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SITTING DAYS—2013

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FORTY-FOURTH PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION—FIRST PERIOD

Governor-General
Her Excellency the Hon. Quentin Bryce AC, CVO

House of Representatives Office holders
Speaker—Hon. Bronwyn Kathleen Bishop MP
Deputy Speaker—Hon. Bruce Craig Scott MP
Second Deputy Speaker—Mr Robert George Mitchell
Members of the Speaker’s Panel—Mr Russell Evan Broadbent MP,
Mr Ian Reginald Goodenough MP, Mrs Natasha Louise Griggs MP,
Mr Craig Kelly MP, Hon. Charles Christian Porter MP, Mr Ross Xavier Vasta MP,
Mr Brett David Whiteley MP

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

Party Leaders and Whips
Liberal Party of Australia
Leader—Hon. Anthony John Abbott MP
Deputy Leader—Hon. Julie Isabel Bishop MP
Chief Government Whip—Hon. Philip Maxwell Ruddock MP
Government Whips—Mr Scott Buchholz MP and Ms Nola Bethwyn Marino MP

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

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

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<td>Hindmarsh, SA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilson, Mr Richard James</td>
<td>O'Connor, WA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wood, Mr Jason Peter</td>
<td>La Trobe, VIC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wyatt, Mr Kenneth George AM</td>
<td>Hasluck, WA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zappia, Mr Antonio</td>
<td>Makin, SA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**PARTY ABBREVIATIONS**

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

**Heads of Parliamentary Departments**

Clerk of the Senate—R Laing
Clerk of the House of Representatives—B Wright
Secretary, Department of Parliamentary Services—C Mills
Parliamentary Budget Officer—P Bowen
# ABBOTT MINISTRY

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<th>Minister</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Prime Minister</strong></td>
<td>The Hon. Tony Abbott MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Indigenous Affairs</strong></td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Nigel Scullion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service</em></td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Eric Abetz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women</em></td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Michaelia Cash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister</strong></td>
<td>The Hon. Josh Frydenberg MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister</strong></td>
<td>The Hon. Alan Tudge MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development</strong></td>
<td>The Hon. Warren Truss MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Deputy Prime Minister)</td>
<td>The Hon. Jamie Briggs MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Foreign Affairs</strong></td>
<td>The Hon. Julie Bishop MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Trade and Investment</strong></td>
<td>The Hon. Andrew Robb AO MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Foreign Affairs</em></td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Brett AO MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Employment</strong></td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Eric Abetz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister for Employment (Deputy Leader of the House)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Attorney-General</strong></td>
<td>Senator the Hon. George Brandis QC</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for the Arts</strong></td>
<td>Senator the Hon. George Brandis QC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Vice-President of the Executive Council)</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Justice</strong></td>
<td>The Hon. Michael Keenan MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Treasurer</strong></td>
<td>The Hon. Joe Hockey MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Small Business</strong></td>
<td>The Hon. Bruce Billson MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Treasurer</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Arthur Sinodinos AO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer</em></td>
<td>The Hon. Steven Ciobo MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Agriculture</strong></td>
<td>The Hon. Barnaby Joyce MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Agriculture</em></td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Richard Colbeck</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Education</strong></td>
<td>The Hon. Christopher Pyne MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Leader of the House)</td>
<td>The Hon. Sussan Ley MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister for Education</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Scott Ryan</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Education</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Industry</strong></td>
<td>The Hon. Ian Macfarlane MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Industry</em></td>
<td>The Hon. Bob Baldwin MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Social Services</strong></td>
<td>The Hon. Kevin Andrews MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister for Social Services</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Mitch Fifield</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Manager of Government Business in the Senate)</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Marise Payne</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Human Services</strong></td>
<td><em>Senator the Hon. Concetta Fierravanti-Wells</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Social Services</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Communications</strong></td>
<td>The Hon. Malcolm Turnbull MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Communications</em></td>
<td>The Hon. Paul Fletcher MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Health</strong></td>
<td>The Hon. Peter Dutton MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Sport</strong></td>
<td>The Hon. Peter Dutton MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister for Health</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Fiona Nash</td>
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<tr>
<td>Title</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Defence</strong></td>
<td>Senator the Hon. David Johnston</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Veterans’ Affairs</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Michael Ronaldson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Centenary of ANZAC</em></td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Michael Ronaldson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister for Defence</td>
<td>The Hon. Stuart Robert MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Defence</td>
<td>The Hon. Darren Chester MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for the Environment</strong></td>
<td>The Hon. Greg Hunt MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for the Environment</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Simon Birmingham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Immigration and Border Protection</strong></td>
<td>The Hon. Scott Morrison MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister for Immigration and Border Protection</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Michaelia Cash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Finance</strong></td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Mathias Cormann</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Minister of State</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Michael Ronaldson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance</td>
<td>The Hon. Michael McCormack MP</td>
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Each box represents a portfolio. **Cabinet Ministers are shown in bold type.** As a general rule, there is one department in each portfolio. However, there is a Department of Human Services in the Social Services portfolio and a Department of Veterans’ Affairs in the Defence portfolio. The title of a department does not necessarily reflect the title of a minister in all cases.
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<tr>
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</thead>
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<td>Hon Bill Shorten MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Minister Assisting the Leader for Science</strong></td>
<td>Senator the Hon Kim Carr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister Assisting the Leader for Small Business</td>
<td>Hon Bernie Ripoll MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business</strong></td>
<td>Julie Owens MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Cabinet Secretary</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Jacinta Collins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Opposition</strong></td>
<td>Hon Michael Danby MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Opposition</strong></td>
<td>Dr Jim Chalmers MP</td>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Deputy Leader of the Opposition</strong></td>
<td>Hon Tanya Plibersek MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Development</strong></td>
<td>Senator Claire Moore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Women</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Don Farrell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager of Opposition Business (Senate)</td>
<td>Hon Matt Thistlethwaite MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Minister for the Centenary of ANZAC</strong></td>
<td>Senaor the Hon Don Farrell</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Affairs</strong></td>
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<td>Senator the Hon Penny Wong</td>
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<td>Senator the Hon Stephen Conroy</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Assistant Minister for Defence</td>
<td>Hon David Feeney MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Veterans’ Affairs</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Don Farrell</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Defence</strong></td>
<td>Gai Brodtmann MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Minister for Infrastructure and Transport</strong></td>
<td>Hon Anthony Albanese MP</td>
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<td><strong>Shadow Minister for Tourism</strong></td>
<td>Hon Julie Collins MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Regional Development and Local Government</td>
<td>Hon Stephen Conroy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Development and</strong></td>
<td>Hon Warren Snowdon MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Infrastructure</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for External Territories</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Treasurer</strong></td>
<td>Hon Chris Bowen MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Assistant Treasurer</td>
<td>Hon Dr Andrew Leigh MP</td>
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<td>Shadow Minister for Competition</td>
<td>Hon Bernie Ripoll MP</td>
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<td><strong>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary to the Shadow Treasurer</strong></td>
<td>Hon Ed Husic MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Minister for Finance</strong></td>
<td>Hon Tony Burke MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water</strong></td>
<td>Hon Mark Butler MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for the Environment, Climate Change</td>
<td>Senator Louise Pratt</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Minister for Higher Education, Research, Innovation and</strong></td>
<td>Senaor the Hon Kim Carr</td>
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<tr>
<td>Industry</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Vocational Education</td>
<td>Hon Sharon Bird MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Manufacturing</strong></td>
<td>Tony Zappia MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Minister for Communications</strong></td>
<td>Hon Jason Clare MP</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Michelle Rowland MP</td>
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<th>Shadow Minister</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Attorney General</td>
<td>Hon Mark Dreyfus QC MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deputy Manager of Opposition Business (House)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Justice</td>
<td>Hon David Feeney MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary to the Shadow Attorney General</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Lisa Singh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for the Arts</td>
<td>Hon Michael Danby MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Education</td>
<td>Hon Kate Ellis MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Early Childhood</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Education</td>
<td>Julie Owens MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Agriculture</td>
<td>Hon Joel Fitzgibbon MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Resources</td>
<td>Hon Gary Gray AO MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Northern Australia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Special Minister of State</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Northern Australia</td>
<td>Hon Warren Snowdon MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Health</td>
<td>Hon Catherine King MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Assistant Minister for Health</td>
<td>Hon Melissa Parke MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Mental Health</td>
<td>Senator Hon Jan McLucas</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Sport</td>
<td>Hon Bernie Ripoll MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Health</td>
<td>Hon Amanda Rishworth MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Families and Payments</td>
<td>Hon Jenny Macklin MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Disability Reform</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Doug Cameron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Human Services</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Jan McLucas</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Housing and Homelessness</td>
<td>Senator Claire Moore</td>
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<td>Shadow Minister for Carers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Communities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Families and Payments</td>
<td>Senator Carol Brown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Immigration and Border Protection</td>
<td>Hon Richard Marles MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Citizenship and Multiculturalism</td>
<td>Michelle Rowland MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Immigration</td>
<td>Hon Matt Thistlethwaite MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Indigenous Affairs</td>
<td>Hon Shayne Neumann MP</td>
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<td>Shadow Minister for Ageing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Indigenous Affairs</td>
<td>Hon Warren Snowdon MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Aged Care</td>
<td>Senator Helen Polley</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations</td>
<td>Hon Brendan O’Connor MP</td>
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The SPEAKER (Hon. Bronwyn Bishop) took the chair at 10:00, made an acknowledgement of country and read prayers.

COMMITTEES
Selection Committee

Report

The SPEAKER (10:01): I present the report of the determination made pursuant to a resolution of the House on 20 November 2013 relating to private members' business today, Monday, 2 December 2013. Copies of the report have been placed on the table.

The report read as follows—

Report relating to the consideration of private Members' business.

1. Pursuant to a resolution of the House of 20 November 2013, the Speaker, Chief Government Whip and Chief Opposition Whip met on 21 November 2013 to determine the order of precedence and times to be allocated for consideration of private Members' business on Monday, 2 December 2013, as follows:

Items for House of Representatives Chamber (10.00 am to 12 noon)

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Notice

1 Mr Nikolic: To move:

That this House notes:

(1) with concern that Tasmania has the lowest gross state product per capita in Australia, the nation's highest unemployment rate, the lowest proportion of adults in the nation who have attained a year 12 qualification, one of the lowest retention rates to year 12, the lowest population growth, and the highest proportion of Australians without superannuation coverage;

(2) that Tasmania has enormous potential with productive land, a skilled and willing work force and people with a strong commitment to improve the state's economy by endeavour and hard work; and

(3) that the Federal Coalition's Economic Growth Plan for Tasmania, promised in the election campaign and reiterated in Her Excellency the Governor-General's speech opening the 44th Parliament, will provide the architecture to help turn Tasmania's economy around and encourage long term, sustainable employment. (Notice given 18 November 2013.)

Time allotted—40 minutes.

Speech time limits—

Mr Nikolic—10 minutes.

Next Member speaking—10 minutes each.

Other Members—5 minutes each.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 2 x 10 + 4 x 5 mins]

The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.
**2 Mr S. P. Jones:** To move:

That this House notes that:

1. as identified by Infrastructure Australia, we are an urban nation with four-fifths of our population and economic activity occurring in our cities;
2. Australia's growing cities have a strategic need for greater public transport capacity to meet the growing transport task, ease urban road congestion and ensure improved national productivity;
3. this urban transport task is a joint Australian and state government responsibility;
4. recognising this, Labor in government invested $13 billion—more Commonwealth funding for public transport than all other governments since Federation—and this investment in urban transport projects, put forward and assessed through Infrastructure Australia, resulted in a significant boost to the strategic development of Australia's public transport network; and
5. urban public transport projects including the Brisbane Cross River Rail project, the Perth Public Transport Package and the Tansley Park Public Transport Package in Adelaide are nationally significant projects and are not guaranteed to proceed without Australian Government funding. (Notice given 19 November 2013.)

*Time allotted—40 minutes.*

**Speech time limits—**

Mr S. P. Jones—10 minutes.

Next Member speaking—10 minutes.

Other Members—5 minutes each.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 2 x 10 + 4 x 5 mins]

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

**3 Dr Stone:** To move:

That this House:

1. celebrates the success of Rural Clinical Schools (RCS) around Australia, commenced in 1999 by the then Minister for Health, the Hon. Dr Michael Wooldridge MP, and continued by his successor, the Hon. Tony Abbott MP;
2. notes that:
   
   (a) RCS were designed to overcome the maldistribution of all doctors including general practitioners across Australia, which left country regions short of general practitioners and other specialty doctors;
   
   (b) students undertaking training in rural locations have academic results that are equal to or better than their metropolitan counterparts;
   
   (c) published data from public universities show high rates of RCS graduates working in, or intending to work in rural areas; and
   
   (d) the information gathered through an independent project tracking all Australian and New Zealand medical students—Medical Schools Outcomes Database—demonstrates that long term placements in a rural setting through RCS have a significant impact on the vocational choice and intention to practice in a rural or remote setting as well as future career specialty focus; and

3. calls on the Government to:

   (a) continue its support for these excellent initiatives; and

   (b) examine opportunities to increase intern and postgraduate training places in rural locations to enhance the future of specialty medical service delivery with a focus on general practitioners in rural and regional Australia. (Notice given 20 November 2013.)
Time allotted—remaining private Members’ business time prior to 12 noon.

Dr Stone—10 minutes.
Next Member speaking—10 minutes.
Other Members—5 minutes each.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 2 x 10 + 4 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 Rishworth: To move:

That this House:
(1) notes that November is Lung Cancer Awareness Month;
(2) acknowledges that more than 9,100 Australians are diagnosed with lung cancer every year;
(3) recognises that lung cancer claims the lives of more Australians than any other cancer with only 14 out of 100 Australians surviving five years beyond their initial diagnosis; and
(4) calls on Australian and state and territory governments to work together to improve the survival rates of Australians diagnosed with lung cancer by encouraging early detection and providing access to high quality health care treatment and support. (Notice given 18 November 2013.)

Time allotted—50 minutes.

Ms Rishworth—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.

2 Ms O’Dwyer: To move:

That this House:
(1) notes that 1 December 2013 is World AIDS Day;
(2) recognises that:
   (a) more than 35 million people now live with HIV/AIDS worldwide, and almost 10 per cent of these are under the age of 15;
   (b) every day nearly 6,300 people contract HIV—nearly 262 every hour;
   (c) in Australia in 2012 there were 25,000 people living with HIV and 1253 new diagnoses of HIV infection—a 10 per cent increase from previous years;
   (d) in 2012, 1.6 million people died from AIDS-related illnesses;
   (e) in some communities HIV rates are as high as 40 per cent;
   (f) since the beginning of the epidemic in the 1980s, more than 75 million people have been infected with HIV and nearly 36 million have died of AIDS-related illnesses;
   (g) there are now outstanding antiviral treatments available to people living with HIV; and
   (h) although a lot of work has been done and many medical advances have been made, there is no cure and no vaccine, so a lot of research and work still needs to be done before we see the end of HIV;
(3) acknowledges that:
   (a) in July 2014, Melbourne will host the 20th International AIDS Conference (AIDS 2014);
(b) the conference will bring together 14,000 delegates from around 200 countries, which will be the largest medical conference ever held in Australia; and

(c) the conference will be chaired by Nobel Laureate, Professor Francoise Barre-Sinoussi, and Professor Sharon Lewin; and

(4) calls on the Parliament to:

(a) continue Australia's strong commitment to an enduring effective partnership between government, scientists and the community to meet the needs of people living with HIV;

(b) continue Australia's strong commitment to medical health and research; and

(c) foster and cultivate Australia's medical health and research community and researchers to ensure we stay at the forefront of all aspects of treatment, care and research in HIV. (Notice given 20 November 2013.)

Time allotted—50 minutes.

Ms O'Dwyer—10 minutes.

Next member speaking—10 minutes

Other Members—5 minutes each.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 2 x 10 + 6 x 5 mins]

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

Mr Hayes: To move:

That this House:

(1) notes that:

(a) 10 December is International Human Rights Day and also marks the 20th anniversary of the establishment of the High Commissioner for Human Rights;

(b) on 12 November 2013, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam gained a seat on the United Nations Human Rights Council and also signed the United Nations Convention Against Torture; and

(c) despite Vietnam being a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, there remains a concerning number of human rights violations in that country including the:

(i) treatment of 14 Vietnamese Catholics who were arrested and sentenced to four to eight years imprisonment in January 2013 for protesting in support of land rights, freedom of religion and the release of previously convicted activists;

(ii) arrest in October 2012 of Nguyen Phuong Uyen and Dinh Nguyen Kha, charged under Article 88 of the Vietnamese Penal Code for distributing leaflets protesting against China’s claims to the Paracel and Spratly islands in the South China Sea; and

(iii) seven year imprisonment of trade union organiser Do Thi Minh Hanh, for national security charges relating to her involvement in organising workers at a shoes factory in October 2010; and

(2) calls on the Australian Government to:

(a) take all appropriate steps to encourage the Vietnamese Government to honour its obligations as a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;

(b) consider issues of human rights in Vietnam when assigning funding under Australia's overseas development aid program; and

(c) continue Australia's engagement in bilateral and multilateral contexts with Vietnam on human rights.
Time allotted—20 minutes.
  Mr Hayes—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.

4 Ms King: To move:
  That this House:

(1) notes that:
  (a) Australia Post as per its Community Service Obligations, is required to achieve timely mail deliveries in all parts of Australia, not just the major capital cities;
  (b) residents in regional towns and cities across Australia are not receiving mail for up to six days, with mail routes routinely left unprocessed due to insufficient staff at regional mail centres; and
  (c) constituents have contacted the offices of regional Members, citing regular occurrences of late mail affecting people who depend on reliable mail services; and

(2) calls on the Minister for Communications to:
  (a) ensure that the current cuts by attrition at regional mail centres are reversed, suspending moves by Australia Post and the Government to abandon regional Australia by transferring mail sorting services to capital cities;
  (b) restore next day delivery services from regional centres; and
  (c) ensure the security of jobs and safe working conditions for regional postal workers.

Time allotted—remaining private Members’ business time prior to 1.30 pm.

Ms King—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.

PRIVATE MEMBERS’ BUSINESS

Economic Growth Plan for Tasmania

Mr NIKOLIC (Bass) (10:02): I move:
  That this House notes:

(1) with concern that Tasmania has the lowest gross state product per capita in Australia, the nation’s highest unemployment rate, the lowest proportion of adults in the nation who have attained a year 12 qualification, one of the lowest retention rates to year 12, the lowest population growth, and the highest proportion of Australians without superannuation coverage;

(2) that Tasmania has enormous potential with productive land, a skilled and willing work force and people with a strong commitment to improve the state’s economy by endeavour and hard work; and

(3) that the Federal Coalition’s Economic Growth Plan for Tasmania, promised in the election campaign and reiterated in Her Excellency the Governor-General’s speech opening the 44th Parliament, will provide the architecture to help turn Tasmania’s economy around and encourage long term, sustainable employment.

As I reflected on the Governor-General’s speech to open the 44th Parliament, I did so with mixed feelings when Tasmania was mentioned—mixed feelings because, although it was important to highlight Tasmania’s dire situation, I was sad at the fact that we are in such a
predicament that urgent action is needed. As the motion makes clear, Tasmania lags behind the nation on almost every objective indicator that measures growth in the federation. Our unemployment rate is the highest. Our participation rate is the lowest. The figures are even worse when fly-in fly-out workers are considered.

Since 2010 11,000 full-time jobs have been lost in Tasmania—coincidentally, the year of the last state election and the year Labor and the Greens began their political alliance. We have the lowest proportion of private-sector employment compared with public-sector employment, and that balance must change with the creation of more private-sector jobs. We also have the lowest life expectancy, the longest elective surgery waiting times and the highest proportion of people without superannuation accounts.

Tasmania is desperate for policy coherence between the state and federal governments to respond to these challenges, but that has rarely occurred during the last six years. I recall, for example, my predecessor in this parliament standing up to talk about a new $1 million building at the Ringarooma primary school that he had opened—at precisely the same time that the state Labor government and the Greens education minister within the Labor cabinet were planning to close the Ringarooma primary school. I recall former health minister Nicola Roxon in Launceston announcing new beds for northern Tasmanian hospitals—at precisely the same time that the Launceston General Hospital was closing two wards because the state government had ripped $39 million out of the health budget. These are clear cases of the left hand not knowing what the right hand is doing. Despite Labor promises over 15 years at state level and six years at the federal level, major policy problems continue.

It is no surprise, therefore, that Tasmanians resoundingly voted for change on 7 September. The Labor Party now only hold one House of Representatives seat, whereas just three years ago they held all five. As King John said, 'We cannot paint the lily.' Economically and on social measures, Tasmania is in decline. The Greens party tell us that niche industries are the answer—woodcraft, movie making and electric cars. Even the state MHA for Bass talked about a blueberry led recovery for Tasmania's economy. There is nothing wrong with any of those activities, but none of them will provide significant long-term sustainable jobs for Tasmanians. I am yet to meet one young person in Tasmania who aspires to a career as a solar polisher or a wind farm attendant.

There used to be agreement across this chamber that Greens policies are disconnected from economic reality. But with Greens ministers in the Labor cabinet in Hobart we can no longer say that. Labor in Tasmania are captive to the Greens, divided amongst themselves and fixated on trendy social issues rather than on the economy. The Labor-Greens government has strangled industries such as forestry, with approximately half the state locked up, yet every year Australia imports $2 billion in forestry products. And, if you add paper to that equation, we import $4 billion from countries where the environmental practices are nowhere near as sustainable as ours. Yet the Greens clamour for even more preservation. Their definition of 'preservation' is 'no use at all'.

There is of course a world of difference between preservation and conservation, the latter allowing natural resources to be used in a sustainable way. As Bill Gammage wrote, 'Unmanaged forests are dirty forests.' He points out that Aboriginals regenerated the land through fire. The Greens' dogmatic policies to lock up forests vastly increase the fire hazard.
and, ironically, the potential damage to flora and fauna. Tasmania needs less Greens dogma; it needs a strong, stable majority government with a long-term plan for jobs and growth.

The state Liberals under Will Hodgman have a plan to build a modern economy based on our competitive strengths, to create jobs, fix the budget mess, encourage investment, rebuild essential services and cut the red and green tape. It also means no more deals with the Greens, much less with Greens party members in cabinet. Liberal leader Will Hodgman is the only leader who has made that pledge.

By comparison, Labor Premier Lara Giddings was asked if she would welcome Greens MPs back into the cabinet if she won the election next year. Her reply was unambiguous: 'Absolutely.' Even Labor politicians in Tasmania deplore her approach, with Premier Lara Giddings's own parliamentary secretary calling for her to resign and for Labor never again to enter into a deal with the Greens.

Many good, hardworking Tasmanians who grew up as Labor supporters have shaken their head at Labor's betrayal. Well, the electorate did not forget on 7 September and they will not forget in March, when Lara Giddings finally faces the verdict of the Tasmanian electorate.

I have painted a bleak but accurate picture of the current Tasmanian political and economic scene. The next Tasmanian state election will confront voters with a stark choice: do they want four more years at the bottom of the national economic and social tables—four more years of young Tasmanians literally crying as they pack their belongings onto the ferry at Devonport, simply because they cannot get a local job?

Tasmania needs a business-friendly government committed to reducing red and green tape in both Canberra and Tasmania; the regeneration of value-adding industries, such as forestry, mining and agriculture; and the extraction of greater value from the things that we produce, particularly timber and agricultural commodities. We only retain approximately 25 per cent of the value of primary industry production. Wouldn't it be wonderful to have local markets in Tasmania for our agricultural products where we can value-add and export?

One particular opportunity, about which I have written in the past, is enhancing the DSTO facility at Scottsdale. It is a small but innovative centre, looking at rations and nutrition for our Defence Force, but I believe there are great opportunities to expand its potential. Australia has always been a first responder in terms of providing emergency aid in our region. We are good at this because of the ready cooperation between the ADF and civilian organisations, including aid groups. But one area where we could do more is in providing non-perishable food aid as one of Australia's response options. That is an often immediate need, as we have seen recently in the Philippines. The DSTO facility has the expertise and is located in an area that is renowned for food production, and I believe there is great capacity for a well-targeted expansion of DSTO Scottsdale to respond to this humanitarian need.

The coalition's economic growth plan for Tasmania was announced by the now Prime Minister on 15 August 2013. Elements of that plan include the establishment of a Tasmanian major projects approval agency in Launceston as a one-stop shop; incentives for employers to take on the long-term unemployed; and a joint Commonwealth and Tasmanian economic council. The plan includes a joint Productivity Commission and ACCC review into Tasmania's shipping costs, the competitiveness of our freight industry structure, and improving the equity of the Tasmanian freight and passenger vehicle equalisation schemes. I
am prompted to ask rhetorically, why is it that it takes a coalition federal government to recognise the economic barrier of Bass Strait? It is simple: it was the Fraser government that introduced the Tasmanian freight equalisation scheme. The member for Franklin shakes her head, but that is a fact. It was the Howard government that established the passenger vehicle equalisation scheme, and it has taken the election of the Abbott government to commission this important review.

The regions of Australia contribute so much to our national economy. They always have, and they continue to do so in the 21st century. With a population that has shifted massively to the larger cities over the last 50 years, we tend to forget the contribution our regional based industries—forestry, mining, agriculture and a significant portion of manufacturing—makes to the national account. Well, we on this side of the House will never forget them. I am proud to be part of a government for all of Australia, and I thank the House for this opportunity to highlight Tasmania's needs.

WYATT ROY (Longman) (10:11): It is a great honour to second this motion from the member for Bass. In seconding this motion, I welcome the new member to this chamber and say that the electors of Bass are incredibly lucky to have a member who brings an enormous amount of professional experience to this place and somebody who brings an enormous amount of dedication, perseverance and energy. They are very lucky to have the new member in this place representing their interests. And I think this motion goes to that point. As the member for Bass pointed out, Tasmania is a great state with great opportunity. And as the motion itself says, Tasmania has enormous potential, with productive land, a skilled and willing workforce and people with a strong commitment to improve the state's economy by endeavour and hard work.

It does have a bright future, but unfortunately the people of Tasmania have suffered, as have the people of Australia, over the last few years under the awful concoction of a Labor-Greens government. As the member for Bass pointed out in his speech, there was a time in this place when there was agreement across the chamber that the major political parties would reject the insane economic policies of the Greens. Tasmania, unfortunately, has not seen the Labor Party reject those bad economic policies and those disastrous idealistic views that have a real impact on people's lives. Instead, they have seen the Labor-Greens government come to fruition in Tasmania by embracing those disastrous economic policies, and this has had a real impact on the people of Tasmania.

Perhaps I can take a moment to go through what this actually means for the people of Tasmania, because it is very stark and it is appropriate to remind the House and the rest of Australia what happens when Labor and the Greens jump into bed with each other on the Treasury benches. Tasmania has the lowest life expectancy of any state. It has the highest underemployment rate of any state. It has the lowest workforce participation rate in Australia, approximately four to five percentage points below the national average. It has the lowest proportion of private sector employment compared with public sector employment, and that clearly demonstrates the ideological divide between the two sides of politics.

Tasmania has the lowest gross state product per capita in Australia, about 20 per cent below the national average. Private business investment in Tasmania is only 1.3 per cent of Australia's total private business investment. Tasmania has the highest proportion of the population with a low-income card receiving an age pension, a disability support pension,
Newstart allowance, parenting payment single, parenting payment partnered or youth allowance. It has the highest proportion of dwellings provided for housing owned by either the state or federal government of any other state. And it has the highest proportion of people without superannuation coverage.

In short, what has happened since the election of the Labor-Greens government in 2010 is the loss of approximately 10,000 jobs, a shrinking economy and a declining population. What Tasmania needs is a government with a cohesive, clear and direct economic plan. And that is exactly what the coalition government here in Canberra is prepared to deliver. With, hopefully, the election of a majority Liberal government in Hobart we will see the two levels of government working to correct the course that the Labor-Greens government has set in Tasmania.

We understand that great creators of wealth and prosperity in our nation are not the bureaucrats in Canberra and not the people pulling the strings of the bureaucracy in Hobart. The Australian people are the great creators of wealth and prosperity. The wealth creators are the small business owners, the family enterprises, the corner shops—people prepared to take on some risk, to go out there and have a go and to try and achieve something. And they will not be helped to achieve that through higher taxes or greater regulation. And whenever the Labor Party and the Greens get into bed with each other, that is exactly what we see.

Our economic plan for Tasmania will result in higher growth, more jobs and rising living standards. It is really important that, in a state like Tasmania, we re-engage those valued industries rather than victimise them—industries like forestry, mining and agriculture. That is why you are seeing a very strong commitment from the coalition government to invest in that productivity capacity and increase infrastructure by creating a one-stop shop in Launceston. I am really proud to be part of a government that understands that less government is the solution, not more government.

Ms COLLINS (Franklin) (10:17): I rise to speak on this motion, moved by the member for Bass. I agree with previous speakers that Tasmania does indeed have some challenges. But we need to be working together on those challenges not bagging the state of Tasmania, not talking down the state, not talking about all the problems in Tasmania, but actually looking at the opportunities that Tasmania has as a unique place, which other members from Tasmania would know. We have some great industries in which we can invest.

It was interesting that the first eight minutes of the 10-minute speech from the member for Bass were all about the state government and not about what his new federal Liberal government was going to do for Tasmania. He got to that in the last two minutes. But the reason that he cannot talk about that is that they are ripping hundreds of millions of dollars out of our state. They are ripping it out in infrastructure funding. They are ripping it out in rail funding. They are ripping it out in freight funding. We know that. Road funding to Tasmania almost doubled under the previous government, the federal Labor government. It went from around $400 million over the five years of the funding cycle to $810 million. That created jobs and constructed roads to increase our productivity.

We also had a package to deal with the freight situation in Tasmania. That was worth $40 million, $25 million to be delivered before Christmas, to allow some of those bigger and expanding industries to become more productive and get stuff across Bass Strait, because we know what an impediment that is. But the new government's solution, as we have heard, is a
Productivity Commission inquiry. The last Productivity Commission inquiry said to scrap the trade equalisation scheme—

**Mr Nikolic:** Madam Speaker, I ask the member to yield and explain which industries are expanding in Tasmania.

**The SPEAKER:** Do you accept the question, member for Franklin?

**Ms COLLINS:** No, I do not. But I am happy to talk about expanding industries: industries like the salmon industry and agriculture, which are expanding in our state. We have been investing in the salmon industry and it is expanding. It will grow to be a billion-dollar industry for Tasmania. Does your laughter indicate that you do not support the salmon industry in Tasmania? Is that what it means?

We do support the salmon industry in Tasmania. We invested in it and it is creating jobs in Tasmania now.

Because of the jobs situation in Tasmania, we announced a $100 million jobs and growth package to support 2,500 jobs in 31 projects right across the state. What have we seen from the new government? They will not say if they are going to put that money in—$25 million a year over four years—like we said we would. There has been no indication of when or how that money will be delivered. Two and a half thousand Tasmanian jobs are relying on that money. It is very important to Tasmanians and they want to know when that money will be delivered, and they should be told when it is going to be delivered, because those jobs are so important for Tasmanians.

We did not hear from them any discussion about the NBN in Tasmania—the National Broadband Network. The National Broadband Network has been rolling out in Tasmania, and Tasmania was going to be the first state to have the NBN connected to the majority of premises in the state—200,000 premises were to have the NBN connected. It was, of course, slowed down due to asbestos, and we needed to be safe. But for the last three months under this government we have seen it almost halt. There has been virtually no construction at all, and we know what is coming next. Next, the NBN will not be going to people's premises; it will only be going to nodes in the street. You will not deliver on your commitment to deliver fibre to the premises in Tasmania. I hope I am wrong, but I certainly do not think that is the case.

We also saw other investments in Tasmania by the previous government, like the Midland Highway. We made a commitment of $500 million over 10 years. What have we had from those opposite? Only $400 million. There is $100 million missing from the Midland Highway funding.

I will now turn to two projects in my electorate, both of which are very important for safety. One in particular is the Summerleas Road/Huon Highway intersection—$17 million. It is very important for my community. It was promised by the Liberal candidate in the 2010 campaign, but now it looks like it will not be delivered. We cannot get an answer on whether or not it is happening, because I do not think the government knows.

They have also announced ripping out the SchoolKids Bonus to Tasmanians. It is very important for the Tasmanian economy. Next year 34,000 Tasmanian families will have children going to school and they do not know whether they are going to be getting that funding. They do not know whether they are going to be able to afford to pay for their kids'
uniforms, because the new government wants to rip out the SchoolKids Bonus—34,000 families at an average of $15,000 per family over the life of their schooling. It is very important for the Tasmanian economy, and here the new government is ripping it away.

In recent days we have also seen confusion over Gonski funding—the funding for our schools. It is very important to have a good education. If you want good jobs, a good economy, and productivity in the state, you need children to be educated, and educated well. It is important money going into our state and the new government wants to take it away from Tasmanian schools and Tasmanian students. Are the new members for Bass, Braddon and Lyons going to stand up and tell Tasmanian families that they are going to rip money out from schools, as well as the SchoolKids Bonus? That's right, some of the government schools in Tasmania really rely on this funding. Students in low socioeconomic areas who rely on this funding want to know what is happening with their education funding—kids who are going to school in February next year. Some of the schools do not know what is going to be happening. They have been told, 'Yes, just 12 months, not four years.' How on earth are families supposed to plan for their children's schooling.

Then there is crime-prevention funding—some of the diversionary programs for kids at risk of not being in the workforce and kids at risk of not going to school. The crime-prevention funds are there. They were announced—a program that happens regularly. Community organisations, including in the electorate of Bass, are relying on that funding for diversionary projects for kids who are really struggling and need that support.

Mr Nikolic: Shameful.

Ms COLLINS: Yes, it is shameful, member for Bass. It is shameful that you are ripping that money out. It is shameful that you are ripping hundreds of millions of dollars out of the state of Tasmania and you are not being honest with the Tasmanian people about what you are doing.

Government members interjecting—

Ms COLLINS: They keep talking about the state government. Yes, the state government and the state have some challenges. But they are the new federal government and instead of investing in Tasmania they are ripping money out. Regarding this economic development plan, I have had a look at the funding for this. They are putting in $2 million in the current financial year. They are ripping out hundreds of millions of dollars and putting in $2 million. That is it: $2 million in the current financial year from their economic development plan.

What else have we heard about their economic development plan? The one-stop shop: I hate to tell them but it already exists. The state government already has one. It is called the Economic Diversification Task. It already works with major projects and proponents to actually invest in Tasmania. It already exists. Your wage subsidy? It already exists—$5,900. It is called Wage Connect. It is already there. We have had no comment from the other side about how many Tasmanians they expect to employ with their wage subsidy or whether it is in addition to the former government's subsidy or is instead of it—because, of course, it is much lower.

Who would know what is going to happen? Who would know the new government is not being honest with the Tasmanian people about its plans? The economic diversification plan does not actually detail what it is going to do—as I said, only $2 million is committed in the
current financial year, ripping out hundreds of millions of dollars in road funding, freight funding, rail funding, crime prevention funding, school funding and the SchoolKids Bonus.

Mr Nikolic: You're just making it up.

Ms Collins: I am not making this up, Member for Bass. This is real. This is what you are ripping out of our state of Tasmania. This is money coming out of the state of Tasmania, along with the NBN not being delivered. Tasmanians deserve better. I will hold you to account on your commitments to increase funding in Tasmania, and I really hope that happens.

We have had some interesting comments from our state government recently, which has announced some stimulus to turn the Tasmanian economy around, which already is showing some green shoots coming through. There are great opportunities, as I said at the beginning of my speech, and we should be talking together about what we can do for our state. We should be talking about how we can improve the state of Tasmania, not talking about how dire it is or the problems that exist. Rather than talking about all the issues that Tasmania has we should be looking at the opportunities of those industries that are growing, such as the salmon industry and the aquaculture industry. I have plenty of them in my electorate and I visit them regularly. There are great plans for expansion underway in Macquarie Harbour, in the member for Braddon's electorate. Industry does continue to grow in Tasmania and there are industries that are thriving. What we need to do is work together to invest in them. We need to be investing in the state of Tasmania, not ripping money out or being dishonest with the Tasmanian people, as we have seen from the new government, about what is going on in Tasmania and what will happen to the Tasmanian people under the current government.

Dr Hendy (Eden-Monaro) (10:26): I rise to support the motion of the member for Bass. Honourable members will know that I am not from Tasmania myself, but, indeed, my electorate of Eden-Monaro is in the great state of New South Wales. However, I am supporting the motion for two reasons: firstly, while the member for Bass would have preferred for either the member for Lyons or the member for Braddon to be in a position to speak today about the motion and second the motion, the traditions of this House, whereby they are to refrain from speaking on substantive motions prior to giving their first speeches, have prevented them from doing so. I know they were keen to speak on the motion and I am sure that they will have an opportunity in the future.

Government members interjecting—

Dr Hendy: They should buy tickets for the future!

A government member: Buy tickets tomorrow, Julie!

Dr Hendy: Secondly, I am also very happy to speak to the issues at hand because, as a member also representing a rural and regional electorate in this parliament, I know that there are particular problems that Tasmania faces that the coalition is committed to dealing with.

As the motion states, the House notes:

(1) with concern that Tasmania has the lowest gross state product per capita in Australia, the nation’s highest unemployment rate, the lowest proportion of adults in the nation who have attained a year 12 qualification, one of the lowest retention rates to year 12, the lowest population growth, and the highest proportion of Australians without superannuation coverage;
Further, despite this record, 'Tasmania has enormous potential'. Because of this potential, the motion notes:

(3) that the Federal Coalition's Economic Growth Plan for Tasmania … will provide the architecture to help turn Tasmania's economy around and encourage long term, sustainable employment.

In my own first speech, I turned my attention to regional disadvantage. In that speech I spoke of the need to do the right thing by all people who live in regional areas. I said:

I hope to be a strong advocate in this parliament who can support both good economic policy and the regions. I certainly believe in economic reform, but let me say that I also believe that what I call the country-city compact, … that existed for the best part of 100 years in Australia, was a tragic victim of the reform agenda of the eighties, nineties and 2000s.

… … …

The country regions—
including those in Tasmania—
need a fair go. The compact recognised that there was an inextricable interdependence between the country and the city. It acknowledged that there was a mutual obligation that recognised the costs of living in the country. This has basically gone, and yet country regions remain vital to the nation.

In the case of Tasmania, the coalition has a specific plan to address the regional disadvantage. The coalition's economic growth plan for Tasmania will reset Tasmania's course to one of growth, new jobs and rising living standards. It is only through building a stronger economy that we can deliver the better future that Tasmania deserves—a future with more jobs, higher wages and better services.

The combination of Labor/Green minority governments in Canberra and Hobart has done enormous damage to the Tasmanian economy. Under Labor, no additional new jobs have been created. In fact, almost one in 10 full-time jobs have been lost under the Rudd-Gillard-Rudd government. Tasmania needs real action to create jobs.

The new coalition government plans to restore confidence in and change the economic trajectory of Tasmania. The coalition's economic growth plan for Tasmania will create a Tasmanian major projects approval agency, expand Hobart International Airport, secure Hobart as a world centre for Antarctic and Southern Ocean research, establish a joint Commonwealth and Tasmanian economic council, upgrade the Midland Highway, review the equity and effectiveness of the Tasmanian freight equalisation and Bass Strait passenger vehicle equalisation schemes, and create a fruit and vegetable industry task force, amongst other policies.

This is a strong plan for growth and jobs that builds on the discussion paper that was developed by the Liberal Tasmanian senators and candidates, including the member for Bass, following extensive consultations across Tasmania. At the last election, the coalition offered the people of Tasmania a plan to build a strong, prosperous economy and a better future for all. The election of the members for Bass, Braddon and Lyons indicates that the electorate heard that message and want the coalition's plan to be implemented. So, in conclusion, I commend this motion to the House.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR (Gorton) (10:31): I rise to speak to this motion. I do also acknowledge the fact that the member for Bass is moving the motion, for the very first time. Clearly he denied the opportunity for the members for Braddon and Lyons to speak on this,
because he is aware that they have not given their first speech yet. It would have been, I think,
more appropriate and more collegial if he had waited until next Monday to move this motion,
because what he has done is to deny his own side's representatives in Tasmania the
opportunity to speak on the Tasmanian economy. I would say to the members for Lyons and
Braddon, 'Watch out for the member for Bass; obviously he is not what you would call a team
player.'

I have heard a few things already in this chamber in relation to this matter, but let us just go
through some of the things that have actually happened rather than the speculation that has
been articulated by those opposite. Firstly, it was Labor that put forward a $100 million jobs
and growth plan for Tasmania, not the Liberals. It was Labor that invested in the $17 million
North West and Northern Tasmania Innovation and Investment Fund. That fund leveraged
millions of dollars, and not only sustained businesses across the state, particularly in the north
and north-west, but allowed them to ensure that they could provide support for businesses in
that area. It was Labor that actually—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Mitchell): Order!

Mr Nikolic: Mr Deputy Speaker, I ask if the member for Gorton would yield and tell me:
which industries and businesses specifically have had a growth in jobs in Tasmania?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Just to give you some advice, questions are only permitted on
orders of the day. This is not an order of the day.

An honourable member: You're an L-plater!

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Do not reflect on the chair. Member for Gorton, continue.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR: You have been in the place for a short time, and I give you
that, but, really, you have had 10 minutes on this. You have denied your own Tasmanian
colleagues, by not allowing it for next Monday, and you are actually now denying me the call
because of your own inability to understand the standing orders.

The fact is that the Tasmanian economy does have some challenges; there is no doubt
about that. But it does not help when you talk down your own state's economy. What is really
needed here is constructive proposals about how we can provide support for Tasmanians.

I note that the motion that was authored by the member for Bass goes to a number of issues
that I think are significant and genuine challenges for the Tasmanian people, one of which is
the lowest proportion of adults in the nation who have obtained a year 12 qualification. That
is a very serious matter that needs to be addressed. That seems to fly in the face of the recent
comments by the Minister for Education and the Prime Minister to deny support to the
Tasmanian education system to ensure we see an increase in the accreditation of year 12
students in Tasmania. The fact is there was the Gonski plan in place and a so-called 'unity
ticket', as explained by the Prime Minister and the Minister for Education prior to the last
election, and they have reneged on that promise. They have completely and utterly
contradicted what they said before the election. The facts are these. We have a Prime Minister
who has lied to the Australian people. He has lied to the Australian people on education. I
quote Phil Coorey today in the Australian Financial Review: 'Like a slippery lawyer—

Mr Keenan: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order. It is a longstanding convention
that we do not accuse each other of lying in this chamber. If the shadow minister wishes to do
that, there are other forms in the House he can take advantage of. I call on him to withdraw.

CHAMBER
Mr Brendan O'Connor: I am happy to withdraw. As Phil Coorey said in the *Australian Financial Review* today:

Like a slippery lawyer pointing to the fine print after the client had signed on the bottom line—

Mr Tudge: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order on relevance. I do not know how this is relevant to the motion at hand in relation to the Tasmanian—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Aston will resume his seat. The member for Gorton may continue.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR: Phil Coorey wrote:

Like a slippery lawyer pointing to the fine print after the client had signed on the bottom line, the government is maintaining everyone else has got it wrong—the states, the journalists and a great deal of the education sector.

The fact is that the Prime Minister has completely and utterly contradicted the commitments he made before the election on 7 September. That is going to hurt the Tasmanian economy. It is going to hurt every student in Tasmania and you should hang your heads in shame.

Dr LEIGH (Fraser) (10:37): It is a pleasure to rise on this important motion discussing the state of the Tasmanian economy. As has been outlined by other speakers in the debate, there are important systemic reasons the Tasmanian economy has struggled over recent decades. Tasmania has been excessively reliant, as Saul Eslake points out, on the production of essentially undifferentiated commodities seeking to compete solely on the basis of price. Saul Eslake talks about the difference in productivity. He points out that the output of goods and services per hour worked is about 8½ per cent lower in Tasmania than on the mainland, which translates into a $3,600 difference in annual per capita gross state product between Tasmania and the rest of Australia. Mr Eslake also points out that there has been a longstanding assumption in some policy circles that Tasmania's problems can be solved by a single big project, such as another pulp mill. He describes this as 'a cargo-cult mentality, not an economic development policy'.

One of the real challenges for Tasmania is in boosting quality and quantity in the education system. Far too few Tasmanians receive a complete school education, up to year 12. If you are looking for a reason Tasmanian productivity is 8½ per cent below mainland productivity, educational attainment is a big part of that. How do you achieve higher levels of educational attainment? One way is to make sure that parents have a bit of extra money on the first day of school. The SchoolKids Bonus provides precisely that—a means tested payment that assists parents with the cost of school. For someone living on the poverty line that $400 or $800—depending on whether your child is in primary or secondary school—is important in making sure that they are able to meet expenses; and it can, in some instances, make the difference between a child staying on at school or dropping out of school. But unfortunately those opposite are cutting the SchoolKids Bonus so they can give a large tax break to mining billionaires. I am not sure how many mining billionaires there are in Tasmania but I would hazard a guess that there are not many.

The abolition of the carbon price and the mining tax will cost $17 billion over the forward estimates. In order to make up for that hole in the budget, those opposite have to cut into services which are important for Tasmanians. They will have to get rid of the SchoolKids
Bonus, which matters to Tasmania, and cut back on school funding. We have seen the Prime Minister's toing and froing on the weekend. When you are getting beaten up by your state premier mates and Andrew Bolt, you know you are in serious trouble—and that is where the Prime Minister found himself over the weekend. Of course, his pledge that no school would be worse off meant all Tasmanian schools. But we are not going to see that; we are going to see Tasmanian schools worse off, Tasmania being one of the jurisdictions that signed up under Labor to commit to not take state spending out of their education system as the federal government put money in.

There are important challenges for Tasmania and I do not think anyone wants to underplay those challenges—lower productivity, slower population growth over recent decades and, as Mr Eslake describes it, a mix of industrial composition which has not been good for growth over recent years. There are more sectors that have lost out from a strong Australian dollar and fewer sectors that have benefited from a mining boom. That presents important challenges for Tasmania which we need to address in a bipartisan manner.

The carbon price has been good for the Tasmanian state budget and Tasmanians have been beneficiaries of the carbon price. Getting rid of the carbon price is a mistake for Tasmania as it is for Australia's kids in the future. We want to focus on those challenges of the future for the benefit of all Australians.

Debate adjourned.

Urban Public Transport Projects

Mr STEPHEN JONES (Throsby) (10:42): I move:

That this House notes that:

(1) as identified by Infrastructure Australia, we are an urban nation with four-fifths of our population and economic activity occurring in our cities;

(2) Australia's growing cities have a strategic need for greater public transport capacity to meet the growing transport task, ease urban road congestion and ensure improved national productivity;

(3) this urban transport task is a joint Australian and state government responsibility;

(4) recognising this, Labor in government invested $13 billion—more Commonwealth funding for public transport than all other governments since Federation—and this investment in urban transport projects, put forward and assessed through Infrastructure Australia, resulted in a significant boost to the strategic development of Australia's public transport network; and

(5) urban public transport projects including the Brisbane Cross River Rail project, the Perth Public Transport Package and the Tansley Park Public Transport Package in Adelaide are nationally significant projects and are not guaranteed to proceed without Australian Government funding.

The motion before the House today is of critical importance to all Australians. Despite our bush heritage, Australia is an urban nation—four-fifths of our population and our economy activity happens in our cities. Australia's cities produce about 80 per cent of our national wealth. Our great cities can continue to be our great strength, but only if we invest in them and get the policy settings right. Urban public transport is critical to the future of Australia's cities. Our quality of life, our economic productivity and how we deal with the challenges of the future—such as an ageing population, climate change and the growth of Asia—all rely on our ability to get these things right.
For more than 100 years the unyielding trend in Australia has been towards increasing urban density. Over the next two decades Australia's public transport usage will increase by one-third. In many of our cities—including Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane—we are already at capacity for the existing public transport network. As a national parliament, with responsibility for our national interest, we cannot turn our backs on this task. Nation-building infrastructure is a shared responsibility.

Labor has a proud record of nation-building and infrastructure. Labor recognised this responsibility and Labor did something about it. First, Labor set up Infrastructure Australia, an independent process to assess Australia's infrastructure needs—the very same body that the new government is trying to dilute and tear apart. The task of Infrastructure Australia has been to assess and rank those projects that could best contribute to our economic activity. In government Labor committed to urban public transport since 2007 more than all previous governments combined and since Federation. Labor created the first ministry for infrastructure and ensured that that ministry was in parliament. The member for Grayndler was that first cabinet minister for infrastructure.

In 2011, Labor developed Australia's first ever national urban policy. In government, federal Labor committed $60 billion towards nation-building projects. This record investment went towards new, modern and well-planned transport infrastructure right across Australia. The critical point is that this investment included urban transport investment, which helped to make working people's lives easier, our businesses more competitive and the Australian economy more productive.

Given the size of the challenge, Australia is entitled to know what the views of the Prime Minister and the new government are on this great challenge in urban public transport. This is what the Prime Minister had to say quite recently: 'We have no history of funding urban rail and I think it is important that we stick to our knitting, and the Commonwealth's knitting when it comes to funding infrastructure is roads.' Where Labor had proposed to partner with the states to deliver nation-building urban rail projects, the Prime Minister, Mr Abbott, is focused on his knitting. He will not offer a cent in funding for urban public transport.

Contrast this with our approach: the arms-length Infrastructure Australia process, where economic productivity not political pork-barrelling was the centrepiece of decision making, has been the major criteria. It has seen 55 per cent of Infrastructure Australia's nation-building money going on urban rail, distributed on the basis of merit. In government, Labor strongly backed vital urban transport projects, including the Commonwealth's single largest investment in urban rail, the regional rail link in Melbourne. Since the election of the Abbott government, Commonwealth funding has been withdrawn from a number of important projects that were in the last federal budget. They were budgeted for and should be being delivered.

I will cite four important examples. The first is the Brisbane cross-river rail project. This is a tunnel under the Brisbane River that will deliver capacity of 17,000 additional passengers during peak times. That is needed because the existing rail bridge over the Brisbane River is about to run out of capacity. Going south, there is the Melbourne Metro, which would, according to the assessment by Infrastructure Australia, increase passenger capacity on Melbourne's urban rail network by a massive 30 per cent. In the west, there is the Perth airport link. This is designed to ease congestion around the busy Perth airport. Finally, there is an upgrade to Adelaide's Tonsley Park rail line. Labor worked with state governments over many
years to progress these projects. Without these projects, Brisbane, for example, will grind to a halt in four or five years, with Melbourne being almost there right now.

These commitments followed Labor's investment in the Noarlunga line in South Australia, the Moreton Bay rail link, Gold Coast rapid transport and the regional rail link. Melbourne's regional rail link is a $4.8 billion project and landmark urban infrastructure that will remove major bottlenecks in Victoria's rail network by separating the metropolitan and regional tracks. The Commonwealth proposed contribution to the regional rail link is $3.225 billion. The state would match contributions in the order of $1.582 billion. The fact is that no cash-strapped state government can come up with nearly $5 billion in funding for a project of this scale. They cannot do it on their own and they cannot do it without significant Commonwealth support and backing.

Where Labor offered partnerships, the new Prime Minister offers nothing. Those opposite know that this hands-off approach—the sticking to the knitting—is a death knell for urban infrastructure. They know that state governments lack the financial leverage to get these massive urban infrastructure projects off the ground. The Abbott government's position is nothing less than economic vandalism. It is an abdication of responsibility and a failure of leadership for a Prime Minister who made so much in recent months about traffic congestion and about infrastructure. He made it an issue in the last election campaign. This approach, this withdrawal of funds, is nothing more than hypocrisy. I can only imagine the embarrassment of the new member for Lindsay. She must be deeply ashamed of the approach that is being taken by her Prime Minister and her Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development. Her government's view is: leave it to the states. But where does that leave rail commuters from Penrith or Emu Plains?

Instead of rising to this major challenge facing so many Australians, the coalition is pushing this matter off to state governments to address themselves. It is extraordinary. In effect, the coalition is saying, if you travel to work by public transport, your problems are none of the Abbott government's problems; you are on your own. Unlike roads, public transport does not attract private sector investment. It is a proposition purely for the public sector.

The problem of urban congestion in Australia's cities is in plain sight. I think roads are important, but roads alone are not the solution. We know that one loaded passenger train can carry the same capacity as a 10-lane highway. The coalition does not want to help pay for the solution. It is not just Labor saying these things; transport experts agree. There is no reasonable rationale for the Prime Minister's decision to abandon the Commonwealth's funding of urban public transport.

Australia's cities face unprecedented challenges to ensure that they improved their productivity, sustainability and liveability. One reason that Labor established Infrastructure Australia was to take the politics out of these critical infrastructure decisions. Prime Minister Abbott is in the process of putting the politics back. There is a bill before the House that will do exactly that. National Party ministers look on infrastructure budgets as an opportunity to spend up big and to pork barrel in their electorates. Urban public transport investment has always run a big second to their favoured road projects. We cannot sit by and let this happen yet again. There is no justification for abandoning the infrastructure needs of our cities; it is just a political choice made by those opposite. Prime Minister Abbott is turning his back on
this great productivity challenge. The Prime Minister is turning his back on our great cities. Indeed, his promise in the recent election to be the 'Infrastructure Prime Minister' is turning out to be just as hollow as a unity ticket on education. He might just as easily have said: 'I want to be the Gonski Prime Minister.' I commend the motion to the House.

Mr TUDGE (Aston—Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister) (10:52): I welcome the opportunity to debate this motion put forward by the member for Throsby. The essence of this motion is that the federal government should prioritise urban rail projects, three in particular in Brisbane, Sydney and Adelaide, above its traditional infrastructure responsibilities for major roads, highways, airports, bridges and national rail networks.

The motion does not explicitly say that. In some respects, it is a typical Labor motion which suggests that we spend billions more on particular projects, as though the budget is a magic pudding and the only constraint on the magic pudding is a lack of good projects to spend money on. But Australians are smarter than the average Labor member. They know that the budget is not a magic pudding. They know that if you are going to spend billions of dollars on one type of asset—as this motion suggests—you cannot spend it on another. This motion is really about priorities for our scarce infrastructure dollars. There is no lack of projects to spend our infrastructure dollars on. We need more urban rail projects completed, including the Rowville Rail project in Melbourne. We need more ports. We need better water infrastructure. We need better airports, including a second airport for Sydney. And we need better roads, including the East West Link in my hometown of Melbourne.

All of these infrastructure projects are necessary to meet the needs of today and the future. Infrastructure Australia estimates the nation's construction shortfall at about $200 billion. Deutsche Bank prices it at about $800 billion. But despite the magic pudding economics that Labor propagates and that it tried to implement over the last six years, the simple fact is that we cannot do it all at once. So the question that this motion asks is: what should the federal government prioritise? If it is funding the Brisbane Cross River Rail project, it is not funding something else, by definition. It is not funding the East West Link in Melbourne. It is not funding the second airport at Sydney or other major infrastructure items.

I would like to make four points in relation to this question I put. The first is that the federal government should be in the business of prioritising economic infrastructure—that is, infrastructure that is going to help make the economy more productive. That is why the federal government is going to implement and invest money in a range of national road projects across the country. That includes $1.5 billion to get Melbourne's East West Link underway. It includes $1½ billion to get Sydney's WestConnex projects underway. It includes $1 billion for the Gateway Motorway in Brisbane, $615 million to build the Swan Valley bypass in Perth, $400 million to upgrade the Midland Highway in Tasmania and $500 million to begin a full upgrade of South Road, aiming to achieve the complete upgrade within a decade.

We will build these projects in consultation with the state government and we will do so efficiently, quickly and with input from the private sector. In addition, we will invest record amounts in major regional roads such as the Bruce and Pacific Highways as well as our regional bridges program, Roads to Recovery, the black spots programs and other programs. This is an ambitious infrastructure agenda, which will be undertaken by a new Prime Minister who wants to be known as an infrastructure Prime Minister and will be known as an...
infrastructure Prime Minister. If we build economic infrastructure, which we will, then the
economy can grow more rapidly, businesses can thrive; they can be more productive, which
means jobs can be created, wealth can be created and, importantly, families can spend less
time in traffic and more time at home. Infrastructure Australia has been tasked with advising
us on the priority lists to determine which ones make sense going forward on the basis of
rigorous assessments. And Infrastructure Australia will have the ability to assess public
transport projects should it choose to do so.

This approach of focusing on economic infrastructure is in stark contrast to the previous six
years, under the Labor administration. Under Labor, of course, we saw pink batts prioritised
over roads, green loans prioritised over bridges, and overpriced school halls instead of
national rail. It was an administration where billions of dollars were wasted and where the
government took on mountains of debt, but we have so little to show for it. Each of us in our
own electorates or in our own home cities can look across our city and think: where is the
economic infrastructure that this Labor administration built? They put so much debt on the
nation’s credit card but have so little to show for it. The Business Council of Australia
estimated that only 14 per cent of Labor’s multibillion-dollar stimulus package was actually
put towards enhancing economic infrastructure—only 14 per cent.

The second point I would like to make is that there is a massive backlog of infrastructure
projects that are squarely within the federal government’s domain. So it makes little sense for
the federal government to take on projects that are the responsibility of state or local
governments. We have our hands full with infrastructure projects, and thanks to what we
inherited from the Labor government there is very little money in the bank; there is very little
financial room to move. Let’s focus on our job and ask the states and local governments to
focus on theirs. If we were rolling in money it might be different. But clearly we are not.

The third point is that we have the capacity to build a lot more infrastructure in this nation,
with the pool of money that we have available, if we can get costs down. We have become an
extremely high-cost country for developing infrastructure. The Business Council of Australia,
estimates that the cost of resource projects is 40 per cent higher in Australian than in America.
The cost to build a new school is 26 per cent higher than in America. Airports cost 90 per cent
more. We have to get the cost of building infrastructure down, and we have asked the
Productivity Commission to look into this and to advise us on mechanisms for doing so.

Finally, let me say something about one of the biggest infrastructure projects that is
planned for Australia: the East West Link in Melbourne. This is a tremendously exciting
project that each coalition member in the state of Victoria campaigned on. It will finally
connect the Eastern Freeway to the west of Melbourne, and in doing so will complete
Melbourne’s ring-road. It is rated as the number one infrastructure project by the Royal
Automobile Club of Victoria. Residents in my electorate are excited by it, not only because it
will assist in dealing with the Hoddle Street bottleneck but also because it will take pressure
off the Monash Freeway, which is so busy with morning peak-hour traffic. We are strongly in
favour of this particular project. I know the state government is strongly in favour of this
project, and even the union movement is in favour of this project. But, sadly, the Labor party
is not. Mr Deputy Speaker, I do not like to reflect on you while you are in the chair, but the
member for McEwen has referred to it as an appalling project. We do not think that. My
constituents do not think it is an appalling project. We think it is an outstanding project which is long overdue, and we would like to have bipartisan commitment for it.

We welcome this motion from the member for Throsby, as I said at the outset. But the budget is not a magic pudding. Labor thought it was, and for six years they spent and spent on projects which have not added to our economic infrastructure in Australia. They spend it on pink batts, on green loans and on over-priced school halls. We need to get back to building the economic infrastructure which will help enhance our economy.

Mr Giles (Scullin) (11:02): I am pleased to rise in support of the member for Throsby's motion. I am pleased also to follow the member for Aston. I hope that the East West project, which is a matter of great concern to my electors, is a matter that the Victorian government has the confidence to put before the Victorian people at next November's election so the electors can judge it on its merits. If the contracts are not signed in advance, we will see whether the Napthine government—if it lasts to November—has the confidence to put that project as the centrepiece of its agenda for Victoria's future. I am also pleased that the member for Aston referred to the importance of rail projects. I am sure he would understand, as is central to this motion, that the Commonwealth must be a part of funding projects like the Rowville rail, which I believe was also promised by the Napthine government, but I am unsure of its progress to date. He also touched upon the role Infrastructure Australia might play going forward. I hope that he and other members opposite are aware of the view Infrastructure Australia took of the Melbourne Metro rail project, which is that it is a necessity for Melbourne today and tomorrow.

Deputy Speaker, as you are probably aware, in the lead-up to this year's federal election, I spent a bit of time at train stations along the South Morang and Hurstbridge lines. I may have even seen you once or twice there. In early mornings across these stations I spoke to many, many constituents of mine and yours, and constituents from across a range of other electorates. One thing I was struck by was the level of engagement in how urban public transport is critical to the future of outer suburban communities and how well voters understood the role of national government in this. The response of commuters was overwhelmingly in favour of federal Labor's Melbourne Metro rail link—unsurprisingly, it is also the view of Infrastructure Australia—and supportive of Labor's commitment to planning, design and engineering works for the new eight-kilometre, two-track rail tunnels under the central business district to relieve congested rail lines and improve travel times. People understood, even though it does not directly go to Melbourne's North, how critical it will be for commuters in Hurstbridge, in Diamond Creek, in Wattle Glen, in South Morang and in Epping to have an improved service and to spend more time doing the things they want to be doing with their families rather than travelling to and from work.

This positive response, interestingly, was not restricted to rail commuters. When I ran street stalls or doorknocked, particularly in new communities around Epping North, I was struck by the enthusiasm across the community for a greater role for state and federal governments in expanding public transport in the outer suburbs. Public transport is important even to those who do not intend to use it. They understand what congestion means and why freeing up our roads also plays a critical role in expanding urban public transport. Federal Labor's commitment to urban rail is consistent with the role of the federal government since Federation. It is worth noting that section 98 of the Australian Constitution refers specifically
to the power of this parliament to make laws with respect to trade and commerce extending to navigation, shipping and railways. It does not mention roads. Furthermore, as Professor Newman from Curtin University has pointed out, Western Australia—and I see the member for Perth sitting here, who will no doubt make a great contribution to this debate, as she has, practically, in her previous roles—was brought into the Federation on the proviso that the transcontinental railway was built to Perth.

So I was quite taken aback, as the member for Throsby was, by the remarks of the then Leader of the Opposition, now prime minister, that the federal government has no history of funding urban rail, and that it is important that we stick to our knitting—and the Commonwealth's knitting—when it comes to funding infrastructure is roads. There is obviously some very recent history to the contrary, of course, such as the great nation-building agenda overseen by the member for Grayndler in his previous capacities, and its relationship to Labor's vision of the national government's role in forming in shaping our cities. On the other hand, I was heartened to read that Victorian Labor has recently announced Project 10,000, which acknowledged the shared role for state and federal governments to make targeted investment in our rail network to enable the delivery of more services, taking into account the needs of all communities across inner, middle, outer-suburban and regional areas. For public transport, this means Melbourne Metro rail doubling the size of the city loop, and the Metro Level Crossing Blitz program removing 50 of the 180 level crossings on the rail network. This will require the same level of state and federal cooperation which enabled the delivery of the wonderful Regional Rail Link in the western suburbs.

Only Labor has a plan to keep our cities moving—a plan that involves investing in both rail and road infrastructure. That is why, in government, Labor doubled the federal roads budget and committed more to urban public transport infrastructure than all our predecessors combined since federation. I call on the Victorian government and the federal coalition government to follow Labor's lead and invest in urban public transport.

Mr ALEXANDER (Bennelong) (11:07): The member for Throsby has raised some important points on the development of our cities and on the problems that have arisen as a result of relentless centralisation and a lack of any master planning of our nation's development. My electorate of Bennelong is a prime example of total failure by the former Labor government when it comes to honouring infrastructure commitments. Former Prime Minister Gillard's 2010 election announcement of $2.1 billion for the completion of the Epping to Parramatta Rail Link caught everybody by surprise—even her own colleagues in the New South Wales government, as the project was not even listed on their ten-year infrastructure plan. And, as the history books show, the $2.1 billion never materialised.

In contrast, the O'Farrell Liberal government was elected in New South Wales in 2011 with a promise to build the North West Rail Link. Since it was first announced by the New South Wales Labor government in 1998, a 13-year delay has seen the cost of the project blow out from $360 million to $8 billion. But the coalition kept their word. A request was made for a federal contribution—for a reallocation of the unspent $2.1 billion from the Epping to Parramatta rail line. The money was not forthcoming but the project continued. Shovels have already hit the ground. This is the way to deliver public transport infrastructure.

The coalition has a strong record of investment in productivity-enhancing infrastructure, and we have made significant commitments to infrastructure to improve productivity and
address congestion. Prime Minister Abbott, our nation’s first infrastructure Prime Minister, is determined that this government will work with the states to build the infrastructure of the 21st century. In Sydney, this includes $1.5 billion for the WestConnex and $405 million to assist in the construction of the F3 to M2 link. In recognition of the importance of infrastructure, we have introduced—as one of the first bills of this new parliament—amendments to make Infrastructure Australia a more independent, transparent and expert infrastructure advisory body. This includes the development of a 15-year infrastructure plan for Australia, with this plan to be revised every five years. The plan is to specify clearly infrastructure priorities at national and state levels, based on rigorous and transparent assessment, and hopefully to avoid the types of thought-bubble announcements that we have seen from the Labor Party over the past six years.

Former New South Wales premier, Bob Carr, declared in 2001, ‘Sydney is full.’ It is not full and it was not then—but it has outgrown its infrastructure. It serves as the most acute example of the problems that result when planning and infrastructure are not commensurate with growth. It is a most absurd situation that Sydney can boast the second-highest land prices in the world, when land is this country’s most abundant asset. The task is to plan in a way that brings together regional development and urban renewal in a complementary strategy. The pledge of our Prime Minister is that Australia is under new management and open for business—and that we will build the roads of the 21st century, which will deliver greater productivity, efficiency, competitiveness, economic development and wealth. This will be done in a prudent manner while we live within our means.

These great aspirations cannot be achieved while we are burdened with conflict between state and federal governments and while we have red and green tape greater than any iceberg. Vision, innovation, cooperation, and the forming of a team to achieve this common goal must all be present if we are to realise our potential. Stability and certainty are the essential building blocks for business to have the confidence to invest in a project, and to gear up with the certain knowledge that what has been promised will be delivered. Major urban infrastructure projects, coupled with appropriate zoning, provide businesses with the opportunity to invest in the urban renewal and densification of our major cities that is so overdue. The simple fact is that infrastructure must be justified by a commercial return through economic growth and the creation of wealth. Our cities and our country areas must be viable to be sustainable. These are the conversations that need to be had in this important policy area. These are the conversations that were sorely lacking during the six-year tenure of the previous Labor government.

Ms MacTIERNAN (Perth) (11:12): I rise to speak on this motion regarding urban public transport projects. I think this has been a very interesting debate, and I commend the member for Throsby for bringing this on. We have heard here today, from the member for Aston and from the member for Bennelong, a very clear demonstration of what the problem is. They say, ‘No, this is not going to be our priority because a federal coalition government is going to invest in economic infrastructure.’ And they say, ‘We’re going to invest in infrastructure that is going to add to our productivity.’ Therein lies the very profound problem that we have with our Prime Minister and with the direction in which he has set this government: a complete and utter failure to understand the nature of cities or to understand the very profound link between productivity and cities, and the need for that productivity of cities to be enhanced and
preserved through the provision of mobility. Cities are the drivers of our economic growth. Over and over again, all of the economic data is showing that we need large cities to drive this economic growth. This is where we bring together the specialisation of skills and the diversity of skills—so we get those skill sets together, available to create industry, innovation and enterprise.

This has been totally misunderstood by the present government. Very interestingly, earlier this year I was invited to participate in a national conference run by the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute on national urban policy. That conference asked about the role of policy and teased out all those very important issues about productivities and cities. The coalition sent Scott Morrison, now the Minister for Immigration, who spoke about immigration policy. He spoke mainly about refugee policy, and he said absolutely nothing about urban policy. When he was asked: 'Look, this is a conference on urban policy; where is your urban policy? What are the elements of your urban policy?' The response was, 'Well, we don't have one; we leave that stuff to the states.' We had the member for Bennelong saying, a few minutes ago, that we need to get our cities organised; we need to look at densification; we have to be very productive and we only have to invest in productivity. These are the critical productivity issues of our time. These guys on the benches opposite see public transport as welfare stuff. They think it has nothing to do with productivity. It has absolutely everything to do with productivity!

