could be benefiting from this job growth right now, but the government's obsession with nuclear power is putting that at risk. They continue to pursue this dead issue against all evidence. This report is only one example of that.

The Morrison government's biggest advocate for nuclear power has just had a promotion. He is the new minister for resources and water. Keith Pitt has been a vocal advocate for nuclear power, and appointing him to the resources portfolio sends quite a message. I have a message in return: the people of the South Coast will not accept a nuclear reactor in Jervis Bay. We will not accept a nuclear reactor in our pristine environment anywhere along the South Coast—not now, not ever.

Forgive me for diving into the history books for a short moment. I'd like to briefly touch on the long background of the proposed nuclear reactor in Jervis Bay, because this is not a new proposal. It is not something that those opposite thought up yesterday or even while hearing the evidence during this inquiry. A nuclear reactor in Jervis Bay was first explored in the late 1960s. In 1969, the Liberal-National government led by John Gorton gave in-principle support for the construction of a nuclear power station at Murrays Beach in Jervis Bay. Back then, it was expected to cost $131.3 million to build. It took until 1972 for the cabinet to decide to not altogether discount but defer the project 'pending clarification of technical problems with overseas reactor systems and of Australian fuel and power-generating policies'. Sounds oddly familiar.

Today, nothing has changed. We still have a Liberal-National government that wants nuclear power in Australia. In 2018, the Nationals even went so far as to pass a motion at their federal council calling on the federal and state governments to 'abolish such regulation as is necessary to allow the development of sustainable nuclear energy'. They have appointed their biggest nuclear advocate as the resources minister, and now we have this report calling for an end to those regulations preventing nuclear proliferation in this country.

Nothing has changed with the challenges in Jervis Bay either. In a 2007 report published by The Australia Institute, the prospect of a reactor at Jervis Bay was again raised. This report noted a medium earthquake risk at the site. It noted important heritage and ecological sites, 70 nationally listed species and at least 43 migratory species in the area. So again I say that I will strongly oppose any plans this government has to build a nuclear reactor that will endanger the ecological and heritage values of Jervis Bay, a reactor that will endanger the lives, health and safety of thousands of local people who would be caught in the fallout radius of such a plant. We need cleaner, cheaper power, and we need jobs for local people, not nuclear.

Mr RICK WILSON (O'Connor) (17:01): I rise today to make some very brief comments supporting what is an excellent report. I thank the chair, the member for Fairfax, Ted O'Brien, for the great work that he did in marshalling the troops and also all those who were on the committee and contributed and are here today. Although there was perhaps a diverse range of opinions, everyone worked, I think, cooperatively. I think it's a very fine report and reflects well on the parliament.

I just want to make some preliminary comments. We have seen this movie unfold before. As a farmer, I have had a lot of involvement in advocacy for genetically modified crops. Those crops are now being grown Australia-wide, as the South Australian Liberal government recently lifted the moratorium on GM crops in South Australia. They will have that technology available to their farmers this year. We have seen state Labor governments around the country, antiscience luddites, who have opposed this technology all the way along. There has been no recorded incident of an adverse health impact with the billions of meals that have been consumed. Genetically modified crops are grown all over the Americas, both north and south, and consumers in those countries regularly consume genetically modified corn and other products and, as I say, no adverse impact of consuming those GM crops has ever been recorded. They have wonderful environmental benefits, as we have seen with Bt cotton here in Australia, where the amount of chemicals used to control insects has been reduced by a factor of nine. Yet still we see state Labor governments, with their Greens fellow travellers, oppose this technology at every step of the way.

As I say, the last moratorium imposed by state government, a state Labor government, was lifted by the Nationals in South Australia. We can now truck GM canola seed from Victoria to Western Australia, whereas previously we had to truck it from Victoria via the Northern Territory and down through the north of Western Australia to the southern districts. As I say, we have seen this movie play out before.

But I will come back to the nuclear inquiry and the recommendations. The first recommendation is that nuclear energy be considered as part of Australia's future energy needs. This is a very measured and sensible
recommendation, as are all the recommendations. 'It be considered'—all that means is that it be considered as part of our future energy mix.

The second recommendation is that a body of work be undertaken to include economic assessment, technological assessment and readiness assessment. That, once again, is not building a nuclear power plant at Jervis Bay—as the previous speaker said, seeking to whip up fear without actually absorbing what the report said. Thirdly, we recommended a partial and conditional lift on the moratorium to allow third and fourth generation nuclear technology to be considered in this country. If the moratorium sits there, there is no commercial operator that will do the research and do the business plan if they have no hope of ever commercialising that project.