Indeed, it has been very interesting that in Perth recently the RAC did a survey of businesses across Perth, and 82 per cent of those businesses said that the increasing road congestion in Perth is having a major impact on their productivity. It also found that 74 per cent of businesses believed it was affecting their ability to attract staff, to get them to work on time and to work productively. These are major productivity issues. They do need investment. In Perth we are growing rapidly and generating income for the nation. As I have said before, we are only getting some 40 cents back in the GST dollar. We are making a major contribution across the state, and the majority of people who work in the mining industry are living in Perth. They need to get around. We need this infrastructure. The state Liberal government has said that they are unable to do this by themselves and they made pledges at the last election to build a rail line to the airport and to build a light rail system. Federal Labor promised $500 million to help them get one of those projects across the line. But now that is not going to happen. There will be no federal government assistance to the state government, and therefore the state government has made it clear that it will not be following through on those projects. *(Time expired)*

**Ms O'DWYER (Higgins) (11:18):** I concur in the Member for Throsby's view that the provision of infrastructure within Australia is vital to our ongoing economic prosperity, not just within regional and rural communities but also in our growing urban centres. This is something that is well understood within my electorate of Higgins, which covers inner south-eastern Melbourne, where road and rail congestion has both a social and economic impact. The electorate of Higgins is served by two rail lines, the Glen Waverley line to the middle eastern suburbs and the longer Dandenong line, which serves over one million people in Melbourne's south-east. It is a key area for future population and economic growth with commercial sites through to Dandenong and thereafter the proposed deep-water port of Hastings. The catchment area of this rail corridor alone contributed $92 billion in 2007-08,
accounting for roughly half of Melbourne's gross domestic product, or nine per cent nationally.

Historically, Melbourne has benefited from thoughtful planning. However, there remain 172 grade-level crossings within metropolitan Melbourne, with eight of these in Higgins—the same number as for the whole of metropolitan Sydney. Many of these crossings are positioned on Melbourne's busiest roads, adjacent to major arterials such as the Monash Freeway and the Dandenong Road/Princes Highway. These level crossings cause substantial delays to motorists, road-based freight and road-based public transport—15 to 40 minutes during peak times—while limiting growth in rail-based public transport due to capacity constraints. Along the Dandenong rail corridor, within Higgins and bordering Chisholm and Hotham, level crossing congestion is hands-down the single largest issue facing constituents on a daily basis. It influences key decisions such as where they will shop; where they will send their children to school; and how they will access work.

The 2012 RACV red-spot survey ranks three Higgins level crossings in Victoria's top 10 worst congestion sites. They are: Murrumbeena Road, Murrumbeena (No. 1); Koornang Road, Carnegie (No. 4) and Burke Road, Glen Iris (No. 5).

There is broad agreement as to the nature of the problem. How these projects are funded, however, remains less clear. Given that the removal of a level crossing costs up to $200 million, it is important to consider the track record of actual investment by governments, because, as we all know, talk is cheap. The biggest effort by any Victorian government to address this very real issue has come from the current Victorian government. I am pleased to say that as part of this process the Victorian government has commenced planning for the removal of the level crossings at Burke Road, Glen Iris and Murrumbeena Road, Murrumbeena. Both are within Higgins. In fact, just under a fortnight ago over 400 people attended public meetings held by VicRoads to discuss the proposed plans for the Burke Road level crossing.

This progress is in stark contrast to the inaction of the previous federal and state Labor governments. It is of concern to me that since 2011 the Victorian government has been unsuccessful in seeking federal government support, via Infrastructure Australia and the Nation Building Program, despite the fact that this infrastructure is productivity-enhancing infrastructure that would pay huge social and economic dividends to Victoria. In fact, in the 2011-2012 federal budget, Victorians received the lowest federal spending per person on infrastructure of any state in Australia.

To raise awareness at a federal level, I have spoken regularly in this place on this issue. In June of this year I tabled a petition signed by 1,151 constituents calling for greater funding priority to be given to level crossing removal by the federal government. I wrote regularly to the member for Grayndler, the then Minister for Infrastructure and Transport, and—following his visit to a St Albans railway crossing with the member for Maribyrnong and now Leader of the Opposition—I even invited him to come and see the difficulties posed by at grade-level crossings in my electorate.

Debate interrupted.
Rural Clinical Schools

Dr STONE (Murray) (11:22): I move:

That this House:

(1) celebrates the success of Rural Clinical Schools (RCS) around Australia, commenced in 1999 by the then Minister for Health, the Hon. Dr Michael Wooldridge MP, and continued by his successor, the Hon. Tony Abbott MP;

(2) notes that:

(a) RCS were designed to overcome the maldistribution of all doctors including general practitioners across Australia, which left country regions short of general practitioners and other specialty doctors;

(b) students undertaking training in rural locations have academic results that are equal to or better than their metropolitan counterparts;

(c) published data from public universities show high rates of RCS graduates working in, or intending to work in rural areas; and

(d) the information gathered through an independent project tracking all Australian and New Zealand medical students—Medical Schools Outcomes Database—demonstrates that long term placements in a rural setting through RCS have a significant impact on the vocational choice and intention to practice in a rural or remote setting as well as future career specialty focus; and

(3) calls on the Government to:

(a) continue its support for these excellent initiatives; and

(b) examine opportunities to increase intern and postgraduate training places in rural locations to enhance the future of specialty medical service delivery with a focus on general practitioners in rural and regional Australia.

I rise to commend this most important motion to the House. I believe this motion will have bipartisan support, given that the previous government continued to support and encourage rural clinical schools following their establishment nearly 14 years ago. I thank all speakers to this motion, including members of the opposition. Ensuring there are adequate medical services in rural and remote areas in Australia is beyond party politics.

The 2013 fact sheet of the Medical Deans Australia and New Zealand reported that there were 18 medical schools in Australia, which doubled the number of commencing medical students from 1,660 in 2000 to 3,469 in 2010. Despite these numbers and their steady increase, peaking and plateauing in 2014, when it is expected there may be 700 unemployed doctor graduates, most people will tell you there is shortage of doctors in Australia. But this is not true. The reason some country patients have to wait weeks for a GP appointment or hours in an accident and emergency centre is that we have a chronic maldistribution of medical practitioners across populations.

The very good news is that things are dramatically improving due to our rural clinical schools. In 1999 the then Minister for Health, the Hon. Dr Michael Wooldridge, introduced the concept of rural clinical schools. These were bold in concept. They required medical students to spend a significant amount of time out of the cities training in rural settings. Today, in places like Shepparton, Wangaratta, Ballarat and Alice Springs, we take this rural training situation for granted. But in in 1999, students, mostly born and bred in our cities, had to be gently nudged out of their comfort zone into rural hospitals and clinics. They were exposed to life in country towns and to work in small communities and larger regional centres. Impressive amounts of Commonwealth capital built state-of-the-art rural clinical...
school campuses and accommodation in these regional settings. Leading academics were attracted from the metropolitan medical schools or from overseas to lead in the establishment of these new clinical schools.

On 5 August 1999, John Howard turned the first sod for the building of a rural clinical campus at Shepparton. It poured rain that day and then failed to rain for another 10 years, pretty much, but no-one regrets that momentous sod-turning on that very wet day. Today there are 17 rural clinical schools associated with 16 universities, funded by the Commonwealth in every state and territory but with significant state collaboration and cross-university and health service cooperation. It is not just general practice that is involved but all of the specialties. Every Australian medical student now undertakes a rural clinical placement, while, as a consequence of the rural clinical schools, at least 25 per cent spend a year or more training and experiencing the culture and different health perspectives of a rural population.

Although it takes 10 to 13 years to produce an independent practising doctor, there is now good data to show that these rural clinical schools have succeeded beyond expectations. While the first urban campus based students had to be cajoled to go bush, now there are waiting lists, for example, at the University of Melbourne's medical school, as students vie for a place at the Shepparton campus. It is the same with other universities. The medical student outcome data, the MSOD, surveys every medical student in New Zealand and Australia at the beginning of their studies, upon exit and three years after graduation in order to have a comprehensive understanding of the student, graduate experience and destinations. This data is showing that, as a result of at least a year's rural training experience, a significantly greater number of students now convert from intending to practise in a city to wanting to practise in a rural area.

University of Melbourne data shows that 40 to 45 per cent—that is nearly half—of their rural clinical school graduates are training or working in an RA2+ location six years after graduation from the 2006 graduating cohort or earlier. While this university, like so many others, is targeting rural-origin students for its medical student intake, it has found that, as a consequence of its rural clinical schools, the conversion of urban-origin students to preferring a rural practice after graduation is now very high. Published data from rural clinical schools reports that students from Flinders University, the University of Queensland, James Cook University, the University of Western Australia and the University of New South Wales all show high rates of rural clinical school graduates working in or intending to work in rural areas. These students have also shown a change in intended medical discipline as a result of their rural training experience. At the commencement of training many students wish to become surgeons. At the end of their medical training, many more instead want to become general practitioners, obstetricians, gynaecologists, paediatricians, anaesthetists and pathologists. University of Melbourne data that compares examination results of rural clinical schools and urban clinical schools has found that students in the RCSs performed better than those from the urban clinical schools.

But there is more. The University of Melbourne realised that it was very difficult to find training places in one- or two-person private GP clinics, often with an ageing couple of doctors in small country towns. So they embarked on a further innovation, building with the Commonwealth's assistance a Shepparton GP training medical centre. This is the first purpose-built general practice for clinical training. It is located on the rural clinics campus.
across the road from Goulburn Valley Health, also known as Shepparton Hospital. The operating costs are self-funded, so there is no additional cost to governments. The medical centre has 20 consulting rooms and two procedure rooms to enable parallel consulting, where a medical student is first responsible for assessing the patient on their own prior to the academic GP supervisor input.

The 40,000 strong Shepparton-Mooroopna community, with its large Indigenous and multicultural population, has embraced this medical student focused and supported service. There are over 6,500 active patient cases on the books. At the most recent Shepparton Chamber of Commerce Business of the Year Awards, the community voted this clinic the best enterprise and service provider of the year. So much for worries about having a medical student diagnose your child's flu or broken ankle! Waiting times at the hospital emergency department across the road have been reduced. Bulk-billing is the norm and needed in this community, where the food-manufacturing industry has been the major employer and where 25 per cent are now on welfare support.

This purpose-built GP clinic, which provides excellent service to the community at the same time that it facilitates medical student training, is clearly a model to be emulated wherever there is a problem in placing students in private GP clinics in country towns. It also provides a successful alternative model to the superclinics, which are having troubles. The good news is that this is just the sort of innovation and evolution that is typical of the university's rural clinical schools across the country.

The University of Melbourne has also partnered with one of the last public pathology labs in regional Victoria—in fact, one of the last in regional Australia. This vital piece of medical infrastructure, which includes a blood bank, employs some 95 medical scientists in GV Health. Their jobs and critical services are now secure as a result of this partnership and collaboration. Again, this is typical of the cooperation which local hospitals and clinics in regional Australia experience when they have the good fortune to be located near a regional clinical school.

The original vision of Michael Wooldridge, followed by successive health ministers Tony Abbott, Nicola Roxon, Tanya Plibersek and now Peter Dutton, has delivered us a way forward in training health professionals who want to practise in the bush. However, there is a roadblock in this otherwise triumphal story. Unless there are intern places and specialty training places in regional and remote settings, the investment in these regional training experiences for undergraduates can be lost.

In the Review of Australian government health workforce programs, dated April 2013, the author highlights this problem. In summary, she says that we have to also have specialty training places in rural and regional Australia. She says:

In the other specialties, this lack of rurally-based intern positions is further hampered by limited rural training opportunities for trainees seeking fellowship of a specialist medical college, noting that the—Commonwealth—STP … has made some difference in this area.

A recent Senate inquiry came to a similar conclusion. The problem is not hard to understand. If you have to return to a capital city for a number of years to do your specialist training at a
critical stage in your life, you are likely to stay. Your partner will want to work there, your children will want to go to school there and you will tend to stay.

All we need—and it is simple—is adequate specialty training places relocated to rural centres. We need these places for GPs, general surgeons, obstetricians and gynaecologists, general medicine, emergency medicine and anaesthetics. We have the proven RCS model with its infrastructure, excellent staff and well-established cooperation and coordination with local hospitals and health alliances. We can overcome this final hurdle in the maldistribution of medical practitioners in Australia.

I commend this motion to the House. We do not need more medical graduates; we need graduates who are able to seamlessly move between metro, outer metro and rural. We have achieved this. Our maldistribution continues now not as a consequence of lack of will or ignorance about the joys of country life but because we need the supporting specialty training places. *(Time expired)*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott):** Is the motion seconded?

**Ms Marino:** I second the motion and reserve my right to speak.

**Mr SNOWDON (Lingiari) (11:33):** I thank the member for Murray for putting this motion on the books and I thank the seconder for doing the right thing by her and us. I will make some observations, although I will come back a little later to the substance of what the member for Murray said earlier. She mentioned the maldistribution of doctors. I will refer to that as we go through. She mentioned roadblocks, the number of training positions and the need for specialists—all of which I concur with. I just want to give some sort of picture here of why this is so vitally important.

Where I live, Alice Springs, probably is the most remote major regional town in the country and has amongst the sickest population in the country. We know—the data is there for all to see—that people in the bush, regardless of where the bush is or what your definition of 'the bush' is, are more likely to suffer from chronic disease, have a shorter life expectancy and experience higher rates of death. The main contributors to these higher rates of death include coronary heart disease, other circulatory diseases and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. Compared to their metropolitan cousins and their brothers and sisters who live in the cities, they have a shorter life expectancy by one to two years in regional areas and up to as much as seven to eight years in really remote parts of Australia, such as in my own electorate. Of course, health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the bush are the worst of all. The picture here is not a good one. For example, nowhere else in the developed world are there such high rates of endemic trachoma as in Australia. We are on track to defeat it by 2020, but the fact is that we still have not.

People in remote areas are unfortunately and quite sadly more likely to smoke, more likely—and sadly, again—to engage in risky alcohol consumption and more likely to be sedentary. This places them at greater risk of developing preventable illnesses associated with smoking, alcohol and lack of exercise, and chronic and acute injuries. Rates of asthma, arthritis, bronchitis and some preventable cancers, such as melanoma and lung cancer, are higher in rural and remote areas.

Part of the rural-urban health disparity in Australia is caused by inequalities in access to health care. For example, as noted in the *Australian Journal of Rural Health*: 

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Part of the rural-urban health disparity in Australia is caused by inequalities in access to healthcare, for example, in timely access to life-saving cardiac catheterisation services and availability of medical practitioners, particularly specialists.

That concurs with the member for Murray's view. This suggests we need better service delivery of health care for people who live outside the metropolitan centres. Part of the problem is the undersupply of trained health professionals in rural areas. Whilst we are concentrating on doctors, we need to understand that we have shortages across all health disciplines in the bush.

A 2008 audit by the Department of Health and Ageing found a persistent workforce shortage in the supply of doctors, nurses and other health professionals in rural and regional Australia. Rural Australia has experienced medical workforce shortages for a considerable period across the full range of health disciplines. Numbers of GPs in proportion to the population decrease significantly with greater remoteness, with the lowest supply to very remote areas. That concurs again with the member for Murray's observation about the maldistribution of medical practitioners.

One strategy to combat this has been to restrict Medicare provider numbers for overseas trained doctors to encourage them to work in rural areas where there is a workforce shortage. Currently 41 per cent of all rural practitioners are doctors who were trained overseas—that is a staggering figure. We have a real issue here about making sure that Australian trained personnel get the opportunity to live and work in the bush and be trained in the bush.

The rural clinical schools provide a way to overcome this maldistribution, as suggested by the member for Murray, including general practitioners across Australia, by increasing the exposure of Australian medical students to training and to getting work in a rural area. It was an initiative of the Howard government that has been continued by successive governments. Ten RCSs were established in 2000-01 and a further seven in 2006-07. We now have 17 rural clinical schools across Australia, managed by 16 universities. The need for greater coordination between the university medical schools—where they are operating and how they are operating; what they are doing, in fact—is an issue that I hope to come back to.

The RCS program is part of the broader Rural Clinic Training and Support program, which is the amalgamation of the Rural Clinical School and the Rural Undergraduate Support and Coordination programs. This program, as the member for Murray mentioned, mandates that 25 per cent of medical students must be from a rural background and that they must attend an RCS for at least 12 months.

We know that people who are trained in the bush are more likely to stay in the bush. From my own discussions with people outside this place, in my electorate of Lingiari there is the Northern Territory Remote Clinical School, which was established in 2005 and has sites in Alice Springs, Katherine and Nhulunbuy. It is part of the NT Medical Program, which is a partnership between the Flinders University School of Medicine and Charles Darwin University. This program provides training and placement opportunities for Flinders University and James Cook University students and for interstate medical students from other universities, including ANU, Melbourne—you name it. They are all ending up in the Northern Territory, which is good. It allows students to spend up to six months or more in a rural location, exposing them to a different learning environment that adds to their broader clinical experience.
In my home town of Alice Springs we have had the development of the Centre for Remote Health, a joint centre of Flinders University and Charles Darwin University. It is one of a network of university departments of rural health funded by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing to improve the health status of populations in rural and remote areas by appropriate preparation of the health workforce, thereby improving recruitment and retention levels. The schools have a valuable role in providing opportunities to increase intern and postgraduate training places in rural locations to enhance the future of specialty medical services delivery, with a focus on general practitioners in rural and regional Australia. I believe that the impact of the Remote Clinical School in the Northern Territory has been a very positive one. It means that more students are spending time in rural and remote communities.

It is true also that we have a large number of people seeking training, because of the number of training places that were put in place by the former Gillard and Rudd governments. We have doubled the number of training places currently available from that in 2007. That is remarkable in itself, but it means that, working together with universities and medical practitioners in the bush, we can get people into the bush and trained in the bush, ideally in places like Alice Springs and the member for Murray's city of Shepparton, which I have visited—I have visited the RCTS in Shepparton. It is very important that we undertake to reinforce our desire to see these continue.

I will make an observation: we should not be preoccupied just with medical practitioners. There are shortages across the whole range of health professions, not just in the specialties across the areas that the member for Murray spoke about but in physiotherapy, audio services, audiologists, all the health sciences you can think of—those allied health professionals who are essential to getting people to recover. What we are seeing more of is that GPs do not work on their own; they work as part of a team, which might include a physiotherapist or a speech therapist or one of the other allied health professionals. So it is important that when we think about this training we think about encouraging university departments of rural health to think about having team training, to think about making sure that when they are putting these doctors in these places for training they provide the resources where possible to train allied health professionals alongside them, because they will be working alongside them. I am sure it is the experience in Shepparton. I know it is the experience across Northern Australia. It is certainly the experience of doctors in Central Australia, and I know how highly they value these partnerships with allied health professionals, because then they can provide effective treatment for the sickest people in this country. That is what this is ultimately about: getting better health outcomes for the poorest people and the sickest people in this country—in my case, in my electorate of Lingiari. If we can continue to work with these programs, we will get the outcomes we all want over time. I say to the honourable member: whilst I understand paragraph 3(b) of her motion, I would prefer to have seen it expanded across all the health professions. *(Time expired)*

Debate interrupted.

**DISTINGUISHED VISITORS**

The **DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Hon. BC Scott) (11:43): Before I call the next speaker, I welcome Warwick West State School, from my own constituency, who are here and who are seeing a debate that is probably very relevant to their own community.
PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Rural Clinical Schools

Debate resumed on the motion:

That this House:

(1) celebrates the success of Rural Clinical Schools (RCS) around Australia, commenced in 1999 by the then Minister for Health, the Hon. Dr Michael Wooldridge MP, and continued by his successor, the Hon. Tony Abbott MP;

(2) notes that:

(a) RCS were designed to overcome the maldistribution of all doctors including general practitioners across Australia, which left country regions short of general practitioners and other specialty doctors;

(b) students undertaking training in rural locations have academic results that are equal to or better than their metropolitan counterparts;

(c) published data from public universities show high rates of RCS graduates working in, or intending to work in rural areas; and

(d) the information gathered through an independent project tracking all Australian and New Zealand medical students—Medical Schools Outcomes Database—demonstrates that long term placements in a rural setting through RCS have a significant impact on the vocational choice and intention to practice in a rural or remote setting as well as future career specialty focus; and

(3) calls on the Government to:

(a) continue its support for these excellent initiatives; and

(b) examine opportunities to increase intern and postgraduate training places in rural locations to enhance the future of specialty medical service delivery with a focus on general practitioners in rural and regional Australia.

Ms MARINO (Forrest—Government Whip) (11:43): I am very pleased to second this motion by the member for Murray. Rural clinical schools are often, as the member for Murray knows well, quite critical in providing the graduates so desperately needed in regional, rural and remote communities to deliver the services that are generally accepted as being standard in an urban or metropolitan environment. But in many parts of regional Australia the services that those communities need are not locally available. Specialist services are generally provided in areas of high population, but it is essential to get specialists as well out into major regional centres, including Bunbury in the south-west of WA. Even basic services are often in short supply in regional areas. Many country towns still struggle to retain services as basic as simply having a general practitioner on call. That is why the rural clinical school training program is so vital.

As the member said, it was designed in the late 1990s and introduced by the Howard government in the early 2000s to address the shortage of medical practitioners within rural, regional and remote Australia. In fact, I would argue that it is perhaps the only evidence based intervention developed to date that has had a measurable impact on the urban and rural maldistribution of doctors in Australia. The rural clinical school initiative is working and, as the member for Murray rightly pointed out, there is further work to do. It is a very practical response that works on the ground, and it does need continued support to do so.

We know that the aim of the program is to ensure effective medical student training, to be maintained in rural Australia. We hope that this continues to ensure the development and
retention of that local medical workforce. The 25 per cent rate also ensures that we get young people—people of all ages—in the program. We want to recruit more students from rural regions to go back and stay in those areas to practise.

The rural clinical school is important, too, for students from urban backgrounds who have not had an experience in a regional area. They can find out just how rewarding it is to be any form of medical practitioner. But a GP in a small regional community is critical. I said to one group of people at the rural clinical school, 'In a regional community, the local GP is akin to God to families.' Where you go for the most critical thing for your family is medical treatment. Local communities, small communities, which do not have any medical support have absolute respect for their doctor. You have to feel it to actually understand it—and I understand it very well, as does the member for Murray. This positive experience is important, which is what the rural clinical school provides.

In 2008, the rural clinical school in my part of WA won a national university teaching award for innovative curriculum and the Premier's Award for strengthening the state. That is how good it is. The program includes two cities in my electorate: Bunbury and Busselton. The Edith Cowan campus, which is in the same block, includes the South West Health Campus and the St John of God private hospital. It offers three fully-furnished homes. Accommodation is so important for the students who come out to rural and regional areas. They are just a walk away from the university and the hospitals. The Busselton office is located in Gale Street, which is only a five-minute walk from the Busselton Hospital and is fully furnished as well. A really important part of what this program delivers is the capacity for these students to enjoy their time and to form an affinity, a connection, to the community as well as an understanding of how important they are.

I commend the member for Murray for her motion. This is a practical approach. I understand the specific issues that she has raised in the second part of the motion regarding intern and specialty training places. This is a program that we who represent rural, regional and remote Australia understand as being critical to our local communities. There is very little that is more important than the health of families and individuals in our communities. It is the presence of local GPs, doctors and specialists across the board which helps our communities to function and keeps the members of our community safe and healthy. I commend the member for this motion. (Time expired)

Ms CHESTERS (Bendigo) (11:48): I wish to make a few comments in relation to this motion on rural clinical schools. When I saw the motion, I thought it was a great opportunity to highlight some of the opportunities that we have in Bendigo in relation to this issue. Access to health services in rural areas—as you know, Mr Deputy Speaker—is always a challenge. Whether it be health services or medical shortages, they are amongst the top issues facing our rural and regional communities.

We need to acknowledge the historic difficulties for Australians in rural and regional areas in accessing adequate health care, compared to our city counterparts. An example of this is clearly demonstrated when we look at our GP levels: 200 doctors per 100,000 people in regional Australia compared to 370 doctors in major cities. In other words, there is almost half the number of GPs in regional areas for a larger geographical area.

I only have to take a quick drive out of Bendigo to hit a small township where these issues are occurring in my electorate. So the question, of course, is: how do we fix this? I note the
comments on the data from public universities that show higher rates of RCS graduates working or intending to work in rural areas. This is encouraging, but I believe that we can do better than 'intending to work' by looking at the medical places that we have and at new initiatives.

I take on board the comments that we do not need more medical students, but perhaps it is where we have our medical students in training that we need to address. Many in this chamber would know that La Trobe Bendigo is part of the Murray-Darling Medical School, which is an innovative new model of medical education in rural Australia. It is a joint initiative between La Trobe University and Charles Sturt University, and basically takes in the area in its name: the Murray-Darling. It is a new medical school and offers medical training in a regional campus from year 1 to year 5, which currently does not exist in Victoria. Under the model, it is basically 'grow your own', as we have just discussed here today. It is about taking regional students and training them in a regional setting in the hope and with the aim that these students will have careers in their regional towns and communities.

La Trobe Bendigo is already having this success. Under Labor, $40 million was spent on building the Rural School of Health. As another speaker referred to, we cannot talk about medicine and clinical placement for GPs alone; we need to consider the whole health profession. La Trobe is already training nurses, psychologists, dentists—in fact, every area of allied health—but the one area it does not have is medicine. Therefore, it is the missing jewel in the crown.

How successful have they been? La Trobe Bendigo is seeing more than 80 per cent of their health graduates go on to work in rural employment. So the model works. In the model to recruit in the regions, train in the regions, in every aspect of their training, and stay in the regions, so it is already working. This is by having the School of Rural Health. We have the facilities ready to train these extra doctors.

This is an astounding statistic, because we know, when we compare it to domestic students graduating from medical programs, fewer than 10 per cent are actually ending up in our regional communities. Some stay and some go. The ones that come from Monash to Bendigo describe their trip to Bendigo as being like a rural exchange. The word 'exchange' suggests that they are not there for long haul, and, whilst some may stay, many return to the city for their final year or for further clinical placement.

I agree with the comments in the media and the community that medical graduates cannot fix the rural workforce shortages if there are no jobs to go to. I agree with the statement that we need to expand our rural training capacity so that new doctors are not forced to return to the cities for their internships or specialty training. This is where Bendigo offers a unique opportunity with the building of its new hospital. This hospital does provide the opportunity for a larger workforce. It is doubling the number of beds that it has and therefore the number of patients that it will receive and therefore the workforce. (Time expired)

Mr BROADBENT (McMillan) (11:53): The first thing I would like to do is congratulate the member for Murray in her continuing efforts to fight the good fight on behalf of regional Australia, particularly in regard to her own constituents, in that she has always put their health, wellbeing and future at the forefront of all her activity. I commend her for that and thank her for bringing this very important motion to the floor of the chamber.
Also I thank the member for Forrest, who never gives up in her pursuit of policies that benefit rural, regional and remote Australia. There are a number of us in this House, and I was pleased to hear the new member for Bendigo speak on behalf of rural and regional people. We cannot ever lose sight of the fact that the whole of Australia does not live on the eastern seaboard of this nation; in fact, they live in rural and remote places.

The best part about what the member for Murray has presented for us today is that—and I hope the people in the gallery hear this and those listening to this hear it—we are looking right now at and talking about something that has been a success. It has been supported by both sides of the House. It has been supported by two governments and now three governments in a row. It has worked. It has taken rural students—and if I get a chance I will quote three here—from a rural background, from rural activity and from rural, remote and regional areas and educated those people through our medical schools, and they have gone back into regional areas.

Every health minister in the past three governments has supported this proposal. In fact, it goes right back to Michael Wooldridge. Every health minister has supported this proposal, and it has been a success. What a pleasure it is to stand in the House of Representatives in this great nation, in this great south land, which has so much that is rural and remote about it. Our image of ourselves is about the rural and remote. The story we tell to the world is about the rural and remote. It is about the adventure that Australia is.

This particular program, in its essence, has delivered services to people in rural and remote areas through their GPs. It has been successful. We had people marrying—or partnering, as we might like to say these days—somebody in the city and never returning to the country after being educated in the city. We know they are lost to us completely. They are not lost to the nation, but they are lost to our country areas. This education program that the member for Murray has highlighted, in its success, has taken people out of the city. In one story here—which I probably will not get to now because the time has gone—the young lady actually went from the city to a regional medical school, then she thought, 'I'd really like to do my internship in a regional hospital.' That doctor has every chance of the fulfilling the dreams, the aspirations and the energy behind what the member for Murray is highlighting today, even if it is one person and it is one doctor. There will be plenty of doctors for city people.

I know this city of Canberra has plenty of doctors. They do not particularly want to come and service us out in our regional areas, because out in regional areas we are not as well as the rest of the community. We still play up pretty badly and have a terrible reputation for health, but it is improving. I just heard a debate in the Federation Chamber on lung cancer, which was most enlightening—and most embarrassing for some of us too. Having said that, it is important that the subject of this motion before the House is recognised as a very, very important initiative that has been successful.

We are not arguing with anybody. The member for Murray is simply saying: 'Here is a process that has worked. Here is an opportunity for future generations of young people coming out of our secondary schools, right across regional Australia, to enter into these rural health schools.' It is very important to us, it is important to this nation and it is very important to rural and regional people that they get the same opportunities for health care as people do in outer Melbourne or in the city centres. I commend the member for Murray and especially
the member for Forrest for their continuing efforts on behalf of people right across rural and regional Australia.

Ms King (Ballarat) (11:58): I too commend the member for Murray for bringing this motion here before the House. As the former Parliamentary Secretary for Health and Ageing in a previous life and then a minister for regional affairs, I think I have a fairly unique perspective on this very important issue before the chamber. I want to pay tribute to the work of previous health ministers, particularly Michael Wooldridge and Tony Abbott, through to Nicola Roxon and Tanya Plibersek, who all have supported the continuation of the clinical rural medical schools, some 17 schools managed by 16 universities, providing critical opportunities not only for rural kids but also for the many patients in those regional areas who are desperately trying to access those services.

I particularly want to recognise two of those schools, at Deakin University and the University of Melbourne—and I know the member for Murray has a very long association with Melbourne university's rural clinic. They both run rural clinical schools in my own electorate of Ballarat, and I have met many of those fantastic students and I know the many opportunities that are being provided to them. I also particularly want to mention the clinicians who are training these young people. GPs' and specialists' lives are incredibly busy, and the fact that they are making a commitment through the rural clinical schools to continue training really is a tribute to them and to their communities.

I am very proud of the work that Labor did in expanding accommodation as part of the Rural Clinical Schools program and across a range of other programs within the Health portfolio. That has brought many more opportunities to students in our regions, and I certainly want to commend the member for Murray for bringing this motion before the chamber.

One of the things that I was delighted to see was the opening of one of the accommodation facilities in the small town of Daylesford, which has struggled to get a doctor. Again, I am very proud that Labor was able to initiate some 32-bed accommodation facilities being provided for rural clinical students. We know that rural kids want to stay in rural communities as much as they possibly can and are more likely to do so, and these rural clinical schools really have been a success story. Of course, we have a long way to go to continue to make sure that the inequality in health is done away with, but certainly the work of the rural clinical schools and the motion before the House are a good start.

Debate interrupted.

BILLS

Grape and Wine Legislation Amendment (Australian Grape and Wine Authority) Bill 2013

Primary Industries (Customs) Charges Amendment (Australian Grape and Wine Authority) Bill 2013

Primary Industries (Excise) Levies Amendment (Australian Grape and Wine Authority) Bill 2013

Second Reading

Cognate debate.

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

Mr FITZGIBBON (Hunter) (12:01): Saying the names of these bills is a mouthful, Deputy Speaker Scott, if you will excuse the pun. I believe this is my first opportunity at the dispatch box to congratulate you on your re-election as Deputy Speaker—well deserved, and we look forward to working with you. As I travel the world, like all members of this place I am asked specifically where I come from in Australia, and I very quickly and boastfully tell people I represent the world's finest wine region. Now, there will be some in this place that will challenge that proposition, no doubt—and justifiably so, because Australia is a great producer of wine. Indeed, it is the fourth largest wine-exporting country in the world. For a country our size, with rather limited land, water and people resources, that is a very, very significant achievement. So people will not be surprised to see me as the member for Hunter talking on the Grape and Wine Legislation Amendment (Australian Grape and Wine Authority) Bill 2013, but on this occasion I do so as the opposition spokesperson for agriculture and therefore the person responsible for speaking on these issues on behalf of the Labor Party. This bill was one introduced into the parliament by the former Labor government. I believe it passed the House of Representatives in the 43rd Parliament but did not fully run the gauntlet of the Senate, and it has now been introduced by the new Minister for Agriculture—and I again congratulate him on his appointment.

The Grape and Wine Legislation Amendment (Australian Grape and Wine Authority) Bill 2013 creates the Australian Grape and Wine Authority. The new authority will commence its operations on 1 July 2014. It will take the roles and functions of the Grape and Wine Research and Development Corporation and the Wine Australia Corporation. The former Labor government agreed to merge the two wine statutory corporations following a proposal from the Winemakers’ Federation of Australia and Wine Grape Growers Australia. The proposed merger, I am advised, is widely supported by the industry and has really been a long time in the making. A single wine industry statutory authority will support the industry by providing links between the investment initiatives and functions of the Grape and Wine Research and Development Corporation and the Wine Australia Corporation. The merger will provide further benefits by improving administrative efficiency and service delivery to the industry. The merger aligns with the then Australian government's 2012 Rural Research and Development Policy Statement. In particular, the statement noted that combining research and development and marketing functions in one organisation can lead to administrative savings as well as important synergies.

On 19 June 2013, the then government introduced the Rural Research and Development Legislation Amendment Bill 2013 to implement the policy statement. Once this bill has been considered by the parliament, the government will amend the Grape and Wine Legislation Amendment (Australian Grape and Wine Authority) Bill to ensure consistency between the two pieces of legislation. The merger of the two statutory authorities is also in accordance with a broader policy goal to reduce the number of government statutory corporations. This bill proposes amendments to the Wine Australia Corporation Act 1980 to establish the new authority and renames the act as the Australian Grape and Wine Authority Act 2013. The amendments to the Wine Australia Corporation Act are significant, but the merger is not a takeover of the Grape and Wine Research and Development Corporation by Wine Australia; this is a strategic merger of the two statutory corporations.
This bill is divided into two schedules. Schedule 1 amends the Wine Australia Corporation Act to create the authority itself. Schedule 2 covers matters arising from the transition from two statutory corporations to the authority. It covers matters such as the transfer of staff to the authority. Schedule 1 is divided into two parts. Part 1 of schedule 1 commences on the day after royal assent. This part amends the Wine Australia Corporation Act 1980 to establish a selection committee to select and nominate to the Minister for Agriculture possible members of the board of the authority. The bill gives the Minister for Agriculture an alternative option of appointing a board of the authority for a 12-month period without reference to the selection committee. Part 2 of schedule 1 commences on 1 July 2014. This part provides amendments to the Freedom of Information Act 1982 and the Wine Australia Corporation Act 1980. This part establishes the authority and provides the governance framework for its operation.

Schedule 1 also provides the research and development functions, including provisions for the Commonwealth to match research and development levy funding dollar for dollar. The authority will be required to spend research and development levy money and government matching funds on research and development activity. Industry has highlighted the importance of this issue for the new authority. It is also important to the government to ensure that Australian government money appropriated for research and development is used for this purpose. Importantly, the bill does not include any changes to the structure, to the amounts of the levies which currently fund both statutory corporations or to the existing regulatory, marketing and compliance roles of the Wine Australia Corporation.

The bill transfers definitions of research and development from the Primary Industries and Energy Research and Development Act 1981. It establishes an authority with a skills based board of five to seven directors, selected and nominated by a statutory selection committee and appointed by the minister. The board is led by a chair appointed by the minister following consultation with industry. The authority is required to prepare a five-year corporate plan to outline the authority's strategies, policies and priorities to achieve the objectives. The authority is also required to prepare an annual operation plan, but, unlike those of the two statutory corporations, this plan is not required to have ministerial approval.

Schedule 2 provides for the transition of the Grape and Wine Research and Development Corporation and Wine Australia to the authority, including operations, assets, liabilities and staffing conditions. Of particular note is that schedule 2 provides that the minister may engage consultants to assist with preparations for establishing the authority and for appointing the chief executive officer.

The bill allows the Minister for Agriculture to reappoint the first board after royal assent. The board will commence on 1 July 2014. Between the date of appointment and 1 July 2014, the minister can engage future board directors as consultants to prepare for the authority's commencement and to assist it in becoming fully operational on 1 July 2014. Before 1 July 2014 the future directors, in their roles as consultants, may not make decisions that would bind the authority into the future. However, it can be expected that any recommendations they make would be ratified by the board at its first meeting. The costs of the consultants will be met by the Commonwealth through the Department of Agriculture.

Once the authority commences, any and all Commonwealth funding provided for the purpose of engaging consultants will be refunded by the authority. As the consultants are the future board directors acting in the interests of the authority, it is reasonable for the authority
to reimburse the Commonwealth for the costs of the consultants. The bill ensures that all employees of the Grape and Wine Research and Development Corporation and Wine Australia are transferred to the Australian Grape and Wine Authority, along with all employee entitlements.

The bill also provides for a number of amendments to be made to outdated sections of the Wine Australia Corporation Act 1980. It introduces modernised language to bring it up to date with current terms. The wine industry has a unique regulatory structure, with the Wine Australia Corporation enforcing the Label Integrity Program, licensing exporters and maintaining Australia's wine geographical indication system. These important roles are not affected by the merger.

The Australian Grape and Wine Authority will therefore have a strong focus on controlling exports and developing domestic and international markets for Australian grape products, along with investigating, coordinating and funding grape and wine research and development. The authority will be responsible for reporting these to the parliament or to the minister and to representative organisations. The government has introduced amendments to the Commonwealth Authorities and Companies Act 1997 and to the Financial Management and Accountability Act 1997.

The merger of the wine industry statutory corporations is being undertaken at the request of industry and continues to have the support of the industry. This reform will help the industry to function better. It will improve linkages between marketing and research and development and achieve these benefits at no additional cost to winemakers and grape growers. Two companion bills are being introduced alongside this bill, proposing minor amendments to various relevant other acts.

In boasting my representation of the Hunter wine region, can I say that this is a very small step in assisting a wine industry which is under significant challenge from a stubbornly high Australian dollar affecting our competitiveness, coming off the back of the global financial crisis—which had a chilling impact on consumption in some of our key export markets—further consolidation and growing market power in the retail sector, and drought, all combining to produce some very significant challenges for those operating in the wine market, be they growers, winemakers, exporters or distributors.

This industry also faces some wonderful opportunities. I am very fond of talking about the dining boom, which will lead to significant increases in consumption in South-East Asia and China as the middle class emerges along with a growing desire for quality wine. From the Hunter to Margaret River, from the Yarra to the Barossa, from the Tamar to the Clare Valley, winemakers and growers are combining to make the most of those very significant opportunities. They will need government help in a range of areas. Obviously in future we will need to increase our yields of wine production if we are to capitalise fully on the opportunities in Asia. Research and development will be critical to lifting our production output capacity in this country. This bill takes a small step in that area by making as efficient as possible what we are doing in research and development in particular.

One of the big challenges the wine industry face at the moment is what they see as a threat from coal seam gas, much of which is being extracted in the wine region I represent. I want to put on record what I have said many times before. We need coal seam gas in New South Wales. Our energy prices will climb very steeply if we do not find new sources of gas for our
state, as we become more dependent on other states and as demand begins to outstrip supply. What I have also always said is that we cannot afford to have our sustainable industries threatened by industries which might be with us for only 10, 20 or even 100 years—I put coalmining in that category.

My view is that we need these gas resources, but I am concerned about the demonisation of the industry. I think each of these projects should be considered on its merits. Some projects will certainly be able to progress without any threat to water tables or, more generally, to the sustainability of local industries. But some may not. We should rely on the science and allow those that are safe to proceed to proceed, while making sure that there is no threat to the sustainability of viticulture or, more generally, to our agricultural sector.

This is just one of the many challenges the industry faces, some of which I have already mentioned—the Australian dollar, the wake of the global financial crisis and the consolidation of market power in the retailing sector. These are all combining to put enormous pressure on what is a very important industry for this country. As the local member for Hunter, no-one understands that better than I do. Three of our children have worked in the hospitality sector, which of course feeds off the wine sector. It is really the jewel in the crown for Hunter tourism. It is a very important industry, which enjoys my very strong support and the support of all members of this place. This bill is a very small first step in helping it along and I wish it the very best for the future.

Debate adjourned.

Reference to Federation Chamber

Mr RUDDOCK (Berowra—Chief Government Whip) (12:16): I declare that the following bills are referred to the Federation Chamber for further consideration: Grape and Wine Legislation Amendment (Australian Grape and Wine Authority) Bill 2013, Primary Industries (Customs) Charges Amendment (Australian Grape and Wine Authority) Bill 2013 and Primary Industries (Excise) Levies Amendment (Australian Grape and Wine Authority) Bill 2013.

Building and Construction Industry (Improving Productivity) Bill 2013
Second Reading

Cognate debate.

Debate resumed on the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr BRENDAN O’CONNOR (Gorton) (12:17): Labor opposes the Building and Construction Industry (Improving Productivity Bill) 2013 and the Building and Construction Industry (Consequential and Transitional Provisions) Bill 2013. This legislation is intended to bring back the draconian Australian Building and Construction Commission. The ABCC is based on flawed—and often ridiculed—modelling. Its proposed powers are extreme, unnecessary and undemocratic and they compromise civil liberties. The legislation ignores what is already in place, the Fair Work Building and Construction agency, which is working much more efficiently than the ABCC ever did. In addition, Labor’s Fair Work Building and
Construction agency already has sufficient powers to deal with any unlawful behaviour in the industry. Let us call this what it is—the determination to take Australia back to the ABCC shows a return to elements of Work Choices, which is lurking just below the surface.

Labor opposes bringing back the Australian Building and Construction Commission for a number of reasons. The Prime Minister has made a habit of referring to his workplace policies as:

… returning the industrial relations pendulum back to the sensible centre.

Demonising construction industry employees and their representative bodies by bringing back the Australian Building and Construction Commission could not be further from that so-called sensible centre. For the Prime Minister, going back to the future with the ABCC is strictly personal. It was the Prime Minister, then the minister for workplace relations, who in 2001 called for the Cole royal commission into supposed criminality, fraud and corruption within the building and construction industry. But the investigation of crime, let alone organised crime, is obviously a matter for the police, not for the ABCC. After 18 months and $66 million of taxpayers' money, the Prime Minister's expensive political stunt failed to produce one single criminal conviction.

In this 44th Parliament, the Prime Minister seeks to continue his attack on workers' rights and entitlements. The Australian Building and Construction Commission's proposed powers, as I said, are extreme, unnecessary and undemocratic and they compromise civil liberties. Those proposed powers include unfettered coercive powers, the power to conduct secretive interviews and the power to impose imprisonment on those who do not cooperate. In his second reading speech on these bills, the member for Sturt said that he believed workers deserved to go to work each day without the fear of being harassed or intimidated. I agree with that contention. Yet these bills seek to arm the ABCC with powers to deny people the right to be represented by a lawyer of their choice. The primary bill seeks to arm the ABCC with powers to interview people in secret and to deny them the right to silence. Indeed, the previous iteration of the ABCC prohibited people from disclosing that they had been interviewed by the commission—even when they had done nothing wrong. As Nicola McGarrity and Professor George Williams from the Faculty of Law at the University of New South Wales say:

… the ABC Commissioner's investigatory powers have the potential to severely restrict basic democratic rights such as freedom of speech, freedom of association, the privilege against self-incrimination and the right to silence.

Some might say, and I understand this assertion, that some of the provisions of these bills are more akin to legislation you would see in a police state—undemocratic powers hard enough to justify in a time of war or a state of emergency let alone in civil laws governing workplaces. That is exactly what this commission will do, if constructed—impose unfettered, excessive, undemocratic and unnecessary powers upon ordinary workers in governing civil laws in workplaces in this country. Is this the workplace free of harassment and intimidation that the member for Sturt wants for employees? Is this really the sensible centre that the Prime Minister has long referred to?

The attack on workers, however, does not stop there. After pledging to revive the Australian Building and Construction Commission, Mr Abbott has broken his promise—he has broken his promise because this legislation extends the reach of the ABCC into picketing,
offshore construction and the transport and supply of goods to building sites. This is more than a revival of a former body—it is a greater encroachment upon workers than was originally the case. Australians are not getting the government they voted for. A re-established Australian Building and Construction Commission will have significantly broader powers than its 2005 incarnation. The then Prime Minister, Prime Minister Howard, came into this place and stood opposite where I stand now and made a ministerial statement introducing all of the elements of Work Choices without any mandate whatsoever from the Australian people. Part of that process included this commission. This is incidental to those provisions, so let us not pretend that we are not returning to elements of Work Choices legislation that will deny workers in this country basic rights.

The Prime Minister’s Australian Building and Construction Commission is not, to use his own words, the tough cop on the beat—it is an unnecessary workplace bully. Surely before the government enacts such a body it must establish the merits of the reform. The Leader of the House in his second reading speech tried in vain to justify the need to return to the Australian Building and Construction Commission. By anyone's measure it was a soft and unconvincing performance. The Leader of the House quoted a recent report completed by consulting firm Independent Economics, or Econtech as it was formerly known. This firm has a long history of being paid to churn out report after report attacking workers and their unions while supposedly demonstrating a path to improved productivity. Having behaved in such a mercenary and partisan manner, it is utterly laughable that they can rebrand themselves as independent. Hypnotised, the Leader of the House, the member for Sturt, parroted the report. He regurgitated its findings, which were supposedly that under the ABCC consumers were better off by $7.5 billion annually, that productivity grew and that fewer working days were lost through industrial action. What the Leader of the House failed to disclose was that this consulting firm once had the rare distinction of producing modelling so inaccurate that it was described as deeply flawed and 'ought to be totally disregarded.' Who said that about the Econtech report? None other than former Federal Court judge Justice Murray Wilcox. I am sure the Leader of the House thinks he knows better than Justice Wilcox, but it is not only former Federal Court judges who find the government's foundation for the ABCC rather shaky. Journalist Bernard Keane analysed the recent report of Independent Economics. The conclusion was that construction productivity had outperformed productivity in the rest of the economy since 2002, and Bernard Keane said:

Okay, so rubbish reports like this are common as muck, true. But this is more significant because it’s on the basis of stuff like this that the Coalition has committed to reinstitute a major attack on basic rights. And that attack will not be just on the rights of construction industry unionists, but all of us.

There is more to say about the critiques of this firm's reporting prowess. Econtech's 2007 report, which purported to demonstrate that the ABCC had been effective in bringing about significant reform and improvement in the building and construction industry, was picked apart in a report appropriately entitled "Anomalies", damned "anomalies" and statistics: Construction industry productivity in Australia.' Authored by David Peetz, Cameron Allan and Andrew Dungan, the report concluded:

The great gains for construction industry arising, it was said, from the near equalisation of costs in the commercial and domestic residential sectors that was attributed to the ABCC have disappeared, like a mirage on the horizon.
Their analysis went on to say:

This close analysis of the Econtech data raises serious questions about the nature of regulation in the building and construction industry. Alleged economic benefits, used to justify denial of basic rights to employees in the industry—rights which everybody else is, at least at present, entitled to enjoy—are based on discredited cost data. In short, there do not appear to be any significant economic benefits that warrant the loss of rights involved in recent arrangements.

This is the sad reality of the government's revival of the ABCC. It is based entirely on discredited reports that have been described as not worth the paper they are written on. But the lack of evidence to warrant the ABCC does not end there. The government clearly has the blinkers on when it comes to ignoring evidence that the current building industry regulation arrangements are working well.

Let us now consider what the ABS data indicates. While the Leader of the House may be willing to dismiss the analysis of a former Federal Court judge, I would be staggered—I should not be at all surprised, perhaps—if he disputed the data of the ABS. Does he dispute that ABS data shows industrial disputation in the building and construction industry during our period in government was on average less than one-fifth the rate seen under the previous, coalition government? Does the Leader of the House dispute that labour productivity has increased over the last 10 quarters and, on average, is almost three times higher under Fair Work than it was under Work Choices? Does he dispute that, under Fair Work more generally, the rates of industrial disputes are on average around one-third the rate we saw under the previous, coalition government? Is the Leader of the House and, indeed, the Prime Minister and this government so desperate to argue the shallow case for the Australian Building and Construction Commission that they not only dismiss the analysis of a former federal court judge but also deny the analysis of our national statistical service?

I say to the government that the data is in, and the data is crystal clear. Fair Work Building and Construction, established by Labor, has continued and will continue to outperform its predecessor, the ABCC. Furthermore, Fair Work Building and Construction already has sufficient powers to deal with unlawful behaviour in the industry. Fair Work Building and Construction has a full suite of appropriate investigative and prosecutorial powers to deal with any unlawful behaviour in the building and construction industry, whether by employers, employees, unions, contractors or others. Fair Work Building and Construction is undertaking more investigations, concluding investigations, getting matters to court faster and recovering more money for underpaid workers in the industry. Fair Work Building and Construction has secured over $2 million in unpaid wages and entitlements for more than 1,500 workers. Of course, these were the sorts of breaches that the former body, the ABCC, never focused upon.

The Abbott government is seeking to rewrite history by contradicting empirical evidence with respect to industrial disputation in the building sector. This is at a time when more Australians than ever before are covered by enterprise agreements, which shows that the vast majority of agreements are made without any industrial action at all. And on the most important measure of all—safety—we have been seeing fewer deaths on construction sites. While all members of this House would, I hope, agree that one death is one death too many and that we should strive to be better, the evidence at hand does not justify this government's response. I know it is a complex area and there are a combination of reasons we may see fatalities in workplaces, but it is important to note that in 2007, during the life of the ABCC,
worker deaths on construction sites hit a 10-year high of 51. There were 51 deaths in 2007. More than a year after its abolition in 2012, that number had reduced by 60 per cent to 30. Once again, on these measures, Fair Work Building and Construction is doing a better job than the ABCC. So, again, why is there a need for the Australian Building and Construction Commission?

The Abbott government's determination to take Australia back to the ABCC shows, as I said earlier, a return to Work Choices. That is what this is about. We know this because it is entrenched in the DNA of those on the government benches. It is an insatiable appetite to pursue a politically motivated witch hunt to attack unions and diminish their capacity to represent their members, thereby slashing workers' rights and entitlements. This is something the government has to consider. When we are dealing with matters as significant as this, when we are dealing with proposed laws as excessive as the laws that are contained within the bills that are before the House, then there must be an extraordinary or an exceptional reason for the government to go down this path. This case has not been made by the government. In fact, the evidence shows, to the contrary, that, during the life of the previous body that was somewhat similar to the one proposed, productivity did not go up. In fact, during the life of the ABCC industrial disputation did not go down. If you compare the time under Work Choices with the time under Fair Work legislation, you find Fair Work is favourable in this regard.

For these and other reasons Labor therefore strongly opposes these bills, and we call on the government to rethink its position. We oppose the return to the draconian and extreme Australian Building and Construction Commission, and we will fight this government's ideological war on working Australians every step of the way.

Therefore, I move:

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

"the House declines to give the bill and the related bills a second reading because it would be ill advised to continue having regard to:

(1) the negative impact of the re-establishment of the Australian Building and Construction Commission on the rights and entitlements of Australian workers; and

(2) Government plans to equip the Australian Building and Construction Commission with powers that are extreme, unnecessary, undemocratic and compromise civil liberties."

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

Dr Leigh: I second the amendment and reserve my right to speak.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Craig Kelly): The original question was that this bill be now read a second time. To this the honourable member for Gorton has moved, as an amendment, that all words after 'that' be omitted with a view to substituting other words. If it suits the House I will state the question in that form: that the amendment be agreed to. The question now is that the amendment be agreed to.

Ms MARINO (Forrest—Government Whip) (12:37): The construction industry provides many jobs for workers in small businesses and in large enterprises, and for contractors. In my electorate of Forrest, the 2011 census recorded that 8,770 people were employed in the construction industry, more than in any other industry in the region—and that number has no doubt risen since. This industry is critical to growth and development in the south-west of Western Australia, and across the entire nation. It is also the industry that has seen the worst
of union behaviour across the nation. We have seen that what was often illegal behaviour was an absolute blight on this nation, and it was a blight on those very good, hard-working people that just wanted to go to work and be able to do their jobs—all they wanted was to be able to get on with the job.

It was this behaviour that resulted in the establishment of the Royal Commission into the Building and Construction Industry in 2001. The final report of that royal commission provided compelling evidence of the need to reform the industry. It found consistent evidence that building sites and construction projects in Australia were—as we saw—hotbeds of intimidation, lawlessness, thuggery and violence. Projects were delayed, costs blew out and investment in our economy and infrastructure was being jeopardised. The report identified 392 separate instances of unlawful conduct, 25 different types of unlawfulness and 90 different types of inappropriate behaviour. There were unlawful strikes, unlawful payments, abuse of union rights of entry, fabrication of safety issues, compulsory unionism, coercion to pay wages and meet conditions demanded by unions, disregard of contracts and agreements, and disregard of court and tribunal orders. We saw reports of workplace rorts, threats, intimidation, and a range of other behaviours. Based on those findings, the commission made 212 recommendations for substantial regulatory reform, both structural and cultural. The report referred to 31 individuals who had possibly breached criminal laws. Twelve of those 31 individuals came from Western Australia, in an identified 230 separate incidents of unlawful conduct. This is a very bad example for Western Australia. It included breaches of the enterprise-bargaining, freedom-of-association, right-of-entry, and strike-pay provisions of the Workplace Relations Act; a range of departures from proper standards of occupational health and safety; and threatening and intimidatory conduct.

In fact, the Royal Commissioner indicated that, in his opinion, the rule of law had little or no currency within the Western Australian building and construction industry at that time. He found that it was an industry marred by unlawful and inappropriate conduct including the use of fear and intimidation. That was certainly something that I heard about when I was doing a lot of doorknocking in 2007. The commissioner also found that it was common for occupational health and safety issues to be used as an industrial tool. Members of this House would well know the names of Kevin Reynolds and Joe McDonald, key players in the infamy that was the building industry in Western Australia. The royal commission found that Joe McDonald had been involved in 104 incidents of unlawful conduct—57 in one year alone. That is more than one a week. The royal commission was also concerned by the funding of the Construction Skills Training Centre, a training company of which Kevin Reynolds was the chairman. The company was assisted by a capital grant of approximately $1 million provided through the Australian National Training Authority in 1998. The grant was for training levies paid to the unions as required by the union-endorsed EBA, and then by the Builders Labourers, Painters and Plasterers Union, as the income of the Construction Skills Training Centre Inc. However, it was obvious that the money was not for that purpose.

Sadly for us in Western Australia, this was for so many years what our building industry was infamous for—union corruption and thuggery. That is why the bill before the House today is so important. This bill re-establishes the Australian Building and Construction Commission, a genuinely strong watchdog that will maintain the rule of law—to protect workers and the construction sector, and to improve productivity on building sites and
construction projects, whether onshore or offshore. This bill will reverse Labor's changes to the laws which underpinned the Australian Building and Construction Commission before Labor abolished it in 2012. The bill will once again prohibit unlawful industrial action, unlawful picketing, and coercion and discrimination. Penalties that are high enough to provide an effective deterrent will apply to breaches of these provisions, and a wide range of effective remedies, such as injunctions, will also be available to the ABCC and to persons affected by unlawful behaviour. The establishment of the Australian Building and Construction Commission in 2005 provided what was a genuinely strong and effective watchdog which dissolved the 1970s-style practices that plagued the industry. It was a strong, specialist regulator that enforced the rule of law applying to the building and construction sector. The economic and industrial performance—despite what we have just heard—of the building and construction industry significantly improved when the ABCC existed. For example, a 2013 Independent Economics report on the state of the sector during this period found that building and construction industry productivity grew by more than nine per cent, that consumers were better off by around $7.5 billion annually, and that fewer working days were lost through industrial action.

Naturally, as soon as Labor came to government in 2007 there was an immediate and sustained pressure from building and construction unions to abolish the Australian Building and Construction Commission. In 2012, the then Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, Bill Shorten, gave in to union demands and abolished the organisation, and replaced it with a regulator with significantly reduced funding and powers. And—with the minister probably under control—we saw a further return to some of the practices that the ABCC had denied the unions for seven years. We have seen the violence on the streets in the City of Melbourne, with militant union protestors intimidating the community and their supporters even attacking police horses. We have also seen the unprecedented action of workers—and this is a very telling point—on the site purchasing an advertisement in the Herald Sun with an open letter to their own union bosses asking for the blockades to stop. That is an unprecedented action by the workers on the site. They wanted to get to work, to do the work they were employed to do. What did the then Labor government do? I suspect in an attempt to buy some time it contacted Justice Murray Wilcox to review the industry, but Justice Wilcox recognised the need for, and the benefit provided by, the Australian Building and Construction Commission, stating in his report that 'the ABCC's work is not yet done' and that 'it would be unfortunate' if the ABCC's replacement body 'led to a reversal of the progress that has been made'. But that is exactly what we saw happen. The Labor government set up a severely-curtail edition of the ABCC called the Fair Work Building Industry Inspectorate.

The coalition is committed to the re-establishment of the ABCC and we said so during and before the election campaign. It is one more promise that we are fulfilling, because we meant what we said. And this is more evidence of our doing so. In our policy to improve the fair work laws, the coalition government committed to re-establish the Australian Building and Construction Commission to once again ensure the rule of law and productivity on commercial building sites and construction projects, whether on-shore or off-shore. We do not want to see further instances where workers are forced to take out advertisements like the open letter in the Herald Sun to their own union bosses asking for the blockades to stop. That is not what we want to see. We want the workers to be able to go to work. We have been committed to that and we want to see a return to the rule of law and to productivity on
construction sites. We took that commitment to the 2010 and 2013 federal elections as a key policy. The Australian people knew this; we said very directly that it was what we would do, and that is exactly what we are doing. We are committed to ensuring that the rule of law is maintained and that workers in the building and construction sector can go to work free of intimidation and harassment.

We also promised that a re-established Australian Building and Construction Commission would administer a code to govern industrial relations arrangements for government-funded projects. The bill contains provisions to ensure that unlawful action, including unlawful industrial action and unlawful pickets, are dealt with appropriately. I suggest that that is what the workers who advertised in the Herald Sun were asking for, and that is what we are providing them with. The bill also includes the ability for the courts to impose significant penalties for individuals and organisations that participate in unlawful actions, again underpinning what those workers were wanting when they took out that advertisement. The Australian Building and Construction Commissioner will also be able to exercise their power to obtain information quickly—that is critical—and effectively without being hindered by unnecessary bureaucratic red tape around the issue of examination notices. However, to ensure accountability and transparency, the use of these powers will continue to be reviewed and reported on by the Commonwealth Ombudsman. Importantly, the bill encourages productivity and the pursuit of high levels of employment in the building and construction industry.

It will create jobs and investment by ensuring employers and workers—the same workers who took out the ad in the Herald Sun wanting to go to work—that they can go to work and can get on with the job without fear of intimidation. In the future under this legislation the Australian Building and Construction Commissioner will be able to compel witnesses to attend an examination or to produce documents where he or she reasonably believes that the person has information or documents relevant to an investigation into a suspected contravention of workplace relations laws. These powers are needed to ensure the Australian Building and Construction Commission is able to carry out its investigations effectively and is a key tool for breaking down what is often seen as a culture of silence. There are appropriate and effective safeguards in this bill, however, to ensure due process and transparency in the use of these powers. As the first step in the government's restoration, I support very strongly the Australian Building and Construction Commission—I see one of the members in the House who also supports this very strongly—but I certainly do not support the amendments moved by the previous speaker.

Mr KELVIN THOMSON (Wills) (12:50): The bill seeks to re-establish the Australian Building and Construction Commission. That commission was initially created in 2005 to investigate breaches of, and to enforce, federal industrial law in the building and construction industry. If the Building and Construction Commission is re-established, it will have coercive powers that will compel ordinary workers to be subject to secret interviews, to be denied legal representation and to be threatened with imprisonment if the person subject to such coercive powers refuses to cooperate. In my view these powers are excessive, undemocratic and unwarranted. The bill extends the reach of the Building and Construction Commission well beyond where it is now into picketing, 'offshore construction to as far as Australia's exclusive economic zone or waters above the continental shelf', and will encompass the transport or
supply of goods to building sites, including resource platforms. The new powers aimed at stopping pickets include a reverse onus requiring individuals to prove that they were not motivated by industrial objectives in order to escape the maximum $34,000 penalty. How on earth can a reverse onus of proof be justified here?

I note that the Prime Minister has made a habit of referring to his workplace policies as 'returning the industrial relations pendulum back to the sensible centre'. But demonising construction employees and their representative bodies by returning to the Building and Construction Commission is a mile away from the sensible centre. For the Prime Minister, going back to the future with the ABCC is highly personal. It is, after all, the Prime Minister who called for the 2001 Cole royal commission into criminality, fraud and corruption within the building and construction industry. This is despite the ABCC having no role in investigating crime, let alone organised crime—which is obviously a matter for the police. After 18 months and $66 million, what was an expensive political stunt failed to produce a single criminal conviction.

In this 44th Parliament, the Prime Minister has resumed his attack on workers' rights and entitlements. The ABCC's proposed powers are extreme, unnecessary and compromise civil liberties. Those proposed powers include unfettered coercive powers, secretive interviews and imprisonment for those who do not cooperate. People interviewed have no right to silence and are denied the right to be represented by a lawyer of their choice. Is this the supposed sensible centre that the Prime Minister has referred to? After promising to revive the ABCC, the Prime Minister has in fact broken his pledge—not the only promise the government has broken, by the way—because this legislation extends the reach of the ABCC into picketing, offshore construction and the transport and supply of goods to building sites. This is not a revival; the re-established Building and Construction Commission will have significantly broader powers than its 2005 incarnation. The Prime Minister's ABCC is not, in his own words, the tough cop on the beat; it is an unnecessary 'workplace bully'.

In its second reading of this bill, the government attempted to justify the need to return to the ABCC by referring to a recent report completed by consulting firm Independent Economics, or Econtech, as it was formerly known. This firm has a long history of churning out report after report which attack workers and their unions while claiming to demonstrate a path to improve productivity. The government failed to disclose that this consulting firm once had the rare distinction of producing modelling so inaccurate that former Federal Court judge Murray Wilcox slammed their work as 'deeply flawed' and recommended that it 'ought to be totally disregarded'. Indeed, former Commissioner of the ABCC, Leigh Johns, has told the Senate that even the ABCC removed the reports from its website.

If you ask why the government would be doing this if their professed reason for doing this does not stack up, you see that it is the barely disguised, thinly disguised, intention of this legislation to cripple and hamstring the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Employees Union, the CFMEU. The House needs to appreciate that this union plays a very important role in the construction industry, which includes blowing the whistle on various abuses which take place in that industry, including abuses of the migrant worker program, such as the 457 visas.

A recent example drawn to my attention was of the group of Hungarian men brought to Australia on temporary visas allegedly as highly skilled technicians but instead being used as
labourers in a Western Sydney warehouse. They were promised Australian rates of pay—around $30 an hour. Instead, for the last four months they have been paid around $15 an hour to help build a warehouse in Sydney's Eastern Creek. They were working as riggers, forklift drivers and general labourers, not as the mechanical engineering technicians that the 457 visas specified, and indeed none of them have qualifications or experience as mechanical engineering technicians. The Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union was representing the men in this case and putting forward their concerns and the fact that the majority of them have little or no English and that they needed to have this kind of representation and support to avoid being ripped off by what was, in this case, an unscrupulous employer. It is regrettable that the government have a blind spot in relation to this industry and this union. This blind spot is part of their ignorance of the evidence that the current building industry regulation arrangements are working well.

Fair Work Building and Construction, established by Labor, already has sufficient powers to deal with any unlawful behaviour in the industry. Fair Work Building and Construction has to date outperformed—and I dare say will continue to outperform—its predecessor, the ABCC. Fair Work Building and Construction has a full suite of appropriate investigative and prosecution powers to deal with any unlawful behaviour in the building and construction industry, whether by employers, employees, unions or contractors. Fair Work Building and Construction is undertaking more investigations, concluding investigations, getting matters to court faster, and recovering more money for workers in the industry. Fair Work Building and Construction has secured over $2 million in unpaid wages and entitlements for more than 1,500 workers. These were the sorts of breaches that the ABCC was never focused on.

ABS data shows that the rate of industrial disputation in the building and construction industry is on average less than one-fifth of the rate seen under the previous, coalition government. Labour productivity has increased over the last 10 quarters and on average is almost three times higher under Fair Work than under Work Choices. Under Fair Work, the rates of industrial disputes are on average around one-third the rate we saw under the previous, coalition government. This is at a time when more Australians than ever before are covered by enterprise agreements, which shows that the vast majority of agreements are made without any industrial action at all.

It is regrettable that we have a Liberal government with a determination to take Australia back to the ABCC as the beginning of an ideological agenda to deregulate our industrial relations system. This is from a party which is still enamoured of theories of neoclassical economics. It is this kind of world view that blew up the world economy back in 2008. Yet, despite everything we learned from the global financial crisis, we have a government that look the other way and ignore the lessons that this crisis revealed. They still subscribe to that myth that a rising tide lifts all boats. But, as one IMF economist has said:

When a handful of yachts become ocean liners while the rest remain lowly canoes, something is seriously amiss.

As The Guardian journalist and columnist George Monbiot has written:

The neoliberals … insisted that unrestrained inequality in incomes and flexible wages would reduce unemployment. But throughout the rich world both inequality and unemployment have soared. The recent jump in unemployment in most developed countries—worse than in any previous recession of the past three decades—was preceded by the lowest level of wages as a share of GDP since the second
world war. Bang goes the theory. It failed for the same obvious reason: low wages suppress demand, which suppresses employment.

The desire to pursue politically motivated witch-hunts like this is because it is a means of slashing workers’ rights and entitlements. Not only will Labor oppose this bill; we will fight the Abbott government's ideological war on working Australians, including in the building and construction industry, every step of the way.

I point out to the House that the Australian government is subject to international human rights obligations under customary international law and as a result of the ratification of international legal instruments. Failure to abide by these obligations, which include a number of basic rights for workers, has significant implications for the protection and promotion of human rights in Australia and for our reputation internationally.

The former Building and Construction Industry Improvement Act 2005 was found by the United Nations International Labour Organization to repeatedly and unequivocally breach Australia's obligations as a member-state and as a signatory to conventions which include the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention of 1947, the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention of 1949 and the Labour Inspection Convention of 1947. That act was found by the ILO supervisory bodies to breach Australia's international obligations in that it exposed building industry employees to penalties for taking industrial action in a wider range of circumstances than other employees, virtually rendering all forms of industrial action in the building and construction sector unlawful; there was an imposition of penalties and sanctions upon workers and unions that engaged in 'unlawful industrial action' that were significantly higher than those imposed on workers in other sectors; there were provisions in the act that rendered project agreements unenforceable; the provisions of the code of practice contained restrictions on freedom of association and collective bargaining; and there were draconian monitoring and investigatory and enforcement powers for the ABCC, including the powers to enter premises, take possession of documents 'for as long as necessary' and compulsorily interview any person for 'compliance purposes'. These things were all found to be breaches of Australia's international obligations.

Reports were initially commissioned by the ABCC at public expense and were later regularly recommissioned by Master Builders Australia as a political tool. We have seen, however, that the Econtech report on which the government relies is seriously flawed and makes all sorts of assumptions which cannot be backed up or substantiated. When they talk about union involvement accounting for cost differentials across various sectors, they ignore factors such as the difference between construction on a high-rise as opposed to a single-storey dwelling. Economic experts from the Queensland industrial relations department and from Griffith University found no evidence of costs narrowing between the two sectors since the establishment of the ABCC—if anything, the gap slightly widened.

Labour law should be balanced, promoting both the interests of employers and employees and the value of fairness and collectivity. Labor opposes this legislation which forces a return to the draconian Australian Building and Construction Commission that is based on flawed modelling. Its proposed powers are extreme and unnecessary and compromise civil liberties. We already have sufficient powers to deal with any unlawful behaviour in the industry. This legislation is all about an ideological agenda and a nudge and a wink to employers that the
good ol’ days are returning where diminution of wages and conditions and compromised safety on construction sites will be the order of the day.

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (13:05): I support the Labor Party's position and oppose the Building and Construction Industry (Improving Productivity) Bill 2013 and associated bill before the House, and I hope that those opposite will see sense in relation to the legislation. After I was elected in 2007, my brother Regan asked me what I saw about Canberra that was surprising to me. Having been a Labor Party member for nearly a quarter of a century before I was elected to this place, I should not have been surprised when I discovered after I was first elected just how right wing and anti-union the coalition always is when it comes to industrial relations. I heard the speeches of those opposite who were there when we brought forward the legislation to abolish Work Choices. Again and again, they—including the current Prime Minister—got up and said they supported Work Choices and that there were good things about it, implying that the people of Australia had really got it wrong.

I am standing here today speaking for the third time in this place on legislation in relation to the building and construction industry and this very topic. I spoke first on this topic on 13 August 2009 and again on 15 February 2012. At the risk of repeating myself, I say that we should have one law for all. I believe that the law should treat everyone equally, whether they live in Fremantle or Fitzroy, Dubbo or Darwin, Townsville or Tweed Heads. It does not matter what you do for a living or where you go to work; everyone is entitled to fairness in the workplace.

Before I was elected to this place I ran a multimillion-dollar business that I established with my partners. We built it up over the years. I was an employer. My financial security was on the line each and every day. I learnt, as did my business partners, that cooperation, not confrontation, in the workplace is always best. As the business grew, we needed that cooperation.

What we see in the legislation before the chamber today is not cooperation but confrontation. When I made my second speech on legislation of this type I predicted that a returned coalition government would return to the Australian Building and Construction Commission or some body like it and that it would do away with Fair Work Australia and the division that we were about to establish. If ever there was an occasion on which I wish I had been wrong, it was that occasion, but here we are today debating legislation that will bring back the ABCC. The tragedy of all of this is that this legislation should be so offensive to those opposite who call themselves liberals, because this legislation is an offence against civil liberties and it really has nothing to do with what John Stuart Mill talked about in relation to liberalism. Those opposite have the temerity to call themselves liberals when in fact this legislation is all about not freedom but taking away people's rights.

Historically, the Australian population have not trusted the coalition when it comes to a fair go in the workplace. This legislation is about making sure that workplaces are unfair. It is not about the simplicity of bringing things back to the sensible centre. This legislation shows that the people's mistrust of the coalition is not misplaced.

The Royal Commission into the Building and Construction Industry, the Cole commission, was the brainchild of the now Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, and the then Prime Minister, John Howard. It afforded extraordinary powers that favoured big business, not workers. It was
designed for one purpose: to ensure that workers and their representatives, the trade unions, would be prosecuted and persecuted.

In 2009 the former federal Labor government introduced the Building and Construction Industry Improvement (Amendment) Transition to Fair Work Bill 2009 to equalise the balance in the field of construction and on building sites around the country. Our position in this regard has been consistent. We took this to the people in 2007. We took it to them again in 2010, because our legislation had been blocked in parliament in our first term; we could not get the legislation through. We wanted a fairer, more balanced framework for industrial relations. Demonising construction employees and their representatives, the trade unions, is not the way to go.

The unions have consistently opposed the ABCC. We have seen that. We have heard people like Dave Noonan, National Secretary of CFMEU Construction and General Division, speak about the parliament having the capacity to end the ABCC and restore rights to workers. It is important that we look at the history of this and see its background. This is not just political; it is personal to me, because I have had friends who have been on the receiving end of the pernicious and punishing ABCC.

It is not that long ago that the ABCC admitted that it had stepped outside its powers and illegally interrogated about 203 people. That is final proof that the ABCC is a rogue organisation, as Dave Noonan has said. The stress of arbitrary interrogation and its impact on the lives of people who worked in this industry and on their families cannot be underestimated.

Construction is important. We saw how important it is during the global financial crisis, when we invested massively in construction in schools and in community infrastructure such as roads, rail and ports. We kept workers on the job, making sure that we kept the stimulus going and that economic development in this country did not abate. Sadly, those opposite would not support the construction industry in this way.

The ABCC treated employees and representatives of the employees as if they were criminals or even terror suspects. The Prime Minister was one of the architects of that. John Howard got his good mate Commissioner Cole to investigate. The Cole commission lasted 18 months and cost $66 million of taxpayers' funds, but there was not a single criminal conviction. It was an exorbitantly expensive and calculated political stunt. There were 392 instances of alleged, so-called, criminal behaviour, but they could not get one conviction. The Cole commission was never bipartisan. It was never a genuine royal commission; it was set up for a purpose.

The Cole commission was partisan, and the ABCC that that mob opposite are going to bring back will be just as partisan. We made sure through our amendments to the Fair Work Act that workers get a fair go. We put in a lot of protection in relation to coercive powers, such as the capacity to turn them off. We made sure that people have the right to legal representation. We made sure that legal professional privilege is there. We made sure there is videotaping. We made sure that safeguards were undertaken as recommended by His Honour Murray Wilcox. We listened to his recommendations and we implemented them. It was not always easy. Some of our brethren in the trade union movement did not like it. We believe that what we did was the right thing, following what Murray Wilcox had to say on these matters.
I believe that all workers are entitled to fairness and good working conditions in the workplace and that they should be able to safely return to their loved ones at the end of the day. Construction site workers are entitled, like every other worker—a schoolteacher, a social worker, a hairdresser or anyone who works in retail—to that same benefit. But this legislation takes away rights and subjects those employees and their representatives to potential interrogation and prosecution of the worst kind—and the present Prime Minister made no bones about it. I was here last year when he said in his budget-in-reply speech that he was going to bring the ABCC back. But I, along with my Labor colleagues, campaigned on these types of issues. The public in my electorate knew exactly what my position was in relation to this. I had spoken in parliament on it a number of times. I will stand up for what I believe in. We on our side will make sure that there is cooperation in the workplace.

The legislation before the chamber creates an ABCC on steroids. This legislation creates powers that go way beyond the previous powers of the ABCC and include picketing, offshore construction and the transport and supply of goods to building sites. This new revived ABCC will become the ultimate workplace bully. Its powers are excessive and undemocratic. They are illiberal to say the least. It is really a tragedy that a party which calls itself the 'Liberal Party' should be the very one which brings such legislation before this chamber today.

Historically, the ABCC had extreme coercive powers. They could force the average worker to participate, without legal representation, in covert interviews and make the very real threat of imprisonment should they refuse to cooperate. Under the new ABCC, here is a scenario that could be the reality for anyone. You could be outside walking—you could be going shopping, going to work or walking the dog—and happen to pass a construction site. It just so happens during that split second that you see an incident on the construction site. Subsequently, someone from the ABCC turns up and says, 'We want to have you in for an interview.' Under its extraordinary power, absurd power, obscene power, you could be detained for questioning. You could be prevented from telling anyone, even your wife, your partner, your husband—I mean anyone—what you did. You do not have the right to legal representation, and you have the real possibility, the threat, of being jailed if you do not cooperate. This is authoritarian and draconian legislation at its worst. It is jackboot, Bjelke-Petersen type legislation—that is what it is. It is absurd to think that this legislation is bringing it back to the sensible centre.

The new ABCC on steroids will have the power to ban pickets and to include a reverse onus, which means that, to escape the maximum penalty of $34,000, people will have to prove that they were not participating in, or motivated by, industrial action. This all sounds great, but what if one of the brothers or sisters or the children of any one of those opposite happened to be in the scenario I gave? How would they feel if their child were walking the dog and disappeared, had no right to legal representation and could not say what they had said or where they had been? Mr Deputy Speaker, I say to those opposite: 'How would you feel if that were the case?' That is what you are proposing to vote for. That is your proposal.

Extending the power to the transport and supply of goods to construction sites, including resource platforms offshore, is totally and utterly unwarranted. This was not the policy that those opposite took to the election. If they just brought back the ABCC, there would be some consistency in their position, but this is not what they are proposing today and this is not what the coalition took to the last election. This is the ABCC on steroids. This is another example
of those opposite turning out to be not the government that the public of Australia thought they were voting for.

Our position is fair. Our position is the sensible centre. We listened to Murray Wilcox and his recommendations. We got the balance right. We restored fairness in the investigative powers. We brought in videotaping, with Commonwealth Ombudsman involvement. There are safeguards all through the legislation that exists now. I urge anyone to have a look at it. We brought it back to the centre, and those opposite did not.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics shows that industrial disputes in the building and construction industry are on average one-fifth of the rates seen under the previous coalition government—and, last I saw, the ABS was not affiliated to the Australian Labor Party—and that productivity has increased and, on average, is almost three times higher under Fair Work than under Work Choices. So I say to those opposite: don't come into this place and give us arguments about productivity, disputation and matters about the economy when the facts don't back you up.

I urge all those people who may be listening to parliament today and to the Labor contributions on this legislation to write, email or phone their coalition representative and say, 'I want fairness and justice in the workplaces of Australia', because you will not get it under this legislation.

**Mrs PRENTICE** (Ryan) (13:20): Integrity and honesty are qualities that are broadly accepted in our community; they are broadly accepted in politics. But there is one field where integrity and honesty are demanded of industry but are deliberately ignored, and that is when it comes to the building and construction unions, who blatantly misuse their power for quite improper purposes. Their power was enhanced by the Rudd-Gillard governments when they caved in to union pressure to remove quite sensible constraints on corruption and improper practices. This is why I am pleased to rise to speak on the Building and Construction Industry (Improving Productivity) Bill 2013.

It is time to ensure that there is a level playing field for industry and worker alike. Prior to the election, I was a member of the committee charged with the task of investigating the re-establishment of the Australian Building and Construction Commission. After Labor legislated to repeal the ABCC, the coalition made an election commitment to re-establish it to ensure that it upholds the rule of law and drives productivity on commercial building sites and construction projects, whether onshore or offshore.

The Australian Building and Construction Commission working group was established by the then Leader of the Opposition, the Hon. Tony Abbott, in July this year. I, along with my colleagues the members for Bradfield, Forrest and Kooyong, was tasked with examining the governance and practical problems in the construction sector, such as malfeasance and misconduct, as well as with developing a detailed plan, including drafting instructions for the prompt reestablishment of the ABCC.

The Building and Construction Industry (Improving Productivity) Bill re-establishes the ABCC to regulate the building and construction industry and provides for its functions and powers, including those of the ABCC inspectors. The coalition has pledged to drive productivity and end union control over the construction industry. We have also pledged an
additional $5 million to the reestablishment of the ABCC in 2013-14, rising to an additional $10 million per annum in subsequent years.

This is great news for the many members of my electorate who have contacted me with their pleas to stop unions dictating the terms and control of their businesses and their employees. One constituent has informed me that, because he has chosen not to sign the CFMEU’s EBA, the union has prevented his business from receiving any jobs in the city. For his small business, this has meant a net financial loss exceeding $500,000. He spoke of the unnecessary interruptions, intimidations and disruptions caused by union workers on his building sites choosing to carry out inspections whenever they chose—usually to cause the maximum inconvenience.

Evidence to our committee made it clear that aggressive and militant union behaviour is commonplace in the building and construction sector. Site shutdowns, strike action and other industrial action occur regularly and not for proper reasons or to protect the interests of workers. The committee received reports that the CFMEU and other unions frequently use purported safety issues as an excuse for industrial action when no such safety issues exist—that coercion of individuals and companies is a tool frequently used by the unions and their officials.

There is troubling evidence of increasing corruption and criminality in the construction industry. Key construction unions behave as if they are above the law—for example, routinely ignoring court orders to return to work. Through these improper practices, the CFMEU and other unions now have substantial industrial power and leverage, which they use to cause uneconomic and unreasonable employment terms for head contractors and, through them, subcontractors and across the industry through pattern bargaining. In addition, the unions exercise control over what should otherwise be commercial decisions, such as which subcontractors a head contractor may use, and control over detailed operational issues, such as whether a site operates beyond core hours.

This is happening because the Rudd-Gillard government, at the behest of the unions, terminated the ABCC, which the Howard government had established, replacing it with the much weaker FWBC. Another effective tool under the Howard government was the national code and implementation guidelines. To get work from the Commonwealth, a builder had to comply with the requirements of the code. This code was substantially weakened by the Rudd-Gillard government.

Our working group's hearings disclosed that the levels of strike action, site shutdowns and other industrial action are high. In some cases this action is lawful under the Fair Work Act, but we did learn that unions make extensive use of protected industrial action as a means of increasing pressure on employers during the period when they are negotiating an enterprise agreement. We also learned that many unions have no compunction in taking industrial action even where it is not permitted under the Fair Work Act. This action is frequently carried out simply to place pressure on contractors to agree to the terms of an enterprise bargaining agreement.

The Queensland Children's Hospital dispute in 2012 was triggered by six people on the site not being paid the rates set out in the EBA. The project lost almost $100,000 a day when the union decided to picket the site for many weeks. This totalled millions of dollars, at a cost not to the builder but to us, the taxpayers. Time is critical on building sites. The contractor
typically faces a hard deadline and often must pay liquidated damages or lose the benefits of early completion if it is delayed in completing the job. The unions exploit this fact in their industrial action, knowing that, each day a site is shut down, the pressure to cave in to unrelated union demands is building on the contractor.

Union officials routinely state that their reason for entering a site is for safety. This is because legislation generally allows entrance on a site without notice if the union has a safety concern. It is no coincidence therefore that safety concerns are regularly cited as the reason to shut down a site. When a safety issue is raised, the unions will generally insist on the entire site being closed down, rather than just the isolated area that they are discussing.

The working group found that it is not unusual for someone wishing to trigger a site shutdown to fabricate a safety incident. There were even reports of tampering with electrical boards. Additionally, there will often be a clause in the EBA which gives union officials a very broad right of entry to a site, along with the power to stop work. These may be exercised on multiple vague and invented grounds, such as suspected safety issues or OH&S matters.

The committee heard evidence that coercion is now a common feature of union behaviour in the construction industry. This can involve threats and intimidation, verbal abuse and distribution of material making derogatory, belittling, untrue or defamatory statements about individuals or companies. It can be expressed face to face, on the internet and on brochures distributed at building sites and elsewhere. Union intimidation tactics also involve threats of physical harm and, on occasion, physical assault.

The CFMEU's treatment of my constituent is shamefully common across the industry, where non-CFMEU members are bullied and labelled as scabs. The CFMEU's actions were constantly in open defiance of the Fair Work Act and Supreme Court orders, yet with no strong enforcement body the unions continue to wreak havoc. Workers who wanted to get on with the work were threatened with throat-cutting gestures, threatened with having their heads stomped in and told they were 'dead' by union protestors at sites such as the Little Creatures brewery site in Geelong.

We learned through the investigations carried out by the working group that there is troubling evidence of increasing corruption and criminality in the construction industry. We also learned that it is now not uncommon for union officials to openly ask contractors and subcontractors for money. There have been repeated anecdotes that subcontractors will not be retained by head contractors unless they are on a union-approved list, which is what happened to my constituent.

The previous Labor government were aware of this unforgivable conduct, and their inaction makes them complicit. They were even informed by Justice Murray Wilcox of the benefit provided by the Australian Building and Construction Commission. He acknowledged that the ABCC's work was not yet complete and that it would be unfortunate if the ABCC's replacement body led to a reversal of the good progress that had been made in the industry. Yet the Labor government still buckled to union pressure. A reversal of previous progress is exactly what we have seen. Labor replaced the ABCC with a shadow of the commission called the Fair Work Building Industry Inspectorate. Its powers were severely limited, its budget was substantially cut and its staffing was reduced by about 30 per cent.
This bill restores the full power of the ABCC and the funding that Labor took away. It will bring back integrity to this industry. The operation of the ABCC contributed to improved productivity in the building sector. One study found that building and construction industry productivity was boosted by 9.4 per cent. In the 10 years to 2012, the ABCC’s last year of operation, multifactor productivity in the construction industry increased by 16.8 per cent. The construction industry was one of only three industries that experienced increased labour and multifactor productivity growth in the 2000s, when compared to the 1990s. Industry trends since the ABCC ceased operating suggest that productivity performance in the building and construction sector is declining. Independent Economics, in a report prepared for the Master Builders Association, estimated that the removal of industry-specific regulation would ultimately result in a loss of 75 per cent of the productivity gains achieved during the Building Industry Taskforce and Australian Building and Construction Commission era.

Poor productivity and weak competition lead to costs for construction projects being higher than they should be. Customers are being overcharged. We the taxpayers are being overcharged. When the customer is a state or federal government, it is us, the taxpayers, who are ultimately being overcharged. Industry participants inform me that, on large construction sites, it costs about 30 per cent more to do the same piece of work as on an individual home building site. This is a powerful indicator of the excess cost built into the construction sector due to union militancy driving unnecessary expense.

The initiatives associated with the ABCC era resulted in productivity gains which produced an average lower construction cost of 3.4 per cent. Consumers also benefited from a 0.5 per cent reduction in the price of all dwellings. We found that, unequivocally, the ABCC needed to be brought back to ensure the rule of law and productivity on commercial building sites and construction projects, both onshore and offshore.

The Office of the Federal Safety Commissioner and the Building and Construction Work Health and Safety Accreditation Scheme are maintained in this bill. The bill includes a number of provisions modelled on the former Building and Construction Industry Improvement Act 2005 which provide building-industry-specific provisions, such as higher penalties for breaches of industrial law and associated provisions for proceedings relating to a contravention of a civil penalty provision, and protection against discrimination, coercion and undue pressure and rules from the Fair Work Act.

This bill, importantly, encourages productivity and the pursuit of high levels of employment in the building and construction industry. It will ensure that the government’s policy to deliver the infrastructure of the 21st century is being delivered on time and on budget. The bill will create jobs and investment by ensuring that employers and workers in the industry can get on with the job without fear of intimidation.

There are also a number of changes in this bill from the original ABCC legislation. The definition of 'building work' in the bill includes offshore prefabrication of made-to-order components for parts of buildings, structures or works. The definition of 'building work' also includes the transporting or supply of goods to be used in building work. This is a change from the previous ABCC legislation and is included to ensure that large resource construction projects cannot be directly disrupted through coordinated go-slowsls on the supply of materials to those projects. Reforming the lawless culture of the building and construction industry
requires strong regulation, a strong regulator and a level of penalties that will act as a
deterrent to unlawful behaviour.

The bill contains appropriate and effective safeguards to ensure due process and
transparency in the use of powers. The bill requires the Australian Building and Construction
Commissioner to provide the Commonwealth Ombudsman with a report about the
examination, along with a video recording and transcript of the examination. The bill includes
measures to ensure public transparency and accountability and give the community
confidence in the work of the ABCC.

Australia cannot afford to have a building and construction industry which is inefficient
and unstable. I am proud to be on this side of the chamber and to be able to stand up for my
constituents who are being bullied by unions, being denied jobs and workers by unions, and
having the few jobs they do receive delayed and interrupted by union officials. Those in the
construction industry are doing it tough. Today the coalition is standing up for the rights of
workers to go to work each day without the fear of being harassed or intimidated or the
subject of violence.

The former Labor government abolished the Australian Building and Construction
Commission and saw a return to the days of lawlessness and unproductivity. The coalition is
committed to standing up for business owners, like my constituents in Ryan, who are pleading
for stability and reform in the industry. The rule of law must be applied fairly to this industry,
and it is simply not fair or just to require the employers of Australia and their workers to
comply with reasonable laws and not expect the construction unions to do the same. This is a
significant step forward for the industry and for the principle that we are all equal before the
law.

I commend this bill to the House. Australia cannot afford not to increase productivity, and
with this bill we are doing something about improving standards in the workplace for all our
workers.

Mr RANDALL (Canning) (13:34): I am pleased to speak on the bill before the House
today, the Building and Construction Industry (Improving Productivity) Bill 2013, and the
cognate bill, the Building and Construction Industry (Consequential and Transitional
Provisions) Bill 2013. As many of the speakers in this debate have already said, this bill seeks
to restore the Australian Building and Construction Commission, or the ABCC. This will
reverse Labor's changes to the laws which saw the ABCC abolished in 2012. In the
government's policy to improve fair work laws, we are committed to restoring the ABCC to
ensure that the rule of law is adhered to in the building and construction industry and to
seeing much-needed productivity restored.

Let us just remind the House that the coalition took this commitment not only to the last
election, in 2013, but also to the 2010 election. We are here today because the Labor Party,
under both former Prime Minister Rudd and former Prime Minister Gillard, kowtowed to
the union movement and decided to withdraw from being the tough cop on the beat in the
building and construction industry. I looked at a speech I made to this House in 2012 in the
second reading debate on the Building and Construction Industry Improvement Amendment
(Transition to Fair Work) Bill 2011, and much of what I said then is true today. I could almost
reread my previous notes to the House and it would all be relevant. For example, the coalition
established the Building and Construction Commission in 2005 in response to the Cole royal
commission. The then industrial relations minister was our Prime Minister today, Tony Abbott. The Cole royal commission report found that unlawful and inappropriate conduct was widespread in the building and construction industry and that there were many bogus safety issues, such as the right of entry, which I will go to if I have the time.

What the ABCC achieved in that time was a 10 per cent increase in productivity. It provided an annual economic welfare gain of $5.5 billion per year. It reduced inflation by 1.2 per cent and it increased GDP by 1½ per cent. The number of working days lost annually per 1,000 employees in the construction industry fell from 224 in 2004 to just 24 in 2006. Building costs fell by 20 to 25 per cent, and long project delays were dramatically reduced. This is all from my previous speech; it is all true today. But what happened? Along came Prime Minister Gillard. As we know, all members opposite in this place have to belong to a union to be in the House of Representatives or, dare I say, in the Senate. They have to join a union.

Mr Zappia: No, you don't.

Mr RANDALL: I would like to know which union the member for Makin belongs to. He might want to tell us. Then we will know which union he is obliged to. Unions put representatives in parliament through their preselection processes. The unions control the preselection processes of the Australian Labor Party. You have all listened to the maiden speeches in this House. Most new Labor members have an industrial history through either the union movement or through some association. We see how they continually inject former union bosses particularly into the Senate. Senator Doug Cameron comes to mind. All of these people are beholden to the union movement.

I do not have a problem with the union movement. When I was a schoolteacher, I was head of the teachers union in my school. If you are doing good things for your members in a collective way, that is a good thing. But when you become a militant union like the CFMEU or the MUA then you are damaging this country. It is passing strange and interesting to this House that the now opposition leader and industrial relations spokesman, Bill Shorten, member for Maribyrnong, said in Western Australia when he visited the MUA: 'We should all take notice of how the MUA conduct themselves. I admire their militancy and I think we should do more to model ourselves on that.' You did not hear that around the rest of Australia. The opposition leader was there with Chris Cain of the MUA in Western Australia, the anarchists in the workplace setting, saying that we should be more like the MUA. That is the DNA of those opposite, and unions generally pay for most of their election funds. So of course those opposite are obliged to them.

Before the ABCC was abolished, the Labor Party tried to defund it. Any organisation which is defunded cannot do its business. That was the first step in neutering the ABCC, the tough cop on the beat. Let us look at what happened when they did that. We all saw what happened to Grocon when it was trying to do its lawful business in Victoria. The thugs got hold of the workers going to work. They spat on them and called them 'dogs' and 'scabs'. They knew where they lived and said they would get their families—all that sort of talk. The rule of law was broken.

The Cole royal commission maintains its relevance today. In the findings from the Cole royal commission in 2003, 10 years ago, Justice Cole said that in the building and construction industry throughout Australia there is a widespread disregard of, or breach of,
the enterprise-bargaining provisions of the Workplace Relations Act 1996; widespread disregard of, or breach of, the freedom-of-association provisions of the Workplace Relations Act 1996; widespread departure from proper standards of occupational health and safety; and a widespread requirement by head contractors through subcontractors to have union endorsed enterprise-bargaining agreements.

Remember on the sites in Western Australia and all around Australia, 'No ticket, no start'? Unless you belonged to a union you could not get a job. They have taken the signs down, but they are still trying to do it. At the moment in the Pilbara—more than 50 per cent of this nation's export income comes from Western Australia, much of it from the Pilbara with iron ore, gas and a range of other minerals—there is now a demarcation dispute between the CFMEU, trying to muscle in on the union territory, and the AWU. That is now causing disruption in the workplace with strikes and the like. This affects productivity. It has already been pointed out to you how much productivity is worth to the Australian economy. An article in *Business Spectator* on 16 October 2013 said: Australia would benefit to the tune of $1.252 billion if the construction sector improved its productivity by just 1 per cent, according to the new PricewaterhouseCoopers report.

Remember what it did when we brought in the tough cop on the beat before? Ten per cent. We are talking about how much it would improve our bottom line productivity: by one per cent.

When I made my speech in 2012, I heard the member for McEwen say, 'Productivity is another way of ripping away conditions and awards from workers.' If somebody wants to strike a bargain and get a better deal, what is the matter with that? In my electorate of Canning, 20 per cent of the people were on AWAs, most of them in the resources industry. They struck that bargain because they could get more money, not less money. What is the matter with rewarding somebody who wants to work smarter and harder? That is called productivity. Those opposite have a problem with the word 'productivity' because somehow they link it to a reduction in terms and conditions. That is simply not true.

Unless you have someone with the legal authority and the willingness to enforce sanctions, you will have the Joe McDonalds and the Kevin Reynolds of Australia importing their thuggery and lack of rule of law into workplaces. Good honest workers just want to earn a quid to pay their mortgages and to look after their families.

This legislation is not only very important for all Australians and for our economy generally; it is about Australia getting back on the track. At the moment, Australia is one of the dearest places in the world to do business. One of the reasons is that we have artificially inflated workplace laws. Those laws are making it so dear for any resource company coming to invest in this country or to even expand in this country. But those opposite do not really care, as long as their union bosses stay in charge, so they will be able to get back into this place or garner some influence. There are good people on that side of the House who would like to see the union influence in this place reduced—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott): Order! The debate is interrupted in accordance with standing order 43. The debate may be resumed at a later hour and the member for Canning will have leave to continue his remarks when the debate is resumed.
STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Typhoon Haiyan

Mr BOWEN (McMahon) (13:45): Yesterday, the member for Chifley, the member for Greenway, who joins us in the chamber, and I hosted a fundraising day for victims of Typhoon Haiyan—or Typhoon Yolanda, as it is known in the Philippines—in which so many people lost their lives and many people were made homeless. I am very pleased to report to the House that around 400 people came to our fundraising day. We believe we raised approximately $10,000 for Caritas and the work that they are doing for the victims of Typhoon Haiyan. It was a very good day. I want to place on record my thanks to the staff of the member for Chifley, the member for Greenway and my staff, as well as the many volunteers who helped out on the day. It was a bittersweet moment. We had a great day, with jumping castles, face painting and lots of fun activities, but we remembered the thousands of people who lost their lives in Typhoon Haiyan. In a very real sense it made our contribution not just a remembrance but a rebuilding.

The Philippines is a wonderful nation with many challenges on its hands. It did not need the extra challenge of this worst ever landfall typhoon that they had to experience in recent weeks. A terrible crisis, a terrible tragedy often takes the world's attention and then we move on very quickly. The world moves on because there is so much to grab our attention. But we need to remain focused on the victims of Typhoon Haiyan and, as we said yesterday at the community day, they will always remain in our thoughts, and our actions and support will always be with them.

G20

Ms GAMBARO (Brisbane) (13:46): Yesterday I had the pleasure of joining Prime Minister Tony Abbott, Queensland Premier Campbell Newman, Queensland Treasurer Tim Nichols and Brisbane Lord Mayor Graham Quirk to commemorate Australia's commencement of the G20 presidency.

The G20 presidency is an opportunity for Australia to contribute to the economic leadership of the world. Australia's G20 presidency will focus on promoting stronger economic growth and more jobs, as well as making the global economy more resilient to deal with future shocks. As the 12th largest economy in the world, Australia supports global efforts to promote economic growth, create jobs and strengthen the global economy against future economic setbacks.

The G20 leaders meeting will be held in my electorate of Brisbane in November next year and it will be an honour for Brisbane to host the most important gathering of leaders ever to take place in Australia. As the federal member for Brisbane and as an honorary ambassador for Brisbane, I am truly delighted about what this will mean for our great city. Brisbane will be showcased in a way that we have not seen since World Expo 88 or the 1982 Commonwealth Games. The G20 is a perfect summit for Brisbane to showcase the modern city that it is today to the rest of the world and the G20 leaders summit will bring to Brisbane some 4,000 international delegates and 3,000 media.

Currently, Queensland is leading in terms of Australia's economic growth. Business investment is up, the tourism industry is recovering and confidence is high. Hosting the G20 will continue Brisbane's longstanding reputation as one of Australia's cities of choice.
Mr KELVIN THOMSON (Wills) (13:48): I wish to raise serious concerns on behalf of families and employees who are owed outstanding money and entitlements following the closure of the Brunswick Manor aged-care facility in my electorate.

When I was contacted by families concerning the issue of possible closure in early September, I made representations to the former government and I have since made representations to the incoming government. A report in today's Age by Nick Toscano states that one resident's mother is owed more than $230,000 by the nursing home, an employee is owed more than $2,000 in wages and entitlements and that some 45 former employees at the West Brunswick facility are owed more than $200,000 in unpaid wages and entitlements.

The previous Labor government implemented safeguards for aged-care bonds for families as part of the Living Longer Living Better package, so if an aged-care service provider becomes insolvent or bankrupt the act guarantees residents and families will be refunded their accommodation bond balance.

Given this background and the work of the previous government, I urge the government to act quickly and decisively to assist families and employees who have been outrageously left high and dry by the Brunswick Manor director, Debra Lowe, and to use the powers at their disposal to assist these people as quickly as possible.

Dr HENDY (Eden-Monaro) (13:50): I rise today to proudly tell the House that the city of Queanbeyan, in my electorate of Eden-Monaro, celebrated its 175th anniversary on 28 September this year. It was on that date in 1838 that the New South Wales Colonial Secretary's Office formally gazetted Queanbeyan as a 'village'.

There were many interesting events this year celebrating Queanbeyan's incredibly rich history. The city has been and remains so important for this region. It is where my family and I live. I congratulate Mayor Tim Overall and Deputy Mayor Peter Bray on the quality of the various events celebrating the 175 years.

Nichole Overall recently produced a timely and excellent book entitled Queanbeyan: City of Champions. There have been many famous national sporting icons who have come from Queanbeyan. But this book is broader than that, giving a social and pictorial history of one of New South Wales's great cities. It ranges from associations with great agricultural scientists such as William Farrer to movie stars like George Lazenby and even has links to Soviet spy Vladimir Petrov, who used Queanbeyan as a drop-off point for his espionage activities in the 1950s.

Recently I also attended the Queanbeyan Show. The show society began in 1891, making it one of the oldest show societies. This is its 122nd year. I congratulate the Queanbeyan Show Society, in particular, president Michael Harriden, secretary Tony Cross and society stalwart Dawn Mayne for putting on such a great event.

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (13:51): The cuts being inflicted by those opposite seem to have no bounds. Contrary to pre-election promises that health and education would be spared, they are now prime targets. As of last week this government will no longer be funding...
the Alcohol and Other Drugs Council of Australia. ADCA has operated since 1966 as the peak body for organisations working to minimise the harm caused by drugs and alcohol, on an annual budget of just $1.6 million.

I know those opposite claim that we are in a budget emergency, but let's have some perspective. The cost of one Australian living with foetal alcohol spectrum disorder over their lifetime is $15 million. That is almost 10 times the annual budget of ADCA.

Yesterday was World AIDS Day and the Minister for Health spoke about the need for continued vigilance in preventing the spread of HIV. Why, then, has he scrapped the body that has been at the forefront of understanding and working with syringe-using communities in the fight against HIV? Why has he scrapped the body working with our neighbours in Asia and the Pacific to help them understand the links between injecting drugs and HIV infection? In 46 years this is the only government that has decided it can do without ADCA’s advice. The government has saved $1.6 million this financial year, but what will be the long-term cost of the decision to scrap ADCA?

**Flynn Electorate: Cattle Industry**

Mr O'DOWD (Flynn) (13:53): I rise today to speak in support of the Australian cattle industry, in particular the Queensland beef industry and those who have suffered as a result of irrational policy under the previous government and those who are currently suffering the effects of drought, the high Australian dollar et cetera. While the season has shown some signs of breaking in parts of Queensland, there are many who are in desperate need of meaningful rain and support from this government.

I applaud recent actions by the Minister for Agriculture on the relocation of the farm finance concessional loans and ongoing efforts to restore the live cattle trade. I am proud to be a part of a government that is committed to restoring the beef industry and agriculture in Australia to its former glory. After being nothing more than a distant thought for the last six years under Labor, I assure our graziers and primary producers that our government is 100 per cent behind you.

**International Day of People with Disability**

Ms RISHWORTH (Kingston) (13:54): Tomorrow, 3 December, is the International Day of People with Disability, a day dedicated to placing a greater emphasis on the abilities and achievements of people living with a disability. This is a United Nations sanctioned day aimed at increasing public awareness, understanding and acceptance of persons with a disability and celebrating their achievements.

I was very pleased to hear about the winners of the National Disability Awards recently. I will not be able to go through all the winners, but I want to particularly pay tribute to the winner of the Prime Minister's Outstanding Achievement Award, Ms Lesley Hall. Unfortunately, Lesley passed away earlier this year and was unable to accept her award, but, in my dealings with Lesley in the previous government, she was an outstanding contributor to the area of disabilities and an outstanding advocate for those who need it most.

This year, 2013, the theme for the International Day of People with Disability is: breaking barriers and opening doors—to realise an inclusive society for all. It is important, as we roll out the National Disability Insurance Scheme, which will change the lives of so many, that we do not forget that we need to continually strive to make our society more inclusive for people.
with a disability. That goes across a whole range of things, not just services. Whether it is transport or buildings or employment, we need to continue to ensure that people have access to the most important fundamental things in life. *(Time expired)*

**Freney, Ms Jacqueline**

Mr HOGAN (Page) *(13:55)*: I rise to acknowledge a great Australian Paralympian swimmer, Jacqueline Freney, who last month was named New South Wales Young Australian of the Year. Although Jacqueline and her family live just outside my electorate, in the seaside village of Skennars Head, I was fortunate enough to get to know Jacqueline and her parents, Michael and Joanne, when they lived in Casino.

Jacqueline Freney is an inspiration to me, to the people of the northern rivers of New South Wales and to all Australians. She exemplifies the great Australian attitude of, when you are told you cannot do something, doing it anyway—and proving all your detractors wrong. Jacqueline was born with cerebral palsy diplegia, which restricts the movement of her legs and body. But, coming from a swimming family, she was determined to follow them into the pool and she set herself the goal of one day becoming a competitive swimmer.

Rising to such a challenge can only be done with the support of your family, and this was the case with Jacqueline. She was expertly coached by her father, who runs the swimming classes in my electorate at Evans Head and the Casino pool. She names her father, Michael, and her grandfather, Peter, as the most influential people in her swimming career. I congratulate her on behalf of the people of Page.

**Greenway Electorate: Blacktown Cancer Care Centre**

Ms ROWLAND (Greenway) *(13:56)*: I rise to mention a very important issue for residents of Blacktown. Blacktown will soon have a world-class cancer facility, which is a great thing. The new Blacktown Cancer Care Centre is due to open in 2015. It will be a wonderful asset for our local community.

But I want to mention a very important logistical issue, and that is parking access to the new facility. A number of community members want to make sure that the present free parking for patients attending oncology treatment is maintained when it moves to the new centre. They also want to ensure that those people undergoing radiotherapy are given the same consideration.

It is well recognised that parking is a problem for anyone attending hospital, but it certainly causes extra challenges for cancer patients undergoing chemotherapy and radiotherapy. These treatments often require attendance at hospital up to five days a week for something like six to eight weeks, and the side-effects of these treatments leave patients feeling nauseous and tired.

I want to place on record my thanks to the Blacktown Community Cancer Network and in particular its chairperson, former councillor Kathie Collins, who is leading the charge to provide free and accessible parking for cancer patients when the treatment centre opens in 2015. She has noted particularly that there is a huge financial burden on sufferers of cancer, and this burden includes that of parking. I am very pleased that Blacktown Hospital's general manager, Andrew Newton, has recognised the specific needs of cancer patients. I thank the hospital for that and I do hope we can reach a conclusion which will be satisfactory for all involved. *(Time expired)*
Banks Electorate: New South Wales Southern Region Chinese Community Association

Mr COLEMAN (Banks) (13:58): I rise to congratulate the New South Wales southern region Chinese Community Association on its recent gala dinner. I was privileged to attend the dinner, which was held on 30 October in Hurstville in my electorate. In particular, I would like to acknowledge the presence of the Consulate-General of the People's Republic of China in Sydney, His Excellency Li Huaxin, at the dinner.

Hurstville is home to many Australians of Chinese background and it was tremendous to attend this important celebration dinner. It was also great to see many entrepreneurs from the Hurstville region at the dinner, many of whom were recognised at the event. Hurstville is a thriving commercial hub with a wide range of fantastic small business people, who employ so many people in our community. It was really terrific to celebrate their achievements on the evening.

The guests of the function also enjoyed a wide range of performances by local entertainers celebrating Chinese culture. It really was a terrific function. I would like to thank and congratulate the association and all of the organisers of the event, in particular Councillor Annie Tang of Kogarah, Councillor Nancy Liu of Hurstville and Mr SC Wu, who were all instrumental in its success.

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

PARLIAMENTARY REPRESENTATION

Resignation

The SPEAKER (14:00): I wish to inform the House that on 22 November 2013 I received a letter from the Hon. Kevin Michael Rudd resigning his seat as the member for the electoral division of Griffith. Consideration is being given to possible dates for the by-election, and I will inform the House in due course of the dates I have fixed for it.

MINISTERIAL ARRANGEMENTS

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:00): I inform the House that the Minister for Trade and Investment will be absent from question time this week as he is participating in the 9th Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization, in Bali. He is then co-chairing the 38th Cairns Group Ministerial Meeting. The Minister for Foreign Affairs will answer questions on his behalf.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Education Funding

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Leader of the Opposition) (14:00): My question is to the Prime Minister. On Channel 10 yesterday the Prime Minister said, 'We are going to keep the promise that we actually made.' What guarantee can the Prime Minister give that under his latest scheme schools will not be worse off as a result of actions by the Commonwealth or state governments?

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:01): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question. The best guarantee we can give is that we are not like members opposite,
who make solemn pledges before an election and break them afterwards. The problem with
the Leader of the Opposition is that he is not capable of changing his question time strategy
quickly.

I want to make it absolutely crystal clear that this government is cleaning up Labor's mess,
the mess that the Leader of the Opposition left by cutting $1.2 billion from school funding in
the pre-election fiscal outlook statement. So we are cleaning up Labor's mess and we are
keeping our commitments.

Ms Owens interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Parramatta will desist.

Mr ABBOTT: Schools will get $2.8 billion more under this government over the four-
year period. That is $1.2 billion more than they were left with under this shambolic former
education minister.

Economy

Mr VASTA (Bonner) (14:02): My question is to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime
Minister update the House on the financial challenges the government has inherited, and how
addressing waste and mismanagement will help build a stronger economy for all Australians?

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: Before the Prime Minister answers, I would like some listening time
from the members of the opposition. We have one or two members who are slow to learn, and
perhaps they need some encouragement to learn.

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:03): I thank the member for Bonner for
his question. I want to assure him and all members that this government is cleaning up the
mess we inherited and we are keeping our commitments. Wherever members look there are
problems that were given to us by the former government, whether it is the gross debt
skyrocketing past $400 billion; the deficits stretching out beyond where the eye can see,
because of the fiscal profligacy of the former government; —

Mr Perrett interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Moreton may be surprised at any moment—

Mr ABBOTT: whether it is the $25 billion ripped out of defence, leaving us with the
lowest level of defence spending as a percentage of GDP since 1938; whether it is the $1.2
billion ripped out of schools by the Leader of the Opposition; whether it is the almost $100
billion that was being misspent on the National Broadband Network white elephant; whether
it be the complete failure to put any funding in for border protection after 1 January; the
failure to provide for chemotherapy infusions after 1 January; or whether it is the fact that the
ACCC has been running at a loss for three years.

Mr Dreyfus interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Isaacs will desist.

Mr ABBOTT: Everywhere you look the former government has left a mess. If it were so
fantastic, why did they politically execute two prime ministers. If they are so proud of
themselves, why were the Sussex Street death squads deployed, not once but twice, to
assassinate their own leaders, led, of course, by the current Leader of the Opposition. I say
this: if former Prime Ministers Rudd and Gillard could not trust this opposition leader, the Australian people certainly cannot. We are keeping our commitments.

Ms Owens interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Parramatta will desist.

Mr ABBOTT: The most fundamental commitment of all we will deliver is to repeal the carbon tax. Repealing the carbon tax will leave every Australian household $550 a year better off. What has the Leader of the Opposition got against a $550 Christmas present for every Australian household. Every time Australians get an electricity bill they know that it is $200 higher than it should be, because of that smug Bill over there.

Education Funding

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Leader of the Opposition) (14:06): My question is to the Prime Minister. Exactly four months ago the Prime Minister said, ‘We will make sure that no school is worse off.’ What guarantee can the Prime Minister give under his latest scheme that schools will not be worse off as a result of actions by the Commonwealth government or state governments?

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:07): He obviously had what he thought was a fantastic question-time strategy and he is incapable of adjusting it in the light of the facts as they stand.

Mr Burke: Madam Speaker, on a point of order: the standing orders are clear that the Prime Minister should not debate the question, which is exactly what the Prime Minister is doing.

The SPEAKER: I would remind the Manager of Opposition Business that the debate provisions provide two questions.

Mr ABBOTT: The only people who have cut funding from education in this House are the members opposite. In last year’s MYEFO—

Mr Shorten interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The honourable Leader of the Opposition will withdraw that remark.

Mr Shorten: I withdraw.

Mr ABBOTT: In last year’s MYEFO they cut $3.8 billion out of education and in this year’s PEFO—

Ms Owens interjecting—

Ms Macklin interjecting—

Mr Dreyfus interjecting—

The SPEAKER: Would the trio of voices, members for Parramatta, Jagajaga and Isaacs, please desist.

An opposition member interjecting—

The SPEAKER: As a matter of opinion.

Mr ABBOTT: Members opposite cut $3.8 billion out of education in last year's MYEFO; they cut $1.6 billion out of public hospitals in last year's MYEFO and in the PEFO that we got before the election, no one—
Opposition members interjecting—

Mr ABBOTT: The Leader of the Opposition himself signed off on a $1.2 billion cut in school funding.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr ABBOTT: I hear members opposite bellowing and carrying on. We had the shadow Treasurer and we had the member for Adelaide admit in the media, over the last couple of days, that that is exactly what the Leader of the Opposition did. He ripped $1.2 billion off the vulnerable school students and schools of Western Australia, Queensland and the Northern Territory. We are putting it back. We are not just keeping our commitments, we are more than keeping our commitments.

Typhoon Haiyan

Mr HAWKE (Mitchell) (14:09): My question is to the Minister for Foreign Affairs. I remind the minister that North-West Sydney and my electorate of Mitchell are home to a large number of Australians of Filipino ancestry. I ask the minister if she could please update the House on the steps the government has taken to respond to the emergency effort in the Philippines following Typhoon Haiyan.

Ms JULIE BISHOP (Curtin—Minister for Foreign Affairs) (14:10): I thank the member for Mitchell for his question, asking this on behalf of his electorate and the Filipino community in his electorate. The destruction and devastation caused by Typhoon Haiyan on 8 and 9 November in the Philippines has been immense. About 13 million people are estimated to be affected. About four million people are estimated to be displaced from their homes. The death toll is not final but we know that there have been deaths in the thousands, including two Australians. The Australian government responded rapidly in coordination with NGOs and the Philippine government. In particular, we had emergency stores on the ground within hours of the typhoon. We were able to deploy a medical team within days and funding was provided virtually immediately to the Red Cross, other NGOs and to the United Nations. In total, our assistance comes to some $30 million.

On the ground, Australians are having a significant impact and our medical team set up a 50-bed facility at Tacloban Airport, and in the first 24 hours of arriving they treated 100 patients. The ADF is there and have evacuated about 3½-thousand people—nearly 3,400. They have transported 400 relief workers into the disaster-affected areas. HMAS Tobruk has also arrived, to the great relief of the Philippines' people, as I am informed by their foreign minister, and onboard HMAS Tobruk are 100 personnel who are engaged in repair and reconstruction and recovery work—particularly of schools, as requested by the Filipino government. The Australian public are said to have contributed $9 million, which indicates the generosity of the Australian people, and Australia overall is the fourth-largest donor to the Philippines tragedy after the UK, the US and Japan. We, of course, stand ready to assist whenever we are required. I spoke to foreign minister Del Rosario. He thanked us for our assistance. I will be travelling to the Philippines shortly, to discuss further aid and assistance with the Filipino government.

I want to thank our Ambassador to the Philippines, Bill Tweddell, and the team in Manila, also our consular, humanitarian and crisis-centre team at DFAT. I went down to see them last Thursday and thanked them for the work that they have done. I thank the opposition and the
Leader of the Opposition for the bipartisan support in relation to this matter. The Australian government stands ready, as I said, to support the Philippines in however they wish us to support their reconstruction effort. It has been a devastating time for them, but Australia stands with its dear friend the Philippines.

**Ms Plibersek:** On indulgence: I wish to associate the opposition with the remarks of the foreign minister and to say how generous the Australian people have also been at this terrible time and congratulate the members for Chifley, McMahon and Greenway, with the local Philippine community in their electorates, for raising $10,000 for Caritas yesterday.

**Education Funding**

**Ms Plibersek** (Sydney—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (14:13): My question is to the Prime Minister. On 2 August the Prime Minister said: 'We want to end the uncertainty, by guaranteeing that no school will be worse off over the forward estimates period.' What guarantee can the Prime Minister give that under his plan schools will not be worse off as a result of actions by the Commonwealth or state governments?

**Mr Abbott** (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:14): Our guarantee is that we will spend $1.2 billion more over the forward estimates than was envisaged by the Leader of the Opposition. I am sure members opposite will be interested in the statement of the Premier of New South Wales on this matter. He said, 'Mr Abbott should be commended for restoring $1.2 billion of education funding which was deceitfully removed by the Labor government in its dying days.' He went on: 'Tony Abbott's handling of this issue is a refreshing change to the way Labor engaged with the states.'

**Budget**

**Ms O'Dwyer** (Higgins) (14:15): My question is for the Treasurer. Will the Treasurer outline how raising the debt ceiling to a prudent level is an imperative for the next sitting fortnight of parliament?

**Mr Hockey** (North Sydney—The Treasurer) (14:15): I thank the member for Higgins for that question. For the first time, we have received phone calls now from international investors and rating agencies concerned about Australia possibly reaching—

*Opposition members interjecting—

**The Speaker:** The honourable members on my left have been asking their questions. Now there is one from the government. We will hear the answer from the Treasurer.

**Mr Hockey:** The rating agencies have for the first time contacted us concerned about possibly reaching the debt limit in the next few days. It was the Labor Party— the member for McMahon—that introduced the debt limit of $75 billion, pledging it would never be reached. Then Labor introduced a debt limit of $200 billion, saying it would never be reached. Then they introduced a debt limit of $250 billion, saying it would never be reached. Then they introduced a debt limit of $300 billion, and Labor said it would never be reached. Yet they budgeted a debt limit of $370 billion peak debt and, at the same time, the member for Lilley laid on the table of this parliament advice to say that there has to be an additional $60 billion buffer. So I would say to the members opposite: this is the debt that Labor created. Labor is offering a partial solution of a debt limit of $400 billion when they left us with a debt—

*Mr Shorten interjecting—*
The SPEAKER: The Leader of the Opposition will desist. I give the call to the honourable Treasurer.

Mr HOCKEY: that is well going to exceed, as the Secretary of the Treasury advised the Senate, over $400 billion.

The fact of the matter is this. I know the Leader of the Opposition has a shadow Treasurer who does not understand the difference between net debt and gross debt, but I would say to the Leader of the Opposition—

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr HOCKEY: Come on.

The SPEAKER: There will be quiet. The honourable Treasurer is giving important information as to legislation which needs to be dealt with in the House, so it would help the House and the business of the House if we could hear his answer. I give the call to the honourable Treasurer.

Mr HOCKEY: I would say to the Leader of the Opposition—

Mr Snowdon interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Lingiari will withdraw his comment.

Mr Snowdon: I withdraw.

Mr HOCKEY: I say to the Leader of the Opposition and I say to the Greens as well: this is unprecedented territory. If the Labor Party is going to prevent us from trying to fix the problems they created then they will wear this. It will be their responsibility. Labor created the debt of over $400 billion, and now at a cost to the nation they are preventing us from dealing with it. This is a test for the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr Dreyfus interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Isaacs will desist.

Education Funding

Ms KATE ELLIS (Adelaide) (14:18): My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer to the coalition’s election promise made on 29 August:

Our policy starts with a clear commitment to all Australian schools: your funding is certain.

What guarantee can the Prime Minister give that under his plan no school will be worse off as a result of actions by the Commonwealth or state governments?

The SPEAKER: Before I call the honourable Prime Minister I must say that that question is getting very close to one that has already been fully answered. However, the last words that were added asking that the Prime Minister answer on behalf of state governments is new to the question, so I will give the call to the honourable Prime Minister.

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:19): New to the question and, I suspect, outside the standing orders. As I have made absolutely crystal clear, the $1.2 billion that the Leader of the Opposition ripped out of school funding just prior to the election is being fully restored by the coalition, because the difference between us and members opposite is that under us there is a system which is national and fair—national, fair and that we will fully fund to the tune of $2.8 billion. That commitment we will fully fund, unlike the Leader of the Opposition.
National Security

Mr BANDT (Melbourne) (14:20): My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer to a report in today's Australian edition of the Guardian that the Australian Signals Directorate offered to share Australians' data with overseas spy agencies, possibly in breach of the law. Prime Minister, is this true? Is it happening, and will you put in place a full inquiry to ensure that no Australians' information, including medical, legal or religious information, is given to foreign spy agencies in this way?

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:21): I wish to make three points in response to the member. First, Australia will act to protect our national interest and to protect our citizens. We always have under governments of both persuasions; and, as far as I am concerned, we always will. We will act to protect our national security, and we will act to protect our national security using agencies such as ASIO and ASIS.

The second point I want to make is that our security agencies operate under very strict safeguards. They operate under the scrutiny and the supervision of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security and under the scrutiny and the supervision of the Inspector General of Intelligence and Security. These are strong and effective safeguards.

The final point I wish to make is that it has not been the practice of any government of either persuasion to comment on operational matters.

Education Funding

Mrs PRENTICE (Ryan) (14:22): My question is to the Minister for Education. Will the minister please inform the House how the government is delivering fair funding for students in Queensland like those at Mitchelton State High School in my electorate of Ryan? Minister, how does this compare to other approaches?

Mr Fitzgibbon: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order, under 101. It is clear that the last part of that question is exactly the sort of phrase which Speaker Jenkins took offence to in the 43rd parliament. You will see his references on page 555 of House of Representatives Practice in that it invites the minister to comment on opposition policies.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order. I call the Minister for Education.

Mr PYNE (Sturt—Leader of the House, Minister for Education) (14:23): I am very pleased to be able to inform the member for Ryan that, following the press conference that the Prime Minister and I have done today, Queensland will gain $794 million in extra funding for their school students over the next four years. Queensland is one of the three winners from the coalition extending our commitment beyond matching Labor's level of funding before the election. You would remember that Labor took $1.2 billion from the school funding model in the pre-election fiscal outlook. They ripped it away from Queensland, the Northern Territory and Western Australia. I am very pleased to be able to say today that Queensland will gain almost $800 million for their school students because this government are not only keeping their commitment to match Labor's funding but are going beyond that commitment with $1.2 billion of new money. We were left a complete mess—

Mr Dreyfus interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Isaacs is warned!
Mr PYNE: by the previous government. The previous minister for education, in the short tenure the Leader of the Opposition had in that role, ripped $1.2 billion out of school funding and he left a national model that did not include three of the most important jurisdictions in Australia. So there was no national model. He took $1.2 billion from the model. We on the other hand will keep all of our commitments. We are putting $1.6 billion in that Labor promised; we are putting in an extra $1.2 billion that Labor took; we are delivering a national model that includes every jurisdiction; and we will dismantle in the Australian Education Act the red tape and the regulations that Labor built in that made the model almost unintelligible and incapable of being delivered. We will not have a federal inspectorate, we will not have a school performance institute and we will not have all the levels of ministerial intervention from Canberra in our state and territory schools, so that we can say with absolute confidence that, following this commitment, no school can be worse off because of anything that the Commonwealth does.

Education Funding

Ms KATE ELLIS (Adelaide) (14:25): My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer to the coalition's election promise made on 29 August: 'You can vote Liberal or Labor and you will get exactly the same amount of funding for your school.' What guarantee can the Prime Minister give that under his plan no school will be worse off as a result of actions by the Commonwealth or state government cuts?

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:26): We are actually doing better, because the money that the Leader of the Opposition ripped out we are fully putting back, so we are more than keeping our commitments. We will always keep our commitments. In this case, we are doing better than simply keeping our commitments.

Education Funding

Mr IRONS (Swan) (14:26): My question is to the Minister for Education. Will the minister inform the House how the government is delivering fair funding for students in Western Australia like those of Lathlain Primary School in my electorate of Swan? How does this compare to other approaches?

Mr PYNE (Sturt—Leader of the House, Minister for Education) (14:27): I am delighted to get another question from my own side with respect to the government's announcement today, and I am shocked, surprised, that the opposition has not been able to summon up the courage to ask me a question about school funding. Ataturk said that when the battle changes a good general changes their battle tactics. Unfortunately, the Leader of the Opposition is still using last week's questions pack and asking the same questions he would have asked before the government's announcement before question time, but I guess that will change with experience in opposition.

I have good news for the member for Swan. In fact, Western Australia will gain remarkably from the announcement that we made before question time. Over the next four years they will gain $120 million more in extra funding that was ripped away by the former minister for education, the Leader of the Opposition, before the election. In the pre-election fiscal outlook, the former minister for education, now the Leader of the Opposition, took $120 million from Western Australia—punished them for the good outcomes that they are achieving—because Labor do not like the independent public schools model in Western
Australia. They ripped that money away and the coalition today announced that we are putting that money back. We want the debate to move from this debate about school funding to something that really matters in education beyond school funding, and that is quality and standards—teacher quality, parental engagement, a robust curriculum and more local decision making—

Ms King interjecting—

Mr PYNE: And, yes, phonics. The member for Ballarat raises phonics. Yes—the coalition is deeply committed to orthodox teaching methods and phonics, because we want students to leave school being able to read and write. The member for Perth, very respectfully, has written on this subject and said exactly what I am saying today—that things like phonics are exactly the way to improve the literacy and numeracy of our students. She said it. She said modern fads are teaching our students to hate school, and I agree with the member for Perth about that and I am glad to have her on our team.

Western Australia will win from the decisions that we have made today. We are putting back the money that Labor ripped from schools in Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory, and the Western Australians will be able to get on with that excellent work they are doing in giving more autonomy and local decision-making to independent public schools, which is transforming public schooling, not just in the schools but in the communities in which those schools reside.

Education Funding

Ms KATE ELLIS (Adelaide) (14:29): My question is to the Prime Minister. Before the election, the minister told Australian schools, ‘You will get the funding but you will not get the strings attached.’ Can the Prime Minister confirm whether the requirement that states do not cut school funding is considered to be a string?

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:30): The minister’s statement prior to the election was absolutely accurate and entirely reflects the position of the government.

Education Funding

Mrs GRIGGS (Solomon) (14:30): My question is to the Minister for Education. Will the minister inform the House how the government is delivering fair funding for students in the Northern Territory, such as those in Alawa Primary School in my electorate? How does this compare to other approaches?

Mr PYNE (Sturt—Leader of the House, Minister for Education) (14:30): I am delighted to get another question, this time from the Northern Territory, about the government’s education announcements today.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Lingiari will desist!

Mr PYNE: I am very surprised that the Labor Party has chosen to ignore the Minister for Education on such an important day for schools. I can tell the member for Solomon that the Northern Territory will gain $272 million from today’s announcement.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Parramatta is warned!
Mr PYNE: That is $272 million that will, from 2014, flow to Northern Territory schools—schools that have their own particular challenges in supporting those students that the Giles government—

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Liniari is warned!

Mr PYNE: is trying to help. It is $272 million for the Northern Territory that the former Minister for Education, now the Leader of the Opposition, ripped away in the pre-election fiscal outlook. This government is not only keeping the commitments it made before the election to have the same funding level as Labor of $1.6 billion; we have gone further. We are putting an extra $1.2 billion into school education. I can understand the embarrassment of the Labor Party—because they think education is their issue. It must really stick in their craw that it is the coalition government that is spending more money in school education over the next four years than Labor would have had they been re-elected. If Labor had been re-elected, schools would be $1.2 billion short on the funding they expected over the next four years. If Labor had been re-elected, there would be no national school funding agreement. But I have delivered a national school funding agreement. I have delivered what the Leader of the Opposition was incapable of doing. I have delivered an agreement that includes every jurisdiction—state and territory, Catholic and independent—

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Rankin is also warned!

Mr PYNE: and I have delivered it with $1.2 billion more money, which means we can move on to debates about teacher quality, about curriculum, about engaging parents and about more local decision making. It is no surprise that the Premier of New South Wales said today: This measure alone—

our announcement of $1.2 billion—

means schools students are in a better position now than they were before the election.

He said—and it is worth repeating:

Mr Abbott should be commended for restoring the $1.2 billion of education funding which was deceitfully removed by the Labor government in its dying days.

Deceitfully removed by whom?—by the former Minister for Education, the now Leader of the Opposition, who has remained very silent about his $1.2 billion cut. Unfortunately for him, it is now writ large for all to see.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The SPEAKER (14:33): I wish to inform the House that we have present in the gallery this afternoon members of the Special Parliamentary Committee on Public Sector Reform from the Parliament of Papua New Guinea. We extend a warm welcome to the committee.

Honourable members: Hear, hear!

The SPEAKER: We also extend a warm welcome to members of the APEC 4th delegation from the Republic of Korea.

Honourable members: Hear, hear!
The SPEAKER: While we are about it, I acknowledge the presence in the chamber of former Minister Simon Crean; the former member for Durack, Mr Barry Haase; Mr Stuart Henry, the former member for Hasluck; and Mr Tony Windsor, the former member for New England.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Education Funding

Ms KATE ELLIS (Adelaide) (14:34): My question is to the Prime Minister. Under the announcement made by the government today, can state governments cut their school funding budgets?

The SPEAKER: The Prime Minister did indicate earlier, when he was asked about what state governments would do, that that form of words is getting very close to being outside the standing orders—as the Prime Minister is not responsible for state governments. However, I will allow the question to stand.

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:35): What we see again is more shameless effrontery from members opposite. Let us be clear about what they are doing. Members opposite are complaining because we are putting back in the money they ripped out. They are unhappy about that. The truth is that the people of Australia can trust us in a way they could never trust old 'Billion Dollar Bill' over there—$1.2 billion ripped out of school funding.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: It would assist the House if the Prime Minister were to withdraw that statement about the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr ABBOTT: To assist the House, I am happy to withdraw. In fact—

The SPEAKER: The Manager of Opposition Business will resume his seat. I asked the Prime Minister to withdraw to assist the House and that is what he has done.

Mr Burke: On a point of order, Madam Speaker: I raise the issue of direct relevance. It was a very specific question about the relationship between Commonwealth agreements and what they will allow the states to do.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Mr ABBOTT: Madam Speaker, of course I should not have used that phrase to describe the Leader of the Opposition, because it was $1.2 billion, not just $1 billion, that he ripped out of school funding. We will change the Australian Education Act passed by the former government to end the Canberra command and control system that was put in place by members opposite.

Mr Husic: Reds under the schoolbooks.

The SPEAKER: The member for Chifley is warned.

Mr ABBOTT: This government will run a consultative and collegial system. We will end the blame game and we will work cooperatively with the states, and I believe that the states will honour their commitments to spend more money on schools.
Carbon Pricing

Mr O'DOWD (Flynn) (14:37): My question is to the Minister for the Environment. I remind the minister of comments made in The Australian Financial Review on 26 November 2013 by the chairman of Rusal Australia Ltd that they will not invest another cent in major capital investment until the carbon tax is repealed. Will the minister outline to the House the importance of scrapping the carbon tax for the Australian economy and future investments, particularly in my electorate of Flynn?

Mr HUNT (Flinders—Minister for the Environment) (14:38): I did notice the comments from the chairman of Rusal Australia, and members of the opposition should have noticed the comments from the chairman of Rusal Australia. For the record, Rusal is a part owner of the QAL alumina refinery in Gladstone—1,000 employees and another 300 contractors. This is what the chairman said in The Australian Financial Review last week:

Rusal Australia made it clear over the past three years in meetings with, and briefings to, the previous government that its investment in the ... (QAL) refinery at Gladstone was being put at risk by the government's unilateral carbon tax and energy policy.

Mr Dreymus: Tell us about the environment.

The SPEAKER: The member for Isaacs is warned.

Mr PYNE: The chairman went on to say:

We will not invest another cent in major capital improvements until Labor agrees to the repeal of the carbon tax ...

That is a major investor noting that they would not make another cent of investment until the carbon tax was repealed. That warning has been given in crystal clear fashion over the last three years. Significantly, the member for Isaacs asks about the environment. That is interesting, because during the course of this article the chairman of Rusal goes on to say:

A tonne of alumina produced in Australia emits on average 0.85 tonnes of CO$_2$, while in China the average carbon emission from production of a tonne of alumina is 1.35 tonnes.

In other words, the policy of those opposite costs Australian jobs and costs Australian investments, but it also sends up global emissions. For a policy designed to help the environment, it does damage on jobs, it does damage to investment and it does damage to the environment. But it is more than just the member's own area of Flynn and Gladstone. The Queensland Treasurer recently said:

By the modelling done for the previous State government, Queensland could lose up to 21,000 jobs by 2020 and Gross State Product could fall by $9.6 billion thanks to the carbon tax.

Gladstone—pain; Queensland—pain. As the Minerals Council in its submission recently told the Senate:

... for the mining sector the combined costs of permits, higher fuel costs and pass through of carbon costs on gas and electricity was an added burden of about $1.2 billion.

So let us be clear—this tax does damage to jobs, damage to investment and it sends emissions up and overseas.
Abbott Government

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Leader of the Opposition) (14:41): I refer the Prime Minister to his comment today that there will be no broken promises under this government. When will the Prime Minister stop lying?

The SPEAKER: That question is quite out of order and I ask the Leader of the Opposition to withdraw the end of the question.

Government members interjecting—

Mr SHORTEN: Sorry, did you give me the call?

The SPEAKER: I said to withdraw the end of the question. It was unparliamentary.

Mr SHORTEN: I withdraw, and I seek leave to move that this House censure the Prime Minister for breaking his promise to parents and children across Australia—

Mr Pyne: Madam Speaker—

The SPEAKER: The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat. I am calling the Leader of the House on a point of order.

Mr Pyne: Madam Speaker, that was an outrageous abuse of the parliament and the standing orders, as you know. The member for Wannon was on his feet and I would ask you to direct him to ask his question. Otherwise the Leader of the Opposition has simply got away with disgraceful behaviour in the parliament.

Mr Burke: Madam Speaker, on the point of order: there are many occasions when someone stands on either a point of order, as the Leader of the House often does, or to withdraw, as on this occasion, and while they have the call they are welcome to seek leave to raise a further matter. That is what the Leader of the Opposition has quite properly done.

The SPEAKER: Because of the outrageous statement made in the Leader of the Opposition's question I was not looking for anybody else to stand. I took the point of order from the Leader of the House, and in the kerfuffle I did not see the member for Wannon stand. There is adequate time left in question time and I am going to give the call to the member for Wannon.

Mr Burke: Madam Speaker, on a point of order: you gave the call to the Leader of the Opposition.

The SPEAKER: I did, and then I asked him to resume his seat.

Mr Burke: But he sought leave before you did that, and the tapes will show that.

The SPEAKER: And then I asked him to withdraw, and he asked me whether or not I was giving him the call.

Mr Burke: Madam Speaker, with respect, are you saying to the House that you asked the Leader of the Opposition to resume his seat before he said 'I seek leave'?

The SPEAKER: Yes.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: I am happy to look at the tape. I have to say I was absolutely shocked at the language in the question. I might have expected it from one or two others but I did not expect it from the Leader of the Opposition.
Opposition members interjecting—

Mr Pyne: Madam Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition just made a disgraceful slur against the Speaker. He is perfectly entitled to be unpleasant to the government, as he has been, but not to the chair. I would ask him to show that he is a gentleman and withdraw it.

The SPEAKER: I will give the call to the Leader of the Opposition for his conscience.

Mr Shorten: I am increasingly grateful, Madam Speaker, for your mentorship. I withdraw.

The SPEAKER: I think we will listen to the tape subsequently, but for the moment we will hear from the member for Wannon.

Asylum Seekers

Mr TEHAN (Wannon) (14:45): My question is to the Minister for Immigration and Border Protection. Will the minister update the house on the progress of implementing the coalition’s commitment to restoring temporary protection visas and on what threats there may be to the implementation of the government’s plan to end people smuggling.

Mr Fitzgibbon: Madam Speaker, I raise a point of order. Three of the last four questions coming from the government benches have contained a tail phrase which Speaker Harry Jenkins would have ruled out of order. This has become serial now. It is a tactic on behalf of the government that Speaker Jenkins would not have allowed, and I ask you to look at page—

The SPEAKER: The member will resume his seat. If the member for Hunter cared to go through the precedents of the way various speakers have ruled on those questions he would find that there are a variety of rulings. I have said there is no point of order. I call the Minister for Immigration and Border Protection.

Mr MORRISON (Cook—Minister for Immigration and Border Protection) (14:46): This government will never honour the promises of people smugglers, because what people smugglers promise is permanent residence in Australia. It does not matter whether that promise was made three years ago or three days ago, this government will never honour the promise of a people smuggler. That is why this government has honoured its commitment to restore temporary protection visas. It moved swiftly to do that, and on 18 October they came back into being. That happened because more than five years ago the previous government abolished temporary protection visas, and we know what happened after August 2008 when they abolished temporary protection visas. We know that more than 50,000 people turned up illegally on boats.

We also know—and I draw this particularly to the attention of the Leader of the Opposition, who has had a bit to say today about the impact of temporary protection visas on children getting on boats—that, when more than 50,000 people turned up illegally on boats, that included more than 8,000 children. More than 8,000 children arrived after they abolished temporary protection visas, because when you say you are going to honour the promise of a people smuggler what happens is that people come, and they come, and they come, as they did in their hundreds and their thousands and their tens of thousands, with over 800 boats arriving under the previous government. So we have taken action to restore temporary protection visas. The opposition might like to know that since we have done that, 181 people who were sitting in the community on bridging visas waiting around for a permanent protection visa from the previous government have decided to go home. They have decided to
leave because there is no point hanging around for a temporary protection visa, because they will not get what the people smugglers promised them. This afternoon the opposition will be tested, because in the Senate they will have to vote on whether they are going to join the Greens yet again to disallow the introduction of temporary protection visas.

Dr Chalmers interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Rankin will remove himself under standing order 94(a).

The member for Rankin then left the chamber.