I just want to make a few comments about nuclear energy and where it currently sits. We have heard from other speakers that it is on the way out. At the moment, there are 452 reactors operating across 31 countries around the world. Importantly, there are 495 plants either under construction or in the planning phase. So that's almost a doubling of the nuclear fleet in the next 10 years. The two countries where nuclear energy plays a very large role in their energy mix are Canada and France, both very sophisticated countries that we can learn some lessons from. The current wholesale price of electricity is US$28 per megawatt hour, which is around A$40. That is compared to Australia's current wholesale price of electricity of around $100 per megawatt hour. So the argument that nuclear energy is expensive is not borne out by the facts in these countries.

In terms of emissions reduction, one golf ball sized piece of uranium represents a lifetime's energy for an individual. That compares with 1,000 kilograms of coal, a tonne of coal, 564 litres of oil or 481 cubic metres of gas. So that's one golf ball sized piece of uranium. And we've got plenty of it here in Australia. In fact, in my electorate I've got three uranium projects that are, hopefully, about to go into the production phase. They've received all their approvals and are looking at the future very optimistically.

The technology that we're talking about here, that would possibly be installed if we ever got to that stage, would be the small modular nuclear reactors with the thorium salt as their main power source, and those small reactors, three of them, could power 1.08 million households in Australia.

In overseas countries it is difficult to extrapolate the figures exactly, but the estimated plant cost is around A$4 billion, which would represent an electricity generation cost of around $60 per megawatt hour. So that's very competitive with the current price. But, effectively, that's not the government's problem, in my view. I don't believe in subsidising nuclear power stations. Personally, I don't believe in subsidising coal power stations and I don't believe we should be subsidising renewable energy. We should be completely technology agnostic in this, and the best power source, the most efficient, and the source that provides firm base-load power is the technology that should win the day.

Finally, I want to touch on the safety aspect. There have been three nuclear incidents—some may say accidents—with the first and second generation power plants. At Three Mile Island there were no deaths from exposure to radiation. At Chernobyl, there were 19 deaths from exposure to radiation. At Fukushima there were no deaths from exposure to radiation. They died when they drowned as they were trying to shut the reactor down. They were in a basement and they drowned in the tsunami. So, from a safety perspective, I don't have the numbers but I can guarantee that many, many more people die in the coalmining industry, in the generation of electricity through coal-fired power stations and others, than die at a nuclear reactor.

I commend the report to the House. I think it's an excellent piece of work. It's something that should certainly stimulate discussion. People with an open mind, people who can move beyond that antiscience mindset that I described with the GM crops, should be able to have a rational debate about this. The best technology to provide low emissions base-load power should be the technology that this country adopts.

Ms STEGGALL (Warringah) (17:11): During 2019, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on the Environment and Energy, of which I am a member, inquired into the circumstances and prerequisites for a future government to consider nuclear energy, including small modular reactor technologies in Australia. We received over 300 submissions and held 11 public hearings all over Australia. I commend the chair, the member for Fairfax, for leading a thorough inquiry in a short period of time.

The background is important. Australia is undergoing a revolutionary energy transition. We are shifting away from coal-fired baseload power to more variable forms of energy, like solar and wind. Australia is now a world leader in the uptake of clean power. Some feel that this transition should include nuclear energy, which has previously been banned from consideration. This inquiry was tasked to investigate the conditions and prerequisites that would have to be in place for a future government to consider lifting the moratorium on nuclear energy. The findings are important. After extensive deliberation—and this is an issue that motivates and creates a lot of reaction—I agreed with some of the findings of the main report, but, nevertheless, I ultimately dissented due to a number of reasons, and they are put in detail in my dissenting report.
I supported recommendations 1 and 2 in the main report, because ultimately I do believe information and an open mind is always important. They, in part, recommend an independent assessment of available and emerging nuclear technology as well as the viability of nuclear power, but it must be done in the Australian context, especially when compared with other technologies. Extra scrutiny of the evidence by independent bodies is welcome and should enhance any decisions made by a future government on nuclear energy. It was clearly evident during the hearing process that we had vastly diverging views and evidence being put forward to the committee. Nuclear must also be considered alongside other technologies, like solar and wind, which I consider to be safer and better options.