Mr MORRISON: What we have to understand is: will they make the same mistake again? It is the same mistake that led to more than 1,100 deaths. Are they going to join with the Greens? Or should they take the advice of former Senator Carr, whose one piece of advice to the ALP was for there to be no daylight between Tony Abbott and Labor on irregular immigration. Maybe they thought Senator Carr was referring to Christine Milne or the real shadow minister for immigration, Senator Hanson-Young, because this afternoon the Greens and the Labor Party will come together to repeat history and to try and deny this government its election mandate for temporary protection visas to be back in business.

MOTIONS

Prime Minister

Attempted Censure

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Leader of the Opposition) (14:50): I seek leave to move a motion that this House censures the Prime Minister for breaking his promise to parents and children across Australia that no school would be worse off under his government.

Leave not granted.

Mr SHORTEN: I move:

That so much of standing and sessional orders be suspended as would prevent the Member for Maribyrnong moving immediately:

That this House censures the Prime Minister for breaking his promise to parents and children across Australia that no school would be worse off under his Government.

Those opposite dislike being told that they have broken promises. But I can tell you something: Australians dislike being told that promises that they were told by the coalition on education before the election—

The SPEAKER: I would remind the Leader of the Opposition that this is a suspension motion, and what he has to establish is suspension, and speak to the suspension.

Mr SHORTEN: Madam Speaker, I remain in constant gratitude for your counsel.

Standing orders must be suspended—

The SPEAKER: I am grateful that you are grateful, and perhaps you would like to demonstrate that you are grateful.

Mr SHORTEN: I will endeavour to do my best. Standing orders must be suspended, because Australians dislike being told that promises about the educational opportunities for their children in the schools of Australia are then broken after an election. What a circus this last few weeks in education history in Australia has been. We know, and every fair-minded observer knows, that for the last three years those opposite, when they were in opposition, did
not want to have a bar of reforming education. We know that those opposite were not interested in changing to needs-based funding. We know that there was the mindless opposition of those opposite—I think they said that Gonski was a 'conski'. In fact, they said that—not last year, not the year before—on 1 August and on the morning of 2 August this year. But someone—probably the notorious Mark Textor—must have told them: 'Do you know what?—on education, Labor is more credible than the conservatives. It is Labor who has worked with parents. It is Labor who has worked with educational experts to try and get a better deal.' But those opposite are so blinded in their hatred of Labor, and they were so blinded in their hatred of former Prime Minister Gillard, that they were determined to say, 'There's no way that we would ever have the needs-based reforms which Labor introduced'.

But, demonstrating the cynical administration that they are, and their desperate desire to get into power, no doubt their planners and their pollsters said in early August, 'Education is one issue where Labor is leading over the conservatives.' Those opposite are quiet, and do you know why they are quiet? They are quiet because they know the truth when they hear it. They know that no-one trusts them on education. Christopher Pyne, member for Sturt, well-known education reformer—not!—on Thursday calls it 'conski' and then on the Friday, in what can only be described as a road-to-Damascus miracle says, 'Actually, we support these changes in education.' I remember very clearly what they were saying and when they were saying it, because I was in negotiations with the conservative government in Victoria on these education reforms. This is why we must suspend standing orders—because this government has different policies before an election to those they have when the get elected.

Then they tried desperately to tell their Victorian colleagues, in a flurry of phone calls: 'Please don't do a deal with Labor. You can trust us.' They came up with that beautifully precise, conservative form of language—the 'no-strings-attached deal'. I have never seen a deal such as this, where they put up a truckload of money and no strings attached, so they could persuade the Liberals in Victoria not to sign a Labor deal. But there is a peril with the no-strings-attached approach, which the Prime Minister has endorsed again today. They have been against this for years and, on the basis that they believe a leopard can change its spots, they said just before the election: 'Well, we've changed our spots. I know we are the conservatives. I know we've bagged needs-based education.' In fact, most of the electorate knows that the member for Sturt does not like government schools; his dream is to turn every government school into a private school! And then what happened—and this is why we should suspend standing orders, Madam Speaker—after the election was that we started to see that well-known government tactic of the backslide. They never go down a slide forwards this crew; they always go down backwards. What a circus!

They have tried to take down from their website their speeches of before the election: 'Let's not talk about what we know.' We have had these golden lines from those opposite, including the Prime Minister, 'We want to end the uncertainty.' What a statement of optimism over experience—uncertainty! These people opposite were boasting today, 'We've changed our view from yesterday.' Education in this country has become a circus of funding. Those opposite have been in damage control ever since—the moose is loose—the member for Sturt has been conclusively confusing everyone. I love what the Prime Minister said when he was the opposition leader. He said, 'No school is worse off.' What a mischiefous, deceptive comment that is in light of today's comments. And they are boasting; the mob opposite have
never been shy about shouting their ignorance to the world, and what they are saying today is: 'How clever are we? We are going to give money to the Queensland government, to the Northern Territory government, and to the Western Australian government—no strings attached!'

They say that a fool and his money are soon parted—those opposite are evidence. Did these clever education reformers even stop to ask those notorious cutters and slashers, the conservative Newman government? Did those opposite ever say: 'Here comes the Commonwealth truck, the Armaguard truck driven by Tony Abbott and his truck jockey, the member for Sturt. We have got the cash, Campbell Newman, quick, get it out the back and get it into the schools! Oh, and by the way, Mr Newman, you can borrow the empty cash truck we're taking. You can bring it around to the back door of the school because you can take the money out of your schools.' These educational vandals, these educational dilettantes, these people too lazy to do their policy in opposition—then turn up at the exam and copy our exam answers. They have made no guarantees to stop Queensland, the Northern Territory and Western Australia from cutting their budgets.

I think you have a colleague seeking the call over there, Madam Speaker—if you don't want to recognise her, I won't.

The SPEAKER: I am happy to give you a rest. The member for Ryan.

Mrs Prentice: Thank you Madam Speaker. I rise on a point of order: I just felt that the speaker was straying from the purpose of his address.

The SPEAKER: The Leader of the Opposition.

Mr SHORTEN: The standing orders must be suspended because in education in this country we have seen those opposite say, 'You can have Labor or Liberal; you will get the same deal'. That is not true. Those opposite are now boasting—and it is a different position to the position they had yesterday and the position they had on Friday—to Australia: 'We will hand Commonwealth money to the states, but we will not require that they do not cut their funding.' The difference between Labor's model on education is that we would seek to give two dollars for every one dollar that the states—

The SPEAKER: The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat. I call the Chief Government Whip—he has sat down again. The Leader of the Opposition has the call.

Mr SHORTEN: This is not the government that was promised to Australians at the election. Those opposite said, 'There will be no surprises and no excuses.' What a joke! Every day under Christopher Pyne is surprise day in education. Every day in 'Abbott-land' and 'Prime-Minister-land' is excuse day. Before the election they said, 'In education, we will make sure that no school is worse off.' I have the quote for the member for New England. They said:

We will honour the agreements … We will match the offers that Labor has made.

They also said that 'no school would be worse off.' They cannot keep that promise with the deals they are talking about doing with the states. The Northern Territory has been closing schools; Queensland has been closing schools.

We see needs-based funding as being fundamental to the improvement of Australian education. We in Labor understand that what is important is giving kids the best start in life. We believe in needs-based funding. We believe there should be a loading based on children's
disabilities and learning difficulties. We believe there should be funding based on whether or not kids live regionally. We believe there should be funding based on the postcodes and the lower socio-economic status of the areas in which parents are sending their kids. We believe fundamentally in giving children needs-based funding. We are a party and an opposition that will back public schools. We are a party and an opposition that will never give up on state education, unlike those opposite. (Time expired)

The SPEAKER: Is the motion seconded?

Mr Burke: I second the motion and reserve my right to speak.

Mr PYNE (Sturt—Leader of the House, Minister for Education) (15:00): Madam Speaker, I move:

That all words after "That" (first occurring) be omitted and the following words be substituted: "this House condemns the Leader of the Opposition for cutting funding to schools in Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory by $1.2 billion in the Pre-Election Economic and Fiscal Outlook, and for failing to achieve a national, fair and needs based school funding model when Minister for Education."

I move that as an amendment to the suspension of standing orders.

Madam Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition has turned up today with last week's questions pack. It is as if he has turned up to the set of Mad Max to play a small role in it but insists that it is really Alice in Wonderland, and everybody has to run around with a clock saying, 'I'm running behind time.' The Leader of the Opposition reminds me he is one of the worst leaders of the opposition that I have experienced in my 21 years in parliament. He has turned up for question time; he has last week's questions pack. He has decided that the way to solve this problem—because the opposition is being killed in the social media verse that I am not part of—is to shout and bellow at the dispatch box at members of the government and the press gallery, almost to insist that the press gallery accepts that he has had a great day in spite of the fact that at half past one today his house of cards came falling down around him. Unfortunately for the Leader of the Opposition, he is shattered that we are putting $1.2 billion into school funding that he ripped out of the school funding model before the election in the pre-election fiscal outlook, rather than standing up to congratulate the government for putting more money into the Northern Territory, Queensland or Western Australia so that there are no second-class students under this government. He did not stand up to praise the government—to seek indulgence to praise the Prime Minister—for putting money in that the Leader of the Opposition took out. Instead, they are going to insist that that has simply has not happened. They are going to say that the questions pack stands, 'We do not have time to change it.' As I said in question time, Madam Speaker, Ataturk said that when the battle changes, a good general changes his tactics. Sadly, on that side of the House, with Mr Albanese away in Italy, they are short of their good generals. And didn't it show today, Madam Speaker? The reason the Leader of the Opposition should be censured, and the reason the amendment should be carried for the suspension of standing orders, is that when he was the Minister for Education he left an absolute wreckage when he departed the scene after the election. He had cut $1.2 billion out of the school—

Mr Burke: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I will try to be brief. The Leader of the House said that his amendment was to the suspension.

The SPEAKER: Correct.
Mr Burke: We now have a written copy. He has said that all words after 'that' and he has added 'first occurring'. That means his amendment ceases to make this a suspension of standing orders and we have an amendment, which, if valid, means we cannot continue with the debate. He meant to say 'second occurring'. If he wants to change his amendment, we will give him leave to do so. But this amendment is actually impossible to be carried.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr PYNE: Any proposition is open to amendment, and that is exactly what I have done. I have moved an amendment to the Leader of the Opposition's proposition. That is why it is in order. Sadly, they will do anything other than debate the facts about today's education debate. A $1.2 billion cut, and the Leader of the Opposition left a model that was not a national model. Queensland was not in it; the Northern Territory was not in it; Western Australia was not in it. He was prepared to take $1.2 billion—

The SPEAKER: I rule on the point of order that there is no point of order.

Mr PYNE: When we came to government, what did we find? We found that the Leader of the Opposition had left us $1.2 billion short in PEFO on school funding. We found that he had never signed Victoria and Tasmania to contracts for the new school funding model. He had claimed that the National Catholic Education Commission had made an agreement with the government, but they had done no such thing—nothing was signed. We found that three states could properly be regarded as signatory states, and two states and one territory were entirely left out of the school funding model. So, it was not national. We found that he tried to introduce a heavily-regulated model dripping with red tape—with new institutes, new government spending, new bureaucracies—that infantilised the states and territories and treated them not as adult governments, but as children.

We said before the election that we would keep the same funding level as Labor. We have not only done that, madam Speaker, we have gone even further. We have bettered that commitment by putting $1.2 billion more into school funding than Labor would have if they had been re-elected. That is why they are so embarrassed. They are embarrassed that it is the coalition that is delivering more money for students so that we can get on with the real debate in education about quality and standards. That is what parents care about. They care about teacher quality; they care about engaging with their children in a genuine way about their studies; they care about local decision making and principal autonomy that is working so well in places like Western Australia. They want a robust curriculum that does produce students that can read and write, and that does rely on orthodox teaching methods that actually do not see us slipping down the rankings all the time internationally, even against other English-speaking countries.

We also said that we would take away the command-and-control features inherent in the act, and that is exactly what we will do. We will remove regulation; we will remove red tape. It will be a better model. We said we would deliver a national scheme, and, much to the embarrassment of the opposition, I have delivered a national scheme that the Leader of the Opposition was never capable of delivering. We now have a national scheme that applies to every student equally in Australia, because we did not want any second-class citizens in the way that the Leader of the Opposition was prepared to leave it.
The Leader of the Opposition in his address talked about 'no strings attached', as though the previous Labor government had a handle on controlling state spending. We all know that the states and territories make their own decisions about spending, about their own budgets, as they should, because they are sovereign governments. What the Leader of the Opposition did not tell us was that last month in the South Australian state parliament's Budget and Finance Committee of the education department—which I assume is similar to our estimates—it was confirmed that Premier Jay Weatherill has demanded $230 million of cuts to the department of education between now and 2017, and $180 million of them are yet to be identified. So on the one hand we have Labor trying to claim the mantle of putting more funds into schools, and on the other hand we find out that they have cut funding by $1.2 billion nationally. In South Australia, the only mainland state Labor government left, last month it was revealed that they were cutting $230 million from the South Australian education budget. Shame on them.

On top of that, as the Prime Minister said in question time, not only has the Leader of the Opposition failed to change his tactics in question time but he has also forgotten—a bit like the rabbit in *Alice in Wonderland*—that it was his government that cut the computers in schools program in the last budget. It was his government that cut spending and funding to trades traineeships and apprenticeships in MYEFO last year, in the PEFO and in the budget last year. It was his government that took a scythe to higher education before the election, cutting $2.8 billion from universities, ostensibly to pay for schools, when we knew they were also cutting $1.2 billion from schools. And it took this government to recognise that the cap on self-education expenses was such a bad policy that we would remove that cap and scrap that measure.

The Leader of the Opposition should be censured. He should be censured for ripping $1.2 billion out of schools before the election and he should be censured because he did not leave a national model; in fact, he was prepared to short-change the Northern Territory, Queensland and Western Australia.

Mr BURKE (Watson—Manager of Opposition Business) (15:10): The need to suspend standing orders to deal with the matter before the chair is more urgent than ever. Since the time this motion was first moved in this chamber, the following words have been said by Senator Abetz in the other place: 'You might actually find some schools are worse off courtesy of various state government decisions.' They are the words that those in this chamber wanted to avoid, but everybody who has a relationship with a school, everybody who cares about a child's education around Australia, knows exactly what is going on with the weasel words that were used by the Prime Minister immediately before question time today.

The guarantees that were given—and this is why it is so urgent—time and time again prior to the election were guarantees that no school would be worse off. They were guarantees that did not say, 'not worse off because of us, but we'll let the states do what they want'. At the exact same time that you have state governments in places like the Northern Territory and Queensland firing teachers and closing down schools, the games that will be played as a result of the announcements made today by the Prime Minister are not lost on anyone—not anyone at all—and it is urgent that we bring this issue on. For a government that promised to be a government of no surprises and no excuses, we have seen the exact opposite.
It takes a very special Liberal Prime Minister to have a bad interview on Andrew Bolt's program—not many people can achieve that. Yesterday we heard from the Prime Minister, 'I think Christopher said schools would get the same amount of money—‘schools', plural—will get the same amount of money.' Let us have a look at that little word game and see that it is indeed urgent for us to bring this debate on now within the parliament, because it was not the Leader of the House, the Minister for Education, who was using Leader of the Opposition letterhead before the election. When that statement was made we had the words: 'We want to end the uncertainty by guaranteeing that no school will be worse off over the forward estimates period.' So maybe he can say to Andrew Bolt, 'Well, that's what Christopher meant,' but everybody knows what the Prime Minister meant. Everybody knows the guarantee that the Prime Minister was giving and everybody knows now that the Prime Minister did not mean a word of it when he said that to the Australian people.

We then had, from the Leader of the House, the Minister for Education, on his own letterhead, in a media release: 'Every single school'—that is an unusual way to describe a plural, I have to say—'in Australia will receive exactly the same Commonwealth funding over the next four years whether there is a Liberal or Labor government after September 7.'

We then go back to letterhead that came out from the Prime Minister when he was Leader of the Opposition, when he did a joint media conference with Barry O'Farrell—hasn't that relationship gone well!—and the Leader of the House, where the Leader of the House, now Minister for Education, said, 'You can vote Liberal or Labor and you will get exactly the same amount of funding for your school.' There is no line there saying, 'Oh, but if the states make the cut it won't be our fault.' There is no line there saying, 'Oh, but we are going to give them permission to do exactly what they want.' As published in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, the then shadow minister for education and now Minister for Education said:

… no school will be worse off, whether it is a Liberal or Labor government in the next term.

This issue needs to be brought on urgently not only because of the dishonesty we have seen from those who now occupy the treasury bench in the commitments they made and promises they have now broken but also because there is no issue that drives both productivity and equity harder than decent, fair investment in the schools of the nation.

The Better Schools plan, a proud legacy of the former Labor government which at the election the coalition wanted to sidle up to so closely, actually guaranteed for the first time that we would end the debate between independent, Catholic and government systems—a debate that those opposite would love to drag us straight back to. The Australian public know the dishonesty that they are hearing from those opposite, and there should be a free vote and a free debate on that here on the floor of the parliament.

**The SPEAKER:** The original question was that the motion be agreed to, to which the honourable member for Sturt has moved an amendment. So the immediate question is that the amendment be agreed to.
The House divided. [15:20]

(The Speaker—Hon. Bronwyn Bishop)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ayes ......................</th>
<th>86</th>
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<td>Noes ......................</td>
<td>53</td>
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<td>Majority .................</td>
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**AYES**

Abbott, AJ
Andrews, KJ
Baldwin, RC
Bishop, Ji
Broad, AJ
Brough, MT
Christensen, GR
Cobb, JK
Coulton, M (teller)
Entsch, WG
Frydenberg, JA
Gillespie, DA
Griggs, NL
Hawke, AG
Hendy, PW
Hogan, KJ
Hunt, GA
Irons, SJ
Jones, ET
Keenan, M
Laming, A
Laundy, C
Macfarlane, IE
Markus, LE
McCormack, MF
Morrison, SJ
O'Dowd, KD
Pasin, A
Porter, CC
Price, ML
Ramsey, RE
Robert, SR
Ruddock, PM
Scott, FM
Southcott, AJ
Sudmalis, AE
Taylor, AJ
Truss, WE
Turnbull, MB
Varvaris, N
Whiteley, BD
Williams, MP
Wood, JP

Alexander, JG
Andrews, KL
Billson, BF
Briggs, JE
Broadbent, RE
Buchholz, S (teller)
Ciobo, SM
Coleman, DB
Dutton, PC
Fletcher, PW
Gambaro, T
Goodenough, IR
Hartsuyker, L
Henderson, SM
Hockey, JB
Howarth, LR
Hutchinson, ER
Jensen, DG
Joyce, BT
Kelly, C
Landry, ML
Ley, SP
Marino, NB
Matheson, RG
McNamara, KJ
Nikolic, AA
O'Dwyer, KM
Pitt, KJ
Prentice, J
Pyne, CM
Randall, DJ
Roy, WB
Scott, BC
Smith, ADH
Stone, SN
Sukkar, MS
Tehan, DT
Tudge, AE
Van Manen, AJ
Vasta, RX
Wicks, LE
Wilson, RJ
Wyatt, KG
Question agreed to.

The SPEAKER (15:26): The question now is that the motion, as amended, be agreed to. The House divided. [15:26]

(The Speaker—Hon. Bronwyn Bishop)

Ayes ......................86
Noes ......................54
Majority...............32

AYES
Abbott, AJ
Andrews, KJ
Baldwin, RC
Bishop, JI
Broad, AJ
Brough, MT
Christensen, GR
Cobb, JK
Coulton, M (teller)
Entsch, WG
Frydenberg, JA
Gillespie, DA
Alexander, JG
Andrews, KL
Billson, BF
Briggs, JE
Broadbent, RE
Buchholz, S (teller)
Ciobo, SM
Coleman, DB
Dutton, PC
Fletcher, PW
Gambaro, T
Goodenough, IR
AYES

Griggs, NL
Hawke, AG
Hendy, PW
Hogan, KJ
Hunt, GA
Irons, SJ
Jones, ET
Keenan, M
Laming, A
Laundy, C
Macfarlane, IE
Markus, LE
McCormack, MF
Morrison, SJ
O'Dowd, KD
Pasin, A
Porter, CC
Price, ML
Ramsey, RE
Robert, SR
Ruddock, PM
Scott, FM
Southcott, AJ
Sudmalis, AE
Taylor, AJ
Truss, WE
Turnbull, MB
Varvaris, N
Whiteley, BD
Williams, MP
Wood, JP

Hartsuyker, L
Henderson, SM
Hockey, JB
Howarth, LR
Hutchinson, ER
Jensen, DG
Joyce, BT
Kelly, C
Landry, ML
Ley, SP
Marino, NB
Matheson, RG
McNamara, KJ
McNamara, RG
Nikolic, AA
O'Dwyer, KM
Pitt, KJ
Prentice, J
Pyne, CM
Randall, DJ
Roy, WB
Scott, BC
Smith, ADH
Stone, SN
Sukkar, MS
Tehan, DT
Tudge, AE
Van Manen, AJ
Vasta, RX
Wilson, RJ
Wyatt, KG

NOES

Bandt, AP
Bowen, CE
Burke, AE
Butler, MC
Champion, ND
Clare, JD
Collins, JM
Danby, M
Elliot, MJ
Feeney, D
Fitzgibbon, JA
Gray, G
Hall, JG (teller)
Husic, EN
King, CF
Macklin, JL
Marles, RD
Mitchell, RG
O'Connor, BPJ

Bird, SL
Brodtmann, G
Burke, AS
Byrne, AM
Chesters, LM
Claydon, SC
Conroy, PM
Dreyfus, MA
Ellis, KM
Ferguson, LDT
Giles, AJ
Griffin, AP
Hayes, CP
Jones, SP
Leigh, AK
MacTiernan, AJGC
McGowan, C
Neumann, SK
O’Neill, CE
Question agreed to.

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (15:27): I ask that further questions be placed on the Notice Paper.

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

Ms MacTIERNAN (Perth) (15:28): Madam Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation.

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

Ms MacTIERNAN: I absolutely claim to have been misrepresented.

The SPEAKER: The member has the call to show where she has been misrepresented.

Ms MacTIERNAN: The Minister for Education has now on several occasions, including today in question time, implied that because I support explicit instruction of literacy I support the government’s decision to abandon needs-based education funding. I absolutely do not support that abandonment of that—

The SPEAKER: The member is involving herself in argument, which is not permissible. She must show precisely from the record where she has been misrepresented, not in the intention or her understanding of but precisely where it has occurred. If unable to do that at the present time she should wait until perhaps she sees the Hansard and then make her point.

Ms MacTIERNAN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will as soon as the Hansard is available. But just to confirm that I do not support the ripping of education funding—

The SPEAKER: No. That is enough, thank you. The member will resume her seat.

DOCUMENTS

Presentation

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

BUSINESS

Days and Hours of Meeting

Mr PYNE (Sturt—Leader of the House, Minister for Education) (15:30): I present a chart showing the program of sittings for 2014. Copies of the program have been placed on the table. I ask leave of the House to move that the program be agreed to.
Mr PYNE: I move:
That the program of sittings for 2014 be agreed to.
Question agreed to.

GOVERNOR-GENERAL'S SPEECH

Address-in-Reply

Debate resumed on the motion:
That the Address be agreed to.

The SPEAKER (15:30): Before I call the honourable member for O' Connor, I remind honourable members that this is his maiden speech. I therefore ask that the usual courtesies of the House be accorded to him.

Mr WILSON (O'Connor) (15:31): I rise for the first time in this House with enormous pride and a real sense of honour to be representing the electors of O'Connor. To be their voice in federal parliament is a responsibility I will take very seriously indeed, and I thank them for their vote of confidence in me.

Madam Speaker, let me take this opportunity to add my congratulations on your elevation to the Speaker's chair, a role I know that you will fill with distinction.

I begin by acknowledging the efforts of the previous member for O'Connor, Tony Crook. Though we came from opposite ends of the conservative political spectrum, I always understood and respected the challenges that Tony faced in representing a massive electorate, such a long way from our national capital.

I am only the third member for O'Connor. Tony served for one term. His predecessor served 11 terms in parliament over 30 years and his name is instantly recognisable in Australian politics. Wilson Tuckey has been a friend and supporter for many years, and I take this opportunity to acknowledge his distinguished service to the O'Connor community.

My home town of Katanning is in the geographic centre of O'Connor. It is in the heart of the agricultural region, and I grew up on the family farm that was carved out of the bush by my great-grandfather in 1867. So my roots are firmly entrenched in the rich soil of my electorate.

My great-grandparents William and Bridget Grover were real pioneers, and their stories of hardship and endeavour have been passed down through the family. Bridget gave birth to 11 children in a mud-daubed hut and, remarkably for the time, all of her children survived to adulthood. Raising and educating a large family in remote Western Australian in the late 19th century inevitably meant great adventures but also trials and tribulations. Bridget recorded them all in her diaries, which we are proud to say reside here, in Canberra, at the National Library. They are a testament to the grit and determination shown by so many of our pioneer families.

A family that has lived nearly 150 years in the same location has, of necessity, developed very strong community bonds. My parents and my grandparents taught my siblings and me the value of community service. They taught us about commitment and dedication, about loyalty and reliability, about kindness and compassion. They showed by their deeds that self-
reliance and hard work do bring rewards. They taught us that the greatest reward and the greatest responsibility is family and community.

My 87-year-old mother, Mary, who is in the gallery today, epitomises all that is good about family and community. She was a child of the Depression whose family suffered financial ruin. She educated herself via correspondence lessons and became a much-loved and respected nursing sister. She has spent her life giving of herself for others. Even today, she still works tirelessly for many community organisations. She is an adored mother, grandmother and now, to her delight, great-grandmother. Her selflessness has been an inspiration to all her family, and we strive to live up to her example.

I am the youngest of six children. I am a farmer. For the past 25 years, I have farmed in partnership with my brother Allan. When our father, Archie, died suddenly, I was just 14 and Allan was 17. Circumstances forced us to accept the enormous responsibility of maintaining the family business from a very young age and, while there were many difficult times, we have succeeded in developing an outstanding farm operation.

I am proud of my hardworking, salt-of-the-earth ancestors. I am a social conservative and an economic liberal. I believe family is the primary social unit of society, just as small business is the primary economic unit of our economy. Marriage is the cornerstone of family life, and I strongly believe that marriage is and should remain the union of a man and a woman.

I believe the institutions that have formed the basis of our government for the past 112 years have served us well. We should not tamper with our system of government without compelling evidence that the system is broken. It is not broken. In fact, I stand here today as a proud Australian, a citizen of undoubtedly the best country in the world.

I stand proudly for the Liberal philosophy of free markets, vigorous competition, small government and individual responsibility. These are the principles that guide me in my life and in this place. My track record in public life shows clearly that I am prepared to stand up for those principles.

As a member, deputy chair and then chair of Western Grain Growers, I helped lead the campaign to deregulate the Australian wheat industry and end the Australian Wheat Board's monopoly. Many farmers saw the AWB single-desk monopoly as a bastion against what they saw as the evils of free markets. A very small group of us saw it as a system that stifled innovation and investment, distorted market signals through cross-subsidisation and reduced returns for Western Australian growers.

My personal battle to effect this major reform to our industry lasted 11 years, from 1997 until its deregulation in 2008. For others, it had been a lifelong battle. Leon Bradley, the chairman and leader of our organisation through this period, was one such individual. A humble and unassuming farmer with a towering intellect and unimpeachable principles, Leon stared down an organized campaign of denigration and derision. That campaign was led by a billion-dollar ASX 200 company, almost every major farm organisation in the nation and powerful political interests at both state and federal levels. It was Leon's simple dictum that 'truth and logic will always win out' that sustained us when it seemed that politics and patronage would triumph.
Two others who were part of that wonderful team are here today in the gallery. Gary McGill, a great friend and supporter, is a truly fearless advocate for the free-market principles that underpinned our philosophy, and Slade Brockman's outstanding policy work meant that we were never bettered in the economic argument. We had very few friends in this place at that time. The former member for O'Connor Wilson Tuckey was one. At great political cost to himself, he stood firm for his principles and for what he believed was in the best interests of his electorate. So, too, did the late Senator Judith Adams, a much-loved friend to me and my family and to many others in O'Connor. She is greatly missed.

As we now know, the wheat market was deregulated in 2008 and the impact on Western Australian wheat growers was immediate. A sustained price rise of between $20 to $30 per tonne has been achieved, which equates to around $50,000 per annum for an average-sized farm business. Simple maths tells us that an extra $1 billion has found its way into the pockets of Western Australian wheat growers since deregulation. The supporting role that I played in this major economic reform of one of our key export industries is my signature achievement, and I am very proud of my part in that success.

During the deregulation debate, Leon, Gary and I spent many long hours in this place, lobbying senior ministers and shadow ministers on both sides of the House. I saw firsthand that many of the important decisions that impact on my industry and my community were made right here. That was when I first started to think about a career in politics. Five years later, I stand here representing the electors of O'Connor. I will fight hard for the principles I believe in and for the good of my electorate. I will fight hard to deliver to O'Connor what all Australians have a right to expect: an opportunity to succeed, to raise a family, to not be burdened by unnecessary laws and regulations, to take a risk and to keep the rewards of their hard work.

O'Connor is a vast and diverse electorate. In this season, we will produce an estimated seven to eight million tonnes of grain, almost a quarter of the nation's crop production. We are also a major woolgrowing electorate. Over the past 150 years, my family has made a small contribution to both industries. I have a great sense of optimism for the future of our agricultural industries. We are well positioned to take advantage of the rapidly growing markets in the Asian region. I believe my children will have a great opportunity to follow in their forefathers' footsteps in pursuing a career in agriculture, if they choose to do so.

O'Connor also has significant viticulture and horticultural industries, along with timber, tourism and fishing. We have major mining operations across the electorate, including—among others—gold, nickel and iron ore. We have thousands of small manufacturers and service industries in our towns and cities. Small business is the beating heart of O'Connor. It is our small business that provides the jobs and opportunities for the future.

Our agricultural industries are predominantly based in the central Great Southern region, where I live. As well as agriculture, it is where we find spectacular wildflowers in spring, remarkable bird life, the beautiful Stirling Ranges and the lovely heritage buildings that remind us of our pioneer past. O'Connor also encompasses the Warren Blackwood region, based around the towns of Manjimup, Pemberton and Bridgetown. It supports a timber industry, and the quality of its horticulture, viticulture and dairy produce has earned it the title of the food bowl of Western Australia. From apples and potatoes to truffles and cherries, as well as its prime beef, the Warren Blackwood produces a wonderful variety of produce.
Albany is the biggest population centre in the electorate. It was the site of the first European settlements in Western Australia in 1827. It has a proud colonial history. Albany is a port city that services the agricultural hinterland of the Great Southern. Along with the nearby towns of Denmark and Walpole, and the renowned Frankland and Plantagenet winegrowing areas, the south coast region is an important tourist destination for local, national and international tourists.

Albany was also the last sight of Australia for the troops aboard the fleet of more than 30 ships that left our shores in November 1914. Many of these young men, who served in Gallipoli, in Palestine and on the Western Front, never returned. One of Albany's most popular and moving attractions is the Desert Mounted Corps Memorial. It is situated on top of Mount Clarence, overlooking King George Sound, where the people of the town waved goodbye to those brave young men.

Both the Prime Minister and the Minister for Veterans' Affairs have expressed their strong commitment to making sure that Albany's place in our Anzac history is appropriately honoured during the period of the national commemoration of the Centenary of Anzac. Expect to hear much more of Albany and its unique place in our history.

Among its many attractions, Esperance has the whitest and the most pristine beaches in the world. In Esperance, O'Connor can boast a region that has developed from a small community of fishermen and a few pastoralists to one of the most vibrant and successful agricultural regions in the country—in just 50 years. The sandy soil has been transformed, and this season the grain growers of Esperance are on target to deliver 2.5 million tonnes of grain, a record for the region. Esperance is a testament to the innovation and determination of its residents, who are always looking for ways to do things better and to do things smarter.

Today, as we debate the merits of foreign investment, it is worth remembering that foreign investment transformed Esperance. It was syndicated American money that was behind the development of the sand plain into an extraordinarily productive farming region. A community of around 1,000 residents in the early 1960s, Esperance shire is now home to 14,000 people. In an era in which many farming communities throughout Western Australia are in decline, Esperance is a wonderful example of success.

Mining, of course, is the lifeblood of the goldfields. Kalgoorlie has a rich history. It was established in the gold rush of the 1890s, when prospectors from all over Australia—and indeed the world—came to seek their fortunes. Today, the gold industry lives on. In 2012-13, the region produced $5.7 billion worth of gold. Its gold rush history is evident in Hannan Street, the statue of Paddy and the gracious and beautifully preserved colonial buildings, but what makes Kalgoorlie is not its buildings; it is the spirit of its people: hardworking, resilient and optimistic. They have seen the booms and they have seen the busts, but they are always ready to have another go. They are quite remarkable.

Mining is the lifeblood of Kalgoorlie, but it is also the lifeblood of Australia. It is our largest export earner and its flow-on impact in the economy cannot be underestimated. Across the region, revenue from mining topped $9 billion in 2012-13. It was a tragedy to see the contempt with which the previous government treated this industry. The mining tax, which I have proudly voted to scrap, was a textbook example of bad government. I saw firsthand that tax suck the confidence out of the miners in my electorate. Mining needs confidence. That is
why I am a strong supporter of the exploration tax credit. If we are to see the big projects of tomorrow, we need people to invest their capital today.

These, then, are the five major regions that make up the electorate of O'Connor. It is populated by people who epitomise the spirit of regional Australia: hardworking, resilient, good-humoured people with plenty of backbone, people who look for solutions, people who are keen to explore innovative alternatives in their quest to do things better.

But we are faced with some very particular challenges in O'Connor, challenges that are shared by people in other regional centres throughout Australia but which in our case are compounded by the tyranny of distance. Western Australia produces 16 per cent of the nation's gross domestic product and 46 per cent of the nation's mercantile exports. Much of this wealth is produced by the people who live in the regional and rural communities of O'Connor. They deserve to have adequate access to health care. They deserve for their children to have same educational opportunities as their city cousins and for their parents to grow old with dignity and in comfort in the communities they have served all their lives. And we need to find solutions that address the significant disadvantage that Indigenous communities in our electorate face. I look forward to working with the Prime Minister's Indigenous task force to find those solutions. These are the key areas in which I have committed to work tirelessly to find solutions that work for us in O'Connor.

As a Western Australian I cannot ignore the inequity of the GST distribution formula. In the financial year 2013-14, we will receive just 45c for every dollar of GST that we pay. This is projected to fall to just 7c in the dollar in 2016-17. The Commonwealth grants formula was designed so that the more developed states would give a hand to the developing states, and in Western Australia's development phase we were grateful recipients of that assistance. But now the system is being used to support states which do not maximise economic development and investment. So, while we Western Australians are happy to help our compatriots who are working hard to improve their economies just like we did, we resent propping up those states who are not making every effort to maximise their resources and opportunities. They are seen by many Western Australians as bludging off the system. No part of Australia should be encouraged by the system to do anything less than their best. The planned review in March next year is an opportunity for me and for other Western Australian members to make the case for a more equitable arrangement.

Another issue of particular importance to agriculture, not just in O'Connor but across Australia, is the live export trade. I am very proud that the Australian livestock industry has for many years been engaging with our markets to improve the treatment of our livestock in the supply chain. In fact, we are the only one of 109 countries who export live animals to do so. While our systems are not perfect and there have been some regrettable instances of cruelty, we are making progress. But to withdraw arbitrarily from this trade will see our livestock replaced with animals from other countries where animal welfare has a much lower priority. I welcome the strong commitment of the Prime Minister and the Minister for Agriculture to rebuild and strengthen this important trade.

It is impossible to campaign across an electorate the size of O'Connor for 2½ years without the support and assistance of an enormous number of people. I now take the opportunity to put on the record my deepest and sincerest thanks—to my campaign chairman, Steve Martin, whose partnership on this journey extends well beyond the campaign and, I know, will
continue well into the future; to my campaign committee, who gave an enormous amount of
time over such a long period, because they believed not just in me but also in the greater
Liberal cause: Dom Della Vedova, Bob Morgan, Alana Lacy, Tom and Victoria Brown, Liz
and Kel Parker, Don Green, Helen Inglis, Beau Ashton, Amanda Robideau and my wonderful
niece Danielle Power. To our branch presidents, members and supporters, who did such a
magnificent job manning the 133 polling booths across our enormous electorate, my deepest
thanks. Thanks to our Western Australian state director, Ben Morton, whose commitment to
winning back the seat of O’Connor was unwavering and who gave me great confidence that
the work we were doing at the coalface would be rewarded. Thanks to Ben Allen, my
campaign director, whose dry sense of humour always managed to relieve the tension in a
crisis.

My sincere thanks go to the two senators with special responsibility for O’Connor. Chris
Back, with his expertise in all things livestock, is always a great hit amongst rural people. He
and his wife, Linda, worked tirelessly on my behalf. And Senator Dean Smith, with his
energy and incredible attention to detail, gave my campaign impetus and momentum at
precisely the right time.

To Senators Mathias Cormann and Michaelia Cash: I thank you for your invaluable
assistance along this journey. And I thank Julie Bishop, our senior Western Australian
Liberal, who was so generous with her time.

I also owe an enormous debt of gratitude to the 27 shadow ministers and parliamentary
secretaries who visited the electorate, some on several occasions, and, in the case of Senator
Ronaldson, on five separate visits. To our state MPs, Jim Chown and Graham Jacobs: your
support and guidance have been greatly appreciated.

The fast and efficient establishment of my electorate offices in Kalgoorlie and Albany is a
testament to the professionalism of my staff, and I thank them for their hard work so
far.

In a long and arduous campaign, where a candidate is constantly seeking assistance and
favours, it is inevitable that we turn to our family and close friends, and it is here that I direct
my warmest thanks. To my big brother, Allan, who throughout my life has allowed me to
pursue my dreams while he has steadfastly kept the business running, I owe a debt that I can
never repay. To my big sister, Kate, whose amazing media and communication skills, along
with her commitment, dedication and sense of purpose, were an inspiration to me and all of
our team: I thank you from the bottom of my heart. To Michael Pedley: your contribution to
the campaign was amazing and I cannot imagine how we would have managed without you.
To my sisters Deb, Jane, Bev; my brother-in-law Gary; my nieces Danielle, Lucy and Amelia;
and my nephew Scotty: I thank you for your contributions, big and small.

My final and most important thank you is to my wonderful wife, Tanya: throughout the
long and at times difficult campaign, you have been my support, my reassurance, my rock.
You have endured the sacrifices without complaint, and without your courage and strength I
could not contemplate this journey that we are about to embark on. To my beautiful children,
Emma, Annalise, Phillipa and Archie: I apologise in advance for the birthdays missed, the
sports carnivals I could not attend, the milestones achieved when Dad was busy somewhere in
the electorate. It is my fervent hope that, at some point in the future, we will reflect back on
this time and we will all agree it was worthwhile.
Finally, to the electors of O'Connor, I reiterate the commitment that I have made to work tirelessly on your behalf, to always be frank and honest about the challenges we face, and to work cooperatively and collaboratively to improve the lives of the people who live in the greatest part of the greatest nation on earth. Thank you.

Mr WATTS (Gellibrand) (15:50): I rise to speak in this place for the first time, conscious that I do so not only in front of the House but most importantly in front of my family. My two children are, at the same time, second and seventh generation Australians. On their paternal side, they are the progeny of six generations of Anglo-Saxon Protestants and, on their maternal side, of first generation Chinese migrants. My children's paternal ancestor, John Watts, set out for Australia from England as a 19-year-old in 1840. He came to Australia seeking the opportunity of what he called 'the colonial life' and became a landowner in the area now represented here by the member for Groom. In 1859, he was elected as the member for Drayton and Toowoomba in the first Queensland parliament and later became minister for public works. I regret to inform the House that John Watts was not a labour man, describing himself as a 'liberal conservative'. I do not question his judgement too severely as the great Australian Labor Party would not be established until some 24 years after he had left parliament.

My wife and her family came to this country from Hong Kong in 1985 seeking the same freedom and opportunity in our nation as John Watts did some 150 years before them. They brought with them a different language and cultural tradition, but they shared the same desire and determination to be the architects of a better life for themselves and for their children. Today, these braided threads of my children's heritage are equally fundamental to both their own and the Australian identity. However, in 1877, less than 10 years after my ancestor left parliament, the Queensland parliament passed a series of laws designed to force Chinese residents out of the state. The presence of my family here today—diverse, happy and thriving in a modern Australia—is a living testament to how far we have come as a nation in the last 150 years. This transformation did not happen by accident; it happened because of our politics.

Members will appreciate that 'politics' is a term of contempt in this country. However, as unpopular as it may be, it is our politics that created the institutional framework for Australia's prosperity. The success of our politics at building the institutions of growth and fairness in our society has been our true national advantage. This is why I am humbled to be elected to this place as the member for Gellibrand. I am particularly honoured to be representing a seat with such a strong Labor history. Gellibrand has always been held by the Labor Party, and most recently Nicola Roxon and Ralph Willis provided four decades of extraordinary service to the Labor cause.

It is not easy being a Labor member of this House. While Labor's ideological objective—expanding equality of opportunity, social and economic—is very simple, more often than not the political task of advancing this cause is a very difficult one. Labor is the fire in our democracy. We are the source of the combustion that drives political change in our nation, but this flame is difficult to maintain. When the tenders of this flame have failed to fuel it, when
we have let the embers of reform burn too low, the public has overlooked us. Equally, when we have let the fires of radical change burn too rapidly, when the flame has grown too wild, the public has recoiled and rejected us.

My strategy for the tending of this flame of change is taken from the New Labour strategist, the late Lord Philip Gould. He convinced me that progressives should not focus simply on winning elections, as crucial as that was, but instead plan on the bigger picture of winning centuries. Lord Gould argued that to win centuries Labor must win the battle of ideas in our community over the long term, rallying public support to our causes in both government and opposition and forcing the conservatives to fight on political ground already captured in the minds of the public by the ideas of the progressive movement. To win centuries, Labor must shape public opinion over time, not merely reflect it. In fact, Labor must win the public debate so comprehensively in the hearts and minds of the people that, once introduced, our reforms are so embedded in a bedrock of community support that they simply cannot be overturned by a conservative government, no matter how transient.

Labor's agenda won the 20th century. We were not in power for the majority of the last 100 years, but our ideas were. From the Fisher government's championing of the old age pension and workers' compensation to the Curtin government's wartime leadership and foundational work on the Anzac alliance; from the Chifley government's nation building and leadership of the establishment of the United Nations to the Whitlam government's opening of Australia to the world through tariff reduction, trade relations with China and multiculturalism; from the Hawke government's Medicare, HECS, compulsory superannuation, dollar float and financial deregulation to the Keating government's Native Title Act, enterprise bargaining, national competition policy and APEC leaders meeting; and throughout it all the union movement's fight for better conditions for workers; it was Labor ideas that shaped the 20th century.

Members on this side of the House can look back on this legacy with pride, but the question confronting new members is how we can win the 21st century. The Labor reforms of the past are a great legacy, but they are just that: the past. We must keep feeding the fires of political reform, looking ahead and engaging with the challenges of the future. To win the next century, Labor must see the changing landscape of the nation, understand the trends that are already shaping our future and paint the big picture about how Labor's reform agenda will create a fairer and more prosperous nation. This is a challenge that the party will need to take up on many fronts—education, secure work, urban liveability, workforce participation, climate change and regulatory growth, to name just a few. There are, however, three fronts of this fight that I want to personally address briefly today: first, defending the role of government in a period of fiscal challenge; second, championing the online communities which have emerged as a result of the digital revolution; and, third, showing that the success of our open economy depends on our open society founded on immigration and multiculturalism.

The first must-win debate for Labor is the role of government in a time of fiscal challenge. The case for an intelligent, active government needs to be continually remade. We in the Labor Party are different from the conservatives because we understand the role that government must play to make our nation a fairer and more prosperous place. While Labor must resist the unthinking Left, whose answer is always and everywhere to increase the role
of the state, we must also rebut the ideologues of the Right who see no role for government that does not simply prop up the status quo.

It is no secret that Australia is currently in a period of structural fiscal constraint. Important sources of government revenue are under pressure and significant areas of government expenditure are growing. If we do nothing, the budget goes backwards. Yet, while you might easily miss it amongst the din and filthy clamour of partisanship and sloganeering, Australia already has a lean government by international standards. Our tax-to-GDP and spending-to-GDP ratios are among the lowest in the developed world. Despite this, the conservatives' response to fiscal contraction has been to unthinkingly and ideologically cut government spending. Their instinct is to chase the spiral downwards.

In this context, Labor must convince the public that the size of government must be determined primarily by our expectations of it. While some public revenue sources are under pressure, the task of government has not reduced. We cannot cut our way to a fairer and more prosperous nation. We must continue to invest in urban infrastructure so that the strains of population growth do not cripple the productivity of those living in our cities and suburbs—investments like the regional rail link and metro rail tunnel that will allow for more services and ensure a faster and more reliable commute for people across Melbourne's west, not just for those who catch the train but also for those who drive.

We must invest in the nation's human capital, ensuring that we have a workforce that possesses the skills needed to do the high-paying work of the modern economy—investments like Labor's Better Schools package, which delivered millions in additional funding for schools in Melbourne's west and was distributed to those who needed it the most on a needs based funding model.

We must continue to invest in the health of our people to avoid the emerging fiscal productivity and participation crisis of the rise of chronic disease. In Gellibrand, 5.3 per cent of the population currently suffers from diabetes. It is estimated that there are half as many again with undiagnosed diabetes or pre-diabetes. Without investments in preventative health, like Labor's Medicare Locals, the cost of this chronic disease will be felt throughout the budget and the economy. These brief examples show that there will always be problems that we need to collectively pool our resources in order to solve. In these areas, the short-term savings of smaller government condemn our society and economy to greater costs in the long term.

The second must-win debate for Labor is our response to the digital revolution. The word 'revolution' is overused, but one of the few true revolutions we have experienced in our society over the past decade has been the impact of the spread of digital technology on the way people communicate. Before coming to this place, I spent the better part of 10 years working in the ICT industry and I have seen the pace and scale of this change firsthand. Consider that the first iPhone was released in this country in the year after the Rudd government was elected. In the barely six years since, the proportion of the Australian population who own a smartphone has exploded to over 72 per cent, all of whom are now walking around with computer processors in their pockets more powerful than those used by NASA to put a man on the moon 50 years ago.

However, for all its technical wonder, the most important aspect of the digital revolution is not technology; it is people. The internet has made it dramatically easier to find other people
who are passionate about the same things you are, to share information with these people and then to collaborate in producing altogether new information with others in these communities, often with non-financial motivation. This new mode of production, peer production, has brought us a series of what Australian economist Nicholas Gruen has called 'emergent public goods'—goods such as the GNU/Linux operating system that supports the majority of the world's web servers, the Android mobile operating system that operates on the majority of the world's smartphones, and Wikipedia, the largest encyclopedia ever produced. At the same time, social media has allowed specialised communities of interest to form around even the most obscure subjects, producing unprecedented and constantly evolving repositories of technical expertise, culture and journalism—all created by communities for the benefit of other community members. In this era of unprecedented connectivity, as Michael Wesch puts it, 'The machine is us.'

These changes are particularly important for the progressive movement. We are a movement founded on collective action, on people working together for mutual gain. From the early cooperatives, mutual societies and trade unions, progressives have pioneered new institutional arrangements for organising collective action. The digital revolution has made possible a panoply of new ways of acting collectively, but we have not yet engaged with this change on a philosophical or institutional level. We need to do so soon, as the way we respond to the digital revolution has the potential to become the major ideological divide over the next decade—the next century, in fact. It has implications for how progressives should think about issues as varied as tax, defence, public services, trade, privacy and infrastructure investment. For this reason, the work of thinkers like Yochai Benkler, Richard Stallman, Eric Raymond, Lawrence Lessig and Eric von Hippel, who have studied these online communities, should be essential readings for all progressives.

In particular, progressives must become aware of the ways that government and business can stifle these online communities. There are already many examples of this in Australia, particularly with respect to intellectual property. As Chief Justice French noted in a case close to the heart of my predecessor in this place—the tobacco plain-packaging challenge—intellectual property is an instrument of policy created by government to serve the public. Figures as varied as Adam Smith, Friedrich Hayek and Thomas Jefferson have long warned of the dangers of this statutory monopoly and its tendency to expand. Despite this, policymakers continue to view intellectual property as little more than an innate property right to be unthinkingly protected by government. This orthodoxy is buttressed by trade agreements, often negotiated without transparency or democratic accountability, that, instead of promoting free trade, are increasingly providing the expansion of private statutory monopolies.

Australian copyright law, in which all reproduction is prohibited—other than specific, narrow exceptions—is particularly problematic and is currently throwing sand in the gears of digital innovation in this country. In the absence of a broadbased fair-use exception, innovations like the Google search engine and the iPod were legally problematic under Australian law upon introduction—chilling incentives for digital innovation in this country. Patent laws are already becoming a similar handbrake on innovation. As maker communities and 3-D printing grow in popularity, so too will disputes about patent infringement. The
emergence of commercial patent trolls in the technology sector is just the beginning of this problem.

In response, progressives should champion a new microeconomic reform agenda to re-evaluate intellectual property law from first principles, focusing on incentives and public benefits—not the mindless protection of statutory monopolies. This process should be led by economists and innovators, not lawyers and rent seekers. Without it, intellectual property will increasingly become an instrument for the protection of vested interests rather than the promotion of innovation. As progressives, we must stand up for the new online communities created by the digital revolution. They are our people acting in a long, progressive tradition and we must be a voice for them in this place. To win the 21st century on matters digital, our mantra as progressives must become, 'It's the community, stupid.'

The final must-win debate for Labor is the importance of Australia's open society to our open economy. Through leaders like Whitlam, Hawke and Keating, Labor has argued well the case for the openness of our economy. What we have not argued with similar vigour is that an open economy cannot reach its full potential without an equally open society. The foundation stones of Australia's open society have been immigration and multiculturalism.

Our early history was violent and the product of thinking and ideas that are foreign to us now. But even then, the southern continent, Terra Australis, was a canvas for the projected hopes of many in Europe and Asia—a new place that could perhaps be free of the injustices and prejudices of the Old World. For the most part, we have borne out this promise, but we will not have fully honoured it until we break our remaining links with the exclusive institution of the British monarchy and become a republic that allows all Australians to say that they have a head of state who is one of their own.

As a nation, we have used this position as a beacon for ambitious dreamers around the world—to our overwhelming benefit. As in the case of my family, over 60 per cent of the residents of Gellibrand have at least one parent born overseas. In the last term of government alone, we welcomed more than 350,000 skilled migrants to our shores, increasing our productiveness and helping us to avoid the costs of an ageing population. The reason these migrants chose Australia is the opportunity of an open society that has proven to the world that multiculturalism can make our nation stronger. As Tim Soutphommasane, Australia's Race Discrimination Commissioner, has argued, Australia has developed a uniquely successful model of multiculturalism founded on the concept of citizenship. This model recognises that cultural heritage can form an important part of a citizen's identity and that, generally, individuals should be free to express it.

However, by viewing multiculturalism through the prism of citizenship, Australian multiculturalism has also emphasised that this liberty is coupled with unifying and overarching obligations that we all have as citizens of a liberal democracy. Australia is a country where you are free to wear a hijab or celebrate Italy winning a World Cup game, even when they beat Australia—maybe. But you cannot bribe a government official, incite ethnic violence or take a child bride. The openness of our society and the opportunity we have extended to migrants to our nation has left Australia better placed to succeed in an open global economy. The great Australian chronicler of our nation's Anglo-Celtic convict heritage, Robert Hughes, noted that multiculturalism:
… proposes … that some of the most interesting things in history and culture happen at the interface between cultures … the future … in a globalized economy … will lie with people who can think and act with informed grace across ethnic, cultural, linguistic lines … In the world that is coming, if you can't navigate difference, you've had it.

Despite this, there are those who seek to threaten Australia's multicultural success story. There are those on the other side of this chamber, particularly in the other place, who do not understand the success of the Australian model of multiculturalism and instead attack it with imported political arguments from nations with different experiences. There are those who are willing to sacrifice the success of our multicultural, open society to seek political advantage through the demonisation of asylum seekers who arrive through unauthorised channels.

Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the decision of this government to rename the Department of Immigration and Citizenship the Department of Immigration and Border Protection. Let us reflect on those two terms, 'citizenship' and 'border protection.' One of those terms is about inclusion, the other about repulsion. One is about opportunity, one is about fear. One represents a very large number of people, the other a very small number. Such are the ignorant, inverted priorities of the coalition—priorities that sacrifice the very foundation of the success of the Australian model of multiculturalism, citizenship, in favour of language that raises the drawbridge on the rest of the world.

Labor must challenge these threats to the success of our open society and continue to convince the public that Australian multiculturalism makes our nation stronger. We must argue that while we are morally compelled to do what is necessary to ensure that asylum seekers arrive in Australia in a fair and orderly way, to protect the primacy of Australia and citizenship for all, we must also ensure that we are offering refuge to those in need in proportion to our capacity to assist. In this context, this government's dramatic cuts to Australia's annual refugee intake and aid budget, at a time when so many people—in the countries surrounding Syria and in the refugee camps of Africa and Asia in particular—are so desperate, is an abject moral failure. These are good people with the bad luck to live in countries whose governments gas their citizens or where militias murder, mutilate and rape women and children. As a party who believes in equality of opportunity in a nation that has benefited so much from an open society, and in a country that knows how to make multiculturalism work, Labor cannot abandon them if we hope to win the 21st century.

I would like to conclude by thanking the people who have contributed to my being here today. To my wife Joyce: it is a cliche to say that someone is your better half, but in my case my wife is truly everything good in a person, that I am not. I thank you for your love and support and sacrifice, and I say here today that you have a commitment from me written in Hansard that our family life will not be Borgen-ed by this job! To my grandfather, who passed away recently, and my grandmother, who I lived with for a number of years: you stamped the twin obligations of hard work and community service on generations of your family, and I thank you. To my immediate family—my father, Peter, my mother, Yvonne, and my brother and sister, David and Sarah—and my uncles Ian, Michael, Derek and Barry and my aunts Jacqui and Pam: you are people who helped me find my political values and supported me in chasing my dreams and I thank you. To my in-laws Wang and Dominica Kwok, I thank you for welcoming me into your family and supporting Joyce and me in this difficult expedition into political life.
Thanking party supporters by name is a sure way to offend many, given the many hundreds who gave their time to the Labor campaign in Gellibrand, so I will limit myself to thanking my core campaign team—my indefatigable campaign manager Jesse Overton-Skinner, Melissa Horne, Hamish Park, Fiona Ward, Matt Nurse, Cesar Piperno, Telmo Languiller, Andrew Moore and James Kenyon. To Senator Conroy, who has supported me and mentored me for many years now, even when he has thought me to be misguided—we do not always agree; he is a Collingwood supporter after all—I am proud to be associated with his enormous contribution to Australia and the Labor cause.

Finally, I want to thank the other MPs on this side of the House who have given their first speeches in parliament. I have had the privilege of listening to many of your speeches before giving my own today, and it has been an inspiration. I proudly associate myself with those speeches. We are the Promethean party—the bearers of the fires of political change. This task is a difficult one but I am confident in Labor's future knowing that I share this mission with you all. I thank the House.

The SPEAKER (16:12): Before I call the honourable member for Durack, I remind the House that this is the honourable member's maiden speech and I ask the House to extend the same courtesies to her as have just been extended to the member for Gellibrand.

Ms PRICE (Durack) (16:12): Madam Speaker, I too wish to add my voice to the very long chorus of well-wishers regarding your elevation to the position of Speaker of the House. I am confident that your experience and knowledge, and not forgetting your grace and good humour, will bring dignity and humility to this House.

I am an ordinary person now with an extraordinary job. I have the job of representing the people of Durack. This is a huge responsibility and one that I do not take lightly. I am very humbled to have been entrusted by the people of Durack to be their representative. I intend to work hard so that I may serve them for many years. But no matter what happens I am determined to leave my mark by making Durack and Australia a better place to live.

I am a girl from Kalgoorlie—the gold mining town in the eastern goldfields of Western Australia. I left school at the age of 15. I did not think the nuns could teach me anything further. I was wrong, of course, and had to find out the hard way. I eventually returned to complete my education, qualifying as a lawyer at the age of 31. I am the youngest of four children, with two older brothers, Mark and Greg, and my sister, Lynda. My parents, Ray and Lyn Dellar, created a loving family and went without to give to us all a Catholic education. I give thanks to those educators—the nuns and lay teachers at St Mary's Catholic Primary School and Prendiville Ladies College, as it was then.

Growing up in the goldfields in the 1960s and 1970s was no picnic. The gold price was unpredictable so times were tough. But in those days people who worked on the mines worked regular hours, went home to their families at night and were able to contribute to the community more broadly. Growing up, my mother encouraged my siblings and me to 'just have a go', 'do your best, that's all that can be asked of you.' These words of encouragement have followed me through life and given me the belief that to be successful all you need is effort—the rewards will flow.

I am a fourth generation goldfielder. My grandad David Dellar entered the Western Australian state parliament as a Labor politician in 1963. My uncle, Stan Dellar, also Labor,
was elected to the parliament and was famously knocked from his seat by my friend the Hon. Norman Moore MLC, in 1977, who retired only last year after a stellar career. My father also had aspirations of a political life but the opportunity did not present itself. He did work hard for the Labor Party and worked on many different campaigns.

As a child growing up I saw my parents’ involvement in the Labor Party as really just a part of their social life—not as political activism—not unlike many people living in mining towns in that era. Mum and I both agree that if grandad Dellar were alive today he would probably be a Liberal. He was a hard worker, took good care of his own and was quite the entrepreneur with his various mining interests. I also pay tribute to my mother’s parents, Norman and Olive Blurton, who raised to their eight children in Leonora and Wiluna, later moving to Useless Loop to work in the salt works.

Not unlike many people who have grown up in regional Australia, I did not always love living in the bush. I often thought I was missing out on things that people from the city just took for granted. However, Sherbet and Renee Geyer did come to Kalgoorlie, so it was not all that bad! What you do get, though, from living in a country town is a sense of belonging to a community. I have never lost that belief that people from the bush really know me and understand me, and, more importantly, that I know and understand them. That passion for and understanding of people from regional Western Australia will drive me to be a strong voice for Durack and to champion all that it is and all that it can be.

The federal electorate of Kalgoorlie was first proclaimed in 1901, with the change to the electoral boundary to create Durack not taking place until 2008. I would like to take this opportunity to thank each of my predecessors of all political persuasions who have helped to create the powerhouse region that Durack is today. My first mention must, of course, go to Mr Barry Haase, who is here with us today. Thank you, Barry, for all the hard work that you have given to the electorate for 15 years. I would also like to thank and acknowledge other past members: Graeme Campbell, Mick Cotter and Fred Collard, to name but a few.

I have some 30-odd years of combined commercial and legal experience. The member for Curtin and the member for Pearce and I are the three members of the Clayton Utz Perth alumni here in Canberra. I am very grateful to my former colleagues from Clayton Utz for their tutelage and friendship, especially Adrienne Parker, Mary-Alice Paton and Stephen Boyle. Some would say I have had a colourful work history. I have enjoyed working in the hospitality and insurance industries, and also in management in the fast food industry, the grains industry and the mining industry, where I worked for Robe River Iron Associates at Wickham, and also the iron ore company Crosslands Resources. I was even an aerobics instructor at one point in my history. I think the House can probably judge for itself that I appear to have more in common with the fast food industry now than the fitness industry! More recently, I have been given the opportunity to work in more regionally focused industries. I had a legal and then a business development role at the CBH Group. This experience was very valuable for a girl from the goldfields. An appreciation and understanding of the farming industry is critical in a seat such as Durack, and, although I am no farmer, this experience taught me much about this important industry, including its passion for community and the challenges of running this type of a business.

My time working for Crosslands Resources, which is part of the Oakajee stable of companies, and is owned by Mitsubishi Corporation, was also very valuable. Wearing my
business development hat I had the pleasure of travelling deep into the mid-west to assess possible mining acquisitions, near to towns like Yalgoo, Cue and Meekatharra. Regrettably, the Oakajee Port and Rail project is currently on the backburner, but I have no doubt that a solution will be found in the near future and we will all witness the unlocking of the value of the iron ore industry in the mid-west. In the meantime, Geraldton has displayed her resilience and has taken advantage of other opportunities as they have arisen.

I would like to take this opportunity to pay my respects to the Durack family, who were pioneers and developers of the Kimberley, and whose namesake epitomises the progress of this great region. The electorate of Durack is quite simply like no other in Australia or the world. Its sheer size, of approximately 1.6 million square kilometres, or one-third of Australia's land mass, makes it not only Australia's largest electorate but also the second largest electorate in the world. Durack's future relies upon successful diversification of industry. To achieve this in a region that encompasses 46 shire councils and stretches from the mid-west and the wheat belt through to the Gascoyne, Pilbara and Kimberley will be no easy feat.

As a kid from the bush, I know the region has its problems, but I also know its potential. It is my hope that this current parliament is remembered not only for the economic benefits Durack makes to Australia's economy but also for the contributions this parliament gives back to the electorate. Ensuring that all families have access to affordable child care, supporting small businesses and making improvements to services such as aged care facilities, telecommunications and road and port infrastructure is what everyday Australians will thank us for.

People may step back from the Durack electorate and say, 'Boy, do you have it all!' We have a multi-billion dollar resources industry which has risen out of the red dirt of the Pilbara, and we have some of the most unique and interesting landscapes in the world, from the wonders of the Ningaloo Reef and Karijini National Park to the picturesque Kimberley region. To those people I would say, 'Yes, we do have it all!' It is a big region with a big economy, but also with big problems. The Durack electorate will face many obstacles, particularly over the next decade, to diversify and meet these challenges.

Madam Speaker, you may not be surprised to know that one of the biggest sectors suffering in Durack is the small business sector. What is good for small business is good for Australia—in particular, in regional communities. In Durack, yes, we have the resources industry, but not all have benefited from this economic activity. In short, it has not been the land of milk and honey for everyone. In mining towns in Durack the cost of housing is now starting to ease, but the reality is that if you are working in the service sector or running a small business in these communities you are still struggling. We also see small businesses in the wheat-belt towns fighting to keep their doors open. As we all know, these small businesses are often the glue that holds these communities together. Whether it is the pharmacy in Kellerberrin, the tour operator in Broome or the B&B in Kalbarri, the story is the same. We need to reduce red tape, get rid of unnecessary taxes—something that I am pleased to say that the Abbott-led government is well on its way to achieving—and restore confidence to the economy. Small business can then flourish and hire more people—jobs for our children, jobs for our grandchildren.
Getting rid of the carbon tax is a significant step forward to provide an injection of hope for these constituents. The establishment of a parliamentary committee for the development of Northern Australia, with the honourable Warren Entsch as its chair, is yet another example of this government's foresight into the need to plan for Australia's strategic growth. I hope to be able to contribute in a meaningful way to the creation and the ultimate implementation of the white paper for Northern Australia.

Western Australia's resources industry, whose main contributors are the Pilbara and Kimberley regions in Durack, was the country's largest exporter in 2012, contributing 46 per cent or $114 billion to Australia's total merchandise exports. Big business has invested in this region and has reaped the benefits, but the ordinary person struggles with a higher-than-average cost of living, and we experience the same social issues as any other electorate. Madam Speaker, the Kimberley is one of Australia's hidden treasures, with spectacular gorges and waterfalls. The view from the Five Rivers Lookout in Wyndham is breathtaking, as is Cable Beach in Broome. But our tourism industry is under threat. The beauty of the canary-yellow canola fields and the light brown, healthy wheat hides the fact that there are still many farmers in the wheat belt who are struggling from previous poor harvests. The availability of the federal concessional farm loans scheme is important to these farm businesses. The arrangements between the Western Australian and federal governments must be finalised as quickly as possible.

Many cattle producers are still recovering from the effects of Labor's knee-jerk ban on live animal exports. This has highlighted how vulnerable this part of the industry is with so few markets; the sooner we can open up more markets, the better. Whilst the opponents of this industry are focused on animal welfare, I am focused on human welfare as we hear disturbing stories of cattle producers' families receiving threats, with too many taking their own lives. These are all issues that I know are important to my coalition colleagues. Our leadership team has already taken the first steps to ensure that the issues which affect the lives of everyday Australians are a first priority.

Madam Speaker, you did not need a crystal ball to predict the failure of the mining tax. Although it raised, relatively, no revenue, it still hung over the mining industry like a bad smell. From a regulatory point of view, it put a drain on the industry, whilst also discouraging investment and making Australia internationally uncompetitive. Whilst we have taken the first steps to rid Australia of the mining tax, it is worth reflecting on the positive impact that the resources industry has had, particularly at a local level. Our regional communities have benefited significantly from this industry in terms of infrastructure and employment opportunities, with one of the most valuable contributions being to Indigenous employment. The WA resources sector is the largest employer of Indigenous Australians, who comprise 4.2 per cent of its overall workforce. I believe that everyone in this House today would agree that there is a desperate need to improve the lives of Indigenous people in Australia. Although there has been some progress with government and community programs, we still have a long way to go. I applaud Prime Minister Abbott's decision to include Indigenous Affairs as part of his office, and I wish Warren Mundine the very best in his role as the Chair of the Indigenous Advisory Council, and with the creation of successful future policies for Indigenous Australians. Make no mistake: this is a tough job. It will take very strong leadership and courage to make the necessary changes. We need policies that will ensure that current and
future generations of Aboriginal children are educated, have hope and opportunities, and remain healthy—so that they may aspire to contribute in their own ways to this great country. Durack has the third-highest proportion of Aboriginal residents. My plea is that history will show that this 44th Parliament showed the courage and the foresight to adopt policies that improved the lives of these Durack residents.

If you live in the city, your choices for post-secondary education are usually many; if you live in the bush, this is often not the case. Australia needs to promote and support the increase in post-secondary education service providers in rural and regional areas. Not everyone wants to study and live in the city, and our country cousins should be afforded the same opportunities as are available in the cities.

We still have a long way to go to improve health services in rural and regional areas. Just having a local doctor can make a huge difference to a community, but sadly that service is not always available. Part of the solution is to ensure that young people from regional areas are given the opportunity to study medicine. Providing rural and remote placements for student doctors should also be encouraged, so that these students gain a greater understanding of the health needs of regional Australia and, hopefully, return to take up practice.

I pause for a moment to reflect on the not-for-profit sector. This is an important part of our economic make-up; a sector that knows how to make a dollar go that bit further. Government funding of the not-for-profit sector should always be seen as a value-add. As a director of both the Cancer Council (WA) and BrightSpark Foundation, I have experienced firsthand the valuable contribution that this sector makes, especially in supporting cancer and child health research. I pay tribute to my friends and fellow board members who dedicate much of their unpaid time and expertise to ensuring the success of the not-for-profit sector, for the benefit of us all: in particular, Jenny Rogers, Professor Christobel Saunders, Pina Caffarelli, Graham Dowland, the Hon. Hendy Cowan, Andrew Thompson and Kim Pervan.

Government needs to be smaller, and more efficient; government departments more accountable, and more productive—with their performances measured to ensure that Australians are getting good value for money. Australia simply cannot afford not to make changes to the way in which we govern. A reduction in government employee numbers is a good start but, culturally, we have a long way to go. With the Abbott-led government now at the helm, we must strive for such changes. I look forward to being a part of the team that brings about the necessary cultural shift.

Like all new members of parliament, I did not arrive at this place without receiving a helping hand. My journey began during the Western Australian state election earlier in the year, when I was the candidate for the state seat of Kalgoorlie. I narrowly missed out on winning the seat. The experience did, however, sharpen my resolve to be a strong advocate for regional Western Australia, and it made me even more determined to win the seat of Durack so that I could be a strong voice in this House. I say a special thanks to Linda Crook, my campaign manager for the Kalgoorlie campaign, who believed in me then and has supported me ever since. Thanks also to the Kalgoorlie campaign team and all those at the Kalgoorlie Liberal branch, and to my family in Kalgoorlie: you have all played a part in my journey to Canberra.

My campaign to retain the seat of Durack was a very short, sharp, fast-paced six weeks. Although the seat was already held by the Liberal Party, success was not guaranteed. The
campaign team therefore needed to be something very special to have any hope of holding the largest seat in Australia. I call this special group of people the ‘Durack Dream Team’. I sincerely thank the members of this team who are as follows: Ben Morton, Ben Allen, David De Garis, Joey Armenti, Gordon Thomson, Ruth McLagon, Senator Alan Eggelston—thanks Eggy—and my dear friends Michelle Lewis and the Hon. Mark Lewis. A special mention and thank you goes also to Ian Blayney, the member for Geraldton, and Greg and Fran Weller, and all the Liberal branch members in the electorate.

I would also thank my electoral staff who have really helped me to hit the ground running. Many thanks to De-Arne, Leanne, Jackie, Louise, Shannen and Lorraine. I know that together we will achieve great things for Durack. For her hard work on election day, I thank Judy, who organised the booth workers and all the numerous volunteers, far too many to mention. Special mention must go to my mum, sister Lynda, Brian, Jessica, Hannah, Alistair, Sheena, Aunty Mandy and Patrick. Special thanks also to the Hon. Norman Moore and Lee Moore, the Hon. Ken Baston and Robin Baston, Senator Eggelston, Tammy Corby, the Hon. Mark Lewis and Barry Haase for their extra special efforts on the day. I really could not have done it without them.

Madam Speaker, I thank the following new and old friends that may not have always understood my journey but have supported me nonetheless: Hilary MacDonald, Hayley Lawrance, Karen McGougan, Bev Sinclair and John Blakemore, Nicki and Maurice, Amaryl and Aldo, Craig and Trish, Shorty and Kate and Gary Connell. Thank you to the Price family and the Bell family for accepting me into their families without question. To my adorable Brad, being the member for Durack would not be possible without your love and support. Finally thanks to Rhiannon: may she rest in peace and keep close watch over me—now my guardian angel.

Ms O’NEIL (Hotham) (16:32): Thirty years ago, a group of Cambodians purchased a large piece of land in Springvale South. They had a vision of a regional temple, where thousands of local Buddhists would gather to worship but, when construction began, it was beset by problems. At this time one of the congregation began to be visited in her dreams by a Bunurong woman. ‘This is not your land,’ she would repeat night after night. The monks conferred and agreed that a shrine would be built to honour the Bunurong, and the congregation began to leave gifts of fruit, avocado and nuts. From there, construction ran smoothly and today Clarke Road temple is one of the largest in Melbourne. Still, worshippers leave gifts at the shrine to the Bunurong to show their respect to the traditional owners of that land.

Just to the north is Westall Secondary College, one of the most multicultural schools in Victoria. The school sits opposite the site of the old Springvale Enterprise Migrant Hostel. Between 1970 and 1992, 30,000 migrants and refugees called this hostel their first Australian home. They received food, shelter and services and were allowed to find their feet in a new land. Each day, while parents took English classes and looked for work, their children would cross Westall Road and access free, quality education. A generation later, those students are making their own contributions as doctors, lawyers, scientists and community workers of Melbourne’s south-east.

Up Fairbank Avenue stands the Corning factory, where scores of local workers are making and testing the fibres that will be a part of the National Broadband Network. The factory floor
is not dirty, and the workers do not sweat. This is modern manufacturing, made possible by a clever and adaptable workforce. Just down south, the trucks of Butler Market Gardens in Heatherton are setting out to deliver their speciality Asian produce to supermarkets around Melbourne. They have been at it for six generations. Market gardens like this one once stretched right across Cheltenham, Moorabbin and Clarinda, and today the gardens that remain form part of Melbourne's green wedge, which we call lungs of the south-east. It is fiercely protected from development by local activists who fight to preserve this area's rural character. Nearby, in the early evening, the netball courts at Duncan McKinnon Reserve will be filled with shouts and squeaks of rubber soles as girls of all grades get together for a regular game. Families surround the sidelines—husbands cheering for their wives, brothers for their sisters, dads for their daughters.

This is my electorate of Hotham. It will always be the traditional land of the Bunurong and will be ever lucky for the migrants who have made our local area their home too. It is a place of industry and enterprise, of community and family—proof of this country's achievements and its potential. This is Hotham; this is modern Australia. Whether I am at home or in Canberra, fighting for the people of Hotham, who have placed their trust in me, will always come first. So it was for Simon Crean, who gave 23 years of his life to this electorate and to making Australia a better, fairer, more open country. He was, and is, a reformer, a thinker, a negotiator, a doer; a politician who brought a good mind and a good heart to every task. He was equally at home in the suburbs or in a country town, on the factory floor or in the boardroom, at the footy or at the opera. He is one of my Labor heroes and a person in whose footsteps I am honoured to walk. Simon also has a great track record of supporting Labor women. When I joined the Labor Party at 16, Simon was the first member of parliament I met. He helped me when I ran for council as a 22 year old and, a year later, he endorsed me as the mayor. Now, he has backed me all the way to federal parliament.

Standing in this House is for me part of a family tradition. I come from a long line of battlers, bohemians and radicals—of people who fought for what they believed in. My first Australian ancestor, John O'Neil, arrived in chains, arrested in London for boxing in the street. They say that on a 10-point scale of Irish wildness, John and his wife Ellen would probably have scored an eight or a nine. In 1853, they caught wind of a chance to escape poverty fast. They hired a dray, and with their three children, pitched a tent in the Ballarat goldfields. According to the family historians, when the injustice of the goldfields officers crossed a line, John joined the rebellion that would form the foundation of Australian democracy. John's great grandson, my grandfather Lou, was built from the same stuff. He was at various times a wool classer, a bar clerk, a station hand and a communist, but he was always a proud trade unionist and at one stage was jailed for fighting for rights that today we take for granted.

My mother's father was a frustrated poet. He won the Courier-Mail writing competition three times, but he saw out his days trapped in a job where he did not get to use that fine mind. My grandmother Clare was a kind and wise woman with the type of quiet, steely resolve needed to raise four children without money or support. Like so many of her generation, she missed out—no more than a grade-4 education, no income, no choices. They were a wonderful family in a tight-knit Catholic community in Brisbane, but they were trapped by the times.
My parents were raised by these people, and in their spirit. Mum and Dad were book publishers. My father, Lloyd O'Neil, started out in the book trade as a 16-year-old bookseller at Angus and Robertson. He used to tell the story of a woman who came in looking for a gift. They found the right book and, as he was ringing up the purchase, he said, 'And the best thing is this one was published in Australia,' and she said, 'If that's the case, I don't want it.' It was the cultural cringe, neatly wrapped in one encounter.

From there, Dad made publishing books about Australia his life mission. He published more than 1,000 titles—on everything from sport and cooking to art, politics and history. He was no jingoist but he believed that the Australian experience was like no other and that it had created a distinctively Australian voice that deserved to be heard. He used to say, 'I would prefer to publish a lesser work of Henry Lawson than the best work of William Faulkner.' For Dad, and for our family, books about Australia were inherently good things—not because Australia was better but because they were books about us.

My mother shared these views, taking some of Australia's best ideas into form as books. Mum is one of the great perfectionists of Australia's publishing industry and ran her own dynamic publishing house. Many of her bestsellers were books on women's health, women's politics and women's money—knowledge she saw as essential to the independence of the modern Australian woman. Mum introduced me, even as a tiny little girl, to Australian art and theatre. She taught me about feminism and showed me that, when women work together, we are unstoppable.

It was, and remains with my stepfather Brian, a family where to be original and creative was infinitely more important than kicking goals and acing exams. It was a household full of ideas about what Australia is and what it could be: a brave country; an open and creative republic, wise to its history and culture; an independent and respected presence in the world; a fair, decent country that valued things that matter—jobs, the arts. And it was a household where it was absolutely implicit that we would be doing something to see Australia reach this potential. That is the tradition in which I become a member of parliament.

I think back to what my grandfather Harry could have done if he had had a proper education; how my grandmother Clare might have had her own money and, with it, her freedom; what grandfather Lou might have achieved if he had not been forced into poverty, sharing a one-room flat in Kings Cross with my young father. I think of how they missed out, and so did Australia. The root of disadvantage was, in every case, economic.

I had this in mind almost a decade ago when I set out to try to understand more about economics and business. I have been lucky in that time to study with some of the world's most famous economists. I have sat in boardrooms and worked in workplaces in mining, manufacturing, telecommunications and retail—just about every part of Australia's economy. I have closed the trading day at the New York Stock Exchange and helped a group of Aboriginal women build a business that will one day provide them with their first jobs.

What have I learned? For the growing parts of our economy, the old lines of labour and capital have all but disappeared. Working people—more than two million of whom now own their own businesses, and almost all of whom are shareholders—know that a fair society needs a strong economy, and that means businesses that work. The big thinkers in Australian business also know that government is essential to helping them succeed—and I do not mean in a narrow sense. I think we modern students of economics know that government should not
be building great tariff walls or controlling the big macroeconomic levers. But if we take our noses out of economics textbooks and look at how our economy really works, we will see that government provides the platform on which our businesses compete—and win—globally. Other countries exploit low wages or low export costs, but in Australia our source of advantage is our skilled population, our world-class infrastructure, our safe and lively cities and our culture of invention and scientific research. In all of these, government matters.

As the countries we compete with grow, this parliament faces the challenge of making reforms that will keep Australia ahead of the game. Over the next decade, global demand for food is going to double. How can we help Australian scientists and farmers be part of the agricultural revolution that will be required to meet this demand? Australia’s temperature could rise by up to five degrees by 2070, creating radical changes to our weather, our rainfall and our environment. How can we help our energy, tourism and primary industries adjust?

By 2020, the world will face a shortage of about 40 million skilled workers. How will Australia compete in this environment? By 2025, more than 60 per cent of global GDP growth will come from just 600 cities around the world. None of them is in Australia. How can we help more parts of our economy connect with these cities so that more Australians can benefit from this growth? By 2070, Melbourne’s population will double to 8.5 million. Sydney will be of a similar size. How can we make sure our cities are places where creative people, who will generate wealth, will continue to want to live?

Government need not answer these questions alone, by any means. But all will require good policy and clear communication from our political leaders. And there is one reform that will trump them all. In every business or organisation I have worked in, whatever it is trying to achieve, the driver of success or failure is people. If Australia is going to thrive in a world of fierce and unrelenting competition, we must have one of the best education systems in the world. Being the best is achievable and it is real. But, at the moment, we are moving in the wrong direction—sliding further and further back down in international rankings.

At my school we had a big gym and plenty of Bunsen burners, but what mattered to me most was having Mr Farnsworth nurture my love of politics with his superb impromptu lectures on the history of the Labor Party and the Whitlam dismissal.

What seems to get a bit lost in our conversations about education in this place is that it is teachers who matter most. This parliament should lead a conversation about how to attract, train and retain the best and brightest Australians, young and old, in this national endeavour.

We focus a lot in the education debate on secondary schools. But students of public policy are coming to terms with the reality that I think Australian mothers have known for generations and that is that, by the time a child starts secondary school, much about their life chances has actually already been determined.

My first experience of caring for a child was as a foster parent. A baby came into our care straight from hospital, seven weeks premature, tiny and defenceless. All that stood between that perfect, sleepy little baby and a house of violence and chaos, between having a chance and no chance, was government.

The main parties in Australia differ in their beliefs on many things. But I know that we all believe that children are worth protecting. So this should not be an area where we need any reform. Yet, of the more than 12,000 children who are currently living in care in Australia,
about a quarter have lived in 10 or more foster homes. Today, more than 1,000 children are locked up in immigration detention, with limited access to education, and many are subject to abuse and self-harm.

Each child subjected to fear and to danger, each child who misses out on an education, on proper health care, on the very best start in this abundant country of ours is the special failing of the people in this room. In my time here, I want to help change that.

Another area of bipartisanship in this House is improving the situation for Indigenous Australians. Two years ago, I lived for nine months in the searing heat of North East Arnhem Land. I worked in an Indigenous community which continues in its traditional language and culture but which is beset by crises in health, housing and employment. For many decades politicians have said it is shameful. I want my generation to be the last to have to say it. To make things right, some things are going to have to change. No two Aboriginal communities are the same and, hard as it is, we are going to have to learn to work with each community individually. We need to narrow the chasm that exists between public policy made in Canberra and policy implemented on the ground. And we need to help Aboriginal people strengthen their voice.

We do face a lot of challenges in Australia but, when I look to the future, what I actually see is a lot of opportunity. We are made to tackle what this next century will throw at us. We are a small country, nimble, fast and strong. We are on the doorstep of some of the fastest growing economies in the world. Globalisation has become our reality and we have adapted. Our resources have given us a head start, as long as they do not dumb us down. We have a people who are open and willing to change, when they understand what is required and why it is necessary.

I know this because of what I see when I look back. The Australian story is a rather unlikely one. Our first people have sustained the oldest living culture in the world by surviving on a most inhospitable land. When a group of half-starving criminals sailed into Botany Bay, they learnt how to change and they survived. Through immigration, we have brought more than 150 cultures to our country and we have done it peacefully.

Our economy has made profound transitions, not once, not twice, but probably a dozen since Federation. Change is part of who we are. We have used times of difficulty and transition to make our country better. And we will do it again.

When I turn my mind to the big issues of the future, I know that I will not do it alone. I want to thank my team of personal advisers: my completely brilliant brother Patrick; my wise stepfather Brian; and my wonderful mother Anne, who has sacrificed so much for me. To the Munzel family: you have taught me so much about life in the bush and I feel privileged that you are a loving part of my family, too.

To Helen, Ian, Joan, Phoebe, PK, who are here, and to Dan, my wonderful cousin: thank you so much for all your support.

I want to thank Nick Staikos, who ran a fantastic election campaign and who continues to serve his community through my office, along with Carina, Barb, Robyn, Luke and Koula.

Thanks to Geoff Lake and Tim Holding for their unfailing support, advice and friendship. Thanks to Hong Urm, Martin Pakula, wonderful state colleagues who represent their communities so admirably. I want to thank Julie Warren, Tim Kennedy and Charlie Donnelly
at the NUW, who are showing us all what it takes to run a growing, successful, modern union. Thanks to Matt Rocks at the TWU and Nick Bantounas for their support and counsel.

I want to thank Hotham's wonderful local branches, led by a group of inspiring true believers: the indomitable Amy Duncan, who has just celebrated her 80th birthday; Steve Staikos; Steve Dimopoulos; Heang Meng Tak; Youhorn Chea; Loi Truong; Sean O'Reilly; Gael and Charlie Mitzi; the Sapir family; Jeffrey Lim; and many others. I want to thank fine Labor women, like Ann Barker, Judith Grayley and Jaala Pulford.

And, most of all, I want to thank my partner Brendan. Brendan is the finest person I know. He is my best friend, the father of our beautiful boy, a man whose commitment to living what he believes inspires me every day. I know that, if I can come home after each week in parliament and look him in the eye, I can be proud of the work that I do here. And that pride will not come from sitting on this green leather.

Since I was elected, I have thought about a girl named Sarah, who made me her sister and showed me what life in Arnhem Land communities is really like.

I thought about Amanda, who visited me in my office last week in utter despair about her son who is four years without a job, out of training, and has given up.

I thought about beautiful little Rachel, the baby we had the privilege of caring for and about how I might be able to provide more safety and structure for other little girls like her.

I thought about the dairy farmers of Brendan's community in northern Victoria, whose annual fortunes run with the weather, who worry sometimes for years at a time about putting food on the table and about how I might now have the chance to do something big, something real, for those Australians. That is when I will feel proud of what I have done. Thank you.

The SPEAKER: Before I call the honourable member for Indi, I would remind the House that this is the honourable member's maiden speech. I would ask the House to extend to her the same courtesies as we have just extended to the member for Hotham.

Ms McGOWAN (Indi) (16:50): Madam Speaker, parliamentary colleagues, special friends, family and David. Madam Speaker, warm congratulations to you on your election. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you and my colleagues in this place for their warm welcome. I proudly begin my first speech by acknowledging the traditional owners and custodians of this land both past and present.

Today I am going to share a story, a story about myself, my electorate of Indi and the power of community to re-invent itself. I will introduce you to the Voice for Indi, the rural community movement and the philosophy that has brought me to this place.

I am honoured to be the representative of the people of Indi and I am grateful to my family, 700-plus supporters and volunteers, almost 1,000 donors and, of course, the voters who brought me to this House. Many of you have made an extraordinary effort to be here today and I can only imagine what you must have done—getting up early to have families organised, children, animals, lunches done, kids on buses, farms cared for, picnics packed, car pools organised and that terrific trip of six hours up the Hume Highway on buses.

To the volunteers, all of you who staffed the booths and ran the offices at Alexandra, Wangaratta, Wodonga and Benalla, the door knockers, those who made the cups of coffee and tea and arranged food, the people who ran classes and shared their skills, the scrutineers, the
organisers of local meetings, the young people, the lawyers, the designers, the marketers, the
diary keepers, the bookkeepers, the reporters, the journalists and, most important, the makers
of all things orange—I recognise all of you for your courage, your belief and your conviction
that we could do it. Thank you.

In the 1800s, some five generations ago, my family left Europe in harsh times to make a
better life for themselves and their children's children. Their courage and persistence is my foundation, like it is for so many Australians and so many of the people who are gathered here. On my father's side, Elizabeth Anne Brown arrived from County Cork, Ireland in 1860. She was 20 and alone. She died at the grand age of 87 and is buried in the Tallangatta cemetery, her occupation, proudly, farmer. Arriving in the Chiltern goldfields of north-east Victoria, she quickly met and married a wise bloke, John Terrill, a miner from Cornwall, England.

In 1875 they selected land in the Mitta Valley just below the township of Tallangatta. Barely a year later, John Terrill was killed in a mining accident at El Dorado, leaving Elizabeth Anne to raise six children and two nephews. My family is rich with the stories of clearing the land, dealing with floods, fires and drought, and the desperate struggle to meet the conditions to purchase that land. In 1890, Elizabeth Anne, 30 years after her arrival in Australia, made the final payment on the land and, in her own right, won free title. Her fourth child, Albert, was my great grandfather. Her legacy to me was courage, persistence, dogged determination and deep roots into farming and the rural community of north-east Victoria. She was a woman in agriculture well before that term was even thought of.

On the other side of my family, my great great grandfather worked in the post office at Wodonga. His job was to travel overnight on the train, sorting the mail so it would arrive in Melbourne ready to be delivered by 10 am. My grandmother, Rose Roberta Chapman, was born in Wodonga in November 1888. She married Gladston Robert McGowan, son of Tasmanian pub owners, in 1920 and went on to become a teacher, a mother of six children and a grand matriarch. She is buried in the Yackandandah cemetery next to my father, my mother, two sisters and a dearly loved brother, and where I too plan to be buried. Grannie's legacy to me was: be a teacher; be a lover of stories and history; have a deep sense of social justice and community service and never forget to laugh.

It is not known whether these two families knew each other, but what is known is that it was a dangerous time to live in rural Australia. In Grannie's words:

We lived in Wodonga and during that time the Kelly bushrangers were active. My father who worked for the PMG (before it became Australia Post) used to be accompanied by an armed policeman as they feared the train might be ambushed.

My parents were Paul McGowan and Marie Terrill, who met and married when he was a young agricultural scientist working at the Rutherglen Research Station. They lived, farmed and ran a business in the Indigo Valley, 20 kilometres south of Wodonga, all their lives. I am proud to say I live in that valley, on my own small farm, where I conducted a rural consultancy business—or I did until 7 September!

In the early days of my business, the jobs were many and varied. I lobbied for the establishment of a school for the Flying Fruit Fly Circus. I lobbied for home and community care in Wodonga, Tallangatta, Corryong, Beechworth, Chiltern, Rutherglen and Yackandandah. I lobbied for palliative care in the Ovens, King and Kiewa valleys, and for
mobile child care for farming and rural families. Through this work, I built extensive networks and gained firsthand knowledge of the challenges of delivering services in rural areas, particularly in our valleys and towns. I learnt that one size does not fit all and, most importantly, it is a constant struggle to have our rural voices heard. A highlight of these years was working with the Victorian government department of agriculture as a rural affairs advisor and also travelling to Canada on a Churchill Fellowship to study rural women's networks and their role in improving communication with governments.

When I was 40, my mother died. She was dearly loved and a really important part of my life. It was a turning point for me—a second turning point was being elected to parliament.

But, going back to the first point, I recall thinking when mum died that soon my life, too, will be over, and what will I have to show for it? So I returned to study. I completed my master's degree in applied science at the University of Western Sydney, at Hawkesbury, and I learnt how to work with communities for change. The Australian Rural Leadership Program helped me grow in the art of leadership, to understand the role of a shared vision and the power of networks in transforming rural communities.

I decided to take a more active role in agricultural politics. I was an inaugural member of Australian Women in Agriculture, rising to become national president. I participated at National Farmers' Federation meetings and was elected to the Victorian Farmers Federation policy body. I learnt many skills: working with difference, building partnerships, how to chair meetings, how to build teams and how to embrace diversity. I became involved in international agricultural politics, trade, and became committed to Australia's role in feeding the world.

I restructured my business and became a consultant to rural communities, with specialist skills in development, empowerment and transformation. Working in Australia, and more recently in Ireland, India and Papua New Guinea, my clients were the national rural research and development corporations—dairy, wool, sugar, and horticulture—state and local governments and non-government organisations.

Teaching leadership became a passion. Together with friends and colleagues, many of whom are here today, we taught community leadership skills and we set up the Alpine Valleys Community Leadership Program. We ran leadership conferences. We talked about visions. We built networks. We wrote submissions. We grew our businesses. We all grew in skill, wisdom and confidence. We became a force. We began to find our voices—our community voices. With this brief introduction, you will see that I have deep roots and connections into the communities of north-east Victoria. I have an absolute commitment to the future of Indi.

Let me take a few minutes to talk about Indi. Indi is a foundation federation seat. Our first representative, in 1901, was Sir Isaac Isaacs, who was educated in Yackandandah and Beechworth, my local towns. Isaacs went on to become our first Australian-born Governor-General. More recent Indi representatives include the Country Party's Mack Holten—as Minister for Repatriation, he was Indi's first minister—Ewen Cameron, Lou Lieberman and Sophie Mirabella. I pay tribute to them for their public service, dedication and commitment.

In particular I acknowledge Mr Ewen Cameron for the role he played as my mentor. I worked for him as an electorate researcher in the old parliament house during the years of
Prime Ministers Malcolm Fraser and Bob Hawke. They were heady days. I am delighted to reacquaint myself with friends from that time, including some of the long-serving library staff.

Indi is a local name for the Murray River. It is a well named electorate, because the rivers and how we use them are critical to the future of north-east Victoria. Indi is blessed with seven major watersheds: the Goulburn, Broken, King, Ovens, Kiewa, Mitta/Dart and Murray rivers, which contribute an estimated 50 per cent of the water to the Murray-Darling Basin. Our major industries include manufacturing, retail, tourism and agriculture. Our food and wine is exported all over the world. Our ski fields, rail trails and festivals provide entertainment to many.

One of the outstanding features of Indi is our small rural communities, where people take things into their hands. Small communities like Yackandandah, where residents started a community business, the Yackandandah Community Development Company. We bought the petrol station, we run a rural produce store and we give profits back to the community. Communities like Stanley, where volunteers set up and run their post office.

But not all is well in Indi. I believe that Indi has not yet, as my mother would say, reached its potential. In parts of Indi only 57 per cent of 20- to 24-year-olds finish year 12, compared with 78 per cent in Melbourne; only 19 per cent of those between 20 and 39 hold a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 31 per cent across Australia; 63 per cent of people in Indi are in the bottom half of the Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage; and many of our young people move away from home for work and study. Other critical issues are infrastructure, access to transport and jobs. I will come to those in a minute.

I would like to talk to you about the part of my story where it changes. In May 2012, a group of young people decided enough was enough and put out a call for action. The Indi Expats, as they became known, were young people from communities across north-east Victoria. They had moved to the city for work, study and a better life. The federal election was coming up. How could their views be heard? They had big issues. Their questions were: what sense would we make of this and what would the adults do? As a result of this some of my friends came to the state of feeling big guilt. We asked ourselves what our legacy would be. If we could not be for our young people, what was the point? This question resulted in the birth of a community group named Voice for Indi. It is an incorporated body committed to building an active 21st century democracy based on engagement, respect and ideas, for Indi and beyond. Voice for Indi conducted 53 kitchen table conversations with over 425 people from all parts of the electorate. We discussed what would make for a stronger relationship between people and our elected representatives. They talked about what it means to live in the community of Indi, what our issues are and what makes for a strong community. In summary, the answers were: community matters; politics matters; representation matters; infrastructure matters; and services matter.

Like other places in Australia, the people of Indi wanted a representative in parliament who would put the electorate first, and they wanted their vote to count. They wanted to do things differently. The people of Indi had a vision for a community where people feel they belong and have a sense of purpose, where people pull together and help each other, where diversity, acceptance and tolerance are valued; a community that has quality services, infrastructure, education, jobs and health and opportunities for the next generation.
With this feedback, the Voice for Indi report became the foundation for a community-based, grassroots election campaign that totally changed our community. What did we do? Let me tell you about our not-so-secret ingredients. Start with the involvement and enthusiasm of young people, and their extensive use of social media. Add in volunteer training, support and permission to act in local communities. Negotiate shared values—be respectful, being our best selves, acknowledging difference and taking responsibility for our own actions. Understand that democracy is important to us—we want to participate and we want it to work for us. A good dose of courage, sense of duty, community service and trust helps. Finally, a vision for how the future can be better.

As our campaign gained momentum we were all surprised by the groundswell of support and creativity. Jenny put her sheep in orange T-shirts and drove them around Wangaratta, Corowa and Yea saleyards. Courageous indeed. Rex organised a campaign choir bus. Year 12 students made videos. Sophie covered shops in Chiltern with balloons and streamers. We kidnapped a *Wangaratta Chronicle* photographer on the train journey between Wodonga and Benalla. Nick trained the door knockers, Leah developed policy, Cam managed media, Lauren took over communications, Anne fed people, Denis managed logistics and Barb organised—and lots and lots more. Four of our people produced a video where they rapped: 'Our trains and buses fail to go, our internet's down, the phone is out; to get heard in Indi you have to shout.' Up there, many of these people are here today and I encourage you to ask them for their stories.

Madam Speaker, with this strong history and the support for our Indi community, I am so proud to be the first Independent member for Indi. So, what now? The Voice for Indi report guides me. I will listen: I will listen to the older people who have lost touch with their grandchildren, the teenagers who suffer with mental-health issues, the people who know what it is like to feel hardship and adversity and get on top of it. I will turn up to the pubs—in Mitta, Dederang, Whitfield, Chiltern and Alexandra—to hear people's concerns. I will visit community-education centres, such as in King Lake, shopping centres in Wodonga, Wangaratta and Benalla, and the schools of Marysville, Walwa, Myrtleford and Yea as well as the festivals in Beechworth, Bright, Swanpool, Mansfield and King Valley—and all the wonderful places in between.

To the young people of Indi, I make a formal commitment to involve you in decision making. I will focus especially on those who live in the more isolated rural areas, who are disadvantaged because of poor public transport, very patchy mobile-phone coverage, terrible internet connections, and fewer employment and educational opportunities. I will work with communities who have suffered terrible losses of family and friends through devastating bushfires and floods and continue our rebuilding process. To the Aboriginal people of Indi, I have committed to form an advisory group comprised of Aboriginal people, from Indi's communities, to advise me on issues such as health, education and employment. Today I also commit to making a public statement to recognise and acknowledge past mistreatments of the stolen generations, their families and communities as a result of the laws and policies of successive parliaments and governments that have inflicted profound sorrow on our fellow Australians.

I will build partnerships to improve public transport infrastructure, access to telecommunications and health services, particularly rural mental health, and work to reduce...
the red tape that hinders the growth of small businesses in our rural communities. I will bring the voices and the community of Indi to Canberra. I will work for a vision of a prosperous and caring community, where businesses grow, agriculture flourishes and everyone can reach their potential.

Madam Speaker, as the 44th Parliament begins its journey, I support the Prime Minister and Leader of the House in their desire for a more respectful parliament. The story of my election and the role of respect has resonance for all of us. In closing, I would like to quote from a piece of wisdom found on a toilet door at Mittagundi, an outdoor-education centre for young people in the King Valley: 'The future is not some place we are going to, but one we are creating; the paths to it are not found, but made, and the making of these pathways changes both the maker and the destination.' The people of Indi had to shout to be heard. To all Australians, particularly those who feel they are not being heard here in this place, I defer to Margaret Mead: 'Never doubt that a small group of committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.'

The SPEAKER: Before I call the honourable member for Fairfax, I would ask the galleries if they would now extend the same courtesy to the next speaker. Before I call the honourable member for Fairfax, I would remind the House that this is the honourable member's maiden speech and I ask the House to extend the same courtesies to him as we have just extended to the member for Indi. I call the honourable member for Fairfax.

Mr PALMER (Fairfax) (17:12): Madam Speaker, Australians know who I am and where I come from. They know I love my family and that I love Australia. In 1918 my father, at the age of nine, went to see a silent movie. By the time he was 14 he was producing and starring in his own movies. He went on to become the world's youngest movie producer—as he was known in Hollywood, at the time, in the United States. He returned to Australia to establish radio station 3AK in Melbourne and radio 7UV in Tasmania. Prime Minister Lyons, of the United Australia Party, opened radio 3AK—and I still have the recording.

My mother was born in Penguin, Tasmania, and left in 1940 to work in ammunition production in Melbourne. Family members have served this nation in the first and second world wars, some giving their lives for Australian freedom. My nephew, Squadron Leader Martin Brewster, served with INTERFET in Timor, and all of them have done for Australia more than I could ever do. Like half of all Australians, I lost my first partner, Sue. Her love and our children, Michael and Emily, sustain me every day. My wife, Anna, and my lovely five-year-old daughter—or middle five, as she says, daughter—Mary, remind me every day of what life is all about: love for each other, and the love we will have for each other in the future. I look forward to the coming weeks, when I will again become a father, and I have a strong resolve to serve our nation and a strong resolve not to let the people of Fairfax down.

Fairfax has been taken for granted for many years. My election is a reminder to the major parties that they must truly serve all Australians. As has been said, let us not seek the Liberal answer or the Labor answer but the right answer. Let us not seek to fix blame for the past but let us accept our own responsibility for the future. We meet today in a city which itself has reconciled our people at difficult times in the nation's history—a city that in this last century has been witness to the trials and tribulations of our people—at a time when the nation lacks direction and needs to set sail on a new course.
How long can parliament remain indifferent to the needs of all Australians? How long can
government be deaf to the everyday struggles of all Australians? They must be on top of the
national agenda. On this small speck in the universe, planet Earth, we must do all that we can
to help each other. Our main concern needs to rest with how we can grow and expand our
economy and create more wealth—not wealth for the wealthy but for all, even the least
among us. As a wise man once said many years ago, injustice to a man anywhere is an
injustice to all men everywhere. We live today in a nation where the roads are no longer safe,
where ambulances remove the carnage from our highways, where the infant mortality rate of
our Indigenous people is twice that of the Australian community, where the life expectancy of
many of our poorer and downtrodden citizens is less than it should be, where health services
are declining, where our elderly and veterans are forgotten, where the tyranny of distance
separates the hopes and the aspirations of remote Australia, and where the despair of the
homeless and unemployed robs the nation of the productivity of our citizens. Tasmanians, I
found out during our election campaign, feel abandoned by mainland Australia. The ghosts of
the Anzacs call us to action.

To stimulate our economic activity, we must ignite the creativity of all our citizens.
Chairman Mao said a long time ago that women hold up half the sky, yet women received
their vote in 1902 but prejudice still remains. Leadership, not complacency, is our need today.
In parliament and in cabinet, we need more women.

The nation needs a strong economy with efficient production. Australia still has a AAA
credit rating. The decline in Queensland's credit rating has been followed by a decline in
services. Our citizens need to live a civilised life. Government is not about business; it is
about creating the environment to allow all our economy to flourish, to grow revenue to
sustain the nation, and to provide income and security to all Australians.

Confidence is low. Our standard of living has declined. We must use our resources better.
We are not prisoners to the world economy, helplessly adrift in a sea of despair. The problems
we have have been made by Australians and can be solved by Australians. We should not
accept defeat by just cutting and slashing, lest the reaper reap more than he can sow.
Borrowing to avoid the problem and put off the day is not the real solution. We need in this
place and at this time to set a national agenda for growth—a goal for all of us. When the day
comes—and it most surely will—when citizens elected by the people take proper and full
responsibility for the welfare of their fellow citizens and when we treat other Australians as
we would want them to treat us then we can surely know that we do God's will. Public service
has no reward other than the service of others. It is the legacy we leave future generations.
History is our real judge. Let us work together not as opponents in this place but as colleagues
joined by time and space to serve the nation we love.

Australians have lost hope in the future. Change is certain. Success reflects our ability to
adapt to that change. It is not individuals' personalities that are important. It is not demeaning
comments about those who sit opposite you that are important. After all, all of us in this place
have merely offered our lives to serve, and the challenge is really what we can do to make life
better for our fellow Australians.

At the last election, the Palmer United Party won 5.5 per cent of the vote, becoming
Australia's fourth largest party. The Prime Minister only became Prime Minister because the
coalition received the Palmer preferences. Palmer United outpolled the National Party. Palmer
United elected one member—me—of the House of Representatives and three senators, only to find our last senator denied his position in the Senate by the AEC losing the ballot boxes in Western Australia. Palmer United and the motorists will hold the balance of power in the Senate. In Western Australia our polling is showing that we can win two senators if an election is held today. In Fairfax, Palmer United received one of the largest swings in the nation's history, of 50.3 per cent. That is why I am here. The Murdoch Newspoll showed 'others' as being 12.4 per cent recently, but they did not list Palmer United. I think we must be in the 'others'. Our recent polling has shown that we are now polling about 10 per cent of the nation, nearly twice as much as the vote we received at the election. Many Australians believed that a vote for Palmer was a wasted vote. Now our party vote has solidified. I want to thank all the 150 candidates who stood in every seat available in the House of Representatives, our Senate teams and our party members in every state and every territory.

Political courage is one of the rarest commodities, and in Queensland our state leader, Dr Alex Douglas, and his deputy, Carl Judge, defend freedom and the rights of individuals before a difficult parliament and in an impossible situation. They are putting the rights of Australians and principle before political expediency, a lesson we can all learn. The entrenchment of the two-party system in this country not only threatens democracy but destroys the creativity of the nation. It robs from all of us the benefit of each other's ideas and innovation.

The forward estimates in August 2013 projected provisional tax receipts for 2014 would exceed $70 billion. Instead of making our companies and businesses pay this tax quarterly in advance based on an estimate, we need to let them pay it yearly based on what they actually earn. If we keep $70 billion in enterprises' hands then they can spend it better than the government. Australia will create real demand, massive job growth and reduced unemployment. We will turbocharge our economy. If $70 billion is spent by individual taxpayers, the government gets 10 per cent GST. The government gets $7 billion every time it is spent by our citizens, and the government will receive the $70 billion at the end of each year. More hospitals and schools, a rising standard of living and increased wealth and revenue mean we can make Australian lives better. At current interest rates it would cost around $800 million a year, but it will generate billions each year for the nation. We have to stimulate domestic demand.

The government is the top petitioner of bankruptcy and liquidations, and as a result our businesses close, our employees lose their jobs and we lose out as a nation. We lose group tax, company tax, exports, GST and jobs. Stop government driving businesses to the wall. Let people stay employed. Transferring people from gainful employment to unemployment just guarantees misery for all of us. Find a better way, such as Chapter 11 in the United States. The US government do not petition bankruptcies; they stimulate the economy. The loss of one year's income due to unemployment is more than it costs for five years of education at high school. To neglect education performance is not only bad policy but bad economics.

Our Army, Navy and Air Force personnel protect and defend us all. We must link all service pensions to male total average earnings and expand gold card benefits to peacekeepers and to spouses of our very brave veterans. We need to support regional Australia by introducing zonal taxation. Regional areas need doctors and professionals to grow. Regional industries benefit all of Australia. We have to end this discrimination over regional industries and allow them to compete in international markets.
If Australians are satisfied that what their government is doing now is adequate for Australia and our future, Australians can accept their lot, but if, as I do, they see Australia's future as doing more than we have done so far—expanding our economy, not cutting and not borrowing but looking to grow the nation that we love—the government should give everyone the support to have an agenda of growth and enterprise for this nation. The nation has the strength and the potential to live out its heritage and to fulfil the dreams of the Anzacs, to turn Australia into the lucky country, to restore our economy and to reclaim our national heritage. Many people say they care but they really do not. Parliament should be about the needs of others, but sometimes it is not.

In Queensland, the Mulga is dying. Drought and flood have combined to rain havoc on families of that region. How can we not act? How can we complain about animal welfare overseas when we let thousands of cattle die a slow and painful death? How can we let Australian families suffer? Are we so indifferent to the needs of our fellow Australians? It is our responsibility in this place to be the last sentry at the gate to protect the rights and freedoms of all Australians, regardless of the party they belong to. Australia needs a revolution in the way we think and in the way we boost our wealth and our economy for the benefit of all our citizens. We have to re-establish confidence. We need to believe we can lift our economy to a better future. We need to have a positive attitude. We may not get there, but nothing is surer than we will fail if we do not project a positive agenda for the nation in a positive manner.

Public service and political life must be the highest calling. The catchcry of this place needs to be: respect for ideas. Great debate demands its victim and truth is the only winner. We are all winners when truth prevails over injustice. The content of our individual characters is more important than how much money we have. We need to praise the incorruptibility of our public officials, the integrity of our marriages and the worth of our people. It is ideas that matter. Governments may come and go, but ideas go on forever. It is ideas that will shape this nation; it is ideas that will endure through time. We are gone and forgotten in history, in commerce and in politics. It is ideas that capture the conscience of the nation. It is ideas that endure when all else is gone. Let us unite to serve the nation we love, to discover the future, to share our trials and tribulations, to overcome adversity, to pull together for our common good under the Southern Cross and to know, as a great man said, that on this earth God's work must truly be our own.

The SPEAKER: The question is that the address in reply be agreed to. I call the honourable member for Isaacs.

Mr DREYFUS (Isaacs) (17:28): Madam Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to rise today to speak. It is an honour to have been re-elected for a third time to represent the people in my electorate of Isaacs. I thank them for their support and their trust. Today I will talk about three things. The first is Labor's economic record. I am proud of Labor's achievements for our nation's prosperity during our two terms of government—a period of ongoing economic growth, low unemployment, low inflation and low interest rates that was accomplished despite the massive upheavals occurring in the global economy. I believe this record should be acknowledged. I also believe that Labor's excellent economic record must be defended against the scurrilous and self-serving rewriting of economic history that is already
underway from the new government and its supporters. Today I will also state briefly my objectives as shadow minister for the arts and as shadow Attorney-General.

Finally, I will say a few words about my approach to the role of opposition, because I believe that it is possible to approach opposition in a constructive manner that places the national interest first and foremost. This is an entirely different approach to opposition to that of the Prime Minister, whose quarrelsome, destructive and dishonest tactics were a burden on our national life for the past four years, placing as they did the partisan political interests of the Liberal Party above all else, with the national interest a secondary consideration, if it was a consideration at all.

Australians look to their governments for many things—for support when times are tough and for an honest engagement with the major challenges that face us as a nation, such as climate change. They look to government to manage the economy effectively and in the interests of all Australians, particularly working people, who form the backbone of the Australian economy. They look for governments to provide justice, to support the rule of law and to work to lessen the injustices that many, many people in our community continue to face as a result of their race or gender.

First and foremost, the Australian people look to government to manage the economy, because they understand that government has a vitally important role to play in fostering economic prosperity. Good economic management means investing in transformative infrastructure like the National Broadband Network, investing in research and innovation and, perhaps most importantly, investing in our future through education. Good economic management also means maintaining demand through stimulus when the economy contracts. Good economic management means that, in delivering prosperity to our nation, government ensures that the benefits of our economic successes are spread fairly, that all Australians get a fair share of our national wealth and that Australians all have an opportunity to secure work that is dignified and fairly paid. The economy must always be managed in the interests of the great majority of Australians; it should never be managed for a few privileged and powerful sectional interests.

I am very proud of having served as a cabinet minister in a government that did an excellent job of managing the Australian economy, judged by those essential criteria that I have just outlined. I am proud to have served in a government that made the right decisions, a government that stayed true to the values of fairness, justice, openness and respect for the sovereign people that it was elected to serve, a government that got the big calls right, managing to keep our economy strong through the crisis that engulfed the rest of the world and, at the same time, making great strides to improve the lives of ordinary Australians and Australians in need. Despite all the hysteria, propaganda and manipulation used by the coalition to further its political interests, we must not allow the new government and its supporters to recast economic history to deny Labor successes or to paint their own self-serving and destructive opposition to Labor's nation-building policies as anything other than the politically opportunistic deceit that it was.

The agenda of this new government and particularly its approach to managing the economy will be deeply felt by millions of Australians over the coming years. This government's ability to manage the economy will determine whether many Australians will be able to get jobs. This government's decency and vision, or lack of them, will determine the quality of the
social services that many Australians can access. We will know how authentic its professed concerns for Indigenous justice are when we see how the Indigenous community fares.

Let me pause to remark that we will hold this government to account on Indigenous affairs, given the Prime Minister's professed goodwill towards Aboriginal people and his desire to be the Prime Minister for Indigenous affairs. I have to say that the new government's goodwill is not discernible in the massive funding cut to Aboriginal legal services revealed in the last days of the election campaign when the coalition finally released their remarkably lightweight policy document on Indigenous affairs. Nor is any goodwill discernible in the Prime Minister's stated aim of repealing the protections against racial vilification contained in section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act. These provisions have served our nation well for almost two decades and send a clear message that racist hate speech is unacceptable. The provisions were left intact throughout the entire period of the Howard government, but, since one of the Liberal Party's media cheerleaders, Andrew Bolt, was found by the Federal Court of Australia to have engaged in racial vilification, the Prime Minister and Senator Brandis have been eager to repeal these provisions of the Racial Discrimination Act that for almost 20 years have protected Australians against racially motivated hate speech.

We will be holding the government to account not only for their stated agenda but perhaps more importantly for the agenda that they have hidden from the Australian people, for the agenda that they have denied but that is now all too apparent in their first decisions, for the agenda that they are assiduously preparing the ground for but that they are too fearful to spell out—their agenda for cuts.

The unfolding debacle of the Liberal Party's response to Labor's school funding reforms is a case in point. First we had years of malicious opposition to Labor's fairer school-funding model from the Abbott led opposition. Then, when the Liberals saw that the Australian people wanted their government to invest in better and fairer education for the nation's children, at the last moment before the election they miraculously dropped their objections and claimed to be believers in the Gonski reforms and promised to implement them. But, once the Abbott government were elected, the nasty surprises began as they began to betray their promises to the Australian people and make pathetic excuses seeking to justify those betrayals. Finally, when it became clear that the Australian people were not going to accept the Abbott government's broken promises, pathetic excuses and nasty surprises, the Abbott government tried to backflip yet again. But it is just more excuses and more weasel words, refusing to back their own election promise that no school will be worse off. I say again: opposite me are a government that must and will be held to account.

I want to touch on the economic context in which the coalition finds itself governing, because, while the economy is softening in some sectors and the coalition will have to deal with that reality, the truth is that it has inherited an economy that is doing very well by international standards, in large part due to the stewardship of the former Labor government. Despite the coalition's histrionic rhetoric of a budget emergency prior to the election, the new government has inherited an economy in very good shape.

Let us take a look at some of the key statistics. Interest rates are very low. Australia's current benchmark interest rate is 2.5 per cent, well below the rate of 6.75 per cent when Labor took office. This means access to cheaper home loans for millions of Australians. It also highlights the falsity of the Howard government's promise that interest rates would
always be lower under Liberal governments than under Labor. Inflation is below the target range, and taxes as a percentage of GDP are much lower than when Labor first took office. In fact, the total tax take in 2012-13 was 22.2 per cent of GDP, down from a high of 24.2 per cent between 2004 and 2006.

Most importantly, during Labor's term in office Australia has grown strongly compared to most advanced economies and is now one of the world's wealthiest nations. The IMF, for instance, ranks Australia fourth among the 35 wealthiest nations. A recent report by Credit Suisse ranked Australia as the most wealthy nation in the world when measured by median income. Australia is the only one of the OECD nations that has experienced continuous economic growth over the past 22 years. This is incredibly important. It means that the new government has inherited an economy that, as a result of Labor's stimulus package, avoided the worst impacts of the global financial crisis. Not only did the stimulus keep Australia growing; it avoided the tragic impact of mass unemployment that we have seen around the world: a waste of lives, a waste of labour and an enormous burden on those economies that suddenly have to provide support to those who have no opportunity to work.

In March this year our unemployment rate was 5.6 per cent, well below the OECD average of eight per cent, and it remains one of the lowest in the developed world. During the worst of the global recession the differences were even more pronounced. According to the OECD, during 2010 the annual unemployment rate for Australia was 5.2 per cent, while it was 9.6 per cent in the United States, almost 14 per cent in Ireland and over 20 per cent in Spain. Our stimulus package was so successful that it prompted over 50 of our most eminent economists to write an open letter that trumpeted it as a major economic achievement. Nobel Prize winner and former World Bank Chief Economist Joseph Stiglitz called our stimulus package 'one of the best designed Keynesian stimulus packages of any country'. The IMF was also strongly supportive of Labor's stimulus, and the OECD has pointed to Labor's policies as a model of how to respond to the economic crisis.

Labor achieved this despite the strident opposition of the Liberal Party and the Nationals. In fact, the coalition campaigned ferociously against the stimulus package despite the overwhelming economic evidence of its success. The new Treasurer has now let the cat out of the bag on just how cynical this exercise was, recently indicating that he may support stimulus if the economy requires it—despite his claims that the cupboard is bare and that Australia is in a budget emergency.

While the Treasurer's acceptance of the use of stimulus measures so effectively deployed by Labor suggests a welcome return to reality, it is also a timely reminder of the importance of not believing much of what is said by senior figures of this government but instead looking at what the government does. While the government has inherited a very strong economy, it has also inherited a budget in deficit. But the fact is that our deficit is very small by international standards. It is easily manageable in an economy as strong as Australia's and is in part a consequence of the spending measures that were used to keep Australia out of recession. That is why Australia has, despite this modest deficit, a AAA credit rating from all three international ratings agencies. This grand slam of AAA credit ratings is an economic achievement that the Liberal Party has never, ever achieved.

Both sides of politics, despite the hysterical cries of 'budget emergency' from those opposite during the campaign, agree that we need to return to surplus over time. We have no
argument with that. Economies are cyclical, and we have moved through the economic cycle to a time when surplus should again be the goal. But there are major differences between the parties about how we should return to surplus. Returning to surplus requires that choices be made about what essential spending by government is and what we can do without.

Labor believes that we should cut unnecessary concessions that go to groups that are already doing well. This is not about class warfare; it is about the Australian ideal of a fair go. While we think that some fat can be cut from concessions to the well off, we believe that we should continue to invest in the future—in infrastructure and education—because that is what we must do to remain a prosperous nation. Failure to invest in our future will cost us much more in the long run. We must also protect the services that Australians rely on. As one of the wealthiest nations in the world, we can afford to both invest in our future and uphold our values of fairness at the same time.

In contrast, the coalition believe in cutting spending by targeting support accessed by ordinary families and low-income earners and by cutting public services. I am concerned that that is their real economic agenda: an agenda of cuts and austerity. It may sound far fetched, but there is much to suggest that this is what the modern Liberal Party have become. Take, for example, the recent decisions of the new Treasurer to add $3 billion to the budget deficit by junking a range of savings announced by the former government. This was an incredibly hypocritical action given their professed concern about the state of the budget, but it also gives a stark illustration of the priorities of the Abbott government.

Let us look at just one part of that astonishing decision. The new Treasurer has cut tax to Australia's 16,000 wealthiest superannuants, meaning that they will now not have to pay a very modest tax imposed on earnings above $100,000 per year. This contrasts with their election promise to increase tax for 3.6 million low-income earners, those earning under $37,000 per year, who will pay about $500 per year more tax on superannuation as a result. What a lack of moral vision: spending scarce resources to cut taxes paid by a small group of wealthy Australians, while raising taxes on millions of low-income earners. I am appalled, as I think are all Australians who value basic notions of fairness, by these warped priorities.

And this is just the warm-up act. The Prime Minister's Commission of Audit has just begun, but I have little doubt that he has already planned his response: cuts to education and health and the junking of his own inconvenient promises. We will continue to see wasteful spending, such as their extravagant and inequitable paid-parental-leave scheme, while the Liberal Party seed the ground for massive cuts to health services, education and jobs. We will continue to see the Liberals placing the interests of small, sectional interest groups, such as the 16,000 most wealthy superannuants, ahead of the interests of the great majority of ordinary Australians. We are a prosperous country and we deserve better. And we can afford better. We will be holding the Abbott government to account.

I want to talk briefly about my specific role in holding this government to account as shadow minister for the arts and as shadow Attorney-General. In my new role as shadow minister for the arts, I will be fighting to realise the vision of a creative and vibrant Australia in which our culture is explored, celebrated and understood through artistic endeavours of all kinds. This was a vision that my Labor predecessors in government worked very hard to achieve. The former Minister for the Arts Simon Crean, in particular, worked for three years to deliver Creative Australia—our national cultural policy—and his successor as arts minister,
Tony Burke, then worked to implement that policy, with enormous energy and enthusiasm. The government has a vital role to play in continuing to support the arts, because the arts improve the lives of all Australians and enrich our economy. I will be holding the government to account in fulfilling that vital supporting role.

In my role as shadow Attorney-General, I will continue to fight for the same things that I have fought for throughout my life as a lawyer, as a barrister, as a parliamentary secretary and as Attorney-General. Specifically, I will be fighting to continue to build a more just Australia. Sometimes this will mean fighting with this government to defend the reforms we implemented and the gains we made while in office. I hope that sometimes this will mean supporting the government when it proposes a policy that will advance justice in our nation. But whatever the government does—and I must say that the early signs of its approach to justice are deeply disturbing—I will continue fighting to improve access to justice in our nation. I will continue to fight to strengthen the rule of law, and I will continue to fight to strengthen our nation as an egalitarian, participatory democracy in which justice is not a privilege that must be fought for but rather a way of life enjoyed by all Australians.

The final matter I will address today is my approach to the role of opposition in a general sense. I will be clear: I do not see the role of the opposition as the member for Warringah did in his four years as opposition leader. I do not think that the only purpose of the opposition should be to tear down the government of Australia, regardless of the cost to our nation, the prosperity and wellbeing of which suffers when its leaders are embroiled in endless skirmishing, with an unprincipled opposition that reactively opposes almost every policy the government puts forward and that deliberately talks down our national strengths and achievements for partisan political advantage. I do not think that the only purpose of the opposition should be to tear down the government of Australia, regardless of the cost to the public, who have to endure the bitter rhetoric of partisan political conflict. I do not think that the only purpose of the opposition should be to tear down the government of Australia, regardless of the cost to truth and, with that, to our personal integrity.

I hold that the purpose of the opposition, of which I am now a part, is to serve the national interest by engaging constructively in the debate our parliament has been entrusted to conduct about the future of our nation. This means that, when we do decide that the policies of the government are to be opposed, we will not do so with fearmongering negativity and a barrage of slogans founded on distortions and false claims. I hold that a key task of the opposition and of the government is to engage in a genuine political debate, to join in a productive contest of ideas, rather than in a barren war of rhetoric, because it is the robust exchange between those with differing viewpoints that creates the energy that is essential for a vibrant and creative democracy such as ours. As I remarked to the Sydney Institute earlier this year, viewed through one eye the world has no depth, but with the parallax created by differing viewpoints we perceive the world in three dimensions, and our nation is made richer and wiser for that.

I would urge the member for Warringah, now that he leads a new government, to serve the national interest by entering the policy arena and engaging the opposition in a genuine and productive contest of ideas. The space for genuine debate is one of the great strengths of democratic nations such as ours. I welcome such a debate in the months and years ahead.

Debate adjourned.
BILLS

Grape and Wine Legislation Amendment (Australian Grape and Wine Authority) Bill 2013

Report from Federation Chamber
Bill returned from Federation Chamber without amendment, appropriation message having been reported; certified copy of the bill presented.
Ordered that this bill be considered immediately.
Bill agreed to.

Third Reading
Mr FRYDENBERG (Kooyong—Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister) (17:49): by leave—I move:
That this bill be now read a third time.
Question agreed to.
Bill read a third time.

Primary Industries (Customs) Charges Amendment (Australian Grape and Wine Authority) Bill 2013

Report from Federation Chamber
Bill returned from Federation Chamber without amendment; certified copy of the bill presented.
Ordered that this bill be considered immediately.
Bill agreed to.

Third Reading
Mr FRYDENBERG (Kooyong—Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister) (17:51): by leave—I move:
That this bill be now read a third time.
Question agreed to.
Bill read a third time.

Primary Industries (Excise) Levies Amendment (Australian Grape and Wine Authority) Bill 2013

Report from Federation Chamber
Bill returned from Federation Chamber without amendment; certified copy of the bill presented.
Ordered that this bill be considered immediately.
Bill agreed to.

Third Reading
Mr FRYDENBERG (Kooyong—Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister) (17:52): by leave—I move:
That this bill be now read a third time.
Question agreed to.
Bill read a third time.

Building and Construction Industry (Improving Productivity) Bill 2013
Second Reading

Cognate debate.
Debate resumed on the motion:
That this bill be now read a second time.
to which the following amendment was moved:
That all the words after "That" be omitted with a view to substituting the following words:
"the House declines to give the bill and the related bills a second reading because it would be ill advised to continue having regard to:
(1) the negative impact of the re-establishment of the Australian Building and Construction Commission on the rights and entitlements of Australian workers; and
(2) Government plans to equip the Australian Building and Construction Commission with powers that are extreme, unnecessary, undemocratic and compromise civil liberties."

Mr GILES (Scullin) (17:52): I rise in opposition to the Building and Construction Industry (Improving Productivity) Bill 2013 and the Building and Construction Industry (Consequential and Transitional Provisions) Bill 2013 and in support of the amendment moved by the member for Gorton, the shadow minister. This is unnecessary legislation that takes us back to the future without due consideration of past experience. It is ideologically motivated and it is divisive. It is unconcerned with building cooperative workplaces, much less with the rights of those thousands of Australians who work in building and construction or indeed the concerns of their families.

I mention the families because the nature of the powers intended to be given through these pieces of legislation impacts beyond those individuals actually working in the industry. The regime proposed by these bills is unbalanced, unlike that which it proposes to replace. It raises some very real questions about the democratic functioning of our society. It is disappointing that we are having this debate now, because it is a debate that has been had. It is telling that the rhetoric that members opposite rely on is unsupported by evidence.

I propose to focus in my contribution on two aspects of these pieces of legislation: the argument around productivity that is said to justify their introduction, and the coercive powers that the pieces of legislation contain. But I am also concerned that the very fact of these pieces of legislation flies in the face of this government's deregulatory principles, so I will also touch upon this. This is a government that says one thing and does another.

I have this morning reread the Governor-General's speech, which is full of references to reducing regulation and to small government. It can only charitably be said that those aspirations are not on display here. Whatever else this legislation is, it is illiberal. As the
member for Blair has reminded me and hopefully also members opposite, it is not legislation that John Stuart Mill would intuitively find appealing.

We have heard much said by members opposite in this debate around safety at work and around suggestions of the misuse of existing provisions in other legislation designed to secure workplace safety. There have been lots of tabloid allegations and lots of assertions, but very little evidence—which is, of course, this debate here in a nutshell.

It saddens me and it burdens me, rising here, that this year has seen—as all years do—a number of deaths in the construction industry in Melbourne and no doubt elsewhere in Australia. One death at work is obviously one too many. I am sure that is something we all share in this chamber. But it must also be said that there is a relationship between workplace regulation and safety outcomes. As Professor Peetz of Griffith University has pointed out, observance with occupational safety does tend to be lower where unions are weaker. Of course, these bills are designed at their very core to weaken unions. I take this opportunity to acknowledge the important and often difficult work of unions and of workplace safety representatives, in particular, in standing up for safe workplaces. I hope they will not be deterred from doing so as a result of this debate should these bills be enacted.

I am proud that Labor opposes a return to the Australian Building and Construction Commission. This is not the 'sensible centre' of which the Prime Minister is so fond of speaking. Indeed, demonising construction workers and their representative bodies by returning to the ABCC could not be further from the sensible centre of the industrial relations debate. When one thinks of the sensible centre, one thinks of a sense of moderation, of fairness, but this is an attack on workers' rights and workers' entitlements.

As previous speakers on this side of the chamber have made clear, the ABCC's proposed powers are extreme and unnecessary and most certainly compromise civil liberties. Those proposed powers include unfettered coercive powers, the prospect of secretive interviews and the prospect of imprisonment for those who do not cooperate. Persons interviewed have no right to silence and are denied the right to be represented by a lawyer of their choice. Again, I ask myself: is this the supposed sensible centre that the Prime Minister has referred to?

Mr Abbott has not, as members opposite have asserted, just revived the ABCC as was committed to. These pieces of legislation in fact substantially extend the reach of the ABCC, including in manners which would appear to make the scope of its operation somewhat uncertain. I refer here in particular to the definition of building work, the reference to ancillary sites and the extended geographical scope of this legislation. Of the many concerns that I have in this regard, the greatest is—and perhaps this is an unintended consequence of drafting—that we may see the extension of these coercive powers into a wider section of the economy, including the manufacture of goods. Complexities of this scope should be addressed in this place and not left to courts to determine. This is clearly more than just a revival.

The re-established ABCC will also have significantly broader powers than its 2005 incarnation. It is very strange, as I mentioned earlier, to hear from self-described champions of small government that they are so strongly in favour of such big, draconian emanations of state power. It makes a mockery of all the invocations of people's lives being free from government intervention that we have heard often from members opposite in recent weeks.
I reiterate the member for Gorton's statement that the ABCC's proposed powers are extreme, are unnecessary and compromise civil liberties. These powers are not used, we remember, to investigate allegations of criminality. So much for concerns of proportionality and reasonableness.

On this note, I take this opportunity to remind members of the actions of ABCC officials in 2007, who detained an innocent bystander, not even an employee in the building and construction industry, for hours and subjected him to interrogation in secret. This person's crime was that he happened to witness an alleged altercation as he walked past a construction site.

In response to this incident, Professor Andrew Stewart stated that the ABCC's then powers were 'extraordinary, analogous to those of ASIO'. He said:
Ordinarily, under our laws, you have certain rights not to answer questions ... You have privileges against self-incrimination. But these rights do not exist when you are being interviewed by the ABCC. That an innocent member of the public can get caught up in these powers simply increases the concerns.

Professor Ron McCallum described the ABCC's powers as 'similar to aspects of the terrorism laws'. I am troubled by this and by many aspects of these coercive powers. I am troubled by the reverse onus provisions in clause 57 and, more fundamentally, by the curtailing of the presumption of innocence, the right to peaceful assembly, the privilege against self-incrimination and freedom of expression.

The provision in respect of retrospective application appears to me at least unnecessary and plain wrong—to suggest that people should be punished for actions that were lawful at the time. I am also troubled by the capacity given to the ABCC to effectively enable the re-litigation of matters that have been settled between parties. The bald statement of compatibility that asserts that workers' rights to freedom of assembly would be enhanced would be funny if it were not so serious in its consequences.

All these provisions raise deep concerns as to how our society should operate. They undermine key safeguards of civil liberties and fundamental aspects of our social fabric. They are of course also inconsistent with international obligations we have assumed as a nation. Unlike members opposite, I do not regard construction workers or, indeed, people walking past construction sites as terrorists. They should not be treated as such. I do not see that the case is being made in any way, shape or form for these extraordinary coercive powers.

I note that Fair Work Building and Construction, established by Labor, already has sufficient powers to deal with unlawful behaviour in the industry. Fair Work Building and Construction has outperformed and will continue to outperform its predecessor, the ABCC—and, should these bills come to pass, its successor. Fair Work Building and Construction has a full suite of appropriate investigative and prosecution powers to deal with any unlawful behaviour in the building and construction industry, whether by employers, employees, unions or contractors. Fair Work Building and Construction is undertaking more investigations, concluding more investigations, getting matters to court faster and recovering more money for workers in the industry. I remind members opposite that the work of Fair Work Building and Construction has secured over $2 million in unpaid wages and entitlements for more than 1,500 workers. These were the sorts of breaches the ABCC was never focused on and, it appears, will not be focused on.
ABS data shows that industrial disputation in the building and construction industry is on average less than one-fifth the rate seen under the previous coalition government. Labour productivity has increased over the past 10 quarters and, on average, is almost three times higher under Fair Work than it was under the Work Choices regime, and, in the building and construction industry, the rate is on average less than one-fifth the rate we saw under Work Choices. This is at a time when more Australians than ever before are covered by enterprise agreements, showing that the vast majority of agreements are being made without any industrial action at all.

The Governor-General's entire speech to the Senate chamber was littered with references to cutting red tape as a way to increase productivity, as I mentioned earlier in my contribution. Yet trying to find statistical data to support the assertion that the reintroduction of the ABCC will increase productivity in the construction industry produces very little. For example, the coalition have been unable to adduce any ABS statistics that conclusively demonstrate that the ABCC improved productivity in the construction industry or that the ABCC's abolition created a corresponding decrease in productivity.

As the member for Gorton and other speakers have shown eloquently and effectively, the best that the supporters of this legislation can come up with is a widely discredited Econtech report—the same report that simply plucked a figure out of thin air when it came to estimating the productivity gains that would be lost with the abolition of the ABCC. Coalition members cling to this report like a drowning man clings to flotsam and jetsam. On the other hand, to make our case, we only have to look at reputable sources like the ABS's basic productivity figures from 1988-89 to 2011-12. Whilst productivity depends on many factors and it is hard to attribute productivity changes to a particular cause, these figures show a gradual improvement in productivity in the period of the ABCC, but these productivity rates accelerated after Labor changed the remit of the ABCC.

So, if the coalition are in favour of improving productivity in the construction industry, they should simply adopt and support Labor's existing policy and carry on a real dialogue with workers, unions and employers around this shared challenge. Given the inability of supporters of this legislation to substantiate their assertion in respect of productivity, the only conclusion that can be arrived at is that these assertions are baseless. Indeed, in the Minister for Employment's media release of 14 October 2013, the minister mentions improving productivity—ostensibly the justification for this legislation—as if it were a mere afterthought. It is asserted twice as a given, with no further elaboration or elucidation.

Again, in the bill itself, productivity is mentioned just twice. For a bill that is supposedly concerned with the topic, it is a curious oversight, to say the least. The first mention is just the usual one-sentence assertion, whilst the second proceeds with Orwellian menace to state that the reintroduction of the ABCC involves 'providing a framework for ongoing cooperation between individual building industry participants'. And this gets to the heart of it. It gets to the true obsession of the coalition and the true nature of this legislation: to strip away the rights of people at their workplace and intimidate people from coming together and joining their union. It is not about productivity, nor even about building and construction. Let's cut to the chase. This is the thin edge of the wedge, a precursor to a return to Work Choices. I oppose that return in any shape or form, and I oppose these bills.
Mr BROUGH (Fisher) (18:05): In a perfect world, we would not be debating this bill. In fact, even in a reasonable world, we would not be debating this bill. There would no need for the parliament to even be considering it, because this bill is about dealing with a procession of instances of unlawful behaviour, coercive behaviour and bullying in the workplace, and reasonable individuals do not engage in that.

We just heard the member opposite, the member for Scullin, say that this bill, the Building and Construction Industry (Improving Productivity) Bill 2013, will hurt families. Let me just say at the outset that I see this bill as being fundamentally important to everybody involved in the construction industry, whether they be workers on the work site, subcontractors, head contractors or the families of all of those who are employed or are employing others in relation to the contracts and also the suppliers, because all of their livelihoods, all of their experiences, are tied up in what happens in and at the workplace. Unfortunately, the actions of a minority impact negatively on many people who are not even on the workforces or in the workplaces that we are talking about.

What is the real purpose of this bill? Why is it being debated in this chamber today? It only really has one purpose, and that is to deliver future infrastructure projects on time and within budget. Let me say that again: the purpose of the bill is to deliver future infrastructure, which we all on both sides of this House acknowledge is crucial to the productivity of our nation, on time and on budget. That is why the very name of this bill is the Building and Construction Industry (Improving Productivity) Bill. Improving productivity is something we must do. It is not just nice to have; it is an absolute necessity in this country because our competitiveness is slipping away. Every time there is a delay in a construction there is a massive cost. The cost starts with the individual families, and it runs through to the subcontractors, to the contractors and then of course to the people building the projects, whether they are in the private sector or in the public sector.

Let us go back to where this started—the Cole royal commission. With all of its powers, the Cole royal commission can hardly be regarded as anything other than a judicial body which had to find evidentiary material to support its findings. It has been said before in this debate, but let us repeat it, that the commission's final report, delivered in 2003, found widespread disregard of laws and courts, threatening and intimidatory conduct and the underpayment of employees' entitlements. It catalogued a large number and variety of misbehaviours by unions.

Mr Bandt interjecting—

Mr BROUGH: Let me clarify that for the Deputy Leader of the Greens. How balanced was that? It did not just bash unions—it did not say anything about that. It referred to the rights of employees and to their pay and conditions not being properly upheld. It also reported widespread disregard for laws and the courts and threatening and intimidatory conduct and the underpayment of employees' entitlements. It catalogued a large number and variety of misbehaviours by unions.
and legal norms and the pursuit of legal remedies. We are talking here about operating outside the law. In any other aspect of society we just would not accept that. There would not be a debate; we would all be as one. Ask yourself: why is that so? That was in 2003 under the coalition government.

So what is this intimidating practice? Here is an example, legal in itself, but its ramifications and its purpose are clear. It is quite legal for a union representative to turn up at a workplace and ask for a two-hour union meeting. They call out the workers on a large construction site. The first ones who go out for two hours, who leave the site, are perhaps the form workers who set the concrete. What does that do to the work site? It effectively stops the work. At the end of that two-hour meeting you might call out the concreters—that stops work again—or the carpenters, and on it rolls in a systematic attempt to blackmail the contractors into changing their behaviour. Here is the sad reality: it does not necessarily apply to and is not aimed at one site.

A case was put to me just today where a bunch of union officials came from interstate on one day, targeted four or five major sites and conducted this behaviour in what could only be seen as an intimidatory way. But this does more than that. They are looking for an unspoken outcome of getting a settlement somewhere else. So all the workers and their families are embroiled in something they are not even aware of, are not party to, but it impacts upon their lives. I ask the member for Melbourne whether he condones that behaviour, whether he sees that as positive or as something that he and his party should not support.

Those intimidatory practices go straight to bullying as well and not just saying the odd word here or there but really vicious behaviour in the workplace. There are examples of this being used in Victoria and in South Australia in recent times. The old term 'scabs' is well known. The CFMEU grossly bullies nonmembers by posting and labelling them as such—it would not be tolerated by the member for Melbourne, so why should it be tolerated in these forms?—referring to people in that way in absolute defiance of the Fair Work Act and Supreme Court orders stating they must end their protest. What about intimidation in Geelong, saying that you would cut people's throats? Try doing that in any workplace and see how you go. For some reason, we are supposed to accept intimidatory practice as part and parcel of the cutthroat, dare I say, construction industry—or being told, 'You're dead!' Shoving, kicking and punching motor vehicles: how much more intimidatory can you get? Are we accepting these practices, or are we saying they have no place in a modern society, that we will enact laws to prevent them from happening? What about the Colombian neckties which, I am told, were applied in Werribee—in other words, hanging people? Again, I ask the member for Melbourne, when you address this place today—

**Mr Bandt:** It's crime.

**Mr BROUGH:** So this is a crime, and that is precisely why we are here today and why we should not be, because in a perfect world, in a reasonable world, people do not act that way. Why do they act that way?