I did not agree with recommendation 3, which sought conditional approval for lifting the moratorium on specific technologies, like small modular reactors, with the prior consent of affected communities. The prospect of nuclear energy divides our community. Therefore, prior to any consideration of the lifting of the moratorium or any part of the moratorium in relation to nuclear energy, nuclear energy must be put to the Australian people, either by plebiscite or by federal election. Further, any community engagement program undertaken by the government must include education and awareness of other technologies, like solar, wind and hydrogen. Nuclear is not an either/or proposition. It must be considered in the context of other means of energy production.

As for the substance of the main report, it both overstates the benefits of nuclear and understates the risks, especially when compared with other technologies, like renewables, particularly as it pertains to waste management, transport and storage, health and safety—which is vitally important—energy affordability, and reliability. The Australian people deserve transparency, especially on such an important matter. Ultimately the people will decide on what direction the country should go, which is why I provided detail, in the dissenting report, on the evidence omitted from the main report—to inform better decision-making by the Australian people.

The main report also lacked consideration of two essential prerequisites: a long-term target to reach net zero emissions by 2050 and a settled national energy policy. Any consideration of nuclear must be in light of our commitment to the Paris Agreement, which is a commitment to limiting warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius. This requires Australia to reach net zero by the middle of the century, a fact supported by evidence heard during the inquiry—even by those supporting and requesting a lift of the moratorium on nuclear energy. Australia must follow the example of many other nations and legislate a target of net zero by 2050.

Finally, you cannot guide an energy transition without a national energy policy—a fact supported by many submissions and eminent Australians. This policy must consider the ambitious direction of our various state and territory governments. They are shifting their jurisdiction to renewable energy. This has to be the focus.

Australia has a huge opportunity to be a renewable energy superpower. We have a duty in this place to investigate the possibilities in front of us and find a sensible way forward. Time is of the essence, and I urge the government to not be distracted but to focus on implementing a long-term plan to encourage investment in large-scale renewable projects—technologies that are ready now, not that hope to come online sometime in the future. The technologies that are ready now will deliver clean and cheap energy to Australians and, most importantly, are much safer for Australians. That is ultimately our first and foremost duty in this place.

Dr GILLESPIE (Lyne) (17:17): I would like to put on record that this report on the inquiry into the prerequisites for nuclear energy in Australia is one of the most important inquiry documents in this term of this parliament. There is the energy conundrum of how to decarbonise our electricity system but still maintain an industrial base—have a modern industrial society where energy is required 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year—and meet our commitments and aspirations for reducing the CO2 impact on the atmosphere and the climate. The nuclear report emphasises that by its very name, Not without your approval: a way forward for nuclear technology in Australia.

In this inquiry, we were charged with looking at the prerequisites that would have to be in place before we proceeded further. That amounts to a certain three big recommendations. They are all measured and very sensible. We recommended, first of all, that a body of work be done by ANSTO, outlining all the generations of nuclear technology, generations I through IV—in other words, a technology assessment; second, that a regulatory assessment be done, by ARPANSA; and, third, that an economic assessment be done, by the Productivity Commission.

With regard to technology, some of the speakers have mentioned a few things on which I would like to correct the record. The big recommendation is to not remove the moratorium until we get those things in place but to consider a partial removal, particularly of the old technology—maintain the moratorium for type I, type II and type III versions of nuclear reactors, and look and assess generations III+ and IV. Just to reassure the member for Gilmore, the Jervis Bay one that was being looked at quite seriously in the 1960s was generation II.
If you look at where the accidents have happened, Three Mile Island was an early generation II; Chernobyl was a beginner model, a generation I—it was poorly maintained, it was working beyond its capacity and it wasn't being used appropriately—and even Fukushima, which was damaged by the tidal wave, is a generation II. If they'd followed the guidelines that had been recommended, that the diesel pumps that ran the cooling water should be moved up out of the tsunami area—it was recommended many times, which is quite disturbing—it wouldn't have had the hydrogen explosion that it did.

But, overall, nuclear reactors are incredibly safe. When you compare those events to the safety of traditional electricity production technology, like coal in China, you find that, for each petawatt of energy produced, it's estimated that there are 90,000 deaths. This is Massachusetts Institute of Technology data. Compare that to the safety of nuclear, where, even with the limited number of deaths, for the same amount of energy produced, the rate is 90 deaths. So it goes from 90,000 to 90. Coal in America is obviously safer because of their occupational health and safety, but it's really a myth that nuclear power is dangerous.

In fact, one of the depositions in the inquiry by Professor Erich Weigold explained that, with the engineering changes now:
The probability of core damage or the loss of structural integrity … for modern nuclear reactors is close to one in a million years.

Small modular reactors use traditional technology in a smaller, factory-built modular sense, which delivers passive safety features so they can actually be air-cooled. An accident like Fukushima couldn't happen because they have passive safety features built into it. By the time all the water evaporates, the modules are small enough that they can all be air-cooled. Engineers do this stuff. They model all the things and all the capabilities. Professor Weigold goes on to say:
Small Modular Reactors … are even safer, with a CDF of only 5 in a billion years.

In a design sense, that is incredibly safe.

Getting back to the other observations, there is so much that you could talk about in this report. I recommend that everyone read it. One of the conditions we had to look at was the workforce capability of Australia if we wanted to go down that track. That is a really misunderstood capability. We are a nuclear nation. We've been running reactors in Lucas Heights since the 1950s. We are one of the biggest producers of medical isotopes in the world. It is all run by Australians. We have a huge engineering and scientific base in this country. Most of the engineers involved in nuclear power plants aren't nuclear engineers; they're regular electrical and mechanical engineers. As for most of the construction, it's only the inner core where the radiation is that gets inherently nuclear. Most of it is traditional, high-grade civil engineering, which we do in spades in the mining industry and in the construction of major projects. And we have many Australian expats who are working around the world running nuclear plants who would be back here in a heartbeat.

We have a huge regulatory set-up already with ARPANSA, the Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency. We have the Australian Safeguards and Non-Proliferation Office. We have state levels of regulation for all the movement of isotopes and nuclear material. And there's another observation I'd like to make which most people don't understand: we have a nuclear waste facility in this country already. It's great news that the one in Kimba has finally been approved by the local community, which harks back to that sentiment that we're not going to do this without people's approval. So we need to educate people about the real nature of nuclear energy and the real cost of it, which is highly competitive with even coal, which is the cheapest. The system levelised cost of energy in these countries that build nuclear plants all the time, which is confirmed by the International Energy Agency, is very competitive. We subsequently visited India, and the nuclear corporation that runs their nuclear power plants is a profit-making entity for the nation of India. So it is economically viable if you do it well. We can be a late adopter of technology, so we can get the very best, and, if we do it right, we have the potential to solve the conundrum—that is, the climate requirement for us to reduce our carbon footprint.

One other thing I would like to say concerns this furphy that 'it uses too much water'. Most of these new modern reactors—whether they're molten-salt or heated-gas reactors heating the water—can be very efficient with water. The Chinese are building reactors in their arid interior which won't require that large amount of recycling of water. The water can be produced, if you do need to use technology where you have water cooling—that's very easy. Nuclear power plants can be a net producer of water. If they do want to go by the coast, they can act as a desalination plant, as well as using the desalinated water for the cooling towers.

I commend this report to the House and to members who haven't read it, because they will see that a lot of the historical attitudes towards nuclear energy are really not accurate. It is a safe technology. It can be used to re-industrialise our country with a reliable base-load system that will deliver energy for years. A modern nuclear
power plant can last for 80 or 90 years. They have done so in India: they've got the world record for the longest continuous production of energy from a nuclear power plant.

Mr BURNS (Macnamara) (17:27): It's good news for the people of Lyne that their member in this place is very happy to have a nuclear reactor in their electorate, and I look forward to him running community consultations with his community about where a nuclear reactor might go! This was a good inquiry. I want to thank the other committee members, including the member for Lyne and Acting Deputy Speaker Gillespie as well as, of course, the chair, the member for Fairfax, and the member for Fremantle, the deputy chair, as well as the member for Warringah and others. I want to thank the staff of the committee and everyone who made a submission to the inquiry.

It is true that in this country we have energy challenges. It is absolutely true that our energy market and our energy future are uncertain. We don't have a national energy policy. We don't have any indication or any clear ambition from the government about what they want the energy market to look like, or how they want energy to be generated in Australia. But on absolutely no indicators—on not one indicator—is nuclear energy the answer. Let's start with the economics. Nuclear energy is very, very expensive—and I note the previous contribution from the member for Lyne, who said that nuclear energy has become safer, and it has—because all of the different safety features that need to be built into nuclear reactors are very, very expensive. The estimation for a nuclear reactor in Australia would be somewhere between $10 billion and $15 billion. That is for one. Imagine the renewable energy generation that you could supplement with $10 billion to $15 billion. No-one is saying that nuclear energy financially stacks up without government subsidies—huge government subsidies. The only example in the world, currently, where there are nuclear reactors being built for under $10 billion or $15 billion is in the UAE right now, being built by a South Korean firm. But there are massive cost blow-outs, there are massive delays, just like there are all around the world. The economics of this do not stack up.