**Mr Bandt:** That's what the police are for.

**Mr BROUGH:** When you are intimidated to such a degree, physically intimidated, verbally intimidated, and your family is intimidated, your workplace is intimidated and your income is intimidated, when you are then asked to stand before a hearing, that intimidation
goes so far as to prevent you from acting and therefore you do not give the evidence. I should know because, in my previous role in this place as Indigenous affairs minister, I saw exactly the same behaviour with allegations of child molestation and rape in remote communities. The police would get witnesses to walk in the door to the police station where everyone could see them. As a result—guess what—the witnesses had nothing to say. This is just a mirror image, but it is happening right here in our cities. It is hurting our productivity, it is hurting workers and it is hurting families—and it can be stopped. This was shown during the period of the Howard government when we had the ABCC in place. Then his people behaving in this way had a cause to be answer, and people did react to that.

Let us turn to the Labor Party. Did they change this heinous act when they came to power in 2007? You would have thought, listening to them today go on about how abhorrent it was, that they would have changed it immediately. But no, they did not. It took them some five years and it is interesting to note that the person who finally took it upon himself to do it was today's Leader of the Opposition. He did so despite the findings of the Wilcox report, which came down in 2007. The Wilcox report concluded that the ABCC had made a significant contribution to improved conduct and harmony in the industry but that there was still more to be done. Despite those findings, the now Leader of the Opposition felt it was necessary to act on behalf of certain union connections rather than in the interests of the nation, the interests of the workers, the interests of the subcontractors or the interests of the suppliers. The evidence was there for them.

A number of speakers have said—and I will be clairvoyant and can just about guarantee you that the member for Melbourne will say the same—that these are unreasonable powers and that these powers somehow are excessive. But the ACCC, ASIC and the Australian Crime Commission all have similar powers and they have had them for much longer. We are talking here about death threats and physical threats. I do not think anyone in this place can dispute that, because there is documentary evidence of it arising out of royal commissions. On some occasions, you can even see such things with your own eyes on television.

Before the ABCC existed, more than 50 per cent of investigations into unlawful conduct failed because witnesses would not give information. That is true intimidation—in a country where we do not accept intimidation. The members on this side of the chamber say that that can and should stop. It should stop because it is not in the nation's interest, it is not in the construction industry's interest and it is not in the interests of families. Who should be fearful of this legislation? Quite frankly, if you accept what those opposite say—that there are no issues—then absolutely no-one should be fearful. If there are no issues, no-one is going to be called to give evidence and no-one is going to be held to account—because everyone behaves like angels. You have to ask yourself why people like the Property Council and the Master Builders Association have screamed long and loud to get this changed. It is in everyone's interests to make sure that there is a strong cop on the beat and that the issues we have referred to are dealt with.

If we stop acting on these sorts of matters, we give in to bullying. Bullies destroy children in schools, they destroy workers in workplaces and they can destroy businesses. When they do, there are downstream impacts. Say, for example, you are in a regional town and you own the cement mixer in the concrete plant—but you cannot turn up to do the pour. Why? Because the unions just pulled the workers out for two hours—and then for another two hours and then
for yet another two hours. You have nothing to do with the dispute that is going on, but you are caught up in it. It is bastardry. That is what it is. That owner of the cement mixer has an overdraft and has employees. It impacts on them. That is how it goes down the chain.

The description of this bill talks about fairness, efficiency and productivity. It is about a bargaining framework in which people can be protected. The definition of building work does go beyond the workplace. It covers the fabrication of components for buildings and structures—the entire industry. This is so important to us as a nation. I know that it is a lost cause talking to the Labor Party, but I spoke with the Greens today about some of their concerns—whether we could ameliorate some of those concerns and deal with this matter in a constructive way.

There is one last issue I will deal with in this short address—and that is a further change that the previous member mentioned relating to sections 73 and 73A of the Fair Work (Building Industry) Act. It refers to any issue that has been dealt with. Perhaps, say, there has been unlawful behaviour but through negotiation—basically hitting the employer, the subcontractor or the contractor over the head and blackmailing them—the matters have been settled between the parties. It does not matter if you have acted illegally—as long as you get some sort of a settlement, it can no longer be dealt with. If we are going to start rewarding that behaviour, we are going to see it repeated time and again to this nation's cost. We cannot afford it any longer.

This is but one of the examples of Labor getting it wrong. Employers and employees need to work together in their own interests and in the nation's interests. If we do that we can, as the member for Fairfax said in his maiden speech, grow the economic pie here. This is an important component of growing that economic pie. It is an important piece of legislation and I commend it to the House.

Mr BANDT: Parliament should be a place where the rule of law and civil liberties are defended. There are a number of elements of those core principles, but two very important ones are under significant threat from the Building and Construction Industry (Improving Productivity) Bill 2013. The first is the basic principle that people are entitled to equal treatment before the law. That principle says that it does not matter that you happen to be a person of a certain colour, a person of a certain occupation or a person of a certain residence—your right to be treated before the law as a citizen equal to other citizens will be guaranteed. That is a cornerstone of democracy.

Another fundamental principle is that, as an individual, you have rights to liberty and rights to privacy—and that those cannot be taken away by the state in the absence of some compelling urgency. Most importantly, our criminal law is founded on the principle that it is up to the prosecution to prove that you have done something wrong and that you cannot be compelled to say something that might incriminate you. There are very limited exceptions where that rule does not apply. It is often said, with some justification, that those principles of equality before the law—the fact that you cannot be treated in an arbitrary manner by government just because of the circumstance of where you happen to be born or where you happen to work or who you happen to be, and the fact that you cannot be forced to give up the right to silence—define a democracy, and that once you remove those you start slipping from a democracy into something else. We need to carefully police those principles and the parliament should be the prime defender of them.
The thing about defending the principles of the rule of law and the right to silence is that you cannot just defend them when they are being exercised by people you like. If you believe in the right to silence and if you believe in equality, they need to apply to everyone—not just those who happen to be on your side of the fence at a particular point in time. This is a government that is fond of making that case, especially when it comes to freedom of speech. It says that that should be an untrammeled right and the parliament's role is to expand the right of people to say whatever they like. You would expect, also, not only that parliament would be the place where that will be defended but also that a party that has the word 'liberal' in its name would be one of the first bodies to stand up in defence of an individual's right to the rule of law—to be treated equally and to have their liberty preserved.

That is not what we are getting with this bill. As other speakers have said, we are getting a situation where in Australia, just because of the industry you happen to work in, you can be hauled before a Star Chamber for a secret inquisition, you do not have the right to silence, and when you get out you cannot even tell your wife or your husband or your family about it, because that would be breaking the law. As the member for Fisher said, this does not apply just to people who work in that industry—it applies to someone who happens to be walking past at a particular time who might accidentally witness something. They can be hauled in and become subject to those same rules as well. This is not liberalism. What we have from those who sit on the government benches is reactionism masquerading as liberalism; extremism masquerading as liberalism. It is why in all of their speeches so far we have not heard them say one thing about an individual's right to silence or the right to equality before the law. This is absolutely a targeting of particular people in particular industries on a particular side of the fence.

It is said that there are problems in the building and construction industry. There are problems with sham contracting that the government says nothing about. Even more recently, we opened up the newspaper to find that one of the biggest construction companies in this country is alleged to have tried to bribe Saddam Hussein's regime. When that happens in the construction industry, what do those opposite do? Nothing. There is no request to investigate what ASIC and the AFP have been doing or why this has been allowed to continue. Where is the royal commission into that? Instead, we have the targeting of a particular group of people because they happen to sit on the government side—on the wrong side of the fence.

The member for Fisher talked a lot about the Cole royal commission, saying that that was a judicial inquiry. That was a judicial inquiry in the same way that Stalin's show trials were a judicial inquiry. I observed the royal commission at very close quarters, and on an incredible number of occasions the prosecutor would get up and talk about people being locked in shipping containers. But, by the end of that case study, no evidence was led about anyone being locked in shipping containers. But the headlines were there and the damage had been done. Whatever you think about that royal commission, after all those millions of dollars had been spent on that royal commission that is supposedly the basis for this bill, how many prosecutions resulted? Zero. Zero prosecutions came out of that royal commission. Despite all of this alleged illegality in the industry that this royal commission uncovered, not one prosecution came out of it.
We hear talk about alleged crime and thuggery in this industry. I remind members sitting on the government benches that this legislation does not give the new body power to deal with criminal matters. That is what the police are for and will continue to be for. All this rhetoric about burning necklaces and so on is completely out of order because it has nothing to do with this bill. This bill is not about criminal matters. It is a hallmark of this government that it will dress it up and use inflammatory rhetoric to do something in an area the bill has nothing to do with. The bill is about targeting a particular group of people, and one aspect of it is to try to litigate those workers and their unions to death and to tie them up in red tape while their other mates are allowed to go off and do whatever they like. You can see that shining through in the proposed section that says it does not matter if the employer and the workers have resolved the dispute, this new body still has the power to come in and continue the litigation. What other areas of industrial disputation does that apply to, where we do not encourage people to resolve things at a workplace level but instead allow the government to come in and continue litigating one side to death if they want to?

In the same way that we did not hear any commentary from the government benches about the right to silence or an individual's liberty, those opposite have shown their rank hypocrisy through this legislation when it comes to the free market. They are saying, 'We are quite happy for people to go and negotiate amongst themselves, as long as it turns out in our favour.' People who work in the construction industry or who perhaps do dangerous and demanding work offshore might be able to negotiate themselves better wages and conditions but, no, they cannot do that because the free market was not meant to operate in that way; we need a massively resourced government body to come in over the top and tell people how to live their lives and if they do not accede they will face the threat of going to jail.

This is not a government of liberals. This is a government of corporate shills who are willing to stand up and say whatever their mates on one side of the fence want them to. But, when it comes to tackling sham contracting or addressing substantial underpayments of people on building sites right across this country, this government is completely silent. So I will not take up the previous speaker's suggestion to join the coalition in this assault on the rule of law. This is something that, quite rightly, deserves the condemnation not only of people who work in the industry and who know what this will mean for them on a day-to-day basis, but of civil libertarians and anyone who believes in the principle of the rule of law. I am very proud to stand with them in opposing this bill.

Mr McCormack (Riverina—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance) (18:31): The building and construction industry is of vital importance to economic growth, the employment of subcontractors and the advancement of regional development. I will just repeat that: the building and construction industry is of vital importance to the advancement of regional development. Sometimes I think some speakers in this place—not 'speakers' as in the chair you are occupying, Deputy Speaker Scott, but members speaking, and certainly the Deputy Leader of the Greens, who has just preceded me—may forget about regional development and the importance thereof. In order to ensure builders, subcontractors and homeowners are able to work together—and work well together—it is critical, essential and vital that the balance is restored between builders and unions. That is why the Building and Construction Industry (Improving Productivity) Bill 2013 is so important. It is a bill for an act to re-establish the Australian Building and Construction Commission and for related
purposes. It is important, and it needs absolutely to be agreed to by this parliament, by this
House of Representatives.

Many building companies in my electorate of the Riverina are small businesses. We heard
the member for Fisher, just a little earlier, talking about family businesses, and, indeed, many
of those in country areas are just that. They are family businesses and they want to build
quality homes and other fit-outs for local, regional, community people. Their work will
employ many subcontractors, labourers and other workers during the construction of homes
and other projects. It is vital that this industry is supported by government so it can help our
nation be the best it can be—to help our nation be a productive, competitive and prosperous
economy.

We have heard the Prime Minister saying that we are open for business, but to have a
construction industry which is so bogged down by union thuggery—and that is what happens
even in, I am sad to say, regional areas—is not good for business. It certainly does not allow
the construction industry to be open for business. The coalition government recognises the
importance of the building industry and its marvellous contribution to the growth and strength
of the Australian economy, particularly in regional and rural areas.

During the lead-up to the 7 September election, the coalition promised the Australian
people we would be a government which would grow and strengthen the economy, and we
will be. We want to be an infrastructure government, where businesses, families and
individuals are encouraged to build and to create jobs. We want to be a government with a
diversified economy, where we can restore the balance between those who run our nation's
businesses and those who work in them. Unlike the previous government, building companies
also know the benefit of being able to balance the books. We want to be a government which
pays back the debt. We want to be a government which is open for business, and this piece of
legislation will do just that. The building and construction industry is critical to the coalition's
plan for economic growth, and prosperity is just what we need in this country right now.

This bill will re-establish the Australian Building and Construction Commission, which is
much needed. It will recreate a strong and independent watchdog for the building and
construction industry and assist in the coalition's plan to restore the balance between the
industry and the unions. I will be up-front: my wife, Catherine, works in the industry. She is
on the Housing Industry Association's Wagga Wagga committee to further enhance and
further advance the construction industry in my home city of Wagga Wagga, which has a
population of 63,000 and is, thankfully, growing. It is growing thanks to a vibrant industry—an
industry which needs a watchdog just like this to be able to grow even further.

This bill also reverses the decision by the Labor Party, when it was in government, to
abolish the Australian Building and Construction Commission, which it did in 2012. I
certainly spoke very vehemently against that at the time. In fact, when the ABCC was
abolished by the former government in February 2012, I told this parliament that the decision
was an ill-conceived, knee-jerk decision made at the behest of minorities and that it was in
anything but the national interest. I stand by that comment today. We have just heard the
member for Melbourne, in his usual sanctimonious way, going on about the fact that this was
an assault on the rule of law. It is not an assault on the rule of law; it is common sense. He
talked about the Liberal Party being reactionary and about extremism masquerading as
Mr McCORMACK: What a crock of rubbish! I am sure the member for Mayo sitting beside me would absolutely agree with me on that score.

Mr Briggs: Hear! Hear! Coming from a Green!

Mr McCORMACK: Coming from a Green, indeed!—have you ever heard such a thing? When the commission was abolished it led to a huge outcry, particularly in the Riverina and in a lot of other country communities. The Howard government created the commission in typical Howard government style. It was methodical, it was well considered, and it was implemented on the basis of evidence and the need for such a watchdog. Eight years later, the need for an organisation such as this commission remains. The building industry is a good one, and it is a productive one, and that is what we want. We heard the member for Fisher talk about the fact that this bill is all about fairness and all about productivity. I absolutely concur with the member for Fisher.

The building industry is a good one, and it needs to be helped and enhanced. We need to do whatever we can to assist it along the way. This bill will do just that. The overwhelming majority of builders, subcontractors and labourers work in the industry to build dream homes. It used to be every Australian's dream to own their own home—and that is just what the building industry provides. It needs to be given every assistance to do just that. Builders do their very best to ensure that clients are happy with their finished product, but builders need to be able to do that in an environment which assists them, not an environment which is clogging them down with union thuggery. In order to ensure balance and the best outcome for all involved, the commission is necessary to oversee building and construction independently—and I will use that word again, independently—with a genuine strength to act when things do not go according to plan.

Peter and Debbie Hurst, constituents of mine from Wagga Wagga and fine people too, run a house-and-land package building company in my home city. It is a family business, owned and successfully run by Peter and Debbie, husband and wife, with the best interests of their community and their customers in mind. They are typical of many family-run businesses in regional areas. They have been in business since 1990, and their construction work in Wagga Wagga and surrounds employs up to 100 subcontractors at any point in time—

Mr Briggs: Is that right?

Mr McCORMACK: Yes, 100. It is a very good company. They are in opposition to my wife's company, but that is another story! Mr and Mrs Hurst's company builds around 20 homes in Wagga Wagga every year. It might not sound a lot to the Australian parliament, but 20 homes in Wagga Wagga—that is a big company; that is a big concern. When I was talking to Peter about the re-establishment of the commission, he was delighted to hear that the government will honour its promise and ensure that the commission is back in operation—back in vogue. He was absolutely delighted. Peter is a straight shooter. He said that the ABCC is 'an overarching governing body which will restore common sense and productivity to a much needed building industry'—and there is that term again, 'common sense'; we need more of it.

I think that point really sums up the intent of this bill. The re-establishment of the Australian Building and Construction Commission is all about common sense and it is all about productivity. That is why we all need to get behind this bill. It makes sense to ensure
that the building and construction industry has a genuinely strong watchdog to oversee its activity. The intent of this bill is to make it easier for the majority of builders, subcontractors and labourers to get on with what they do best, and that is building—not looking over their shoulders, wondering when the next union official is going to stop a work site. Mr Hurst also told me this bill will 'restore equity in the corporate market between builders and unions'. And, if you'll pardon the pun, Mr Hurst has hit the nail on the head there.

The former government abolished the ABCC after pressure from the building and construction unions, who were lobbying for its removal along with the abolition of the building code which supported its work. And that is typical of unions. The Labor Party ummed and ahed about this decision for five long years until in February last year, Minister Shorten, now the Leader of the Opposition, gave in to the demands of his union mates and replaced the ABCC with a new regulator with significantly reduced powers. And there we have another example of Labor caving into the unions; caving in to those who run their show. When the now opposition leader made this decision last year, I spoke with a Wagga Wagga builder who feared that the decision would cause a return to the bad old days of union control on building and work sites. He told me then: 'We don't need the thuggery of unions on our work sites. Unions are fine but everything should be in moderation.' And the builder was right—unions are fine. I was a member of a union for 21 years.

In the time since the former government abolished the ABCC, we have seen violence on the streets of Melbourne; workers purchasing advertising space in the Herald Sun asking that their own union bosses stop blockades; and the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union, the CFMEU, attacking builders whose employers were not members of the union. That is shameful. This is not about attacking unions. This bill is not a union bash-up. As the builder told me last year, unions are fine. They have their place and they do some good work. I have told this House before that I was a member of a union for 21 years: in the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance and, before that, in the Australian Journalists Association. But actions such as those I just named are not in union members’ interests, nor are they in the interests of the building and construction industry. The re-establishment of the ABCC is an action by the coalition in government to restore the balance on Australian building and construction work sites. It is about ensuring this industry has a genuine and independent watchdog to ensure that people looking to build new homes or to have new fit-outs, extensions and the like, are protected from unnecessary interference from unions. The basic point is this: this bill is about the coalition government allowing builders, labourers and subcontractors to be able to do their best, to do what they are engaged to do and what they are skilled and trained up to do.

We committed to this at the 2013 federal election. We felt that the building industry was in such dire need of this reform that we pledged to restore the ABCC within 100 days of the sitting of the 44th Parliament, and we will do just that. Here we are, keeping that promise to the building and construction industry, and doing just that, on the first sitting day of the second fortnight of this new parliament. As we have said, the primary objective of this bill is to provide an improved and balanced workplace for the building and construction industry and to ensure that work is carried out fairly, productively and effectively in harmonious places of employment. Through doing this, the coalition government will allow builders, including Peter and Debbie Hurst, and the many home-building companies in Wagga Wagga
and throughout the wider Riverina, to do what they do best. But don't just take it from me—I have had a look at the Housing Industry Association's annual report for the year ending 2012. Under 'Industrial relations', the HIA has this to say:

HIA also strongly opposed the government's decision—to abolish the industry watchdog, the Australian Building and Construction Commission. By mid-year, the industry had already witnessed a return to union militancy, with blockades notably shutting down construction sites in the Melbourne CBD. HIA has called on the Commonwealth Government to restore the ABCC with appropriate penalties against offenders.

And sure, appropriate offenders do need to be penalised. They need to have police action taken against them. But this bill will ensure that union thuggery is not allowed to go unfettered. Union thuggery is not acceptable anywhere. We heard the member for Melbourne talk about the fact that it is a crime, and he is right. This bill will enable the construction industry to get on with doing their job—and not have this overarching concern about union thuggery on their work sites.

The HIA is a key player in all of this. The HIA in New South Wales was a key stakeholder in a number of important reviews of the industry, including the rewrite of the Planning Act, the Home Building Act, the Inquiry into Construction Industry Insolvency, IPART Review of Local Government Compliance and Enforcement, and the Infrastructure Charges Taskforce. So, when the HIA makes a comment as sternly and as strongly as it did in its 2012 report, it needs to be listened to and it needs to be followed. This is an industry which is too large and too important not to listen to. This is an important issue which is too vital for the future progress of our nation not to be followed when there are concerns such as those raised in HIA's 2012 report about a return to union militancy. As a local builder in my electorate said, it is a return to the bad old days. No one wants to see work sites being shut down for no good reason when building contractors just want to get on and build people's homes and do the jobs they are being paid to do.

Builders do a wonderful job for our nation—we all know that. Builders work in regional areas, but it is sometimes a bit tougher in regional areas than in city areas. Builders need to be able to work in an environment which is conducive to common sense without unions flexing their muscles. Australia cannot afford to have a building and construction industry which is inefficient and unstable. Restoration of the Australian Building and Construction Commission and the code which supports its work is a critical reform for Australia. The contents of this bill reflect this commitment, and that is why I urge the House to pass it.

Ms Ryan (Lalor—Opposition Whip) (18:46): I rise today not only to speak as the member for Lalor, but also to speak as a mother, a former teacher and a concerned citizen—to add my voice to those on this side of the House who are critically concerned about this bill and its implementation. I do this because the legislation currently before the House is of great concern to anyone who cares about justice and fairness. It is a great concern to those of us who have family working in the building industry. It is of great concern to those who care about our young apprentices and trades assistants and their safety at work. And it is of great concern to those who value our democracy and the civil liberties that come from living in this great nation.
While the government is attempting to frame the re-establishment of the Australian Building and Construction Commission as a so-called 'sensible centre', it is anything but. This bill is not just a threat to workers or to unions, it is a threat to every Australian. In its previous incarnation, back in 2005, the Liberal Party then led by John Howard, attempted to frame the introduction of the ABCC in the same way—as a sensible solution. They argued that it was about curbing illegal activity and that it was, somehow, paradoxically, a win for workers. They argued it would reduce industrial disputes and increase labour productivity growth. Of course, Deputy Speaker, we know what it was really about. It was, and is, an attempt to demonise the union movement, as we have just heard, and impinge upon the rights of workers: rights fought for and enshrined in our industrial relations history; rights recognised by the Building and Construction Industry Improvement Amendment (Transition to Fair Work) Act proudly passed by the previous Labor government in 2011 to abolish the ABCC and establish the Fair Work Building Industry Inspectorate—the real, sensible centre of industrial relations.

I am particularly troubled about what the proposed legislation could mean for those who work within the building and construction industry. I am the mother of a concreter, and I am concerned about his safety and the safety of those he works with. As a former teacher, I am concerned about our young apprentices and trades assistants; those who do not know that they can, and should, raise safety concerns; those who, like my own three sons, who are too willing to please; and those who are willing put themselves at risk to get the job done. Those opposite would not be proposing legislation that puts our young people's safety at risk if they too had sat in the principal's chair in a school in Lalor. You may groan, but I am a teacher and therefore a storyteller. They would not be taking action to hamstring a union defending work safety if they had seen what I have seen.

Let me share with you, Deputy Speaker, a particularly awful example of a student, a 15-year-old boy, who left our school to take up an apprenticeship in the building industry, building houses in Lalor. I watched him excitedly get his T-shirt signed by his classmates on his last day of school. This was supposed to be the next phase of his life, his next big adventure. In spite of this, I gave him the normal spiel and reassured him that, should it not work out, he would always be welcomed back. It was only three months until he returned—not because he had decided it was not for him and not because he had reconsidered that maybe school was not so bad after all, but, devastatingly, because he was in a non-unionised workplace and had been intimidated, bullied and physically assaulted by his employer. Unfortunately, I have many more stories like that I could share. That is not to say that all employers are doing the wrong thing. Most are responsible and genuinely care about their workers. They believe in occupational health and safety, as we all do. They understand its importance and they are willing to do what it takes to make their workplaces safe.

But the building and construction industry is a dangerous one. To date, this year there have been 18 construction workers who have lost their lives at work, and that is 18 too many. Every worker has the right to come home safely. Under this proposed re-introduction of the ABCC, I fear the Liberal government would make it harder for construction workers and union officials to stand up for safety on site. Not only is this an attack upon unions and workers, but it also a draconian attack on the most basic of civil liberties. And let's just be clear about what the passing of this legislation could mean. Under the Howard government's
ABCC, the commission had the power to secretly interrogate a witness and then prevent them from telling anyone that they have even been interviewed. We have heard this several times today from this side of the House. Obviously it is ringing bells on this side of the House, as, I believe, it will with the Australian people. Under the former ABCC, there was no right to silence, there was no right to legal representation and—because of the risk of being called to stand before the commission—there was a very real threat to freedom of association. These draconian measures did not just apply to those from the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union nor just to employees, employers or contractors in the building and construction industry, but to anyone and everyone.

In fact, as reported in the Sydney Morning Herald on 15 December 2007, and as said again here today, a bystander—an academic from a Melbourne university—was called before the commission. His crime? He had simply walked past a building site at the wrong time. His punishment? He was to be called before the commission and interrogated for hours. It sounds like something that would happen under a dictatorship, not here in our enlightened democracy. But that was what did happen under the Australian Building and Construction Commission, the very same ABCC that the United Nations International Labour Organization found to have contravened conventions that Australia was signatory to—the right of workers to organise, the right to petition and the right to freedom of association. The commission's powers were so extreme that even the conservative stronghold of the Institute of Public Affairs said it went too far. And yet, for all its unprecedented power, plus $66 million in funding, the ABCC led to not even one criminal conviction—not one.

How then are the government justifying this return of the Australian Building and Construction Commission? The same way they justified its introduction. The government throw around terms like 'productivity' and 'growth', without connecting them to anything real or tangible. They talk in figures that mean little and prove even less. They ignore that under the current Fair Work system, labour productivity has continued to increase over the last 10 quarters. They ignore that on average this growth is close to three times higher than under Work Choices. And they ignore that the rate of industrial disputes in the building and construction industry is on average less than one-fifth of the rate seen under the previous Liberal government. They do this because the facts are not on their side.

In fact the report that the government, and many of its speakers here today, are using as some sort of legitimisation was dismissed by a Federal Court judge as deeply flawed. He even recommended the figures from the self-purported Independent Economics group be disregarded due to their lack of rigour or integrity. So how then did this group arrive at the figure that the Australian Building and Construction Commission provided over $7 billion annually in benefits to the economy, and how did they reach the subsequent figure that its abolition has cost consumers around 75 per cent? They guessed. They plucked a number from thin air. It is, after all, very easy to get the figures you want if you are willing to just make them up.

So if this is clearly not to do with improving the industry and not to do with tackling crime, one must ask: what is this really all about? This is yet another attack by Tony Abbott and the Liberal government on industrial relations and our unions. And it really is a poorly made Trojan horse—a Trojan horse to disguise the beginning of the return to Work Choices and an attack upon fair industrial relations in this country. Because, while they may not take their
promises seriously, they do take their ideology seriously. They say that they hate red tape and that they hate the nanny state. But what they really hate is the CFMEU. They can dress it up in any way they like—that is what this is really all about. Even more concerning for every worker is that the bill extends the commission beyond the building industry into the maritime industry and the transport and supply sector. It also extends the ABCC’s jurisdiction offshore. If this legislation is passed, this is just the beginning.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Vasta): I thank the member for Lalor. The question now is that the amendment be agreed to. I also welcome the member for Eden-Monaro to our parliament.

Dr HENDY (Eden-Monaro) (18:56): Thank you, Deputy Speaker. Today I rise in support of the Building and Construction Industry (Improving Productivity) Bill 2013 and the accompanying bill and to oppose the opposition’s amendment. This bill represents a critical piece of economic reform. It will, in a single piece of legislation, significantly boost productivity in this country.

The building and construction industry is a vital industry for Australia. It is a critical industry in terms of its inputs to basically every other industry in Australia. If the building and construction industry is not operating efficiently and in a productive way then that adversely impacts on the manufacturing industry, the mining industry, the agricultural industry and the services industry. It is a vital link in the chain.

Unhappily, over the years the trade unions in that industry have been very well aware of the importance of this link in the chain and they have exercised their industrial muscle to the detriment of the industry and the Australian economy. It has been irresponsible. It has been economically destructive. It has been selfish. The national interest has been trampled by an unrepentant union movement. With this bill we will stop this in its tracks. We will restore the rule of law. This bill re-establishes the Australian Building and Construction Commission. It was and will again become a strong watchdog that will maintain the rule of law to protect workers and constructors and to improve productivity on building sites and construction projects, whether onshore or offshore. The last Rudd-Gillard-Rudd government bowed to the requests of their union masters. They had said they would keep a tough cop on the beat and they caved in to union pressure. It was one of the bad policies extracted as a price for union money and resources to prop up the ALP.

This bill will reverse Labor’s changes to the laws which underpinned the Australian Building and Construction Commission before it was abolished in 2012. The bill prohibits unlawful industrial action, unlawful picketing, and coercion and discrimination. Penalties that are high enough to provide an effective deterrent will apply to breaches of these provisions. A wide range of effective remedies such as injunctions will also be available to the ABCC and persons affected by unlawful behaviour.

As the Minister for Education and Leader of the House stated when introducing this bill, for many years, the building and construction sector provided the worst examples of industrial relations lawlessness. He noted that it was the then Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations in the Howard government, the member for Warringah and now Prime Minister, who was prepared to tackle this longstanding bad behaviour and in 2001 established a royal commission into the building and construction industry. That was the Cole royal commission. History shows that the final report of that royal commission provided compelling evidence of
the need for reform in this industry. Amongst other things it found consistent evidence that building sites and construction projects in Australia were hotbeds of intimidation, lawlessness, thuggery and violence. Projects were delayed, costs blew out and investment in our economy and in infrastructure was being jeopardised.

So we are not making this up. This is not some ideological obsession, as members of the opposition want Australians to believe. We held a royal commission. It found multiple cases of lawlessness and recommended strong measures to solve the problem. Let me say it again: central to the royal commission's findings was industry lawlessness. As the minister noted in his second reading speech, witnesses reported criminal conduct, unlawful and inappropriate conduct, including breaches of relevant workplace relations and work health and safety legislation, and a disregard for Commonwealth and state revenue statutes. In response, the Howard government established the Australian Building and Construction Commission in 2005. I want to recognise the great contribution to economic reform made then by the member for Menzies, now the Minister for Social Services, through the creation of the original ABCC.

As a former chief executive of the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, I know both the damage that rogue unions were causing in the pre-ABCC era and the fine results that the ABCC produced in its years of existence. For example, a 2013 Independent Economics report on the state of the sector during this period found that building and construction industry productivity grew by more than nine per cent, consumers were better off by around $7.5 billion annually and fewer working days were lost through industrial action.

Who on the Labor side actually abolished this key element of economic reform? It was none other than the Leader of the Opposition as the Minister for Workplace Relations in the former government. As many people have observed, he was less a minister for workplace relations and more a minister for unions. The now Leader of the Opposition gave in to union demands and abolished the ABCC in 2012 and replaced it with a regulator with significantly reduced funding and powers. As we know, this saw the bad old days return—wildcat stoppages, militant protests, demands from unions that their mates be employed on projects ahead of non-unionists and an increase in construction industry disputes to a seven-year high.

As the minister noted, one of the worst examples of this occurred late last year, merely weeks after the ABCC was abolished. There was violence on the streets of Melbourne, with militant union protestors intimidating the community. Their supporters attacked police horses. Images of these protests were seen on television screens around the world. This was a dreadful message to send around the world. Potential international investors recoiled in horror. Behind it all was one of the usual suspects. It was the CFMEU, the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union. With the ABCC gone, its bullyboy tactics emerged straightaway—thank you very much, Leader of the Opposition. There were also violent disputes at the Little Creatures brewery site in Geelong and at City West Water in Werribee, and just two months ago we saw CFMEU officials threaten to stop work on a Lend Lease project in Adelaide if a union flag was not moved to a more prominent position.

As a fig leaf, the Gillard Labor government set up a severely curtailed version of the ABCC called the Fair Work Building Industry Inspectorate. As well as having its powers substantially curtailed, it faced significant reductions in funding and staffing of around 30 per cent. Again, this was all thanks to the now Leader of the Opposition.
Prior to the election, we committed to re-establishing the Australian Building and Construction Commission within 100 days of parliament first sitting. Our government was given a clear mandate by the Australian people to make this change. We also promised that a re-established Australian Building and Construction Commission would administer a code that will govern industrial relations arrangements for government funded projects. This step will ensure that taxpayers' dollars are used efficiently. We also promised we would work with the state governments to ensure consistency with guidelines introduced by those governments who saw the urgent need to set up their own schemes in response to the Gillard government's abolition of the ABCC. A new statutory code is being developed that is intended to commence at the same time as the re-established Australian Building and Construction Commission on 1 January 2014.

The position of Australian Building and Construction Commissioner will be supported by deputy commissioners. The agency will be properly funded to ensure it can do its work. The funding taken away by the Labor government, led by the current Leader of the Opposition, will be restored. In addition, higher penalties will be imposed for unlawful behaviour. They are justified in an industry that is so critical to Australia's economic performance. As the minister noted, building and construction organisations are well resourced, and some show a blatant disregard for court orders and shrug off fines as simply part of the cost of doing business. The legislation also reinstates civil remedy provisions in relation to coercion and discrimination and makes it clear that project agreements are unenforceable where the intention is to secure standard employment conditions relating to a particular site or sites covering employees from different enterprises. These types of project agreements inhibit genuine enterprise bargaining.

In conclusion, I note again that this is a major piece of economic reform. I strongly support this legislation and commend the Prime Minister and ministers for making it one of the earliest pieces of legislation on the agenda of the new government.

Ms CHESTERS (Bendigo) (19:05): I rise today to speak against the Building and Construction Industry (Improving Productivity) Bill 2013 and associated bill. This legislation will see the return of the draconian Australian Building and Construction Commission. The ABCC, as it is also commonly referred to, is based on flawed modelling which proposes powers that are extreme and unnecessary and which compromise civil liberties. The main point I wish to make today is a simple one—that the construction industry should be regulated by the same general laws that apply to everybody else in the federal system. A worker is a worker and should be treated the same regardless of where they work.

Let me expand. This bill seeks to re-establish the Australian Building and Construction Commission. It was created, as we have been told, in 2005 to investigate breaches of and to enforce federal industrial law. But all we hear from the government is that it is to investigate criminal activity. This is not the purpose of the industrial relations act.

If re-established, these coercive powers would be used to compel ordinary workers to attend secret meetings, deny them legal representation and threaten them with imprisonment just to get them to answer questions about industrial matters. These are people who have not committed a crime. They are simply being made to go to a meeting, possibly against their will. These powers are excessive, undemocratic and wrong. The coercive powers in this legislation are not applied to any other workers in the federal system. There is no good reason
why workers in the construction industry should be treated differently from those in other industries. As a fundamental principle—a fundamental matter of fairness—the starting point for us as law-makers is to make sure that every Australian employee and employer is subject to the same national industrial laws. Whether they are cleaners, work in construction or work here at Parliament House, all workers deserve a fair work system.

These coercive powers are used typically not in matters of industrial relations but in matters of national security, of fraud, of serious corruption or of public safety or in criminal matters, not in industrial matters. Why are we trying to apply to the industrial arena laws that are usually kept for the most grievous of situations in our community—for example, national security? It should also be kept in mind that these powers would be used to interrogate a person not under suspicion of a crime but who may simply be able to assist in an investigation: 'We are going to make you come and talk about what is going on in your workplace.' That is not how any country, let alone a democratic country, should treat its people and its workers. Coercive powers in the industrial arena contradict this value and are therefore undemocratic.

These powers should be kept out of the industrial arena to ensure that the exercise of industrial rights such as the right to associate, the right to organise and the right to take collective action is not tainted with the quasi-criminal overtones that are generally talked about when it comes to these matters. If these bills are approved, these forms of powers will continue to exist. For those who refuse to comply with them there will be a penalty of up to six months for refusing to go and talk about what is happening in your workplace. This directly contradicts another part of our democracy, the right to organise and the right to freedom of association. In this chamber we are creating a contradiction within our democratic society. If you are allowed to democratically organise and get together then you should not be compelled to attend the meetings that the proposed legislation sets out.

Another myth is that these new laws would tackle criminal behaviour. The government is arguing that there is a need to introduce these laws because of allegations of widespread violence and threats, criminal damage to property and so on and so forth. The original ABCC did not deal and has never dealt with criminal conduct. It was concerned purely and simply with industrial behaviour. Why? Because criminal conduct is not its responsibility. Industrial law deals with your rights at work; it talks about workplace organisation. Criminal law is a separate matter and is something that is quite often dealt with in our state jurisdictions. The labour movement—the Labor side of this chamber as well as the labour movement in the community—has always accepted that criminal matters must be dealt with under criminal law. Regardless of whether it is in a workplace, a home or the community, if we suspect that a crime has occurred it should be dealt with under crimes legislation. References to criminality in this debate serve only to distract and to suggest that a group of hardworking Australians need to be treated differently. The construction industry should be subject to the same laws as the rest of us.

The ABCC previously led to a rise in deaths and injuries in the workplace, yet those opposite do not wish to talk about that. During the period of the most aggressive activities by the ABCC, in the last years of the Howard government, workplace fatalities in the construction industry peaked at 48 deaths in 2006 and 51 deaths in 2007, making them the worst two years for construction deaths in a decade. Is that the purpose of reintroducing this
bill? What happens when you start to attack unions and workers' rights to organise? What happens when you turn the focus away from workplace safety to being about whether you are at a union meeting? Safety slips. We cannot afford for that to happen. Those are the facts. There was a peak in deaths during the period of the ABCC, so it has been shown not to deliver safe workplaces. By contrast, following the abolition of the ABCC in 2012, 30 deaths were reported, the lowest number in the past 10 years. Why was that? Because workers felt that they could organise again. They could speak up about safety issues.

Being able to organise in the workplace is a democratic right. It is a principle of freedom of association. I understand that the government has a problem with the concept of freedom of association, but we are a country that was founded on the right to organise. I mentioned in my maiden speech the Chewton monster meeting of 1851, in which 15,000 workers gathered in the small town of Chewton protesting over the mining licence. They came together, saying, 'We join here together in union.' This country was founded on that basic principle that we can stand together and organise and talk freely and openly without threat of being pulled into a secret meeting.

The ABCC breaches international human rights obligations. The Australian government, as much as it tries to pretend otherwise, is subject to international obligations which state that it must allow and encourage the freedom of association and the right to organise: the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention of 1947, the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention of 1949 and the Labour Inspection Convention of 1947.

We have longstanding traditions in this country. The reintroduction of the ABCC takes away those rights. We are simply saying that by reintroducing the ABCC, if this act is passed by parliament, workers in the construction industry will be treated differently. They will not have the same rights as the rest of us. That is the problem with these proposed laws. They fly in the face of the UN and its accepted principles around the world. They go against the grain of what this country was founded on, which is the right to organise, the right of freedom of association and the right to democracy.

This bill singles out workers and states that they will be treated differently from those in other industries. This bill is undemocratic; it strikes at the heart of our democracy. The existence of the ABCC during the Howard years was a shameful stain on Australia's proud reputation as a country that respects the rights of its unions and workers. The building and construction industry employs over a million hardworking men and women in Australia. They make a massive contribution to our economy, and they deserve to be treated in exactly the same way as the rest of us.

I will finish my contribution today by making a few comments about what this legislation means to Bendigo. The construction industry does not need extra red tape. The construction industry wants to be able to get on with the job. If there is a safety breach at a workplace, the workers there should be able to gather without the threat of the powers in this legislation being called on. How we save people's lives is by making sure that we have workers who are willing to stand up and speak on their safety issues. In Bendigo, this legislation is more red tape being introduced by a government that is ideologically driven. It is more red tape designed to stop workers from being able to gather—and for what purpose? As I stated
earlier, these proposed laws seek to reintroduce coercive powers, and these powers seek to treat workers in this industry differently.

We have also heard from the government that this legislation is necessary because of criminal behaviour in the construction industry. Again, if there is criminal behaviour it should be investigated under the Crimes Act, not under the industrial relations act. They are two separate things. Talking about criminality serves one purpose, and that is to demonise an entire workforce. We have always agreed that if it is a criminal matter, whether it be in the workplace, whether it be in the home or whether it be in the community, it should be investigated under the appropriate section of the act. By creating the ABCC, we are confusing that issue. One part of the ABCC which talks about industrial law contradicts another law, and that is the right and the opportunity to organise collectively.

So, please, when considering this bill, remember the precedent that we are reintroducing. We are reintroducing an undemocratic system. We are reintroducing a situation that says to a group of workers, 'You are different.' This is not the kind of country, it is not the kind of Australia, that we were founded on. It is not the kind of country or the kinds of workplaces that we want to have in the future.

Mr FLETCHER (Bradfield—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Communications) (19:17): I am very pleased to rise to speak on the Building and Construction Industry (Improving Productivity) Bill 2013. This is an important step to address the growing culture of disrespect for the rule of law on building sites around Australia and, in turn, to improve productivity in the vital construction sector. This bill will achieve that objective by doing several important things: firstly, by re-establishing the Australian Building and Construction Commission to enforce the rule of law applying in this sector; secondly, by prohibiting unlawful industrial action, unlawful picketing, coercion and discrimination and by delivering significant penalties for breaches of the law; and, thirdly, by providing a wide range of remedies, including injunctions, to the Australian Building and Construction Commission and persons affected by unlawful behaviour.

In the time available to me this evening, I want to make three points: firstly, that productivity in the building and construction industry has been very poor, largely thanks to the conduct of unions in the sector and particularly the CFMEU; secondly, that the Australian Building and Construction Commission addressed in a very successful and effective way the problem of poor productivity in the building and construction sector during the Howard government years; and, thirdly, that with this legislation, should it pass into law, we will again see an improvement in productivity in this vital sector of our economy.

Let me turn first to the proposition that we have seen a reduction in productivity, a reduction in performance in the construction sector, thanks to a wide-ranging disregard for the rule of law by building sector unions over the years of the Rudd-Gillard-Rudd governments and particularly following Labor's Fair Work (Building Industry) Act 2012, which led to a sharp decline in standards of behaviour in this vital sector. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that we have seen a return to the bad old days of lawlessness in this sector. We have again seen aggressive and militant union behaviour becoming commonplace. We have seen site shutdowns, we have seen strike action and we have seen other industrial action occurring regularly.
Indeed, we saw a strikingly large number of high-profile, large-scale industry disputes under the Rudd-Gillard-Rudd governments—for example, at the sites at which Lend Lease, the big building company, was operating in the ACT, New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria in July 2012. We saw the notorious disputes at Grocon sites, mainly in Victoria, in August and September of 2012. We saw the episode at the Queensland Children’s Hospital between August and October 2012. In Victoria, in October and November 2012, we saw industrial disputation at the Little Creatures brewery. In February of this year at the Werribee water treatment plant, again we saw egregious examples of union conduct, particularly by the CFMEU, showing a flagrant disregard for the rule of law.

I was pleased earlier this year to be appointed to chair a coalition working group on re-establishing the Australian Building and Construction Commission. Together with parliamentary colleagues, in the month of August, I met with many participants in the building industry, and we learnt about the violence and the intimidation which, I am sorry to say, has accompanied industrial action by the CFMEU at many construction sites—for example, at the Myer Emporium site in Melbourne, where CFMEU officials engaged in extensive intimidation directed at Grocon workers who wanted to go to work on the site.

We heard instances of the unions insisting on construction companies paying for union delegates to work on the site and spend their time entirely on union business, not on the business of getting the building built. We heard shocking examples of union militancy, including one example where the unions commenced a shutdown halfway through a concrete pour, which meant that the concrete subsequently had to be jackhammered out at a cost of several hundred thousand dollars and many days of lost time.

Indeed, this consultation process was a thoroughly eye-opening experience in learning that during the Rudd-Gillard-Rudd years the construction sector unions had been engaged in 1970s style militancy and disruption. We also heard alarming evidence of increasing degrees of corruption and criminality. We heard that it is not uncommon for union officials to openly ask contractors and subcontractors for money. That will be justified or described in many different ways, but that appears to be a pattern.

We heard anecdotes that subcontractors will not be retained by head contractors unless they are on a CFMEU approved list. In other words, if you are a subcontractor wanting to go about business in the building and construction sector—the way things have been operating under the Rudd-Gillard-Rudd government—and you are black-listed by the union, no head contractor will be prepared to engage you to work on a site.

We heard troubling stories, troubling anecdotes and troubling reports of criminality, drug dealing and other things on building sites. We also heard numerous reports, and this is a matter of historical record, of the CFMEU routinely disregarding court orders and routinely failing or delaying in the payment of fines which had been imposed on it by the courts.

It is troubling indeed that, in the building and construction sector, unions exercise considerable control over matters which would typically be the exclusive responsibility of the management of a business. For example, they routinely dictate to contractors who they must employ as occupational health and safety representatives on a site. We heard numerous examples of uneconomic and unreasonable terms being included in enterprise-bargaining agreements at the insistence of the CFMEU or other unions.
Such lawlessness has profound economic and social consequences. It results in lost productivity and in construction costs being higher than they ought to be. Indeed, an independent report prepared for the Master Builders Association estimated that, if things did not change, 75 per cent of the productivity gains that had been achieved during the Howard years thanks to the Australian Building and Construction Commission were at risk of being lost.

That leads me to the second point I want to make, which is that the record of improvement in productivity, of improvement in performance, in the building sector during the Howard government years under the Australian Building and Construction Commission is an impressive record. The evidence speaks for itself. During the period that the Australian Building and Construction Commission was in existence, before it was white-anted by the Rudd-Gillard-Rudd government, there was substantial evidence of improved productivity. According to one study, building and construction industry productivity was boosted by 9.4 per cent. In the 10 years leading up to 2012, which was the last year that the ABCC in its old form existed, multifactor productivity in the construction industry increased by 16.8 per cent. Indeed, the construction industry was one of only three industries that experienced increased labour and multifactor productivity growth in the 2000s when compared to the 1990s.

Another very telling piece of evidence is that in the ABCC years the number of days lost due to industrial disputation fell very sharply. Between 1995-96 and 2000-01, that is to say before the ABCC, the days lost to industrial action in the building and construction industry averaged 159,000 per year. Once the ABCC arrived, that rate dropped sharply. By 2007-08, it was down to a mere 8,000 days a year. So it was 159,000 days pre ABCC and a mere 8,000 working days lost due to industrial disputation in 2007-08, post ABCC. That reflects, amongst other things, the clear and demonstrated preparedness on the part of the ABCC to pursue unlawful conduct and to do it without fear or favour. It pursued unlawful conduct on the part of unions and on the part of building companies equally—and indeed on the part of any other industry participant.

The ABCC built a reputation as a tough, strong, determined regulator. Let me give you one instance which was repeatedly pointed out to me and my colleagues during our consultation process. When the ABCC was notified of a dispute, its inspectors would frequently or typically arrive on the building site within an hour of being notified. This was a proactive and effective regulator. But once it finally ceased operation in 2012, after the sustained period of white-anting under the Rudd-Gillard-Rudd government reached its peak, you saw a very rapid turnaround. Between 2011-12 and 2012-13, just in that one year, working days lost rose from 24,000 to an estimated 89,000, an astonishing jump in just one year. Over half of the gains achieved by the ABCC in working days lost turned to dust and ashes once the ABCC was gutted by Labor.

The final point I want to make is that the legislation before the House this evening, if passed into law, will once again improve productivity in the vital building and construction sector. We have been in the dark ages under the Labor government, but with this bill we will come into the light, into a new era of productivity and efficiency.

This coalition government is committed to ensuring that the rule of law is maintained in the building and construction sector and that workers are able to go to work free of the kind of base intimidation and harassment which has regrettably been a feature of the modus operandi
of the CFMEU over the past few years—a modus operandi which it has been allowed to proceed with without interference, unrestrained by government or its agents. It is no wonder that confidence in the building and construction sector dropped very sharply. But this bill, if it passes into law, will restore order, will restore confidence and will ensure that the rule of law is enforced, and its building-industry-specific provisions, including much tougher penalties for breaches of industrial law, will maintain order. And, in turn, this legislation will again encourage productivity and again encourage the pursuit of high levels of employment in the sector.

The bill makes it clear that there are significant penalties for taking unlawful industrial action or for engaging in or organising an unlawful picket, and this is an important and necessary step in view of the kind of conduct we have regrettably seen on building sites all around the country over the past few years.

The bill also gives the Australian Building and Construction Commission the power to be effective in investigating and in enforcing the law. The bill will give the ABCC the power to compel witnesses to provide evidence in relation to suspected contraventions of workplace relations law. Now, we have seen some ill-informed criticisms of this measure from the other side of the House, but I make the point that these powers are quite consistent with those granted to other regulators such as the ACCC, ASIC, the Australian Taxation Office and Medicare, and these powers are necessary given the culture of silence, based on fear and intimidation, which has prevailed on building sites. Employees on building sites have been simply too frightened to speak. They have been subjected to a culture which very strongly discourages them from saying to the regulator what has actually happened. That is why this particular power is necessary and that is why it is included in this bill.

I conclude by saying that the measures in the bill before the House this evening are of the first importance. Should this bill pass into law, these provisions will encourage productivity and employment growth in the building and construction sector. This is something that the coalition can do. It is something that the previous Rudd-Gillard-Rudd Labor government could not do because it owed the CFMEU far too much. But we are ready to do so and we are prepared to do so, and we are acting in the national interest.

Mr HAYES (Fowler—Chief Opposition Whip) (19:32): Not surprisingly, I rise to oppose the Building and Construction Industry (Improving Productivity) Bill 2013 and the Building and Construction Industry (Consequential and Transitional Provisions) Bill 2013. I should make the disclosure at this point that, when I was about 21, I think, I was first engaged to work for a trade union and, for the next 25 years, I worked to represent the interests of working men and women. I started off looking after people who worked for the water board—salaried officers. I then moved to the Australian Workers Union and looked after shearsers and miners, and, as most people who are more aware of my immediate past know, I looked after police officers. So I say to those on the other side: don't give me a lecture about law and order and tell me that that is what this legislation is about.

These bills, quite frankly, masquerade as an attempt to improve productivity, but we know why they are before us. In the lead-up to the last election, those on the other side pledged not to reintroduce Work Choices, not because they did not believe in it but because they knew the political reality—that the last time they tinkered with Work Choices it caused them to lose government, in 2007. That is what this is about, trying to reinstitute and bring back those
things by picking on one area of industry, thinking that this would just meet with the view, 'Well, it's only one union, the CFMEU; it's okay to look at them;' because they are big, tough fellows out there working in the construction industry. They think, 'We'll give you a pile of statistics to say why the area is less efficient.' But I have not heard one single element about some of the employers that operate in that industry, and I might talk a little bit about that as I go on.

I would have thought that some of the people who actually donated to the Liberal Party, people from Leighton, would be involved in some aspect of this debate. I would have thought that, in terms of doing damage to the national psyche and doing damage to industrial relations, people going out to bribe contractors, with a view to winning contracts, would require the attention of this parliament. Apparently not. They are going to talk about the workers on industrial sites, the riggers, the electricians, the carpenters and people like my sons. Both of them are construction workers. We are getting lectures about how these people operate on their sites, but as far as I know I have instilled values in my sons of fairness and decency, and I take umbrage at the fact that, simply because they are construction workers, those opposite are giving them less of a standard of decency than anybody else.

As for coming along and making the argument, 'We want a strong cop on the beat,' well, if you were going in that direction, I would actually support that. If we are talking about criminality, why aren't the police involved? Why are we going to give such powers to this construction industry body? The only powers you can equate with these would be those exercised by the Australian Crime Commission—coercive powers, where they can force witnesses to answer, and if you do not answer the questions you are then incarcerated. That is what we are talking about. By the way—and I cannot speak for my colleagues—I was one of those that supported those coercive powers for the Australian Crime Commission, because it was fighting serious and organised crime. That is not what you use for a construction site. But that is what those opposite want to do.

This is a diversion. This is how they are going to suck up to those people who contribute to Liberal Party fundraising, to show how they are tough against unions without using Work Choices. That is what this is about—nothing more, nothing less.

As I said, I have two boys who work in this industry. People can talk about the construction industry, but I have been through one of my sons working on a construction site in Western Australia when the fellow he was working with died. He was crushed to death. It is okay to point out that accidents happen, but it would have been nice to know that there were a few other people on that site, even a union safety inspector—someone else out there also having a look. This bill is designed to put a line through all that. I do not mind having a union official who is tough when it comes to safety. I do not mind somebody stopping a job to protect someone's welfare—in this case, it may have saved someone's life—because I know how much this impacted on my boy.

The bill is going to put fines for unlawful actions of $34,000 on individuals and $170,000 on organisations, and the ability to take criminal action. It sounds really tough, except that when you look at the previous incarnation of the Building Industry Construction Commission and where it came from—which was the Cole royal commission, conducted to the tune of $70 million—you realise that not one criminal charge emanated from it. It was okay to have the 'wheat for weapons' scandal going on, everything else going on, but the Cole royal
commission looked at the construction industry for $70 million. I do not accept the argument that there has been an improvement in productivity. I do accept that wages have been suppressed. I do accept that safety has been jeopardised. I do accept that union officials have been kept off site. If that is what the productivity argument is, I will have to accept that it achieved what it was designed to do.

I would have thought that we support fairness in this country, that we support decency, regardless of what side of the House we stand on. The other thing I think we should all stand for in this place is supporting the rule of law, where everyone is treated equally before the law. That is not the case when it comes to the building and construction industry, apparently. As I said at the outset, I am more than happy to have a strong cop on the beat. I know after talking to the Police Federation of Australia and to each of the state branches of the police association that they would be happy to have police called upon to investigate areas of illegality occurring on building sites. They have not been. They will do their jobs, they will investigate criminal activity, they will arrest and prosecute people, but they are not being called upon to do anything here because no-one is making the allegation of criminality. Why is it that they have not called the police to engage in that? And do not give us the line of the code of silence, that no-one talks. That is ridiculous. The police are out there doing things day in and day out, fighting a battle with outlawed motorcycle gangs, dealing with the legacy of silence they put over that, but we are going to treat this differently. There has to be another motive in it. This is more political than not.

It was not that long ago that I was standing in this place when former Prime Minister John Howard brought in Work Choices. I remember it because one of the disputes I raised was called the Esselte dispute. A company in Minto had a young literacy challenged bloke called Warren Small working for them—he still is, as far as I know. Warren came to me because they wanted him to sign an individual contract and he said, 'I don't know what's in it.' This led to a 36-day strike. I really felt for these people because they were very low income workers on minimum rates of pay, and they stood up. I drove past that community for 36 days. I took them meat pies in the morning. I supported their stoppage. When I got a chance to talk to one of their directors, a quite prominent person who was involved in other boards, not just this company, I asked him, 'Why the hell are you guys doing this?' I still remember to this day that the view was: 'We don't make the laws. If you fellas in parliament decide that we can put people on wages lower than the award, why shouldn't we?' So they abrogated their responsibility by simply saying, 'The law allows us to do this and we don't feel any regret by doing it.' These workers were on minimum rates of pay, being squashed like that, with no negotiating ability and no industrial clout, and that is what they got.

We are talking about the building and construction industry, but don't for a minute think that we are only talking about the high-rise sites. Do not for a minute think that it is only fully organised sites, where organisers get out and knock on employers' doors wanting to negotiate. We are also talking about those many other areas of the industry where workers have little bargaining power. Most workers in this industry are price takers, whether they be apprentices or semiskilled workers. They have been offered a job and they take it at a particular price. They do not have the ability to negotiate individually with an employer.

If we are going to simply have laws that make it difficult for unions to do what they do, to represent workers honestly and decently, we need to have a good close look at ourselves...
because in this parliament we are not much different from union officials—except that we are not representing someone in the CFMEU or someone in the Police Federation or organisations like that; we are representing the community. If we are going to say that anyone who is of a particular class—in this case, a building worker—is going to get treated differently, how can we stand here and say that we genuinely, without fear or favour, represent members of our own communities?

I think a lot of this has to be put into perspective. These bills have only been pushed forward and are only being debated tonight to ensure that this government looks tough when it comes to industrial relations—because they cannot do what they really want to do. They really want to re-introduce Work Choices and to make it possible, once more, to frustrate normal industrial relations processes and to give the whip hand to employers. If they are saying there might be corrupt union officials out there, they should not come in here and assert that there are no corrupt employers. Not long ago, we looked at construction companies running freely around out there with their chequebooks. If those companies are prepared to buy contracts and influence contractual negotiations with a chequebook, what might they be doing with union officials? If there are union officials on the take, I imagine that it is those companies that are paying them. So those opposite should not come in here and tell us that this is a one-sided thing and that this is what we have to do to stop these officials from the Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union.

I know only a few people in the CFMEU, but I certainly know Brian and Brad Parker from New South Wales. They are good friends of mine, as is their mother. I would not say for a minute that they are not tough people, but they do put in huge efforts to look after workers in their industry. If that is what we expect of union officials—to look after workers in their industry—and if what we expect of members of this parliament is to look after people in their communities, then let us not start treating people differently. Let us not say, ‘Just because you happen to work in building construction, you are going to be treated differently.’ If we say, ‘We are going to treat you no differently than a serious and organised criminal,’ I think that will put us in jeopardy of transgressing a number of international human rights conventions we are signatories to. There has to be some balance in this argument and there has to be some transparency from those putting forward this argument.

Ms GAMBARO (Brisbane) (19:47): I support the Building and Construction Industry (Improving Productivity) Bill 2013, which will deliver enormous benefits to the 3,066 construction businesses based in my electorate of Brisbane. The main object of the bill is to provide an improved workplace relations framework for building and construction work to ensure that it is carried out fairly, efficiently and productively for the benefit of building industry participants and for the benefit of the Australian economy as a whole. The bill aims to improve the bargaining framework so as to further encourage genuine bargaining at the workplace level. Enterprise bargaining negotiations must be harmonious, sensible and productive and should be tailored to the particular workplace.

The bill upholds and promotes respect for the rule of law and ensures respect for the rights of all building industry participants. To that end, the bill contains provisions to ensure that unlawful actions, including unlawful industrial action and unlawful pickets, are dealt with appropriately. The bill also gives the courts the power to impose significant penalties on individuals and organisations that participate in unlawful actions.
The bill provides effective means for investigating and enforcing the law. The Australian Building and Construction Commission, the ABCC, will be able to exercise their power to obtain information quickly and effectively without being hindered by unnecessary bureaucratic red tape around the issue of examination notices. However, to ensure accountability and transparency, the use of these powers will continue to be reviewed and reported on by the Commonwealth Ombudsman.

Most importantly, the bill encourages productivity and the pursuit of high levels of employment in the building and construction industry. It will ensure that the government's policy to deliver the infrastructure of the 21st century is delivered on time and on budget. The bill will create jobs and investment by ensuring employers and employees in the industry can get on with the job without fear of intimidation.

The construction industry provides many jobs for workers in small businesses, large enterprises and contracting firms. In my state of Queensland, approximately 240,800 individuals are employed in the construction industry. It is critical to the productivity, prosperity and international competitiveness of Australia. The coalition government recognises the importance of an industry that is vital to job creation and essential to Australia's economic and social wellbeing. This is something that is understood by many people—not, sadly, by the Labor Party—in the construction and business sector, including bodies such as the Chamber of Commerce and Industry Queensland, the CCIQ, in my electorate of Brisbane. The CCIQ strongly supports the re-establishment of the ABCC and its full suite of powers. They were one of the many voices in industry who were opposed to its abolition by the former government.

More specifically, in relation to the government's bill, the CCIQ said:

We believe that it is primarily a productivity enhancing measure that will provide certainty to businesses that their livelihood will not depend on the arbitrary actions of rogue union officials. The re-establishment of the ABCC is a reflection of the realities of the building and construction industry, and the capacity of projects to be held to ransom by union groups seeking that their unreasonable demands be met. The building and construction industry represents around eight per cent of GDP, and re-establishing the ABCC to watch over the industry is an important step in increasing productivity and boosting long term confidence and investment in infrastructure projects.

Small and medium businesses are particularly vulnerable to the effects of industrial action and industrial activity in the workplace—they often do not have the time or the resources that large companies have to devote to expenditure on the legal battles that these situations often necessitate.

While much of the industrial action that occurs on building sites is unlawful, by the time it is brought to a halt, businesses have sustained significant economic harm because the workplace has come to a standstill.

The Fair Work Building Industry Inspectorate did not provide businesses with certainty that unlawful industrial action would be dealt with firmly and decisively, because it inherently lacked the powers to do so.

That was a very deliberate aspect of its establishment. The CCIQ goes on:

The fact that it was established within the architecture of the Fair Work system, rather than as an independent regulator, is highly problematic, given the perception among many employers that the system is designed to assist employees, rather than employers.

By contrast, the ABCC will be an independent industrial regulator which has already demonstrated its capacity to be the 'tough cop on the beat' for the building and construction industry.
This voice of business and industry has provided an overwhelming endorsement of the government's actions in introducing this bill into the House.

In the government’s Policy to Improve the Fair Work Laws, the coalition has committed to re-establish the ABCC to once again ensure the rule of law and improve productivity on commercial building sites and construction projects, whether onshore or offshore. We took this commitment to the Australian people in the 2010 and 2013 federal elections as a key policy. So important did we see this commitment that we also committed to re-establish the ABCC within 100 days of the parliament first sitting. This government was given a clear mandate by the Australian people to make this change. The introduction of this bill into the parliament is proof of the coalition's commitment to delivering upon that promise and provides yet another example of what can be done when you have a government that is run by adults and is focused on governing as opposed to celebrity campaigning.

Australian workplaces can no longer be lawless regimes dominated by standover merchants and thuggery. For many years, the building and construction sector provided the worst examples of industrial relations lawlessness. The workplace relations minister in the Howard government, the Hon. Tony Abbott, was prepared to tackle this longstanding bad behaviour and in 2001 established the Royal Commission into the Building and Construction Industry. It says a lot that it required all the power of a royal commission to break through the wall of silence and intimidation that had so dominated the building and construction industry for so many decades.

The final report of the royal commission provided compelling evidence of the need for reform in this industry. It found consistent evidence that building sites and construction projects in Australia were hotbeds of intimidation, lawlessness, thuggery and violence. Projects were delayed, costs blew out and investment in our economy and infrastructure was being jeopardised. Central to the royal commission's findings was industry lawlessness, and it appears from all of the opposition to this bill coming from the other side of the chamber that the Labor Party is suffering from collective amnesia on these findings. Just to correct any memory lapses those opposite may be having, let me remind them that the royal commission concluded that the standards of commercial and industrial conduct exhibited in the building and construction industry represented a significant departure from that in the rest of the Australian economy. Witnesses reported criminal, unlawful and inappropriate conduct, including breaches of the relevant workplace relations and work health and safety legislation, and a disregard for Commonwealth and state revenue statutes. Inappropriate conduct was defined by the royal commission as ‘behaviour that infringes the Workplace Relations Act 1996, a person's right of choice or other conduct which departs from recognised norms of civility and behaviour.’

The royal commission's findings publicly established what everyone in the industry had known for many years but previous governments had been unwilling or too intimidated to tackle. The Howard coalition government was prepared to step in and make the tough decisions required to clean up this sector. The establishment of the ABCC in 2005 provided a genuinely strong watchdog, dissolving the 1970s-style practices that had long dominated this industry. It was a strong, specialist regulator that enforced the rule of law applying to the building and construction sector.
While the ABCC existed, the economic and industrial performance of the building and construction industry significantly improved. For example, a 2013 Independent Economics report on the state of the sector during this period found that building and construction industry productivity grew by more than nine per cent, consumers were better off by around $7.5 billion annually and fewer working days were lost through industrial disputation. In the manner of all Labor governments who take their orders from the unions, the former Labor government came under sustained pressure from building and construction unions to abolish the Australian Building and Construction Commission and the building code that supported its work. Even then, you have to wonder whether the Labor Party’s heart was really in it. This issue was such a burning bridge for them that the previous Labor government procrastinated for five years. Before then, the workplace relations minister, Bill Shorten, gave in to union demands and abolished the organisation in 2012, replacing it with a regulator with significantly reduced funding and powers. This saw the bad old days return, and they returned with vigour. There were wildcat stoppages, militant protests, demands from unions that their mates be employed on projects ahead of non-unionists, and an increase in construction industry disputes to a seven-year high.

What I find even more disturbing is the apparent continuation of the Labor Party’s collective amnesia in relation to the scenes we saw last year, merely weeks after the ABCC was abolished. There was violence in the streets of the city of Melbourne on the Grocon site, with militant union protesters intimidating the community, and their supporters attacking police horses. We had workers on the site purchasing an advertisement in the Herald Sun with an open letter to their own union bosses asking for the blockades to stop. Images of these protests were seen on television screens around the world. What message did it send to national and international companies that were thinking about investing in our building and construction projects in Melbourne or in Australia generally? Notably, not a single member from those opposite has been able to answer that question.

The Abbott government is committed to ensuring that the rule of law is maintained and that workers in the building and construction sector can go to work free from intimidation and harassment. As the Cole royal commission concluded a decade ago, the behaviour that we too regularly see in this industry marks it as singular. It is an industry in which conventional standards of commercial and industrial behaviour do not apply—like in the textiles, clothing and footwear sector, special circumstances require special laws.

We also promised that a re-established ABCC will administer a code that will govern industrial relations arrangements for government funded projects. This step will ensure that taxpayer dollars are used effectively. We promised we would work with state governments to ensure consistency with guidelines introduced by those governments who saw the urgent need to set up their own schemes in response to the Gillard government’s abolition of the ABCC. A new statutory code is being developed that is intended to commence at the same time as the re-establishment of the Australian Building and Construction Commission on 1 January 2014.

We have also had the CFMEU grossly bullying non-members by creating posters labelling them, amongst various other things, as scabs and advocating that they be run out of the industry, in open defiance of the Fair Work Act and Supreme Court orders to end the protests. We saw violent disputes at the Little Creatures brewery site in Geelong, where union picketers were accused in court documents of making throat-cutting gestures, threatening to
stomp heads in, telling workers who wanted to get on with the work that they were dead, and shoving, kicking and punching motor vehicles.

The coalition government believes that workers deserve to be able to go to work every day without fear of being harassed, intimidated or the subject of violence. Unlike the Labor Party and the unions, we do not believe that the employment relationship is one that must be based upon an ideological commitment to conflict. Rather, the coalition believes that the employment relationship should be defined by cooperation and mutual commitment to the achievement of prosperity and productivity. The former Labor government undermined confidence in the building and construction industry. Abolishing the ABCC has seen a return to lawlessness and an increase in the number of days where work is simply not being done in the industry. Australia cannot afford to have a building and construction industry which is inefficient and unstable, and the restoration of the ABCC and this code that supports the work is critical reform for Australia. The content of this bill reflects this commitment, and I commend the bill to the House. (Time expired)

Mr LAURIE FERGUSON (Werriwa) (20:03): I wish to speak on the Building and Construction Industry (Improving Productivity) Bill, although I believe it is a misnomer to include 'improving productivity' within the title. At the outset, I want to deal with a comment made by the previous speaker and, coincidentally, by her cross-town colleague, the member for Fisher. Those comments imply that Labor's abolition of this body was in some manner related to the current Leader of the Opposition's role in that portfolio and that we showed no haste in abolishing the ABCC. As anyone who has followed Australian politics would know, there were grave difficulties in getting that matter through the Senate, and there was a lot of significant negotiations over a long period of time to get to the abolition. To imply that we were in some way tardy, that we were not determined, or that we were somehow manipulated by the unions when a new person became minister, is rather crass.

The opposition would absolutely repudiate the line of argument that some balance is being brought back into industrial relations through this measure. It is, indeed, undemocratic. It is, indeed, unnecessary. It was interesting to note that the member for Fisher quoted Justice Wilcox very fondly in regard to one aspect of this debate. He failed to mention the demolition job that Justice Wilcox did on Econtech, which is the main company that those opposite have relied on for their analysis of productivity in this field. The member for Fisher very briefly commented on Justice Wilcox because he knows his comments formed a significant part of the justification for abolishing the ABCC.

There has been significant citation of the Cole royal commission, carried out by the former Prime Minister John Howard's close law school friend. But what has not been stressed about that report is that after the Australian people spent $70 million on that inquiry, after we heard the most extreme allegations, after it went through the process for a massive 1½ years, not one charge was laid. There was $70 million dollars spent, there was much publicity in the Murdoch press and much coverage of very extreme allegations, but there were no prosecutions. It is worthwhile noting, for all the rhetoric about criminalisation in this industry—the evil deeds that are going to be assailed—this is not the body that will be prosecuting people for those kinds of offences. That lies elsewhere.

This legislation will represent a major imbalance in the industry. I have not heard too much of a contribution from those opposite on a variety of characteristics of this industry. We know
that there has been a widespread occurrence—one might say there has been a fever—of phoenix companies. These are collapsing companies that are established in the names of Iraqi migrants with no assets whatsoever. Those companies are collapsed down and the workers are left without their wages and various other rights. That is a very strong characteristic of the industry. I have not seen too much concentration, when we are analysing the industry, from those opposite about the persistence of sham contracts throughout the industry. I have not heard too much lingering comment about Leightons and companies in this industry being accused of bribing others. I have not heard too many references to black lists operating in the industry, where workers who are regarded as militant—of standing up for their fellow workers' rights—are black listed and are unable to get jobs. This bill represents a major attack on workers' rights in this country. The member for Riverina says: 'Well, it's just common sense. It's all right to abolish people's rights because it's common sense.' Well, we know how wide that argument goes: we have seen now that we can't tell the Australian people what is happening in immigration because of national security reasons. And here we have a justification even lower down the order—that it is common sense to just smash human rights.

If passed, this bill will mean that there will be restrictions on freedom to gather. There will be self-incrimination. There will be a reverse onus of proof. There will be no presumption of innocence; and, importantly, there will be intervention by this government, from whom, in these first few weeks of parliament, I have heard so many speeches about red tape, about small government, about getting the government out of the way, and about getting the government out of interference with industry and its needs. We are now going to have the government coming in, and not only introducing measures of tax and human rights here but also reversing negotiated outcomes—supposedly because they are going to get a few companies coming along and complaining, 'We're intimidated,' so they want to renege on the negotiations. Those opposite are saying, 'Let's reverse that.' This is a government which is characterised by its claims to be standing up for small government, to be standing for less red tape and for less restriction of people's rights et cetera, but this is a government which is monstrously attacking a group of people because they stand up for their rights in this country.

We have in this bill the extreme measure of imprisonment for non-cooperation with this regulatory body. Yet those opposite have not actually produced any statistical measure—except from Econtech—of any merit in this approach. In bringing forward this legislation the government is driven by ideology. The legislation is, as one member said—and it is surprising, isn't it?—supported by the Master Builders Association and by the Property Council of Australia—as though that means anything but an attempt by this government to strengthen employer rights against workers in this industry.

It should be no surprise to the Australian people that those opposite would attempt again to minimise the rights of people to organise and to bargain for themselves. Despite all the rhetoric about boat people, and about how strong those opposite are on protecting the position of the workers of this country, we saw the coalition stand up here and oppose Labor attempts to toughen up the rules on 457 visas. The previous government was enshrining the required content of existing sponsorship obligations—basically doing a bit of labour market testing, and preventing the transfer charge or recovery of certain costs from sponsored visa holders, and measures relating to enforceable undertakings, et cetera. These were measures by which the previous government was trying to do something to protect Australian workers from the
manipulation of 457 visas, which was undermining the conditions for workers in this country. This new justification—of supposedly attacking violence and intimidation in industry—is just another attempt by those opposite to minimise workers' rights, as they did when opposing 457 visa changes.

I know of the interesting example of the current Minister for Immigration and Border Protection—in front of a very select audience mind you; not in front of the Australian people—going to a gathering in my electorate and telling the assembled people that any attempt to restrict 457 visa fraud was racist, and that it was an attack on Indians. The people at that gathering had had a significant number of people quite rightly come through skilled migration, and the minister goes out there and says, 'This is racist.' That is what we saw from those opposite on 457 visas.

We also saw, in relation to international students, that the conditions of workers in this country were undermined by fraudulent colleges in the private sector, by inappropriate manipulations of contracts for these kinds of workers, and by people working far in excess of the allowable 20 hours. Once again, those opposite were out there trying to undermine Australian conditions.

This bill before the House today has very little to do with unsubstantiated allegations of widespread intimidation in the industry, and a lot more to do with the question of workers' rights. If we are talking about individuals, we should mention that there was a prosecution against 116 construction workers in Western Australia—a prosecution not of the unions, not of the Reynolds of this world, not of the CFMEU leadership of Victoria, but of 116 individuals, who were up for a fine in excess of $1 million.

The ABCC was set up in 2005 and it cost the Australian people $250 million. There was no evidence at the end of that process to show the Australian people any tangible outcomes except for the harassment of individuals, the diminution of people's right to organise and assemble freely, self-incrimination and other measures. If those opposite start talking about having a mandate, quite frankly, both sides of politics know that this was not a substantial issue at the last federal election. There might have been divisions in the Labor Party over the previous period. There might have been the question of climate change and how we reacted to that, but I do not remember too many people in my electorate—including Liberal Party friends of mine—telling me that the ABCC was a central issue. The coalition have actually gone beyond the previous legislation with the coverage of this bill. Even if—it is a most remote possibility—the government could come up with some kind of claim for a mandate, the fact is that they, by going to offshore processing and to the delivery of goods and other aspects, this bill is dealing with things that are way beyond the previous legislation. I am pleased to be here with the opposition, opposing this measure. This bill represents a severe attack on the individual and a severe undermining of people's rights to bargain for themselves and to have some rights in society and in their workplace. This bill represents a one-sided analysis of industrial relations.

Mr HARTSUYKER (Cowper—Deputy Leader of the House, Assistant Minister for Employment) (20:13): I welcome the opportunity to speak on the Building and Construction Industry (Improving Productivity) Bill 2013 and the related bill. Before I commence my contribution, I would like to reflect on the words of the previous member. He talked about sham contracting and phoenixing, and so on and so forth. Those activities are currently
illegal, and the Fair Work Ombudsman can investigate them and prosecute—so the member's argument falls flat. Also, members opposite seem transfixed by the idea that this legislation is absolutely and solely focused on the activities of unions. This legislation is more than that; it is about achieving proper conduct on building sites, whether that conduct is by unions or by employers—both sides of this contract, if you like, are covered by this legislation. This legislation will impact on improper conduct by employers. I would also like to say that the member opposite was casting reflections on the independence of Econtech. I would like to remind the member that the mining tax was modelled using Econtech; you should bear that in mind before casting aspersions on that particular company.

This bill is further evidence that the coalition government is getting on with the job of building a stronger economy so everyone can get ahead. We made a commitment to Australia that a coalition government would boost national productivity and competitiveness. To achieve this, the coalition will continue to work methodically and diligently to create an environment which will deliver strong economic growth and strong employment growth. It is strong employment growth that provides both social and economic benefits and that is why we are working to remove impediments to genuine employment growth. Productivity is the underlying driver of economic growth and higher standards of living. It is what underpins wealth creation and a better quality of life for all Australians. The past six years of deficit and decline have clearly highlighted that those opposite have little understanding of productivity. The coalition understands productivity. We know that it is fundamentally driven by the ingenuity of businesses and individuals operating in an efficient and competitive market environment. We understand that a core responsibility of government is to facilitate economic opportunities for the people it represents. We understand that governments can impede productivity growth by imposing inefficient and unnecessary taxes, burdensome regulation and ill-targeted spending programs.

Over the last six years, Labor was the roadblock to a more productive Australia. It shut the doors to business and investment, so much so that in August 2012 The Economist's Intelligence Unit ranked Australia 50th out of 51 countries for productivity growth, and No 51 on the list was, in fact, Botswana. Even though Labor spent the last six years talking about productivity and competition, they actually delivered 200,000 extra unemployed Australians—the highest level in almost 15 years. Those opposite spent the last six years talking about productivity and the House should note that in some areas they were productive. They were productive at reducing the real net wealth per person in this country; productive at delivering the five biggest deficits in our history; and productive at creating chaos, waste and mismanagement. They were very productive, indeed, but not the sort of productivity we should aspire to. Let us not forget that federal Labor introduced or amended more than 21,000 regulations during their time in office.

Unlike the previous Labor government, the coalition government has a genuine, achievable plan to improve Australia's productivity. The bill before the House is proof of the coalition's plan to boost productivity. The bill is part of that plan to make Australia more competitive in the global economy and lift our standard of living. As the Prime Minister declared on election night, Australia is back open for business. The construction industry provides many jobs for workers in small business, large enterprises and contractors. The industry is key to a productive, prosperous and internationally competitive Australia.
This bill re-establishes the Australian Building and Construction Commission. The commission is needed to maintain the rule of law, improve productivity on building sites and construction projects and provide workers with a fair, productive and effective workplace. ABCC will re-establish workplaces free from intimidation, where workers can turn up to work without fear of being harassed or subjected to violence. The ABCC was established by the Howard government in response to the recommendations of the Cole Royal Commission into the Building and Construction Industry. Some figures in the union movement have tried to portray the Cole royal commission as some sort of witch hunt, but a royal commission is as serious as it gets. The Cole royal commission was a detailed and methodical examination of the issues affecting the construction industry in Australia. The Cole royal commission found that there was an 'urgent need for structural and cultural reform' within the Australian construction industry. The commission recommended four key structural reforms, including the introduction of mechanisms to ensure that where disputes occur within the industry, such disputes are resolved in accordance with legislated or agreed dispute resolution mechanisms rather than by the application of industrial and commercial pressure.

The commission also recommended the establishment of a tough cop on the beat. Specifically, the commission recommended:

…an independent body, free of the pressures on the participants in the industry, which will ensure that participants comply with industrial, civil and criminal laws applicable to all Australians, and thus operating on building and construction sites, as well as industry specific laws applicable to this industry only.

The ABCC was that tough cop on the beat, and it worked. When the ABCC was patrolling the construction sector, industry productivity was up by 9.4 per cent; Australian consumers were better off by about $7.5 billion per year; and fewer days were lost to industrial action.

When the ABCC legislation was repealed by Labor in 2012, within weeks we saw violence in the streets of Melbourne with militant union protestors intimidating the community. This bill makes it clear that this sort of unlawful action will not be tolerated, which is in keeping with community expectations. The Australian community does not want a repeat of Melbourne, where we witnessed police horses being punched by lawless demonstrators. To make the Melbourne situation worse, the protestors were demonstrating in circumstances where the actual workers on site were happy with the employer and their conditions. So much so that they purchased an advertisement in the Herald Sun with an open letter to their own union bosses, asking for the blockades to stop. We had a situation where the workers were asking the union bosses to stop this unlawful activity—a clear demonstration of how out of step the union bosses were with their own members. The union bosses brought back the bad old days of union thuggery where intimidation and militant protests were the norm. I wish I could say that this was an isolated incident, but it is not. We have also seen the violent dispute in Geelong at the Little Creatures Brewery site. This type of violent event that we have seen is exactly the reason the commission needs to be re-established. And I think those opposite knew that when the unions were without that cop on the beat they would return to their bad old ways. I say this because, when those opposite were in government, for five years they put off the demands from unions to abolish the commission. When they finally made that decision it did not take long for wildcat stoppages, militant protests and bullying of non-union members to take place.
The Cole royal commission made a very reasonable statement about the Australian construction industry when it said, 'The rule of law must replace industrial might.' The foundation of our society is the rule of law. But since the ABCC was scrapped, the rule of law has been eroded within the construction industry. The former government replaced the ABCC with a toothless tiger. The current arrangements undermine the rule of law in the construction industry by removing the ability of the new Fair Work Building Industry Inspectorate to instigate proceedings in relation to a matter that had been settled by the parties. In effect, Labor has said to the unions that they can get away with anything, as long as the matter has been settled before the watchdog arrives on the scene. This approach is clearly at odds with the spirit and the detail of the recommendations of the Cole royal commission. This bill will establish the rule of law in the Australian construction industry, and the result will be improved productivity.

The new ABCC will have strong powers. It will have the power to compel witnesses to attend interviews and to produce documents. These powers are robust, but they are not unique to the ABCC. Other government agencies have similar powers, including the ACCC, APRA, ASIC and the Australian Taxation Office. The bill does contain appropriate and effective safeguards to ensure that due process and transparency in relation to the exercise of these powers are observed. These safeguards include ensuring the commissioner is able to separate the unlawful and organised picketing aimed at disrupting building and construction work from legitimate protests. Additionally the bill provides for compulsory interview processes to be monitored by the Commonwealth Ombudsman, requiring the commissioner to provide a report to the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman must review the exercise of powers in relation to examinations and report to the parliament about the examinations, including the results of the reviews conducted by the Ombudsman. This oversight is an important element to ensure the Australian public can have faith in the commission. It will ensure accountability and transparency. The government is committed to ensuring that workers in the building and construction sector can go to work free of intimidation and harassment.

The government will set the example. That is why the bill is retaining the role of the Federal Safety Commissioner and the Australian Government Building and Construction Industry WHS Accreditation Scheme. The Australian government is a significant funder of large building and construction projects nationally and we will lead the way on improving work, health and safety standards, and culture throughout the Australian building and construction industry.

We are a government focused on creating jobs. The changes in this bill encourage productivity and the pursuit of high levels of employment in the building and construction industry, an industry which is a major employer in Australia and thus essential to Australia's economic and social wellbeing. I ask those opposite to support our nation's economic and social wellbeing and to support a worker's right to go to work without fear of being harassed. Moreover, I ask those opposite to no longer be the roadblock to building a more productive Australian construction industry. Get out of the way and allow higher living standards and greater productivity for all Australians to prevail. I commend the bill to the House.

Ms HALL (Shortland—Opposition Whip) (20:25): I rise to oppose the Building and Construction Industry (Improving Productivity) Bill 2013 and to support the amendment that has been circulated. In doing so, I have to say that it does not surprise me that, in the third
week of this parliament, this is one of the first pieces of legislation that the ideologues on the
other side of this parliament have introduced. They have total disrespect and disregard for
workers in the building industry, and it is payback for the donors to the campaign that they
ran prior to September.

The Liberal government's reintroduction of the Australian Building and Construction
Commission is a return to failed antiworker laws of the Howard government. It is the
ideologues out to get the workers. It is not about having a good, strong economy and a sound
industry; it is about attacking those people that they think may disagree with them.

This legislation will result in a return to the coercive powers used to intimidate workers and
attack unions at the cost of workers' safety and legal entitlements. I see this as a piece of
legislation that will impact on work safety. The construction industry is one of the least safe
industries in Australia, with one of the highest casualty rates, one of the highest death rates, of
all industries. Through the intimidation of workers, which this bill will allow to happen, the
safety of workers in the industry will be jeopardised. These coercive powers allow the ABCC
secret police to hold secret meetings and to jail those who do not cooperate. Workers will
have no right to silence or to be represented by a lawyer of their choice. I do not think that is
good enough.

The previous legislation resulted in construction worker Ark Tribe being drawn into a two-
year investigation and trial because he refused to attend the ABCC secret interviews regarding
a workers safety meeting he attended on site. Once again those on the other side of the
parliament do not support worker safety. He and his family went through hell for nearly two
years not knowing if he was going to jail. The ABCC and the conservative government failed
in their attempts to make an example of him.

The Cole commission, ordered by the Howard government, spent millions in taxpayers'
money to stamp out criminal behaviour of construction unions, but no convictions were ever
recorded. It was a total waste of taxpayers' money. It was something that made the Howard
government feel good. The government is misleading the Australian community by
suggesting that the ABCC will stamp out criminal behaviours in the construction industry. It
is flawed on two levels. Firstly, the Prime Minister and the Minister for Employment both
know that the ABCC have no jurisdiction over criminal matters. The ABCC only has powers
to intervene on industrial issues. Secondly, no convictions have ever been recorded.

The ABCC is an ideological stance by the government to put the power in the boss's hands
so no worker feels able to refuse to work, even if they think the work site is unsafe, let alone
to stand up for their legal entitlements on wages and allowances. Once again, it is
jeopardising worker safety, something that we as a parliament should be ensuring is protected.

The ABCC is a body that attacks construction workers. Construction workers are not
asking for much. They are asking for the basic principle of one law for all workers. Construction
workers build our community and they work in a hard industry where their
safety is at high risk. These workers deserve the right to have strong industrial representation
through their union, something that those on the other side of this parliament do not support.

The legislation will result in discrimination against blue-collar workers in the construction
industry, and the Australian community should not tolerate it. We on this side of the House do
not support it. This legislation is yet another attempt by this government to divide and isolate
groups within our society. The old players are all back and ready for the next battle to weaken workers' voices and industrial rights.

John Lloyd, the previous ABC Commissioner, has been appointed as chairman of the inspectorate advisory board. Nigel Hadgkiss was the previous ABCC deputy commissioner and is now the head of the Fair Work Building Industry Inspectorate. Mr Hadgkiss has a history of bias against construction workers and their union, something that those on the other side of this House have little regard for. As long as they get the result that they want, it is not about fairness, it is not about protecting workers' rights and it is not about ensuring workers' safety. The writing is on the wall, and the class battle between capital and labour continues, with the cards tipped towards the employers through this legislation. The ideologues on the other side have won again.

How many construction workers have to lose their lives or be seriously injured because of poor work safety and the limitations placed on them to refuse work through this legislation? These laws have been condemned repeatedly by the International Labour Organization—on, I believe, eight occasions—because they aim to attack workers and weaken the power of unions to represent workers on site, taking away the voice of workers.

My question to the government is: what are you going to do for workers? You are taking away their rights; what are you giving them in return? We have heard a lot of rhetoric from those on the other side of the House, but as yet all I am hearing is that those working in the construction industry are going to be working in a less safe environment with fewer rights and less protection. How are you going to protect construction workers from criminal employers who withhold their wages and put their lives in danger through unsafe workplaces? Is that okay? Is it all right not to pay workers? Is it all right to ask construction workers to go into unsafe workplaces? We on this side of the House do not believe that is the case. But I would have to say that those opposite are demonstrating through this legislation that they believe that should be the norm.

The government does not care about construction workers. It is more focused on repaying those who contributed to its election fund and pursuing workers on behalf of big business, the same people who gave generously to it during the election campaign. The price of the debt is the destruction of the union movement by attacking the right of workers to be represented.

We on this side of the parliament do not believe that is good enough. We believe that workers have the right to be represented. We believe that employers have the right to be represented. We believe that a healthy work environment is one where both the worker and the employer are respected. This government is showing that it has total disregard for workers in the construction industry. Gina Rinehart, the Minister for Agriculture's No. 1 supporter, has made clear her disdain for the industrial laws in Australia that ensure workers receive decent entitlements and require employers to provide a safe workplace, something that we on this side of the House are totally committed to.

The silver lining is that the workers united will never be defeated. Workers over centuries have fought for their rights at work. You only have to think of the huge worker uprising against Work Choices in 2007. I might add that it was not only workers who were concerned by the unfair Work Choices legislation but all the parents and grandparents of people in the workforce. I do not know how many times I had grandparents coming up to me when I had one of my mobile offices, expressing their concern about the impact Work Choices would
have on their grandchildren's lives. This is the first step in the move back to that Work Choices legislation that we had in the past, which shows the focus of this government and its ideological hatred of workers and the union movement.

The union movement has been around a lot longer than Tony Abbott, Minister Abetz, Gina Rinehart and their other conservative conspirators who do not believe in workers' rights. This legislation is a return to discriminatory laws that attack the blue-collar workers who built this country. We would not be where we are today without workers in the construction industry. This is chapter 1 in the government's aim to turn back the clock to a Work Choices style industrial system.

The Prime Minister has misled the Australian people by saying that the government has learnt from the Howard government's industrial relations mistakes and the community's uprising against them. It is just more weasel words—saying things in such a way that you think people will not understand what you are doing and where you are coming from. It is not good enough, because the Australian people are fairly smart and they know this attack on workers in the construction industry is an attack on the union movement that this government has started already. It is something that in the long run the Australian voters will not stand for, because they believe in fairness. They believe in equity. They believe that workers have the right to a safe workplace. This legislation will lead to anything but a safe workplace and a good working environment.

The Prime Minister and his government are unable to ignore their strong anti-union and antiworker beliefs, which drive them and are their purpose in life. Workers deserve to be treated equally, and they have a right to refuse work if they believe it is unsafe or if they are not receiving their legal entitlements. It is a return to the days of the sham contract. Those on the other side of the parliament support that approach rather than workers. This legislation stops workers and their unions from standing up for workers' rights. However, this legislation will only cause a blister for workers and the unions in the long battle to protect their workers' entitlements. I say to the Prime Minister and those opposite: shame! You should be supporting workers. You should be encouraging strong workforces in strong workplaces rather than attacking one sector of the workforce.

Mrs Andrews (McPherson) (20:38): I rise in strong support of the Building and Construction Industry (Improving Productivity) Bill 2013, which restores the Australian Building and Construction Commission. The ABCC was a highly effective, independent watchdog, and its re-establishment will protect workers and constructors and improve productivity on building sites and construction projects. The ABCC was established by the Howard government in 2005 on the recommendations of the Cole royal commission into the building industry and was very foolishly abolished by the Gillard government last year. This legislation fulfils our election commitment to re-establish the ABCC. Specifically, this bill re-establishes the ABCC and prohibits unlawful industrial action, unlawful picketing and coercion and discrimination. It ensures that penalties are high enough to provide an effective deterrent to unlawful behaviour. It is well known that building and construction organisations are well resourced. They have in the past demonstrated a disregard for court orders and are dismissive of fines as simply being part of the cost of doing business.

As someone who worked as an industrial advocate before entering parliament, I know how very important it is that our workplaces are safe and that our industrial relations laws are
enforced. Sadly, that has not always been the case when it comes to the building and construction industry. The fact is that there was no good reason for abolishing the ABCC, which had been working so effectively to address the obvious problems identified by the Cole royal commission.

There is not enough time tonight to go into the litany of problems identified by the royal commission: fraud, corruption, collusion and anticompetitive behaviour, unlawful work practices, violence and inappropriate industrial practice. To say that this culture of lawlessness was a major burden on the building industry is an understatement. The ABCC was effective in removing the worst instances of lawlessness that were rampant in the industry. For example, in the 2010-11 financial year there were over 400 investigations conducted by the ABCC. Over 900 contraventions of Commonwealth workplace relations law were discovered, with $2.5 million worth of penalties being imposed by the courts and Fair Work Australia.

From its inception until the end of May 2011 the Australian Building and Construction Commission successfully prosecuted 74 cases and was unsuccessful in only eight cases. The number of investigations conducted over the last three years of the ABCC's operations had been increasing. Clearly, its work was not done. There was a strong argument for the ABCC to continue its work. The reality is that the ABCC was actually delivering some results.

Many of my colleagues tonight have already referred to the findings of the 2013 Independent Economics report on the state of the building and construction industry during the operation of the ABCC, which found that productivity grew by more than nine per cent, consumers were better off by around $7.5 billion annually and fewer working days were lost through industrial action. This is clear evidence that the ABCC was having a positive impact on the building and construction sector. What is Labor's instinctive reaction when something is working effectively? Better do something about it. In shutting down the ABCC it put at risk a significant part of the Australian economy.

Let us consider the consequences of Labor's abolition of the ABCC. Just weeks after the abolition we saw violence on the streets of Melbourne, with militant union protesters intimidating the community and their supporters attacking police horses. We had the incredible situation where workers on a site purchased an advertisement in the Herald Sun to plead with their own union bosses for the blockades to stop. We saw the CFMEU bullying nonmembers, labelling them scabs and calling for them to be run out of the industry. This action was in open defiance of the Fair Work Act and Supreme Court orders to end the protests. There was also terrible violence at the Little Creatures brewery in Geelong, where union picketers made throat-cutting gestures and threats to stomp heads in, and workers who wanted to get on with their work were told they were dead. There was physical violence—shoving, kicking and punching motor vehicles. At City West Water in Werribee the dispute was so terrible that workers had to be flown in by helicopter. In a shocking attempt at intimidation, workers were threatened with Colombian neckties. The term comes from the Colombian civil war in 1948 and apparently involves slashing a victim's throat horizontally and pulling their tongue out through the open wound. Seriously, this is the worst form of intimidatory action. It is just sheer thuggery. Most Australians would be absolutely appalled by such behaviour, but apparently the unions think it is their right to behave in this way. As soon as the ABCC was abolished, they thought they were back in business. Just this month,
we saw CFMEU officials threaten to stop work on a Lend Lease project in Adelaide if a union flag was not moved to a more prominent position.

Of course, Labor were warned in advance that their changes would cause chaos. Those warnings came not just from the coalition but from many others. The former ABC Commissioner, John Lloyd, said on the day that Labor's legislation was passed:

This move will prove harmful for the building and construction industry, and the Australian economy.

The rule of law is now compromised beyond repair. Construction industry sources complain that the building unions are boasting that they are 'back in control.' They show no fear of, nor regard for, the new Fair Work Building Industry Inspectorate.

The Housing Industry of Australia warned:

The abolition of the ABCC will promote building industry chaos.

The government states that it supports a strong cop on the beat, but these laws promote anything but that.

Australian Industry Group Chief Executive Innes Willox said at the time:

The abolition of the ABCC will increase the risk of unlawful industrial action and coercion on building sites. Those who comply with the law have nothing to fear from the ABCC and the existing legislation.

He went on to say:

The workplace relations reforms introduced as a result of the Cole Royal Commission have been very successful. The ABCC and the Building and Construction Industry Improvement Act were central planks of the reforms. Today, the industry is a much better place to work and invest than prior to the reforms and this has provided huge benefits to employers, employees and the community.

Mr Willox concluded:

However, damaging and unproductive industrial relations practices have been creeping back into the construction industry and a strong regulator needs to be maintained to ensure that industrial practices are lawful and appropriate.

Master Builders Australia said of Labor's legislation:

This means the unions will be able to pressure employers to settle matters, including issues of coercion, reinforcing the very behaviour the law is designed to combat. All of the evidence points to the continuing need for a strong cop on the beat. This Bill just does not deliver on that promise.

And not only did Labor ignore industry concerns; they actually sought to muzzle dissent.

The Senate committee inquiring into the abolition of the Office of the Australian Building and Construction Commissioner decided to deny former ABC Commissioner John Lloyd an opportunity to even give evidence. They obviously knew that expert advice would not help their cause for restoring union power. Of course, as well as abolishing the ABCC, Labor changed the IR laws governing the building and construction sector. They reduced penalties for breaching the Fair Work (Building Industry) Act from $22,000 to just $6,600 for individuals and from $110,000 to $33,000 for corporations. They narrowed the circumstances under which industrial action by building industry participants would be considered 'unprotected'. And they stopped the Fair Work Building Commission from prosecuting parties for breaches of the legislation where the other parties had settled or discontinued a matter. In short, they gave the unions what they wanted.
Much has been said in this place about the very close relationship between Labor and the unions. I will not go into those murky depths today, but suffice it to say that it is a dependency that does not necessarily deliver a good outcome for our country. It is worth noting that the CFMEU donated $1.7 million to the Australian Labor Party in 2010-11 alone. Of course, the overwhelming majority of members opposite hail from the ranks of the union movement. There is nothing wrong with that in itself; it is just not very representative of the Australian community and it does not result in good policy, as evidenced by Labor's decision to abolish the ABCC.

Australia cannot afford to have a building and construction industry that is inefficient and unstable. This bill encourages productivity and the pursuit of high levels of employment in the building and construction industry. It will ensure that the government's policy to deliver the infrastructure of the 21st century is delivered on time and on budget. It will create jobs and investment by ensuring that employers and workers in the industry can get on with the job without fear of intimidation. The restoration of the Australian Building and Construction Commission and the code that supports its work is a critical reform for Australia.

The building and construction sector has a long history of disputation, and I have spoken in this place on a number of occasions about the history of some of that disputation. I went through it in quite a lot of detail in a speech that I gave on 20 June 2011, where I talked about reviews in the late 1980s, over 20 years ago, when the full bench of the Australian Industrial Relations Commission conducted a review into the building and construction industry. It was not the first review that had been undertaken of that industry. So we have a very long history of reviews and inquiries into this sector, trying to make sure that this sector, which is so critical to the Australian economy, is productive and does what it needs to do for our economy. It is one of our most important sectors.

As we begin to kick-start this economy, we will be looking at the building and construction industry to kick in, to make sure that it provides more jobs and that momentum gathers through the total economy. We certainly need to re-establish the Australian Building and Construction Commission, and we need to do it as a priority. I strongly support this bill and commend it to the House.

Mr STEPHEN JONES (Throsby) (20:51): I am a union member. I am also a father. I have been a lawyer, a community worker, a bar attendant, a building worker and a teacher. I have done many, many jobs in my life before coming to this parliament, and I apologise for absolutely none of them.

The bill before the House, the Building and Construction Industry (Improving Productivity) Bill 2013, is everything about the union-bashing agenda of the Abbott government and those who follow in its train. Those opposite are absolutely obsessed with demonising unions, their leaders and the important work that they do on a daily basis in protecting ordinary working women and men.

I am an unapologetic defender of the special role that unions play in our society. There is no other organisation that has the reach, the resources, the capacity and the inclination to challenge tyranny in the way that Australian unions can and do—irrespective of who is in government. Unions are not without fault, but we are a more civilised country in Australia today because they exist.
If you want to talk about tyranny, with this legislation before the House today we can see that tyranny is being turned on its head. It is the tyranny of the government against the organisation of ordinary working Australian men and women that we should be fearful of. This legislation is despicable because it is entirely politically motivated. It is legislation based on ideology with no public policy credentials. Sadly, I fear that it will not be the last of this sort that we see before this House.

Can I address the spurious productivity arguments that have been dressed up and brought before the House today. Once again, legislation brought before the House is based on a fiction; it is based on misrepresentation and a distortion of the facts. Those opposite claim that this bill is about productivity, when there is simply absolutely no basis for this claim whatsoever.

During the federal election campaign, for example, the Prime Minister claimed that the existence of the ABCC had led to $6 billion a year of productivity savings and cost reductions. That is absolute bunkum. The claim was investigated by a reputed independent fact checker during the campaign. It is, I add, a fact checker that did not give a tick to everything that Labor said during that campaign. This is what it had to say about this ridiculous proposition by the Prime Minister: it found the claims to be ‘mostly false’.

In his second reading speech, Minister Pyne relied heavily on a report by Independent Economics, formerly known as Econtech, a report commissioned by the Master Builders Association, to justify his spurious productivity claims. I have had a look at the report. It is interesting. You should have a look at it, Deputy Speaker. It says the following:

… it is considered that separate attribution of labour productivity improvements to the ABCC and industrial relations reforms is not possible, because they both need to operate together to be effective. If you want an independent analysis, go no further than the very well regarded Justice Wilcox, who studied and reported on these laws for the government. He said, not surprisingly, that he found the Econtech study to be deeply flawed.

I will talk about the coercive powers, because the government would like to slide this stuff under the cushion and have not very much said about it at all. The bill authorises the ABCC to exert coercive powers. It will enable the ABCC to require any person to provide information or documents in relation to an investigation of a suspected contravention of the bill. The legislation will also enable the ABCC to compulsorily interrogate any person who may have such information or documents, or they risk six months imprisonment.

You could be forgiven for thinking that you had woken up in Soviet Russia when you look at this legislation before the House. This is a democracy. It is not the sort of country where we want to see innocent people or potentially innocent people subjected to a denial of the legal rights that we provide to criminals or suspected criminals in this country. The introduction of these kinds of coercive powers should send alarm bells throughout the community. It is akin to treating building workers as terrorists.

Mrs Prentice: Mr Deputy Speaker, would the member for Throsby take an intervention?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Vasta): Does it—

Mr STEPHEN JONES: Deputy Speaker, we have had many interventions throughout the course of this debate, and those opposite have had plenty of time to put their case. I would
I like to enjoy the few minutes that I have left before the adjournment to put my case as to why this legislation should be rejected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Throsby has the call.

Mr STEPHEN JONES: Thank you, Deputy Speaker—a just ruling. The introduction of these kinds of coercive powers should send alarm bells through all right-thinking members of the community. It is akin to treating building workers as terrorists. The legislation destroys the principles of freedom of association. We have heard lots from those on that side of the chamber about the importance of freedom of association. I have heard many fine speeches in the first speeches of those opposite about the importance of liberal principles and the principles of freedom of association. I am not surprised that many of them would not repeat those principles when they spoke on this legislation.

The legislation contains maximum penalties for unlawful industrial action, unlawful picketing and coercive offences—penalties far outweighing those that exist within the Fair Work Act. The rationale for singling out one industry with special laws is flimsy at best. Australia's industrial laws should be enforced in the building and construction industry in the same way as in any other industry.

Fair Work Australia and the Fair Work Ombudsman already have capacity to deploy specialist investigators to deal with these issues in this sector. If those opposite have complaints about the way that Fair Work Australia are fulfilling their legislative requirements, perhaps they might bring a bill before this House to increase the resources available to Fair Work Australia.

In a review of the earlier incarnation of these laws conducted by Justice Wilcox in 2009, the Hon. Justice Wilcox could find no rationale to apply the tougher penalties to building workers. In his report, he said this:

There is no justification for selecting a different maximum penalty, for the same contravention, simply because the offender is in a particular industry. Pick a bloke in a blue singlet, and he is a potential terrorist. That is what these laws are saying, because he is being treated in exactly the same way when it comes to the denial of basic civil rights.

Those opposite claim that the building industry is rife with industrial relations lawlessness. In fact, the ABS figures show that the rate of industrial disputation in the building industry is at a historic low. I would like to see those opposite intervene on that point. They want to bury those statistics because they know that they do not support their argument.

From time to time, industrial disputes do occur—some of those angry and fraught scenes we feel uneasy about. In the heat of the moment, when the stakes are high, errors of judgement can occur. Unlawfulness and criminal activities should always be condemned and dealt with under the laws that apply to everyone else and apply equally. There should be no singling out of any particular group for coercive treatment. Recently in this place, I paid tribute to the work of the local CFMEU—

Debate interrupted.
ADJOURNMENT

The SPEAKER (21:00): It being nine o'clock, I propose the question:

That the House do now adjourn.

Australian Defence Force Parliamentary Program

Mrs PRENTICE (Ryan) (21:00): Again this year I had the privilege to participate in the Australian Defence Force Parliamentary Program. In October, I joined the ADF in Papua New Guinea on Exercise Helicon Luk. The program provided me with a unique insight into the Black Hawk helicopter pilot training. The 16th Aviation Brigade provides helicopter support to our troops and undertakes ongoing qualifications renewal to ensure that they are flying safely and effectively. I participated in several aspects of Army flying operations, including ground refuelling operations, aircraft handling and maintenance, flight mission planning and briefing activities, and aircrew duties, including flying in the Army's S70A Black Hawk helicopter.

The full training program goes for four weeks and is the annual training exercise in deployment and maintenance away from bases. The testing is done in and around Madang, on the north coast of Papua New Guinea, as it is a better testing environment than we have in Australia. The area provides the right conditions for high-density altitude training in the mountains and gives 123 service men and women the opportunity to train in unfamiliar territory, putting the service personnel outside their comfort zone. The group which I joined included three instructors, 18 pilots and 20 loadies, better known as aircraft support personnel.

The highlight of the week was the day that, despite the cloud canopy closing in, we managed to land at the Isurava Kokoda memorial—a very surreal experience. I can understand why so many Australians enjoy the challenge of the Kokoda Track, despite the rugged terrain. There is something very special about standing at the Isurava Memorial and reading about the heroic exploits of our World War II soldiers and imagining the incredible challenges they overcame. However, I must confess that I did prefer arriving by Black Hawk rather than tackling the trek. To top off the day, we landed on a small outcrop at Shaggy Ridge, the site of several battles during World War II, on the way back to Madang. When we landed at Isurava, we were greeted by not only the local tribe but also a Channel 9 film crew doing a documentary with Garry Lyon and Sam Newman from The Footy Show. As they say, it is a small world.

I would like to place on record my appreciation to all the service men and women who included me in their routines and patiently explained their roles and responsibilities. In particular, I thank Major Andrew Scheiffers and Major David Thomson for their support and good-natured forbearance. I would also like to thank Sir Peter Barter for his generosity and support while we were in Madang. In the limited spare time I had, Sir Peter introduced me to Father Jan Czuba, the President of Divine Word University in Madang. Father Jan is truly inspiring, and Divine Word University are achieving great outcomes in their five special faculties of Health Sciences, Education, Arts, Business and Informatics, and Theology. Father Jan is the driving force behind the university—but it does not stop there. He is also involved in the Madang hospital and was appointed by Prime Minister Peter O'Neill to lead a task force to review the OBE, or Outcome Based Education, system, which he completed ahead of schedule.
The last time I visited Madang was back in 1982, and a lot has changed. However, it is still a warm and friendly city, idyllically located on the Dallman Passage. Tourism and education both provide future opportunities for the local community and, with support and encouragement from people such as Sir Peter Barter and Father Jan, I look forward to hearing of their progress.

Having participated in this ADF Parliamentary Program, especially now, as our involvement in Afghanistan is drawing to a close, I appreciate the unique insight I have been given into the workings of the Australian Defence Force and the challenges they face. I place on record my appreciation to everyone involved in this program.

**Seddon, Mr Joseph James**

Mr THISTLETHWAITE (Kingsford Smith) (21:04): On 16 November, our community lost a great man. Joseph James Seddon, or Joe, as he was affectionately known, lost his battle with cancer. The name Joe Seddon is synonymous with surf-lifesaving in Sydney, in particular in his beloved Coogee. Joe made a long-lasting contribution to surf-lifesaving, swimming and water safety in the Sydney community.

Joe joined the Coogee Surf Life Saving Club in 1962 and gained his bronze medallion in 1963. He quickly gained a reputation as a leader and a doer within that club and within the wider community. He is the only person in Coogee surf club to have served as president, secretary, treasurer and club captain, and he contributed 40 years on the management committee of the club. Joe received the club’s honour blazer in 1968 for outstanding achievement and was made a life member in 1982 and a club governor in 2000.

But Joe's influence and contribution went well beyond Coogee surf club. He was involved in the establishment of the offshore rescue boat around Sydney. He was also very influential in raising the initial funding for and establishing the Westpac Helicopter Rescue Service, which has saved countless lives up and down the coastlines of Australia. He was a director of that great organisation for 10 years.

He was involved in the Randwick and Coogee Amateur Swimming Club. In 1974, when a severe storm hit Sydney and damaged Wylie's Baths at Coogee, he was instrumental in working with government to have funding provided to rebuild those baths, and he became a trustee of the newly established trust and sat on that trust for 25 years. He was the National Treasurer of Surf Life Saving Australia for five years and a trustee of the State Sports Centre of New South Wales.

He was made a life member of the Randwick District surf clubs and was a visionary in Coogee in terms of his foresight in being instrumental in admitting female members to Coogee Surf Life Saving Club in 1981. At the time he was criticised by many older male members of the club, but nowadays 50 per cent of the membership of the Coogee surf club are women.

In the early 1990s, when the 2007 centenary of Coogee surf club was approaching, Joe took on the massive task of researching and compiling a history of Coogee Surf Life Saving Club. He reviewed minutes, undertook interviews of members, sought out documents, went through all existing newspaper clippings on Coogee surf club and combed the state and national libraries. The result was one of the finest pictorial and written histories of an important institution in our community. It is not just the history of Coogee surf club; it is also
a wonderful overview and history of the development of our area, of our community and, importantly, of our culture. That important record now sits in the National Library.

In 2013 he received the Premier's award for service to the community. On the weekend, Joe Seddon was laid to rest in that great tradition of surf-lifesaving, with his ashes being scattered on the sea off Coogee Beach. Hundreds of community members lined the shores, and out on the ocean were hundreds of members of the surf-lifesaving community in boats, on boards and skis, but also hovering above was the Westpac rescue helicopter, which Joe had been instrumental in establishing.

I represent a special part of Australia. I often say it is the people who make the difference in our community. Our community is fortunate to have many great leaders. Joe Seddon was one of those great leaders. I offer my condolences to his family—to Merilyn, to Tony, to Jimmy and to Anne. May he rest in peace.

**Forde Electorate: Schools**

**Mr VAN MANEN** (Forde) (21:09): I would like to take this opportunity to celebrate some of the wonderful achievements of schools in Forde. I begin by recognising the efforts of Kimberley College. For the second year running they have claimed the title of the highest fundraising school in Australia for World Vision. Students involved in this year's fundraising efforts raised $44,000. This is a very impressive effort and a credit to the school principal, Mr Paul Thomson, the staff, the students and their parents.

Last month, Mount Warren Park State School encouraged students to dress in colours representing special positive behaviours under the school-wide Positive Behaviour Support framework. This is a fantastic initiative aimed at creating a positive learning environment, and I commend the principal, Colin Torr, and the school community for their efforts. I know from talking to the children at their recent end-of-year celebrations that they had a great time undertaking this activity.

All our schools recognise the importance of building positive cultures not only from within the schools but also within the wider community. Eagleby State School are another example of this positive attitude. For the past four years, they have been partnering with seniors nearby at Palm Lakes Resort on a volunteer program. From Anzac Day to volunteering for reading projects, the homework club and in many other classroom activities, the local seniors have been assisting students at Eagleby State School. One of the activities includes students working together with teachers and the senior volunteers, taking vegetables and herbs from the school’s garden each week. The children are encouraged to eat fresh foods and prepare a weekly healthy lunch that they all sit down to enjoy together.

Principal Suzanne Jolley also arranges for seniors to volunteer at the school’s annual Grandparent Day, filling the gaps in children's lives where there is no grandparent around. In addition, the volunteers also fill the gap for some children where there are no parents around. This is a fantastic arrangement, and I congratulate the school and the volunteers from Palm Lakes Resort in Eagleby for their tremendous work with the school and the local community.

As I have mentioned previously in the House, we have some amazing young sports men and women in the electorate of Forde. Rivermount College had two of their students, Elise Downing and Monika Woodhouse, selected to represent Australia in shooting at the Oceanic
Games which were held in Sydney at the end of November. I congratulate both students on their outstanding achievements.

I have also had the opportunity recently to spend some time with a 10-year-old football star, Joshua Moreland. As many in this place would know, I am a fan of football, more commonly known as soccer. A couple of weeks ago, I spent some time with Joshua, a young football dynamo, who, at the age of 10, has already been asked to attend a training camp next year in England for West Ham United. Joshua is the youngest sportsperson I have met in Forde who has reached international level. He will represent Australia in London next year and has been selected in a futsal team to represent Australia in the United States in the middle of next year as well. When asked who he would like to play for if he makes the professional grade, Joshua patriotically answered: ‘Australia, of course. You’ve got to support your country.’ And who knows? This talented youngster, just 10 years old, might very well make it to that level. He may well be a Socceroo in the years to come; he is certainly one to watch and a credit to our community in Forde.

Automotive Industry

Mr CHAMPION (Wakefield) (21:14): Madam Speaker, I do not think I have spoken in the House since your elevation to the speakership. I congratulate you and wish you every success in guiding the House. I will speak tonight on an issue which is very important to my electorate. It is something I have spoken on many times before—the future of the car industry. This is obviously critical to South Australia. Manufacturing is the beating heart of the northern suburbs, which I represent. More generally, it is the beating heart of South Australia and of Victoria.

The car industry’s manufacturing base represents not only Australian ingenuity and a historical connection to cars but the provision of an Australian choice for consumers. At the moment, Australians do have the choice of buying an Australian car. But the car industry faces difficulties generated by our currency. We have a currency that is overvalued and which 19 central banks around the world are holding as a reserve currency. Many of our major competitors are depreciating their currencies, often as a matter of government policy. The Japanese government is pursuing a depreciation of the yen of something like 25 per cent. So the car industry faces a very difficult environment. We have seen the local manufacturers—Toyota, Ford and GMH—grapple with what is a very difficult export market and a hypercompetitive domestic market.

The member for Groom, the now minister for manufacturing—I am not sure if he has it in his title or not, but he certainly has it in his responsibilities—visited the General Motors Holden plant this year after his elevation to the ministry. Many other elected representatives from the Labor Party were there, including the member for Makin and I. Various senators from the Liberal Party were also there, as was Senator Xenophon. We can only hope that the member for Groom prevails in his attempt at dragging this government, somewhat kicking and screaming, I think, towards providing the co-investment that is essential to supporting the two new models at GMH Elizabeth. That will take production from 2017 through to 2022.

There is no doubt that there are some barriers to this. First of all, there is the government’s $500 million cut to automotive assistance. That is a very big barrier to investment and it is sending all the wrong messages to Detroit. The second barrier is this insistence on having the Productivity Commission inquire over a very short period—unfair to the Productivity
Commission, unfair to those presenting to it and, I think, unfair to the parliament and the people. This is not a considered review; it is a rushed review. It is a review that is putting a brake on getting that very important investment into my electorate.

I think this delay reflects ideological divisions in the government. There is a group of pragmatic people in the government who realise that thousands of jobs hinge on this industry—some 8,000 in my own state and many more, something like 40,000, in Victoria. It is unsurprising that there are some pragmatic people in the government who want to fix this up. But there is also an ideological bulkhead, led by a weak Treasurer and backed up by the member for Mayo and others, that wants to rip away assistance to this industry and jeopardise investment in it.

I think this is a very important industry for my state and a very important industry for Australia. To see a lack of investment in this industry, to reject foreign investment in this industry—to jeopardise it—means that there is a very real risk of recession in South Australia and Victoria. If that occurs, blame will only be laid at the feet of the Abbott government.

Swan Electorate: Queens Park Primary School

Mr IRONS (Swan) (21:19): Madam Speaker, I take this opportunity to congratulate you on your elevation to the position of Speaker. I am sure you will bring the dignity and humility to the role that this place deserves. Tonight I would like to inform the House about one of the schools in my electorate. Overall I have about 65 schools or educational institutions so I would hope we could call the seat of Swan the seat of knowledge in WA. The school I want to tell you about is the Queens Park Primary School, which is located in Treasure Road, Queens Park. The school is relatively small, with about 200 students, making it a very friendly and family-focused school. Every child has their place there, and they celebrate diversity.

At Queens Park Primary School they have a strong focus on preparing children academically. Their motto ‘Strength through knowledge’ provides the focus for providing a curriculum that will ensure children are well prepared to fulfil their aspirations. It is more than a motto—it underpins every teaching and learning task undertaken at Queens Park Primary School. Literacy and numeracy are of critical importance, and they have made teaching these a whole-school focus. All the staff have supported this approach and they are starting to see some fantastic student achievements.

Their curriculum also recognises that developing children's self-esteem, decision-making skills and ability to take responsibility is vital. They teach those through empowerment and positive reinforcement. This is a school that believes children learn best when they feel it is safe to try, so they will let children make mistakes and then help them understand what can be learnt from the experience. Most importantly they are quick to applaud their success. Their philosophy is to nurture the ‘whole’ child, and equip them for life.

Madam Speaker, as you would know, the quality of every child's education is dependent on the performance of our educators and their dedication. At Queens Park Primary School the staff are experienced teachers who are dedicated, compassionate and committed professionals. They pride themselves on being an inclusive campus where both teaching and non-teaching staff have a shared responsibility for providing educational programs that address the individual needs of all students. In a small school such as theirs, the staff get to know the school's families really well. The children feel safe and valued.
The teachers are an important part of the Queens Park Primary School community—they do a fabulous job and have attained many outstanding achievements. The Queens Park Primary School believes in providing a values-based education. They believe that every child has the right to learn and play in a happy and harmonious environment, and their teachers and students work hard collaboratively to achieve this. The parents of the schoolchildren contribute as well. Positive reinforcement is used to encourage good behaviour and students are taught from the early years to consider their choices before acting.

My wife Cheryle and I were fortunate enough to attend the Queens Park Primary School's 11th annual art exhibition on 4 November 2013. The art exhibition is a showcase of the many artworks produced from the students and one school-based themed technology project. This year's exhibition was entitled a Creators' Bazaar. The concept of a Creators' Bazaar came from the technology project for 2014, which was to design and make an item that would have a market appeal to the general public. Each class discussed and decided on a suitable item. In class the students made their product and during the exhibition period voting slips were available for visitors to select the item they would be happy to buy. The selected projects were so varied and eclectic that the school wanted them displayed in a market-style environment. The arts centre was transformed to resemble a marketplace and all projects were displayed. Projects included individually designed jewellery, photo frames, decorated pot plants, cards, Mexican crop protectors and unique jars.

It was also with great excitement that this year they managed to incorporate QR codes on students' artwork. QR is short for quick response. A specifically generated barcode was attached to selected artworks. This barcode was a readable label that held recorded information for the student, relating to how that item was made. Once the barcode was zapped with a smartphone or iPad, you were directed to the child's message. The barcode could have been accessed by relations anywhere in the world provided they had a copy of the barcode. Very exciting stuff. Our very special thanks go to Mrs Pushpa Ramalingam for working so hard to get this organised through the school. A family fun afternoon was held after school on the day of the opening and the exhibition was open during school hours for a week. It was very well attended. My congratulations go to Queens Park Primary and I look forward to attending their 12th art exhibition.

House adjourned at 21:24

NOTICES

The following notice was given:

Mr Zappia: To move:

That this House:

(1) notes that the automotive industry:

(a) directly and indirectly employs more than 200,000 people;

(b) is estimated to have a net present value to the economy of $21.5 billion;

(c) provides highly skilled labour and benefits Australia's entire manufacturing sector through research and development and innovation; and

(d) provides a net economic benefit to Australia;
(2) further notes that:
   (a) the sustained high Australian dollar is having a negative impact on the industry; and 
   (b) the Productivity Commission's final report on the inquiry into Australia's automotive industry is not due until the end of March 2014 and more urgent action is required; and 
(3) believes that the Government's procrastination is adding to the automotive industry's demise and calls on the Government to end the uncertainty and secure the long term future of this industry in Australia.
Monday, 2 December 2013

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Broadbent) took the chair at 10:30.

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS
Brand Electorate: Medicare Locals

Mr GRAY (Brand) (10:30): I would like to talk today about the vital role Medicare Locals play in keeping Australians well and out of hospital. There are 61 Medicare Locals across the country. They are designed to put some decisions about health services in the hands of people who know their needs the best—well-informed local communities. In my own electorate the Perth South Coastal Medicare Local delivers after-hours GP services in Rockingham and Mandurah, dial-a-doctor services and suicide prevention and it will also operate the headspace Youth Mental Health Centre and in the Rockingham GP superclinic when it opens next year.

Medicare Locals were established because patients and doctors benefit from local solutions to local challenges. To many communities health services are disconnected, the health professionals and doctors commute to communities and therefore do not share information. Medicare Locals fills the gap. Any reduction in funding or scaling back of the Medicare Locals program will have a severe impact on my community. Rockingham, Kwinana and Mandurah have long been identified as areas of concern for age-related diseases such as type 2 diabetes. The Perth South Coastal Medicare Local provides services to meet these local challenges. It employs around 90 frontline health workers who work across a range of areas to support the needs of my community.

In 2012-13 the Labor government provided half a million dollars for the Perth South Coastal Medicare Local to address priority gaps in after-hours GP services in the Rockingham and Mandurah areas. As part of this funding a new GP after-hours clinic opened in Mandurah in November 2012. When the state Liberal government cut funding for the Rockingham after-hours clinic, Perth South Coastal Medicare Local stepped in to keep clinic hours in operation—a clinic that provides about 900 hours of after-hours services per month.

Without the Medicare Locals program many families in the community would miss out. Young people with mental illnesses in the community would miss out. We know that one in four young people in our community with experience a mental health issue this year. The Perth South Coastal Medicare Local is taking the lead in establishing a headspace youth mental health service in Rockingham. It will support young people dealing with depression. It will support substance abuse and other mental health issues and provide early interventions and help them to fully participate in the social and economic life of their communities. So far 92 per cent of the young people using headspace centres in other parts of the country have reported improvement in their mental health after using headspace, and I expect to see the same result in Rockingham. Reducing the capacity of Medicare Locals will mean neither the headspace service nor the Rockingham after-hours clinic would be able to operate.

Right across the country Medicare Locals are assessing current and future health needs of communities and consulting with stakeholders about what matters in health at the front line. This is important in Rockingham, Kwinana and Mandurah, where the communities have long needed health care services that suit their needs and suit the model of the communities of
Rockingham, Kwinana and Mandurah in the best way possible. That is why the Medicare local is so important to the communities of the south coastal areas of Perth, Western Australia.

Macarthur Electorate: Mr John Saliba

Mr MATHESON (Macarthur) (10:33): It is with great sadness that I rise today to pay tribute to an inspirational man from my electorate who impacted on the lives of so many young people and their families across Macarthur. Last week I attended the funeral of John Saliba, who passed away suddenly on Friday 22 November age 62—too young. He was a life member of Campbelltown Amateur Swimming Club where he served as president for nine years. He dedicated his life to supporting local swimmers in Campbelltown, New South Wales and eventually across the world.

John, together with his son Mark, and former Australian coach Alan Thompson, were pioneers and champions of open water swimming in Australia. John travelled the world as Mark's manager, forging our country's reputation in the sport. His contribution, influence and legacy to the swimming community was inspirational. He was a highly regarded and well-respected official at the club, state, national and international levels and was instrumental in producing most of the documentation and policy on open water swimming in New South Wales. John was also the Australian open water team manager for many years. Former Swimming Australia open water head coach Greg Towle said John's drive and passion for the sport of open water swimming set him apart. John's death has not only shocked and saddened former members of the Australian swimming team, but swimmers from around the world who spent time with him during international competitions. He was dedicated to helping all swimmers be the best they could be.

At his funeral last week at St Gregory's College in Campbelltown it was obvious that John had a tremendous impact on the lives of many young athletes in my electorate and their families. His sons, Matthew and Mark, spoke about their dad and the love he had for his family and the sport of swimming. He was a loving husband to Carol, dad to Mark and Matthew, father-in-law to Kristy and Genevieve and had four beautiful young granddaughters whom he loved with all his heart.

Since his death, I have heard from former swimmers and parents at the Campbelltown swimming club who have told me that John's kindness and support were second to none. He was always fair and encouraging and gave each swimmer his time and advice to help them progress to higher levels in the sport.

John's contribution to open-water swimming in Australia and around the world is immeasurable. On a local level John set a great example for parents of young athletes across Macarthur and executive members of our local sporting clubs. He was a kind and generous man who had a great passion for swimming and for supporting all who took part in the sport.

John's death is a great loss to the swimming community in Macarthur and across the globe. He will be dearly missed by all those who knew him, and they will remember him for his selfless dedication to helping others. My thoughts and prayers go to his family at this sad time—and to all who knew this great man. Rest in peace, John. You are loved and adored by your family, friends and community. Macarthur is a better place because of you. (Time expired)
Scullin Electorate: Whittlesea Community Leadership Network

Mr Giles (Scullin) (10:36): I rise to speak about a new initiative that is doing great things for people in and around the Scullin electorate. This initiative is building stronger communities through leadership and through partnerships. Last week I was honoured to be asked to say a few words at the inaugural annual general meeting of the community leadership network Victoria Inc.—better known as the Whittlesea Community Leadership Network—along with Councillor Kris Pavlidis from the city of Whittlesea. In my speech then, I reflected on how much had been achieved by this group in a very short time. Today, 2 December, marks the first anniversary of the network's incorporation, so I say to it happy birthday, and I take this opportunity to discuss in this place the important work of the network.

The Whittlesea Community Leadership Network grew out of a series of initiatives on the part of the City of Whittlesea, which had identified the need for such a network through an exhaustive process of pilot projects. The membership of the network is largely composed of a wide range of not-for-profit groups. From our very active U3A to the Congolese community of Victoria, a wide range of community groups, which participate actively, is represented along with very many individual members from right across the Whittlesea community. It is pleasing to see the active engagement in this network of newly arrived communities. I was particularly pleased to extend some words of welcome at the AGM to a number of recently arrived migrants from Iran who have successfully sought asylum and who are forging their path in Melbourne's northern suburbs through the extraordinary networking opportunities provided by the Whittlesea Community Leadership Network.

In its very short life, the Whittlesea Community Leadership Network has already conducted a range of community training sessions which have engaged 238 members of the community. These people have attended seminars on subjects such as the law and health care, so that community members can guide themselves and others through the often complicated maze of the legal and health care systems, as well as—critically, in bushfire prone communities—emergency preparation and readiness for culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

The network has developed a strategic plan to carry this nascent organisation into the future around three core principles—connect, coach and construct—to build leadership and relationships across communities. It is very clear to me that effective partnerships have already been formed and that social cohesion across Melbourne's north has been enhanced. New leaders are emerging and making wider contributions. This is down not to the work of a small group but to the work of many people. I acknowledge the tireless work of many at the City of Whittlesea, in particular Maria Callipari and Salvador Nunez, and I extend my thanks to the chair of the network, Chantal Kabamba, the vice-chair, Pece Georgieski, and the chair of the advisory committee, Glen Wall. I look forward to supporting them in their important work and in their following through on the motto of the organisation: 'building capacity through partnership'. (Time expired)

Mount Whitestone State School

Mr Buchholz (Wright—Government Whip) (10:39): A couple of weeks ago I had the pleasure of attending the special opening of the Mount Whitestone State School healthy learning facility and edible garden. The Mount Whitestone State School currently has 21
students enrolled, and it belongs to a community of around 150 people. So it is not a large school with an abundance of resources by any measure, and yet it has been able to give its students and its community access to state-of-the-art facilities.

This has come to fruition as a labour of love for the school management and P&C. Over $150,000 worth of grants and financial support were offered by local businesses and organisations. The facility is part of the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Program, which aims to create a food revolution from the ground up. Around 50,000 children Australia wide are enthusiastically getting their hands dirty and learning how to grow, harvest, prepare and share food—in particular, seasonal food. The program aims to provide positive and memorable food experiences that will form the basis of positive, life-long eating habits for children who might otherwise just become childhood obesity statistics. Twenty-five per cent of children in Australia are obese, and 25 to 50 per cent of obese children will grow up to become obese adults.

At the Mount Whitestone kitchen garden, students are learning important life skills which will take them into the future, as well as important healthy habits. Principal Matthew Taylor said that, as part of the healthy living facility and garden, the entire school now has a sit-down meal once a fortnight where a class group cooks for the rest of the school. Everything else the children are learning directly combats factors which lead to obesity. They are learning to prepare nutritious, low-fat, wholefood meals whilst also spending structured time outdoors in their own vegie patch.

However, what is so great about the Mount Whitestone facility and garden is that it is open to the entire community. Principal Taylor and the Mount Whitestone P&C have extended an open invitation to the broader community to use the kitchen. So far the local Blue Care respite group and a playgroup have taken them up on the offer. After the community open day I attended I have no doubt that the word will have spread through Mount Whitestone and that soon the entire community will be coming together in the kitchen to cook and share wholesome, nutritious food which tastes great.

In addition to that, there are the eating habits of the children. I had the pleasure of spending an hour with them beforehand, perusing the gardens. They knew what fennel was; they knew what broccolini was; and they took great pleasure in preparing that dish for the palates of much younger children.

I know this is a great program. Stephanie Alexander, before this, was relatively unknown, and I commend the program. (Time expired)

Blair Electorate: Blair Disability Links

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (10:42): Every year on 3 December, the International Day of People with Disability, I hold the Blair Disability Links expo in the Brassall Shopping Centre in Ipswich. The event is organised and very ably run by Kylie Stoneman from my electorate office. Kylie has been running the event since our inaugural expo was held in 2010, and, although this year parliamentary duties prevent me from being there, I am sure she has everything under control as I speak here today. The event would not be such a resounding success without the support of local organisations such as Focal Extended, Our House, Allara, Ipswich Stroke Support Group, and FSG Australia Ipswich, just to name a few. Also, wider organisations like MACH1 and Carers Queensland are involved.
A key component of Blair Disability Links is the Blair Disability Links information kit, which I update and relaunch each year. It outlines all the disability support groups locally and in South-East Queensland relevant to Blair. The kit consists of details and contacts for a wide variety of disability groups across Ipswich, the Somerset region, South-East Queensland and, indeed, beyond. Since its inception, we have distributed about 10,000 copies of the Blair Disability Links information kit through service providers and at my mobile offices, and people have called at my office especially to request a copy of it. This is very important, because in my electorate we have 3,800 people with disabilities and about 4,300 carers.

My colleague Senator Jan McLucas, who was Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Carers at the time, attended and launched the inaugural Blair Disability Links event in 2010. About a dozen disability service providers attended our first year. That doubled the next year, and last year we had 500 people attending on the day, to the benefit also of businesses in the Brassall Shopping Centre. This year about 40 service providers are holding stalls tomorrow. The Blair Disability Links event has become a very important one in my electorate. Not only do service providers get the opportunity to display their services and chat directly to people and provide guidance and information; they have the additional advantage of being able to network with each other. A familiar theme among the service providers and their clients is their shared excitement about the rollout of the former federal Labor government’s National Disability Insurance Scheme.

I acknowledge and thank all the service providers who participate in Blair Disability Links and who work hard to improve and enhance the lives of people living with disability in the Ipswich and Somerset regions. I hope the coalition government honours our previous commitment to make Ipswich the home of a regional office for DisabilityCare Australia in the future. (Time expired)

Wentworth Electorate: Jewish Community

Mr Turnbull (Wentworth—Minister for Communications) (10:45): As honourable members will be aware tonight is the sixth night of Hanukkah, an important Jewish festival which celebrates the success of the Jewish people in reconsecrating the temple in Jerusalem in about 165 BCE, which had been defiled by the Hellenistic monarchy in Syria, which at that stage was ruling Judea and that part of the world. Judas Maccabeus and his supporters rebelled, and when they finally recaptured the temple they did not have enough sanctified oil to burn for more than one night—and they had to keep it burning for eight nights. The miracle of Hanukkah is that this one flask of oil burned for eight nights. It is celebrated by the Jewish people, and honoured by all people, as an example of Jewish courage, indomitability, resilience and of course the hope of the Jewish people always to be a light unto the world. When you consider that the two great monotheistic religions of the world, Christianity and Islam, are both directly derived from Judaism, there is some considerable force in that.

But in the midst of all this light there can sometimes be, and regrettably all too often is, darkness. On 25 October in my electorate of Wentworth there was an attack on some Jewish families who were returning home after their traditional Shabbat dinner on Friday night. They were attacked by a group of eight men who abused them with racial slurs and anti-Semitic language. It left one of them, 66-year-old Eli Behar, unconscious with internal bleeding in his head; his wife, of a similar age, was also injured. Their son Shlomo had a finger broken and required stitches in his head. Two others were also injured and abused in this attack.
Everybody has condemned this attack, and it is important that we always do that. Racial attacks, racism, racial abuse—whether against Jews or anybody else—are utterly unacceptable in our society. So, as we celebrate and honour the festival of Hanukkah, it is important to remember that, just as we celebrate that light and that indomitable spirit of the Jewish people, we stand up and oppose racism and racial abuse—in whatever form, against whomever, by whomever—in our society.

**Gorton Electorate: Public Transport**

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR (Gorton) (10:48): I would like to draw the attention of the House to a pressing issue in my electorate: public transport infrastructure and the fact that the residents of Caroline Springs are still crying out for a train station. Back in 2008 Sir Ron Eddington proposed an extension of rail services to Caroline Springs. His *Investing in Transport* report found strong population growth in the west was driving substantial changes across the entire city. The report found Melbourne needed better east-west transport connections to address core congestion problems, to meet rapidly increasing travel demand, to support a growing population and to keep pace with the changes taking place in the city's economic and urban structure. The *Investing in Transport* report also cited data forecasting growth in Melbourne's west by 34.4 per cent between 2006 and 2030. In Melton the population is set to grow by 205 per cent up to 161,000 by 2031.

Recent ABS data shows the population of Caroline Springs has grown by 395 per cent since 2001. Mindful of this burgeoning growth, the former state Labor government pledged to build a train station to service Caroline Springs' 23,000 residents—and it put the money where its mouth was, providing $38 million as part of a $189 million package in the 2010-11 budget. Preliminary work for Caroline Springs train station began in 2010. Had the work continued, the station would have opened last year. Of course, the work did not continue and, instead, we have a road to nowhere. The Victorian state government, when they came to power in 2010, shelved plans for the station despite the funding allocation that had already been made. I keenly remember how shocked and disappointed local residents were to learn of this news—and they are still angry. Indeed, I was stunned to learn of the news myself.

Late last year the transport minister, Mr Mulder, could only offer this comment: 'Caroline Springs station design work has been completed. The coalition government is now considering building the station.' Well, the time for consideration has long since passed. The facts are in. The city of Melton experienced the fifth greatest rate of growth in the entire country between 2011 and 2012. We know the benefits that come with public transport. For users, there is less congestion, shorter commuter times, reduced stress levels, less time spent on the road and more time spent with friends and families. Vehicle cost savings, parking cost savings and increased safety and health and energy conservation are just some of the efficiency benefits. I call upon the Victorian government to address this issue and ensure that the Caroline Springs community have a train station as soon as possible.

**Carbon Tax**

Mr BRUCE SCOTT (Maranoa—Deputy Speaker) (10:51): I rise today to call upon the Labor Party to join with the coalition in repealing the carbon tax before Christmas. The legislation has passed the lower house. If Labor will support us, it would be the best Christmas present this parliament could give to the Australian people—and we could deliver
it before Christmas. We are serious about our election commitments. We want to make sure that we can repeal this carbon tax legislation and that is what we have already set out to do. The carbon tax is a tax on everyone—families, farmers, small businesses and seniors—particularly in rural and remote Australia, where the tax cascades across the economy at every point. When the Deputy Prime Minister was recently in my electorate opening the new Sir Thomas Mitchell Bridge over the Maranoa River, he said at every point where people purchase a product—food, electricity, car registration and fuel—the carbon tax will be impacting on their everyday living costs.

It does not matter whether you are the owner of a petrol service station along the Warrego Highway or in the far remote parts of my electorate in the Diamantina Shire—where, I might add, today's temperature is predicted to be 42 degrees—if you have got refrigeration or air-conditioning you will be paying the carbon tax. It does not matter whether you are the Tarcoola retirement hostel in Tara, when you turn on the air-conditioning to keep the residents cooler and more comfortable this summer, you are going to be paying the carbon tax. You cannot even take your rubbish to the dump in my electorate without being impacted by the carbon tax. Local governments have been hit by the carbon tax on their rubbish dumps. The Prime Minister visited the Maranoa electorate earlier this month. He wanted to be out there to discuss key issues impacting on the area, including infrastructure, drought, floods recovery, the booming resources sector and how the carbon tax affects the two council-owned aged-care facilities in my region. What the council told us out there was that the electricity bill for the two Tarcoola aged-care facilities they run has jumped from $100,000 to $127,000 a year. That is the impact of a carbon tax on an aged-care facility. That is what they have to pay just to keep their residents cooler and more comfortable in summer. So who pays it? It gets passed onto the community.

Councillors have been labelled as big polluters. Now, that is an insult to the people who work for the local councils and the communities out in my part of the electorate. It is an insult to those communities—the Western Downs and the Maranoa regional councils have got to pay the carbon tax on their rubbish dumps. Food producers and families will also be hit with this carbon tax. The carbon tax is not cleaning up the environment, but it is certainly cleaning out the wallets of Australian families and businesses. I call on Labor to support the coalition in repealing this tax before Christmas. 

Shortland Electorate: Surf Lifesaving

Ms HALL (Shortland) (10:54): Today I rise to pay tribute to one of the outstanding surf lifesaving clubs within the Shortland electorate, Swansea Belmont Surf Life Saving Club, a club that yesterday celebrated 85 years. It is a club that is the focal point of that community and that has held both state and Australian titles over the years. It has a proud record in relation. It is one of the strongest clubs in New South Wales from a competitive point of view. But it also has a strong record when it comes to patrolling the beaches and ensuring safety on those beaches. But no matter how strong the surf club is, no matter how committed the volunteers are, there are many occasions on which lives are lost. That has been the case at Swansea Belmont.