The other thing is the time line. Nuclear reactors are very expensive. There are a lot of safety features that are required to manage the uranium levels. They take a long time to build. Ten to 15 years is the minimum time for us to be able to have a nuclear reactor in Australia, starting right now—and that is not using the technology that the recommendations by the government allowed: the old, large-scale generation III reactors that are currently in existence. And we are able to model best practice. But make no mistake: we would have to import scientists. We would have to import the intelligence and the capabilities in order to manage these nuclear reactors. We don't have that in Australia. We do have very capable scientists at ANSTO, but we don't have the capability to manage a large-scale nuclear reactor in Australia, and ANSTO in Lucas Heights were the ones who advised us of that—that we would need to significantly upgrade our nuclear capabilities in this country if we were to have a large-scale nuclear reactor.

All of the pro-nuclear submissions that came in to the inquiry started with one thing—that nuclear is a way of decarbonising the economy. And it is. It would be. It has significantly less carbon, as part of its process for energy generation, than coal, obviously, and fossil fuels. And it is comparable to renewable energy. But, for 10 to 15 years and $10 billion to $15 billion, it's not really giving you much bang for your buck, if your aim is to decarbonise the economy. I think that, if the government is serious about decarbonising the economy, it should say so. It should set ambitious decarbonising targets; it should set ambitious climate targets—which it hasn't done.

The government also should be setting energy policy that would outline how the energy market would look by the time that a nuclear reactor would be built. If we are saying that it's going to take 15 years to build a nuclear reactor in Australia, what is our energy market going to look like in 15 years time? It's going to be very different from how it is today. There is a range of new energy technology coming on. The Prime Minister likes to boast about the amount of renewables coming into this country and the amount of renewable generation. Our energy grid is changing. It is changing in Queensland very dramatically, for example. There is solar and small-scale energy generation happening in people's homes. Yet the government wants us to commit to a technology that wouldn't come on for 15 years, in the very best case, in an energy market that is uncertain and of which we don't yet know what the energy composition is going to be. We don't know what our energy grid is going to look like in 15 years, and yet the government wants us to commit to technology that will be a significant disruptor and exceptionally expensive in that time. It doesn't make sense.

The other point to make is around small modular reactors, SMRs, which many members of the committee have liked to fantasise about on a number of occasions. I don't know how to make it any clearer: small modular reactors do not exist yet. They may; at some stage, small modular reactors might be operating. There might be a factory somewhere in the United States pumping out little nuclear reactors that we can then purchase. But at this stage they don't exist. The only major small modular reactor type operating right now outside of China and Russia on a commercial basis is being built by NuScale, which has just extended its finishing time line for its small modular reactor—or its small reactor, because it's not modular yet—from 2026 to 2027. It has blown out. It is expensive.
And it is not yet ready. So the government wants us to make energy investment decisions based on technology that doesn't exist right now. The other thing to consider as part of that is that ANSTO, when we went there, gave the clearest advice they could, which was that Australia shouldn't be the first to buy new technology. Small modular reactors may end up being a significant technology disruptor and a significant economic disruptor in the nuclear industry. They may, and I have an open mind about that. But they don't exist right now. There is nowhere in the world that anyone can turn to and say, 'There's a factory there; you can order 15 of them, you're going to reduce the cost because you're buying 15 of them, and we're going to pop them in 15 locations around the country.' That doesn't exist right now.

Perhaps, when small modular reactors are a thing, we can reassess this conversation. Perhaps, after we've seen these small modular reactors built by a company like NuScale and completed in 2027, being managed, being assessed via best practice standards, that would be the time—the responsible time, the smart time and the economic time—for Australia to assess this technology. Perhaps the early 2030s would be the time for Australia to assess when small modular reactors might be a viable alternative for Australia. Until that time, it is completely fanciful, it is living in fantasy land and it is economically irresponsible to be making decisions about expensive, potentially dangerous technologies that don't have best practice standards and that simply don't exist.

To sum up, we had a very collaborative inquiry. It was done in good spirits, and all of the members approached it in good faith. I did move, in the meeting—which is outlined in the minutes—that all of the government's recommendations be scrapped because I think the government have the chronology completely wrong and they have made some significant assumptions, as I have outlined in this contribution today.

Debate adjourned.

**Federation Chamber adjourned at 17:37**