The club has received many awards over the years for saving lives. The first one recorded was for saving the lives of Joseph Thorpe and John Maclean from drowning off Green Island on 3 April 1927. For that, the club received a certificate from the Royal Shipwrights Relief...
and Humane Society of New South Wales. That was presented to James Edwards. There have been many other such certificates awarded. But there have also been times, as I indicated, when surf lifesavers from Swansea Belmont have given their absolute all and yet lives have been lost. On Christmas Day in 1950 there was an unsuccessful attempt to save a young man. In 1974, a nun drowned in big seas near Belmont Swansea surf club. That shows that people who work in surf lifesaving are totally committed to ensuring safety. But at times that commitment is really tested when lives are lost.

I would like to give particular credit to the president, Craig Wallace, and to Cliffy Marsh OAM, who as a lifetime member of the club has worked as a coach and really made an enormous contribution to surf lifesaving not only at Belmont Swansea but throughout the whole of the Hunter. That is the way of Belmont Swansea. Belmont Swansea is a club that is committed to surf lifesaving.

(Time expired)

Corangamite Electorate: Mobile Phone Coverage

Ms HENDERSON (Corangamite) (10:57): I rise to speak on the importance of mobile phone communications in my seat of Corangamite. Mobile phone black spots have placed an enormous amount of pressure on local communities, including Birregurra, Gellibrand, Dereel, Rokewood and many other communities throughout the Otways. A reliable mobile phone service is so important, particularly in fire-prone and remote areas. Expanding mobile phone coverage has an obvious benefit to public safety, especially during summer, as well as benefits to small business and the wider economy generally.

That is why I am extremely proud of the coalition government's $100 million commitment to fixing mobile phone black spots, which reflects genuine care for country people. It is extraordinary that over six years Labor did not invest one cent in mobile communications. These communities are crying out for action and we are delivering that action.

However, some communities need action right now. That is why I have called on Telstra to fix these black spots, particularly those in areas in my electorate facing high fire danger. Telstra has the ability to use portable mobile phone base stations to temporarily fix these black spots. The towers can be towed on a trailer and set up quickly. Last week, I joined a community protest in Birregurra calling on Telstra to keep a temporary mobile phone base station that had been brought in for the Great Victorian Bike Ride. It was an insult to many local people, who could see Telstra looking after visiting cyclists but not looking after their community.

The township of Dereel is also a prime example of why Telstra should not delay. Dereel is a local community in the northern part of my electorate surrounded by bush. In March this year, the town was devastated by bushfire and 16 homes were lost. Dereel is a notorious mobile phone black spot and with telephone lines down during the bushfire there was no way of calling for help. It is important that we do whatever we can to improve the situation to make sure that these communities never end up in this situation again.

I want to acknowledge the incredible community push in my electorate, led by the likes of Ruth Uren and Darren Hill in Dereel, Amanda Campbell in Birregurra and Corrie Quorne, Neil Longmore and Maria Cosack in Gellibrand. These community champions are just a handful of the many people in my electorate crying out for instant action by Telstra,
particularly in the lead-up to the very dangerous bushfire season. It is time that Telstra heeded their calls.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Vasta): Order! In accordance with standing order 193 the time for constituency statements has concluded.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS
Lung Cancer Awareness Month

Ms RISHWORTH (Kingston) (11:01): I move:

That this House:

(1) notes that November is Lung Cancer Awareness Month;
(2) acknowledges that more than 9,100 Australians are diagnosed with lung cancer every year;
(3) recognises that lung cancer claims the lives of more Australians than any other cancer with only 14 out of 100 Australians surviving five years beyond their initial diagnosis; and
(4) calls on Australian and state and territory governments to work together to improve the survival rates of Australians diagnosed with lung cancer by encouraging early detection and providing access to high quality health care treatment and support.

It is very important in Lung Cancer Awareness Month that we take time to raise awareness of this very difficult and devastating disease. It is important to note that lung cancer can hit anyone. It is a cancer that affects both smokers and non-smokers. While obviously reducing smoking can be a good preventative measure, it is important that we do not stigmatise people with lung cancer and place those with any other form of cancer above them. Research shows that diagnoses of lung cancer can be compounded by feelings of guilt, shame, distress and isolation, which can cause delay in people seeking the treatment that they need. If there is any message that comes out of Lung Cancer Awareness Month, it should be that if you believe that you are having symptoms please go and get help, because early diagnoses could very much be the difference between getting a treatment that ensures that you can continue to live and not being able to survive this devastating disease.

We should acknowledge the great support services and information that is available. It is important that those who are diagnosed get the support and information that they need. The Cancer Australia website has a lot of practical information about the disease and organisations such as the Lung Foundation Australia also have a lot of information, as well as a patient support line to help those through this difficult time of diagnosis.

Only 14 out of every 100 people who are diagnosed with lung cancer survive beyond five years. It claims more lives in Australia than any other cancer. It is also the fifth most commonly diagnosed cancer in Australia, accounting for 8.9 per cent of all new cancers. This is a disease that is having a devastating effect on those who are diagnosed with it and do not make it through but also on all the families—the children, spouses and parents who are also affected by this disease.

Early diagnosis is important. As I have already mentioned, it is important to seek help. Some of the key symptoms can include a new cough that persists for longer than three weeks, a changed cough, coughing up blood or a chest infection that will not go away. For anyone who is experiencing these symptoms, it is important not to delay getting help from a doctor. You should go and visit your GP. There are many new and improving treatments for lung cancer entering the market. These will, I very much hope, continue to improve outcomes. It is
important that we continue to work on and develop new treatments so that that statistic of a survival rate of 14 in every 100 can become much higher.

I was very proud of the previous Labor government's investment in cancer care and patient support. Indeed, there was a record investment—close to $4.1 billion for cancer detection, treatment and research—between 2007 and 2013. My motion today calls on the Commonwealth, state and territory governments to work together to really improve these survival rates—and I do hope that the new government will not take its foot off the pedal when it comes to investing in cancer prevention, treatment and early diagnosis. Of course, one of the very important steps that were taken by the previous government was the plain-packaging legislation for cigarettes. I was very proud to vote for that legislation, and what we are seeing while it is still in its infancy is that reports are showing that plain packaging has lowered the appeal of smoking and increased the urgency of quitting among existing smokers. As I said earlier, not only smokers get lung cancer. We need to reduce the stigma around this, but prevention is a critical part, and reducing the number of people who take up smoking and also helping people to quit is a really important step. I am pleased that the coalition finally came to the party on plain packaging of cigarettes and hope that this will continue. So I commend the motion to the House and hope that all members do support it.

Mr McCormack (Riverina—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance) (11:06): I second the motion, and I commend at the outset the member for Kingston for this motion and commend her for her advocacy of Lung Cancer Awareness Month and everything she is doing in her electorate and in wider regions to combat the ills of smoking. This is above politics. The member for Kingston acknowledged the work the previous government had done in this space, and certainly I know that the new Minister for Health, Peter Dutton, is also working very hard and committing a lot of funds. There will never be enough funds to fight the ills of smoking and to fight lung cancer. But I know that the Liberal-National government is committed to ensuring that we do everything we can with the support of the opposition to fight smoking and to fight lung cancer.

The motion of the member for Kingston acknowledges that more than 9,100 Australians are diagnosed with lung cancer every year. That is a troubling statistic and one that we want very much lowered, if it cannot in fact be completely eliminated. The motion recognises that lung cancer claims the lives of more Australians than any other cancer, with only 14 out of 100 Australians surviving five years beyond their initial diagnosis. My father Lance was one of those who died from lung cancer, on 1 September 2008. Dad succumbed: he fought the good fight, but in the end it was too much. I know that Dad, in his dying days, stressed to my children—Georgina, Alexander and Nicholas—not to ever take up smoking, and thankfully they have not. And I know they will not, having seen their favourite 'Pop Lance' unfortunately succumb to lung cancer. My father-in-law, Bernard Shaw, also died from cancer, and he too smoked. Unfortunately, he found out all too late that he just should not have done it.

I must say that in my local area the Relay for Life has proven to be a wonderful fundraiser to fight cancer. In the Wagga Relay for Life on 12 and 13 October this year, remarkable generosity was shown by many, many participants and their supporters. They raised nearly $¼ million to fight cancer. Bill Wood and his hardworking committee made such a great effort to promote this tremendous event. More than 120 teams and 2,000 walkers took part. Duncan and Narelle Potts were very much in the thick of things, with Duncan, in his capacity
on the radio, getting the word out there. And Dave Webster and his Australian Army cadets did such a terrific job promoting too, and working on the day. The Relay for Life at Griffith, on 23 and 24 March this year, was a truly inspirational event. More than $130,000 was raised to help in the fight to find a cure for cancer. They are doing their bit, these Relays for Life. I cannot recommend them enough. It is hard work walking around and around an oval, but every step is one closer to finding cures, because of the money that goes to research to fight cancers, and certainly lung cancer.

I know Annabel Macdonald, who works very hard locally in my Wagga Wagga area in the space of raising awareness about cancer, is fighting the good fight, along with many other people right throughout the Riverina. She was very pleased that I was going to speak on this motion. As she said, lung cancer, as it is elsewhere in Australia, is the most common cause of cancer death in New South Wales. The symptoms of lung cancer are detected when the cancer is advanced, sadly, and are often confused with other conditions or the side effects of smoking. If you are a smoker and you have symptoms, including a new dry cough or a change in a chronic cough, chest pain, breathlessness, repeated bouts of pneumonia or bronchitis, or coughing or spitting up blood, you need to consult your doctor or health professional. It is so important, as earlier detection is so vital in advancing the medical treatment you can receive and advancing the years you might have left.

Continued investment in community education, cancer research, improved treatments and early detection means that two out of every three people diagnosed now survive cancer, for all cancers combined. And that is very encouraging. As I said, this is above politics. We need to do all that we can as a government, as an opposition, as parliamentarians in this place and as Australians to raise awareness of lung cancer and to find money for research to fight cancers.

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (11:11): I thank the member for Kingston for putting forward this motion on Lung Cancer Awareness Month and am pleased today to speak in support of it. Lung cancer caused the death of 209 people in the period 2006 to 2010 in the Ipswich and Somerset regions in my electorate of Blair. Between 2007 and 2009 the West Moreton Hospital and Health Service, which covers most of the electorate of Blair, reported an annual average incidence of 101 patients presenting with lung cancer. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, lung cancer was the underlying cause of death for 1,560 people living in my home state of Queensland in 2011. This year an estimated 2,485 new cases of invasive lung cancer were diagnosed in Queensland, and close to 2,000 of those will not survive. There has been a 20 per cent increase in death from lung cancer since 2009. This year, despite the fact that Queensland tragically and often colloquially is called the 'skin cancer capital of the world', more people in Queensland will die from lung cancer than from any other cancer.

More men die of lung cancer than women. In fact, the incidence among men is 56 per cent higher than among women and male death rates are double those of women. A significant cause and risk factor for lung cancer is age, but clearly Indigeneity is an issue as well. Until recently, about 47 per cent of Indigenous adults smoked. Recent reports indicate a 10 per cent reduction in smoking rates amongst Indigenous adults, and that is a very good thing. Still, we see about 15,000 people across the country die each year from smoking related diseases in Australia. According to Paul Jelfs, division head for Social, Health and Labour at the Australian Bureau of Statistics, there has been a significant decline in smoking in urban areas, but it remains stubbornly high in remote areas and there is still a very high smoking rate for
Indigenous people compared with the non-Indigenous population, so we have a very big health challenge ahead of us. On a more encouraging note, he went on to say that young Indigenous people are quitting, or not taking up smoking, in large numbers. Amongst 15- to 24-year-olds, 54 per cent of Indigenous young people have never smoked and 10 per cent are ex-smokers. That is a very good outcome and an encouraging statistic.

In May 2013 the former federal Labor government established the Rural Health Outreach Fund and the Medical Outreach—Indigenous Chronic Disease Program as part of its $179 million investment in health services for Australians living in rural and remote areas. Nevertheless, we know that the figures are still stark and concerning in terms of lung cancer. But the former Labor government had the runs on the board when it came to acting on its commitment. In August 2012 the former federal Labor government was vindicated when it won a historic High Court victory over tobacco giants who had taken their case to the High Court of Australia, challenging our world-first plain-packaging laws for all cigarettes and tobacco sold in Australia.

When an estimated 90 per cent of lung cancer in males and 65 per cent of lung cancer in females is a direct result of tobacco smoking, acting against tobacco companies is morally and ethically the right thing to do. In addition to the plain packaging laws that came into effect, there are many other things that we did, including listing nicotine patches on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme to reduce the price of them. We also produced a round of anti-smoking ads and the like.

Locally, I want to congratulate Ipswich City Council for its stance against smoking and banning smoking in the pedestrian malls such as the Nicholas Street Mall and d'Arcy Doyle Place in the Ipswich CBD. In 2009, the then Labor government introduced the Australian National Preventive Health Agency Bill, and a report relevant to the bill and to the member for Kingston's motion today was prepared by the National Preventative Health Taskforce and entitled Australia: the healthiest country by 2020—national preventative health strategy—the roadmap for action. Recently retired Professor Robert Bush from the Ipswich campus of the University of Queensland was a participant in that report and did some terrific work along with his colleague Professor Helen Chenery, including the work they did on the Ipswich study.

I would like to commend and congratulate William Darbishire for his excellent work as the CEO of the Lung Foundation and make special mention of the Lung Foundation's very successful awareness campaign, Show Us Your Lungs, which they also brought to Parliament House. I have a great T-shirt, which I wear running around the streets of Ipswich, which I managed to pilfer from that particular event. So I want to congratulate William for that. We also made a great commitment. When we were in government after 2007, we put $3.5 billion—$226 million in last year's budget—towards improving the prevention, detection and treatment of cancer. As the then Parliamentary Secretary for Health and Ageing, I am proud to be part of that decision. I thank the member for Kingston for her motion and fully support it. (Time expired)

Mr EWEN JONES (Herbert) (11:16): I too rise to support the member for Kingston's motion on Lung Cancer Awareness Month and I do so with the admission that I am an addict. I no longer use, but I still recognise myself as a smoking addict. Nicotine is the greatest drug in the world for those people who like it. I was a reasonably heavy smoker and I took after my
father with that. My father was one of those people who could smoke a hundred cigarettes in a day. They say that when you roll over in your sleep at night there is a moment where you wake up. My dad would roll over, get up, smoke two or three cigarettes and go back to bed.

I only smoked between 40 and 50 cigarettes a day, and the reason I gave up was that my then wife and I were going to have a family. She said that if I wanted to keep on smoking I would have to go outside. So it was not the packaging; it was not the messages on the bottom. It was the pure laziness of having to go outside for a smoke that made me give up. Those people who do smoke make fun of absolutely everything. In my day, at the bottom of your packet of cigarettes there were messages that smoking causes lung cancer and heart disease. I tried to make sure that I bought packets of cigarettes that said that smoking damages your fitness or that smoking is harmful if you are pregnant, because those things did not hurt me. When you are a smoker, you will rationalise absolutely everything for it, but it is broader than that.

I recognise the words of the member for Blair that kids today are so much better off than we are. My son is 11 years old. We sit at our dinner table. My daughters, as far as I am aware, have never smoked. My son is 11 years old and has his heart set on playing half-back for the Cowboys. We were talking about smoking and he asked me if I smoked. I said, 'Yes, I smoked.' He said, 'So let me get this right, dad: you knew it was bad for you?' 'Yes.' 'You knew it could give you cancer?' 'Yes.' 'You knew it could give you heart disease?' 'Yes.' 'You knew about all of those things that come off it—blindness and all those things?' 'Yes.' 'And yet you still did it?' 'Yes.' 'Let me go through that again, dad.' He cannot for the life of him figure out why I smoked. Being cool and being a little bit rebellious when you are in primary school or early high school is not enough.

I note the words of the member for Blair and the words of the parliamentary secretary earlier in relation to men's health. I think it is something that we do go through and that we do have to recognise. I have spoken at and been to prostate awareness things where men do not look after themselves. Women are so much better at discussing matters amongst themselves, going to the doctor and getting things tested, because it is part of their lives. For men, be it diabetes, depression, lung cancer or prostate, it does not matter how much sense it makes, there is reluctance to go and get themselves checked, to sit there and have that conversation and that relationship with the doctor. Men will go to the doctor when they are near death. Men will go to the doctor when they are very, very ill and need drugs. We do not go to the doctor to get ourselves checked, and we do not go to the doctor and get our blood pressure checked often enough. We do not go and get our vital signs checked up.

As previous members have mentioned, men were 56 per cent more likely to die of lung cancer than women because we do not keep our relationships with our GPs current. Lung Cancer Awareness Month must push that men develop that relationship with their GP. For mine, I think the message is that we can get out there. I was a smoker because it appealed to me. I got hooked and I loved it and I still do. That is the wonderful thing about cigarettes—you can rationalise anything you want! You can be standing outside a building in 45-degree heat, sucking on a burning stick, sweating profusely whilst everyone is inside drinking cold beer, eating prawns and you are thinking you are the lucky one. That is what smoking can do for you. When you are a smoker, an addict, you may not be able to make your car payment, you may not be able to make your rate payment or your insurance payment, but you can
scrounge enough 5c pieces to get a packet of cigarettes. That is the nature of addiction. That is what we have to attack. That is what we have to fix up. I am sure I am joined by you, Deputy Speaker Broadbent, and the member for Wright in cursing this insidious disease.

Ms KING (Ballarat) (11:21): I would like to thank the shadow parliamentary secretary for health for introducing this important motion and for her work not just on Lung Cancer Awareness Month but also in the area of lung health generally. As noted, lung cancer claims the lives of more Australians than any other cancer. In 2010 lung cancer was the leading cause of cancer death for men and women. Some 18 per cent of all cancer deaths in 2010 were due to lung cancer. We know that lung cancer claims the lives of more Australians than any other cancer, with only 14 out of 100 Australians surviving five years beyond their initial diagnosis.

According to the Lung Foundation Australia, more than 9,100 Australians are diagnosed with lung cancer each year. In 2007 there were 7,626 deaths caused by lung cancer. If you are male, the risk of been diagnosed with lung cancer in Australia is higher. 2009 saw 10,200 newly diagnosed cases of both small-cell and non-small cell lung cancers in Australia. They are fairly confronting statistics and it is certainly why Lung Cancer Awareness Month is a month of promotion about the importance of lung health and lung care. We know that cancer is still placing an intolerable burden on our community. We have all been touched by this disease somehow. We have a family member, a friend or someone in our own lives who has been burdened with cancer. But I believe that, if governments at all levels work together, we can improve the survival rate of Australians diagnosed with lung cancer.

Early detection absolutely is the key and I am extremely proud of the work that the previous government did in this area in encouraging early detection and ensuring access to high-quality health care treatment and support. We worked tirelessly to ensure access to early detection, treatment and quality care. In the budget, the Labor government announced some $5.9 million of funding to continue to improve outcomes for people with lung cancer, with Cancer Australia working to deliver best practice cancer care, research and national reporting of lung cancer data. The investment was part of the world-leading cancer care package and the new investment was on top of some $3.5 billion that went into combating cancer since 2007, including $1.5 billion in new cancer medicines. In 2009 alone we announced $6.8 million to improve lung cancer care through identifying research in clinical priorities, providing more consistent data and targeting health professionals to deliver best practice, and we made headway in talking about lung cancer suffering in Torres Strait Islanders and Indigenous Australians.

As we know, tobacco smoking is one of the biggest factors in lung cancer. It is a testament to the previous government that we took on the tobacco industry to reduce the promotion of harmful smoking, removing the last form of advertising for smoking. I want to pay tribute to the previous Minister for Health and Ageing and Attorney-General, Nicola Roxon, as well as previous health minister Tanya Plibersek for their work in this area of tackling smoking, particularly their efforts in plain packaging reform. It was a tough fight but one that was well worth having and one on which I would be exceptionally disappointed to see any backward steps taken.

Through education and investment in critical medical research we can ensure that lung health is a priority across Australia. We remain committed to improving the cancer services
provided across Australia. Lung Cancer Awareness Month is a month of promotion and awareness raising and one in which we should redouble our efforts in looking at significant ways to prevent and reduce the rate of lung cancer in Australia. Lung cancer does, of course, have many causes, but tobacco smoking is certainly the largest cause. I know many people struggle. We heard from the member for Herbert on his own personal journey and struggle with smoking, and I want to commend him. I have a pretty strong policy in my office of nagging every single one of my staff who do smoke. As an ex-smoker from a very long time ago now, I feel it is important that not only do I nag them but also they are provided with supportive opportunities to quit and that it is an environment in which we do not see smoking as something that is common within the workplace. I have so far been successful in managing to get four of my staff to take that very difficult challenge of giving up smoking. I acknowledge that it is an incredibly difficult addiction to break; but, when you see young children develop lung cancer and the survival rates are so small, it is incredibly important that during lung awareness week we talk about the opportunities and support for people, whether it be through the Quit Foundation or MBS items on the PBS, to quit smoking so that we improve lung health and the survival rates of people with lung cancer in this country. (Time expired)

Mr IRONS (Swan) (11:27): I rise to support the motion by the member for Kingston that we note that November is Lung Cancer Awareness Month. There are three other parts to the motion that I also support. It is important that we as parliamentarians on both sides of the House do all we can to help prevent deaths by raising the awareness of the importance of early detection. The Cancer Australia website states:
The symptoms of lung cancer can often be vague and mimic those of other conditions, so it's important to know what your cough is telling you.

For the benefit of my constituents and other people who may read this speech, I will quote from some of the statistics and advice from the website with regard to coughs:
Unexplained, persistent symptoms lasting more than three weeks can include:
- a new or changed cough
- coughing up blood—this is called haemoptysis
- a chest infection that won't go away
- chest pain and/or shoulder pain
- shortness of breath
- hoarse voice
- weight loss or loss of appetite
These symptoms may be due to other conditions however, if any of these symptoms are experienced, it is important that they are discussed with a GP or healthcare worker without delay.

In 2009 lung cancer was the fifth most commonly diagnosed cancer in Australia after prostate, bowel, breast and melanoma of the skin, accounting for 8.9 per cent of all new cancers in Australia. For men and women separately, lung cancer is the fourth most commonly diagnosed cancer for men after prostate, bowel and melanoma of the skin; and for women after breast, bowel and melanoma of the skin. In 2009 there were 10,193 new cases of lung cancer diagnosed: 6,034 in men and 4,159 in women. In 2020 an estimated 13,640
people are expected to be diagnosed with lung cancer in Australia. In 2009 the average age of the first diagnosis of lung cancer was 71 years for men and 69.9 years for women.

The risk of developing lung cancer increases with age. In 2009, 85 per cent of new lung cancers in men and 81 per cent in women were diagnosed in people aged 60 years or older. In 2009, the age standardised incidence rate was 43.2 cases per 100,000 people. This was higher for men than for women: 55.7 cases in 100,000 for men compared with 33.1 cases per 100,000 for women. The incidence of men diagnosed with lung cancer in Australia decreased from 85.2 cases per 100,000 in 1982. The incidence of women diagnosed with lung cancer in Australia increased from 18.2 per 100,000 in 1982. In 2012 lung cancer is expected to be the leading cause of burden of disease due to cancer among men and the second highest burden of disease due to cancer among women.

All these statistics are indicators of how important early detection is. Symptoms of lung cancer in nonsmokers may be different from lung cancer in people who smoke. Sometimes the symptoms may be more subtle, such as shortness of breath with activity, or hard to define, such as fatigue. As a quick aside, talking about lung cancer in nonsmokers is more important than ever. Currently, 20 per cent of women who develop lung cancer in the United States are lifelong nonsmokers. In addition, the majority of people, both men and women, who develop lung cancer at this time are former, not current, smokers. So it is important that even former smokers who think they may be in the clear make sure to have regular check-ups.

Last Friday I represented the Prime Minister at the Asbestos Disease Society's ecumenical memorial service at the Redemptorist Monastery in Vincent Street, North Perth. The service was in remembrance of families, friends, work colleagues and those unknown who have died from asbestos caused diseases and gave us an opportunity to collectively express our compassion and support for many grieving families. This year was the 18th year since the inaugural ecumenical memorial service in 1996, and in this period alone 3,369 of their members and friends have died from asbestos caused diseases. That includes 296 this year. The current epidemic of asbestos caused diseases and lung cancer is alarmingly on the rise in Australia. On behalf of the PM, I lit a candle in memory of Lauren Mariolis, who died of brain cancer at the age of 10, and my sister Margaret Dix, who fell to her death in 2004. I also wish all the best to Barry Knowles, who sat next to me at the ceremony. God bless him as well. I commend this motion to the House.

Ms HALL (Shortland) (11:32): I take great pleasure in rising to speak on this motion and congratulate the member for Kingston on bringing it to the House. November was Lung Cancer Awareness Month, and earlier this year the Lung Foundation Australia came to this parliament and gave a presentation to all members. That really reinforced the fact that we should be thinking about lung cancer and lung disease, and this motion reminds us of just how common it is. In 2011 lung cancer was the fourth most commonly diagnosed cancer in Australia after prostate cancer, bowel cancer and melanoma. In 2009 there were 10,193 new cases of lung cancer, and in 2020 it is estimated that there will be nearly 14,000 people expected to be diagnosed with it.

What these facts establish is that lung cancer is a very significant cause of illness in Australia. It is a disease that really needs to be addressed. There are a number of risk factors associated with lung cancer. Obviously the most commonly known risk factor is smoking. By quitting smoking, after five years a person can have halved their chance of getting lung
cancer. It is also important to note that making changes to your lifestyle—diet, exercise, reducing alcohol—also helps address issues associated with the risk factors of lung cancer.

Lung cancer is not only caused by smoking. There can also be a number of other environmental issues that contribute to lung cancer: passive smoking, radiant exposure, occupational exposure and air pollution. A family history of lung cancer also contributes to lung cancer. Previous lung disease such as lung fibrosis, chronic bronchitis, emphysema and pulmonary tuberculosis also increases a person’s risk of developing lung cancer. So it is not an open-and-shut case.

On 2011 figures, only 14 per cent of sufferers from this cancer live past the first five-year period. So Cancer Australia has been working with affected families, as has the Lung Foundation, in raising awareness. GPs and other professionals have also helped with the diagnosis, treatment and care of lung cancer patients. As the member for Kingston mentioned, it is really important to get an early diagnosis and it is also very important not to stigmatise those people that are living with lung cancer or have been diagnosed with lung cancer.

The rate of teenage smoking in New South Wales has dropped significantly. In 1984 about 27 per cent of teenagers smoked in New South Wales, and in 2008 that had dropped as low as 8.6 per cent. The proportion of teenagers in New South Wales who have never smoked increased from 32 per cent to 75 per cent in 2008, and the best way to reduce the rate of smoking is never to smoke. Increases in the cost of cigarettes, advertising bans, public funding campaigns and, of course, the plain packaging legislation that passed through the last parliament have all been very important measures to reduce lung cancer. Governments not accepting political donations from cigarette companies is another important message. I would like to invite members to join the Lung Foundation parliamentary friends group, which will be established over the next couple of weeks, because this is a very important message that goes out into our communities, saying that we as parliamentarians are supportive of good lung health.

Mr WYATT (Hasluck) (11:37): November was Lung Cancer Awareness Month, an important month considering the number of Australians who are diagnosed with lung cancer every year. This aggressive cancer claims the lives of more Australians than any other cancer, with only 14 out of 100 Australians surviving beyond five years of their initial diagnosis.

One of the challenges we have is the way in which we develop an awareness for people to look at the symptoms that ultimately impact on them when they are diagnosed with an advanced form of lung cancer. I recollect that my younger brother, who died of an aggressive lung cancer, was coughing up blood and thought it was something that was not unusual, which delayed the diagnosis. By the time he received the diagnosis it was too late; it had spread significantly. He lasted two months after the diagnosis. So lung cancer has always been in the forefront of my thinking, because I have seen so many people over the years affected by the fact that their lung cancer is not only caused by smoking. I have lost two friends who had been doing wood-turning. The dust that people generate in wood-turning is significant, and if they do it regularly without wearing a mask then that is another contributing factor.

It is critical that state and federal governments work together to ensure the best possible prevention and treatment for lung cancer. It is important because I think that sometimes the awareness level is not there and people do not look for the signs and symptoms. When they
become aware of them, in hindsight they say, 'Yes, I did have that,' and by then it becomes problematic. But we are getting more and more people surviving lung cancer because of the quality of the treatment that is provided because of the work that is done by researchers.

When we think about it, lung cancer was uncommon before the advent of cigarette smoking. It was not even recognised as a distinct disease until 1761, and different aspects of lung cancer were described further in 1810. Malignant lung tumours made up only one per cent of all cancers seen at autopsy in 1878 but had risen to 10 to 15 per cent by the early 1900s.

Case reports in medical literature numbered only 374 worldwide in 1912. But a review of autopsies showed the incidence of lung cancer had increased from 0.3 per cent in 1852 to 5.66 per cent in 1952, and over the subsequent years we have seen a significant increase in that number. In Germany in 1929, physician Fritz Lickint recognized the link between smoking and lung cancer, which led to an aggressive anti-smoking campaign. The British Doctors Study, published in the 1950s, was the first solid epidemiological evidence of the link between lung cancer and smoking, and I remember that in 1964 the Surgeon General of the United States recommended smokers should stop smoking.

Having worked in a number of roles in the communities in which I have lived and worked, I know the awareness has been much more significant. The work of the cancer foundation and many leading clinicians and those who undertake health promotion campaigns have certainly made us much more cognisant of the importance of early diagnosis, recognising the signs and symptoms. But one group that we do have to focus on is men. I often find that being typical guys we tend not to take seriously the first symptoms that we have: the shortness of breath, the pain of the coughing that comes with it. We tend to ignore it all until it is too late. What I do find, from evidence and certainly from having worked in the health arena, is that women are much more likely to go and have the matter dealt with. I commend the member for Shortland, who is establishing a parliamentary friends of lungs group, because lungs are among the significant organs that are often overlooked in the way in which we deal with health and disease prevention issues and I certainly hope the work undertaken by the group will create a broader and greater awareness amongst our parliamentary colleagues who, in turn, will become advocates in the way in which they engage in discussions within their own electorates.

It is through the educative process that we make others aware, and I would certainly emphasise the need to talk to the fellows in all of this because we have still not learnt that we are not immortal and that we are mortal and that lung cancer is a significant risk factor for those who expose themselves to the range of risks that exist within the environment and within their behaviours.

Ms PARKE (Fremantle) (11:42): I am glad of the opportunity to speak in recognition of the importance of Lung Cancer Awareness Month, and I thank the member for Kingston for bringing this motion. Lung cancer is a terrible disease. It is the main cause of cancer death in Australia, and it is a form of cancer with a comparatively poor survival rate. Only 13 in 100 survive five years beyond the initial diagnosis. Thankfully, over the last 25 years the application of public health policy has seen a significant reduction in the incidence of lung cancer. There is no doubt that one of the most significant public health achievements in this
country over the last quarter of a century has been tobacco control, which has made a clear difference when it comes to rates of lung cancer.

Cancer Australia's 2011 report to the nation notes that 90 per cent of lung cancer in males and 65 per cent of lung cancer in females is estimated to be as a result of smoking. Of course there are significant other factors involved in causing lung cancer but tobacco is far and away the worst. That is why tobacco control has been so important and effective—because, by dramatically reducing the rate of smoking, we greatly lessen the impact of carcinogens in tobacco on smokers and on those exposed to passive smoking, and the incidence of lung cancer has decreased accordingly.

This has not been easy and it is important to recognise that the hard work of shifting Australia from being a country with a relatively high level of smoking and of smoking related disease and death to the situation today required policy and political courage. Between 1991 and 2010 the proportion of daily smokers aged 14 years and over decreased by almost 40 per cent and smoking rates in Australia are now among the lowest in the world, just as life expectancy in Australia is now among the highest in the world. There is no question that the Labor Party has led this effort or that the Labor government took that work further with our world-leading introduction of plain packaging accompanied by a $27.8 million advertising campaign. I was very pleased to make a contribution to the debate in support of Labor's Tobacco Advertising Prohibition Amendment Bill during the life of the previous parliament. It was legislation that made key improvements to the way in which tobacco promotion through the internet and new technologies was controlled.

There are those who continue to claim that this long hard battle was and is unnecessary—indeed, that it was an improper cause pursued by those with a kind of nanny-state mentality. As I said before, that view stands awkwardly alongside the clear statement of the National Tobacco Strategy 2004-09 which said:

Tobacco is a unique consumer item. Tobacco products cause premature death and disability when used as intended by the manufacturer; and they are addictive. No company trying to introduce cigarettes into Australia today would succeed in getting them onto the market.

I note that the UK government is about to follow in our plain-packaging footsteps and yet a member of the government has expressed the view that smoking and the sale of tobacco should really be left as a matter of individual freedom and individual responsibility. To hold that kind of view you would have to ignore altogether the vast inequitable disparity that exists, on the one hand between a multibillion-dollar corporation with all the advertising resources and techniques at its disposal in its effort to push an addictive product on young people, and on the other hand a teenage boy or girl who, if they succumb to that manipulation, will likely have their life significantly shortened.

The history of tobacco is a reminder that corporate interests are quite capable of putting profits before people's health, and not just inadvertently. It is a reminder that one of the critical functions of government is to act as a balance against the potential for large companies and organisations to put their interests improperly ahead of the interests of individuals and society as a whole. I am glad that the Prime Minister has recently acknowledged that it is wrong to accept donations from tobacco companies, just as Labor did a decade earlier, and it is a welcome development that this approach is now bipartisan. We
must have a committed national effort to reducing smoking rates further and to improving the way we diagnose and treat lung cancer.

There are thousands of Australians living with lung cancer, and our thoughts are with all those fighting against this painful, frightening life-threatening illness, and with their families. Lung Cancer Awareness Month is an opportunity to recognise the toll that this disease takes on individuals, families and communities and an opportunity to acknowledge the expertise, research, health care and emotional support provided by health professionals working to combat lung cancer and assist those suffering from it. More than anything, it is an opportunity to remember that lung cancer continues to be a significant cause of death and continues to be a form of cancer that has a comparatively poor survival rate, and for that reason it is a significant issue of public policy. I would like to thank and pay tribute to Lung Foundation Australia for its important work in this area.

Debate adjourned.

World AIDS Day

Ms O'DWYER (Higgins) (11:47): I move:

That this House:
(1) notes that 1 December 2013 is World AIDS Day;
(2) recognises that:
   (a) more than 35 million people now live with HIV/AIDS worldwide, and almost 10 per cent of these are under the age of 15;
   (b) every day nearly 6,300 people contract HIV—nearly 262 every hour;
   (c) in Australia in 2012 there were 25,000 people living with HIV and 1,253 new diagnoses of HIV infection—a 10 per cent increase from previous years;
   (d) in 2012, 1.6 million people died from AIDS—related illnesses;
   (e) in some communities HIV rates are as high as 40 per cent;
   (f) since the beginning of the epidemic in the 1980s, more than 75 million people have been infected with HIV and nearly 36 million have died of AIDS-related illnesses;
   (g) there are now outstanding antiviral treatments available to people living with HIV; and
   (h) although a lot of work has been done and many medical advances have been made, there is no cure and no vaccine, so a lot of research and work still needs to be done before we see the end of HIV;
(3) acknowledges that:
   (a) in July 2014, Melbourne will host the 20th International AIDS Conference (AIDS 2014);
   (b) the conference will bring together 14,000 delegates from around 200 countries, which will be the largest medical conference ever held in Australia; and
   (c) the conference will be chaired by Nobel Laureate, Professor Francoise Barre-Sinoussi, and Professor Sharon Lewin; and
(4) calls on the Parliament to:
   (a) continue Australia's strong commitment to an enduring effective partnership between government, scientists and the community to meet the needs of people living with HIV;
   (b) continue Australia's strong commitment to medical health and research; and
   (c) foster and cultivate Australia's medical health and research community and researchers to ensure we stay at the forefront of all aspects of treatment, care and research in HIV.
I rise today to speak on a motion of great importance. Yesterday, 1 December 2013, was World AIDS Day. To mark this day, the International AIDS Society brought Nobel Peace Prize winner and UNAIDS Ambassador and UNAIDS Global Advocate for Zero Discrimination, Aung Sung Suu Kyi, to Australia to launch the countdown to the World AIDS Conference to be held in Melbourne in 2014. Yesterday His Excellency The Honourable Alex Chernov AC QC, hosted Aung Sung Suu Kyi at a reception at Government House in Victoria where she spoke about the importance of ending discrimination for those suffering from this disease by challenging ignorance and intolerance. She spoke for all of those in the world who do not have a voice of their own. She implored us to continue the fight against AIDS until it is one day eradicated from the world.

World AIDS Day is a day when the world turns its attention to those who have been affected by AIDS and the HIV virus. Human immunodeficiency virus is a contagious disease that is contracted through the exchange of bodily fluids. Once caught, it will eventually lead to acquired immunodeficiency syndrome, or AIDS. There is no time frame to this process and it can in some cases take decades. Advances in treatments have meant that people living with HIV can live active lives for many years. However, to date there is still no cure. HIV attacks the immune system and increases the chances of contracting other infectious diseases. Once AIDS has developed, the patient becomes susceptible to various viruses and cancers which will ultimately prove to be terminal.

World AIDS Day is a time to mourn those who have been lost to this insidious disease and to support those currently in the fight of their lives. It is a time to think of families, friends and carers whose lives have been changed irrevocably. It is also a moment to recognise the work that has been done so far in the effort to eradicate the disease, as well as to improve the quality of life of sufferers.

We are so fortunate to have in Australia some of the most pre-eminent researchers in this field. Many would be aware of the significant contribution that the Burnet Institute has made to the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of AIDS and related diseases, as well as its ongoing search for a cure for AIDS. They have 49 projects currently on foot, many with partners from around the world. These projects cover both research and education in Australia and around the globe, including small molecule inhibitors of HIV-1 reverse transcriptase and HIV clinical training for doctors. I would like to acknowledge the fine work the Burnet Institute carries out for our community, both here and internationally, under the impressive stewardship of Professor Brendan Crabb.

To recognise the importance of the HIV-AIDS challenge it is appropriate to draw the parliament's attention to some very sobering statistics regarding HIV-AIDS from around the world. There are currently 35 million people worldwide living with either AIDS or the HIV virus. That is one and a half times the population of Australia currently suffering from some form of the disease. Of those 35 million people, 10 per cent are under the age of 15, meaning 3½ million children under the age of 15 currently suffer from HIV or AIDS.

In 2012 there were 25,000 people living with HIV in Australia. Although this may be on the lower end of the spectrum per capita, there were 1,253 new diagnoses, which is a 10 per cent increase on the previous year. This is a worrying statistic.

The AIDS epidemic was first recognised in the 1980s and since then more than 75 million people have been infected with HIV and nearly 36 million people have died of AIDS related
illnesses. Globally, nearly 6,300 people contract HIV every day, or 262 every hour. In 2012, 1.6 million people died from AIDS related illnesses and in some communities HIV rates are as high as 40 per cent.

Like most infectious diseases and healthcare issues, HIV and AIDS are most prevalent in Third World countries. They are especially prevalent in western and central African countries, where education and knowledge on the topic is relatively poor and where regard for women’s human rights is low. This in turn leads to some concerning practices in those communities. This further highlights the need to educate people so as to prevent the spread of the disease and decrease the rate of infection.

Of course, HIV and AIDS are not limited to poorer communities and are not limited to Africa; indeed, they are big issues within our own neighbourhood and outside of Australia. There is also though a higher risk among those in the community who do not practise safe sex and drug users who share needles. What is concerning, as I previously mentioned, is that in the last year there was a 10 per cent increase in the number of diagnoses in Australia than in the previous year. This still tells us that there is a lot we need to do in terms of education in Australia around safe sex practices in particular.

Our vigilance must be matched by our continued investment in health and medical research. The coalition have a strong record when it comes to investing in research. Recently the coalition announced $559 million to fund 963 NHMRC grants in the first round of funding. We have also quarantined health and medical research funding from any future cuts and have committed to reducing red tape for researchers and medical practitioners, especially with respect to clinical trials.

Another important initiative in the fight against HIV and AIDS is the world AIDS conference. As previously mentioned, the world AIDS conference will be held in Melbourne in July 2014. This is an opportunity for over 14,000 participants from around 200 countries to meet and collaborate on future endeavours to eradicate this disease once and for all. The conference is organised by the International AIDS Society, which is the world’s leading independent association of HIV professionals, with over 16,000 members from more than 177 countries working at all levels of the global response to AIDS. IAS members include researchers from all disciplines, clinicians, public health and community practitioners on the front line of the epidemic as well as policy and program planners.

The conference is one of the largest medical conferences in the world. In my capacity as co-founder of the Parliamentary Friends of Women in Science, Maths and Engineering, I want to particularly highlight that the co-chairs of the conference are two of the most pre-eminent female scientists in the world: French Nobel Laureate Professor Francoise Barre-Sinoussi and our very own Professor Sharon Lewin.

Professor Barre-Sinoussi won the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine in 2008. She was awarded the prize for her work in discovering HIV and her continued research, which she began in 1983. After a long and incredibly distinguished career, Professor Barre-Sinoussi will be travelling to Melbourne to co-chair the conference with Professor Sharon Lewin.

Professor Lewin is the head of the Department of Infectious Diseases at Monash University and the Alfred Hospital, and Co-Head of the Centre for Biomedical Research at the Burnet.
Institute. She is one of Australia's most esteemed scientists, and I am incredibly proud to say she is also a Higgins resident.

I would like to personally congratulate these two exceptional women and all of the events coordinators for putting together what I am sure will be an incredibly professional and valuable conference. I take this opportunity to congratulate the Victorian government—the Premier, Denis Napthine, and the Minister for Health, David Davis—for their foresight in making sure that this conference can be held in Australia and held in Melbourne.

We have come a very long way on the journey to end discrimination and to find a cure for HIV and AIDS. But there is still a very long way to go. Together, I am very confident, we will get there.

Ms HALL (Shortland—Opposition Whip) (11:56): I take great pleasure in rising to support the motion of the member for Higgins. It is a motion that is particularly important at this time of the year. Yesterday was World AIDS Day, and every year this parliament needs to remember World AIDS Day and to talk about the significance of that day and make a pledge to work towards coming up with a cure for, or some form of vaccine against, AIDS.

Here are a few facts. HIV continues to be a major global public health issue, and it has claimed the lives of 36 million people worldwide. That is a phenomenal number of people that have succumbed to AIDS. Approximately 35.3 million people were living with AIDS in 2012, and I am sure most members would know people within their own electorates who are living with AIDS.

Sub-Saharan Africa is the most affected region, with nearly one in every 20 adults living with HIV—69 per cent of all people living with HIV are in this region. In 2008 I visited South Africa, and when I was there I met with a woman with a young family who was living with AIDS. She told us about how she had gone to the brink: of how she had nearly died. She had been in a facility, and was put in a little room—just put there to die. She was stigmatised by everybody who lived in her township. It was only because she received some care and some drugs that she was given back her life. She had a young child. This young child had the vision of playing soccer for South Africa, and his chances of being able to achieve that were much greater when he had his mother there to support him.

I also met with a young family who had lost their mother and their father to AIDS. They had a memory box, and in it were the only mementos they had of their parents. The family had the support of the township they lived in, but the eldest child was actually looking after the family and keeping it together. It is only by visiting a place like that that you can understand the magnitude of the impact that AIDS has had on real people's lives. We read about it, we hear about it, but when you are in that environment you see the stigmatisation that is directed towards those people that are living with AIDS, you see the challenges they face each and every day, you see the enormity of the loss of lives and you can really understand how it has impacted on those communities.

As we all know, AIDS has now been around since the early eighties. In Australia I think we probably had one of the best campaigns at the time with the Grim Reaper campaign. That was put in place as a shock tactic to raise awareness within the community of the dangers of HIV and the way it was contacted. It was trying to stop those risky behaviours that would then lead to a reduction in the number of cases of HIV.
By December last year there had been 34,029 cases of HIV diagnosed in Australia since 1982 and more than 25,700 people living with HIV in Australia. The majority of these are men. Paul O'Grady, who was a member of the Legislative Council in New South Wales, was one of the first people diagnosed with HIV back in the early eighties. He became terribly ill in the mid to late 1990s and resigned from the Legislative Council. Then he started using the retroviral drugs and that has enabled him to live a longer life and enjoy a good quality of life. There are times when he is more unwell than others.

It has impacted on many people and has impacted on many families. It has actually impacted on my own family. My sister-in-law and her husband both died from AIDS back in the early 1990s. The husband contracted AIDS and then transferred it to my sister-in-law. He was diagnosed very late at the time when HIV was becoming more widely diagnosed. He died fairly quickly. My sister-in-law was diagnosed after his death. Luckily, their four children were free of the virus. She died after a struggle of a couple of years. During that time she felt terribly stigmatised by the fact that she had AIDS. She was embarrassed about it. I read some of the things she wrote about going to the dentist and the way that she was treated on those occasions.

I think our society has moved on since that time but there is still stigma associated with HIV. So World AIDS Day is a time that is very important to me and I always think of my sister-in-law at that time. What I would like to emphasise is the fact that I am very worried that the number of people being diagnosed with HIV has increased in recent times. Even though we have had those campaigns, even though people understand how HIV is contracted, here in Australia there were 1,200 new cases in 2012—which is a 20 per cent increase. The biggest increase has been among gay men under the age of 25. These are young men who were not exposed to the campaign back in the eighties. These are young men who do not understand the significance of it, and complacency has developed around it. I think that we need to get out there in our own electorates and through the arms of government, raise awareness and start getting the message out there again how HIV is contracted and look at ways to address this issue.

There have been some really positive signs in recent times about some of the research that is taking place, and hopefully that will lead to a vaccination or a cure. I think this is a really important time. The conference that is going to be held in Melbourne next year will be a time when a lot of the new treatments and new approaches will be explored. I congratulate the member for bringing this to the parliament and I encourage all members to realise just how significant this motion is. Thank you.

Mrs MARKUS (Macquarie) (12:06): I rise today to speak in recognition of World AIDS Day 2013, which took place on 1 December. It is a sad but harsh reality that, in the world today, 35 million people are living with AIDS. What makes this statistic even more harrowing is that 10 per cent of those people are under the age of 15. While HIV is no longer regarded as a death sentence and in many cases is a manageable illness, particularly with access to medication and treatment and if people have the opportunity to have a healthy lifestyle, the access to that treatment and healthy lifestyle that we sometimes take for granted is not available to many of those 35 million people.

We have moved a long way since the 1980s. I had the privilege in the early eighties, if I may mention it briefly, of working with a young woman who was diagnosed with HIV
following a blood transfusion. It is no longer the case that HIV is transmitted that way, but I walked the journey with her until she passed away in the mid-nineties. I watched her and her family and was able to provide them with support. Back then they were treated with disdain. I remember there was a lot of secrecy and discrimination and misunderstanding about how it was transmitted. We have moved a long way.

My family also have close connections in particular with our nearest neighbour, PNG. It is on that nation that I want to focus and make some comments about today. On my frequent visits I have seen firsthand the devastation that AIDS causes not only to individuals but to families and in fact whole clans. Several years ago there were predictions that as many as one in 20 of PNG's population of seven million could become infected with HIV, amid signs that the disease was spreading unchecked across parts of the Highlands region. Now the epidemic is being contained. Most of those infected are receiving lifesaving treatment and health workers are optimistic that this can be reduced to another manageable public health challenge.

While the spread of the virus is being checked, its management still poses a formidable public health challenge. Almost 12,000 adults and children were undergoing treatment last year, compared with about 9,500 in 2011. The national infection rate is estimated to have stabilised at about 0.83 per cent of the population, with higher rates in some Highlands provinces and Port Moresby's national capital district.

One of the greatest concerns in particular is highly vulnerable women in PNG. There are a growing number of women who are driven to sell sex casually to survive, particularly single women with no support or married women who have been abandoned. This is of great concern. But there has been some success, particularly achieved in the management of HIV among mothers and children. With better treatment and better education programs the incidence of mother-to-child transmission has been greatly reduced in PNG, with about 400 children having received treatment. Part of Australia's annual aid budget of $500 million to PNG is supporting local government efforts to provide antiretroviral treatment, with 80 per cent of eligible adults expected to be receiving the drugs by 2015. But there is much more work to be done.

There is also a challenge in our own nation. In Australia there are an estimated 25,000 people with HIV. A total of 1,253 cases of HIV infection were newly diagnosed in 2012, a 10 per cent increase on 2011. The annual number of new HIV diagnoses has gradually increased over the past 13 years, from 724 diagnoses in 1999. In New South Wales there has been a surge in HIV cases—up 24 per cent between 2011 and 2012. We need to ensure that people who live with HIV/AIDS can participate fully in the life of the community, free from stigma and discrimination. Two reports in 2012 revealed that more than half of the people with HIV have had their status disclosed without their permission. It is often the case that friends or even colleagues reveal someone's HIV status without that person's knowledge. Every human deserves to be treated with dignity and respect. We have an opportunity to reach out to those who are living with HIV and celebrate them for who they are and the contribution they make to our society. Today, along with a number of my colleagues, I support this motion.

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (12:11): I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak on this subject and I thank the member for Higgins for this motion. I can recall a time—it seems not so long ago—when the threat and fear of AIDS gripped this nation. It was a great unknown terror. Nobody knew what it was or what it meant other than certain death. It was an
epidemic. In Melbourne, where I was living, it seemed that almost every person my age, including me, had lost a friend or loved one to this disease. The result of this fear, this trauma, this lived experience was that people became informed, they became vigilant and they protected themselves. In the eighties my sister, who was then a scientist and is now a winemaker, worked in AIDS research—really, in the very early days of it. I can remember talking to my sister about her work. She went from being totally in the dark about this disease to knowing more and understanding more so that, ultimately, we would be able to control it.

Today the story of AIDS is a totally different one. Most importantly, a diagnosis of HIV is no longer the death sentence that it once was. Thanks to the incredible work of scientists, researchers and medical professionals like my sister, HIV-AIDS can now be not only prevented but treated. HIV is now a manageable infection, no longer a gradual progression to AIDS and then death. Treatments not only control the virus but also reduce infectiousness.

The progress that has been made in tackling this disease in what seems like a relatively short couple of decades is nothing short of remarkable. However, there seems to have been an unintended flipside to this progress. As treatment has progressed, fear has subsided—and so too, it would seem, has our vigilance. I was alarmed to read last week that there has been a 10 per cent increase in reported HIV cases in Australia during the last year. Associate Professor Paul Sendziuk, an expert on the history of HIV-AIDS from the University of Adelaide, points to the introduction of meet-up apps on phones, which make it easier for people to have casual sex with strangers, and the rise in the use of recreational drugs, which get people into euphoric states and lower their inhibitions, as two possible factors in the increase. He calls social media 'a double edged sword'. He says that, on the plus side, social media is being used by HIV educators in really innovative ways to reach people who might not otherwise get messages about AIDS. However, it also presents a real challenge in that it allows people to hook up for anonymous sex more easily. HIV might be the unintended consequence of the new ways Australia's young people are socialising. The trend in the use of steroids has also seen a new generation of Australians injecting drugs, which may also have resulted in this increase in HIV.

Yesterday was the 26th annual World AIDS Day. The global theme this year is ‘Getting to Zero’—zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS related deaths. The elimination of HIV is something that the UN Secretary-General's special envoy for AIDS believes is achievable in the Asia-Pacific region within the next 15 years. However, it will only be achieved if we are vigilant, if we avoid complacency. And I believe it is the responsibility of those of us who lived through the birth of the HIV-AIDS epidemic in this country to keep the younger generations informed: always practise safe sex; do not share syringes or other personal items such as razors; and get tested regularly.

HIV can affect anyone. There is no vaccine or cure for HIV or AIDS. By being informed about how HIV is transmitted and how to protect ourselves and others, we can enjoy life with safer sex and prevent the spread of HIV—an important and timely message this World AIDS Day. We must also be forever vigilant, which is why the Abbott government’s decision to defund the Alcohol and Other Drugs Council is so alarming. From 2002 to 2006, ADCA's president was Neal Blewett, who played an active, pivotal role in combating AIDS. As a result, ADCA was at the forefront of improving Australia's understanding of blood-borne diseases and the role of safe injection, and it played a critical role in bringing together a
cohesive cross-sectoral approach to the issue. So, in commending the member for Higgins for the motion, I also ask her to advocate for the reinstatement of funding for ADCA so it can continue to do great work on preventing HIV-AIDS in Australia.

Ms GAMBARO (Brisbane) (12:16): I rise in support of the motion moved by the member for Higgins on World AIDS Day and note that yesterday, 1 December, was World AIDS Day. World AIDS Day is a day when the world turns its attention to those who have been affected by AIDS and HIV, and it is a time to mourn those who have been lost to this insidious disease and to support those currently in the fight of their life battling the disease.

This disease requires our diligence for more than just one day a year. It is a disease that punishes complacency, and we can never take it for granted. To that end, the statistics highlighted by my colleague the member for Higgins, and others, paint a sobering picture of the ravaging destruction of human life that this disease is causing all around the world. There are 35 million people currently living with either AIDS or HIV worldwide. That is 1½ times the population of Australia. Of those 35 million people, 10 per cent are under the age of 15, meaning that 3½ million children under the age of 15 currently suffer from HIV and AIDS.

What alarms me the most is the all-too-prevalent perception among many Australians that this disease is something that is happening somewhere else in the world. The facts prove that any such perception could not be further from the truth. In 2012 there were 25,000 people with HIV in Australia. Although this may be on the lower end of the spectrum when you look at it per capita, there were 1,253 new diagnoses in 2012, a 10 per cent increase on the previous year, and that is a very worrying statistic. In Queensland, 207 people were diagnosed last year and 195 the year before that. This is why the Newman government in Queensland is spending more than $1.1 million on the initial phase of its 'End HIV' campaign, launched yesterday, which aims to be one of the first to adopt a whole-of-population approach. Dr Darren Russell, chair of the Queensland Ministerial Advisory Committee on HIV-AIDS, had this to say about the new campaign:

For the first time, the Queensland trend has crossed the line, meaning that the Queensland rate is higher than the Australian average—that's never happened before.

These alarming numbers require urgent and drastic action, and that is just what the Queensland Minister for Health, Lawrence Springborg, has done. Since coming to office, Minister Springborg has implemented an HIV strategy. So far this year, with sustained high rates of HIV testing, a significant drop in HIV diagnoses has been recorded. There were 183 new notifications in the same period last year, and that figure has dropped to 159. Under Minister Springborg's leadership Queensland became the first state to introduce free rapid HIV testing as part of regular clinical practice, and already more than 500 of these tests have been conducted. That is 500 Queenslanders who know what their HIV status is today, who might otherwise have remained in the dark. The member opposite can interject all he likes, but the results are proving that, with rapid testing in 16 locations in Queensland health clinics and in general practice, we can test and we can find out if somebody has HIV early. I do not know why the member wants to protest about finding out something earlier.

Our understanding of HIV in this state is moving ahead, and the results will benefit all Queenslanders. It is critical that we remain ever-vigilant and that we continue our investment in medical health and research. This disease does not tolerate any lack of respect, and it rewards complacency with death. I want to pay tribute to the great work that is being done at
the Queensland Institute of Medical Research by Dr David Harrich. His approach is a new Australian-made approach and one of the most exciting developments in HIV/AIDS research in recent years. The findings have been published in influential peer-reviewed scientific journals, and Dr Harrich and his team have come up with a way to produce an effective protein inhibitor of HIV by mutating an existing HIV protein. I want to congratulate him on the great work that is being done. The work that Dr Harrich is doing will make sure that a person who has HIV would not develop full-blown AIDS. But the work remains vigilant, and I commend the member for Higgins for her motion on this.

**Mr PERRETT** (Moreton) (12:21): I rise today to speak on the motion of the member for Higgins on World AIDS Day and commend the member for Higgins for this initiative. I always remember 1 December because it would have been my mum's birthday—it would have been her 81st birthday, so, happy birthday, Mum.

This globally recognised event raises awareness all across the world about the challenges associated with HIV-AIDS. I picked up some interesting facts from the speech by the member for Canberra, and I was waiting for the member for Brisbane to make a comment on the closing down of Biala in her electorate, but she failed to mention it in her five-minute speech. But I will come to that in a minute. Obviously we need to recognise that Australia, sadly, has seen an increase in HIV infection rates of more than eight per cent in 2011. It was interesting to hear the suggestion of the member for Canberra that it can be linked to those phone apps, because it did seem to defy all other logic. And obviously the opportunities that are there so readily are both a blessing and a curse. Perhaps linked also to that is the fact that there has been a 50 per cent rise in sexually transmitted diseases over the past 10 years, and perhaps with that information the member for Canberra gave there will be a further spike.

We need to look at ways to promote safe sex practices, especially in our young people, to reduce the transmission of HIV and other diseases. We need to look at endorsing education programs and information campaigns. And I can say, as someone with an eight-year-old son, having a conversation recently with a doctor who said, 'This is when you should be talking about having vaccinations,' scared the bejesus out of me. I thought an eight-year-old would be thinking about Lego and things like that. So, to all of a sudden hear that now is when we should be thinking about having that conversation and with young girls reaching puberty so much earlier than when I was at school, is scary. It is scary to think that someone's body can be so out of sync with their mental development.

So, we need to do what we can to ensure that people living with HIV and AIDS in our community can live their lives without fear of discrimination or exclusion. The days of the eighties are, hopefully, long behind us. And again, we need to invest in programs such as youth education that will break this cycle. One of the scary things mentioned in the motion by the member for Higgins is that there are 25,000 people living with HIV and 1,253 new diagnoses. That 10 per cent increase is the scariest thing.

Sadly, last year in Queensland we saw the Newman government make a harsh decision to dramatically slash services at Brisbane's only free sexual health clinic, Biala, located in the electorate of Brisbane. This service had trained specialist nurses and doctors. There was a suggestion put forward by the health minister, Mr Springborg, that people would be able to go to their local GP. The whole point of an anonymous clinic like Biala was that men—or females for that matter—who sleep with men and men who are cheating on their wives cannot
just go to their GP and have a conversation about the things that they are doing. This state government decision—this horrible decision—to cut 30 jobs at the clinic and refer STI treatment and diagnostic services to GPs was completely wrong. It was very short-sighted and dangerous—and just plain wrong.

Obviously, the government, at the state level and the federal level, needs to consider the long-term implications of closing these anonymous sexual health services. GPs need to be specially trained not only in terms of counselling but also in terms of the conversations that need to go with such things. The reality is that there are people in relationships, men particularly, who then have sex with men even though they ostensibly have children and have a normal heterosexual relationship. They still go off to beats. They still use the phone apps that the member for Canberra touched on which allow them to hook up with people and have anonymous sex. That means that the opportunities for having protected sex may not be as high as they are, especially if we go back to the bad old days when people started removing condom machines from health services. That was something that they used to do in the Joh Bjelke-Petersen days. Hopefully, we are a long way away from those sorts of behaviours.

I urge the health minister, Mr Springborg, to reverse this decision, because we need these services. I commend him for the response that was touched on by the member for Brisbane, but we need to go back to anonymous clinics like Biala. Otherwise, as Dr van Lieshout warned, there will be an increase in syphilis, gonorrhoea and all those things, particularly coming through fly-in fly-out workers, tourists and travellers. (Time expired)

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Broadbent) (12:26): Before I call the next member, I acknowledge that we have members of the PNG government here in the Federation Chamber.

Honourable members: Hear, hear!

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

World AIDS Day

Debate resumed on motion by Ms O'Dwyer:

That this House:

(1) notes that 1 December 2013 is World AIDS Day;

(2) recognises that:

(a) more than 35 million people now live with HIV/AIDS worldwide, and almost 10 per cent of these are under the age of 15;

(b) every day nearly 6,300 people contract HIV—nearly 262 every hour;

(c) in Australia in 2012 there were 25,000 people living with HIV and 1253 new diagnoses of HIV infection—a 10 per cent increase from previous years;

(d) in 2012, 1.6 million people died from AIDS related illnesses;

(e) in some communities HIV rates are as high as 40 per cent;

(f) since the beginning of the epidemic in the 1980s, more than 75 million people have been infected with HIV and nearly 36 million have died of AIDS related illnesses;

(g) there are now outstanding antiviral treatments available to people living with HIV; and

(h) although a lot of work has been done and many medical advances have been made, there is no cure and no vaccine, so a lot of research and work still needs to be done before we see the end of HIV;
(3) acknowledges that:
   (a) in July 2014, Melbourne will host the 20th International AIDS Conference (AIDS 2014);
   (b) the conference will bring together 14,000 delegates from around 200 countries, which will be the
       largest medical conference ever held in Australia; and
   (c) the conference will be chaired by Nobel Laureate, Professor Francoise Barre-Sinoussi, and
       Professor Sharon Lewin; and
(4) calls on the Parliament to:
   (a) continue Australia’s strong commitment to an enduring effective partnership between
       government, scientists and the community to meet the needs of people living with HIV;
   (b) continue Australia’s strong commitment to medical health and research; and
   (c) foster and cultivate Australia’s medical health and research community and researchers to ensure
       we stay at the forefront of all aspects of treatment, care and research in HIV. (Notice given 20
       November 2013. Time allowed—50 minutes.

Mrs PRENTICE (Ryan) (12:27): I rise today to support this motion from the member for
Higgins. As previous speakers are already noted, yesterday, 1 December 2013, was World
AIDS Day. It is important to restate some figures to remind us all just how widespread and
dangerous HIV-AIDS has become. This reminder is necessary because somehow the scale of
AIDS no longer manages to shock us and no longer stirs our compassion as it should. We
have become inured to the facts of AIDS. More than 35 million people now live with
HIV/AIDS worldwide, and almost 10 per cent of these people are under the age of 15.
Alarmingly, every day more than 6,000 people contract HIV.

Our nearest neighbour, Papua New Guinea, is also fighting this deadly epidemic, and I am
pleased Australian aid money assists them with this challenge. I also take this opportunity to
acknowledge my colleagues from the PNG government. In 2011, the Kirby Institute estimated
the number of people living with HIV in Papua New Guinea to be 34,000, which translates
into an HIV prevalence rate of 900 per 100,000 people. UNAIDS's estimates for 2012 put the
number of people living with HIV in PNG at 25,000. UNAIDS has also stated that in 2012
there were 13,000 children under the age of 17 left orphaned by AIDS in Papua New Guinea.

In 2011, I visited PNG with the then shadow foreign affairs minister, Julie Bishop. During
our time there, we met with representatives of Oil Search, including Managing Director Peter
Botten and Mr Aopi. We saw firsthand some of the outreach work Oil Search is undertaking
with local villages. Oil Search operates all of PNG's currently producing oil and gas fields and
has a 29 per cent interest in the PNG LNG Project. Most importantly, the company has
successfully developed public-private partnerships with PNG's national and provincial
governments, non-governmental organisations and faith based organisations to improve HIV
prevention and treatment.

Through the Oil Search Health Foundation, which was established in 2011, the company
has been able to secure grants from the global fund worth nearly $US80 million, and the
company has also contributed more than $10 million of their own funds to tailor HIV
programs to meet the specific needs of PNG people. Working closely with the PNG
Department of Health, the Oil Search Health Foundation has aligned their HIV program and
support services to the country's national standards and is now delivering health, education,
treatment and support services where they are needed most. Today, a team of nearly 100
health foundation staff, most of whom are PNG nationals, deliver HIV, maternal and child-
health and malaria programs in six of PNG's 22 provinces and support 55 health facilities that have performed over 36,000 HIV tests and distributed over 600,000 condoms since 2008.

On World Aids Day, oil search raises awareness about HIV by putting up big red ribbons at all its camps. Staff are also invited to participate in educational presentations. The Oil Search HIV program conducted its first HIV questionnaire last year for oil search's workforce in PNG. It showed a solid level of knowledge and understanding of HIV. The questionnaire was also repeated this year.

In addition to the services provided by the health foundation, since 2003 oil search's in-house medical team has also treated over 32,000 patients from its workforce and from communities in and around the areas in which it operates. Managing director Peter Botten says that these figures make oil search PNG's largest healthcare provider outside government. This is clear evidence of the enormous impact that businesses can have on people's lives, and I encourage more businesses to follow oil search's lead. In July 2014, Melbourne will host the 20th international AIDS conference. It will bring together 14,000 delegates from around 200 countries, making it the largest medical conference ever held in Australia.

The challenge of AIDS has not abated. The cost of care remains incredibly high, and the impact on those who have AIDS, their families and friends and the broader community make this a challenge that we must confront. I join with the member for Higgins in asking this parliament to continue Australia's strong commitment to an enduring and effective partnership between government, scientists and the community to meet the needs of people living with HIV, to continue Australia's strong commitment to medical health and research and to foster and cultivate Australia's medical health and research community and researchers to ensure that we stay at the forefront of all aspects of treatment, care and research in HIV. I commend the motion to the House.

Ms PARKE (Fremantle) (12:32): I am glad of the opportunity to speak in recognition of World AIDS Day, and I thank the member for Higgins for bringing this motion. As the motion notes, HIV/AIDS has been responsible for the death of some 36 million people worldwide and, since the beginning of the epidemic, has affected more than 75 million people. While Australia's response to HIV/AIDS from the earliest days in the 1980s was forward-looking, proactive and effective, over the last few years there has been a worrying rise in the otherwise low rate of infection in this country, and this needs to be addressed as a public health priority.

Australia contributes to the worldwide challenge of reducing HIV infection and treating those with AIDS both here and abroad. The motion acknowledges the significance of the 20th international AIDS conference, which will be hosted in Melbourne in 2014. This will be a crucial opportunity for the 14,000 delegates from around 200 countries to consider our position in relation to millennium development goal No. 6, which calls for unprecedented action to first halt and then reverse the devastating impact of HIV/AIDS. On that point, the UNAIDS Global report on the AIDS epidemic 2013, released only last month, provides a sober reflection on progress made and challenges ahead. While we have achieved an estimated 33 per cent decrease in the number of annual new infections worldwide between 2001 and 2012 and a similar decrease in the number of deaths, there continue to be more than 35 million people infected by HIV. That includes 25,000 in Australia.
I wholeheartedly support part 4 of the motion that calls on the parliament to continue efforts to support medical health research and to meet the needs of people living with HIV. But in my contribution to the debate I want to add how important it is for parliament to continue to support Australia's international contribution to combatting the global epidemic. The AIDS conference in Melbourne next year will certainly consider the domestic health efforts made by participating countries. But more importantly it will consider the global AIDS epidemic and the coordinated effort required to address the epidemic wherever it occurs. The fact is that through our aid program Australia plays an important role, especially in the region, in the global fight against HIV/AIDS. I take this opportunity to include within the debate on this motion a clear call on the government to sustain Australia's work and funding when it comes to the shared international effort required to defeat HIV/AIDS.

It is salient to point out that the government has announced a $700 million cut to Australia's foreign aid budget in this financial year without providing details of how those cuts will be achieved. The cuts over the forward estimates amount to $4.5 billion. This year is nearly halfway done yet we still do not know where $700 million, or one out of every eight dollars of Australia's aid for this year, will be cut. I think it is unlikely that those cuts or the rest of the $4.5 billion to be slashed from our development assistance budget can be made across the range of bilateral, multilateral, regional and NGO programs without withdrawing funding from health initiatives that are essential to saving lives from the scourge of HIV/AIDS.

I will just mention a few of the existing commitments that we can only assume are now under question. First, there is the provision of up to $100 million over eight years, 2008 to 2015, to Indonesia for HIV prevention and care and the provision of $59 million over nine years, 2007 to 2015, for a regional program across Myanmar, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, the Philippines and China with a focus on harm reduction among people who inject drugs. And there is the provision of $30 million over five years, 2009 to 2013, for the Pacific Islands HIV and STI Response Fund. If the government would make a commitment that no cuts will be made to programs that address the HIV/AIDS epidemic, many people would be happy to hear it.

Under the Labor government, in 2009 we launched a new international development strategy entitled Intensifying the Response: Halting the Spread of HIV. In October 2010 we announced a 55 per cent increase in our commitment to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. What the position is now, in terms of the Australian government approach, is unknown—because the new government has not made it clear where the $700 million in cuts to international assistance will be made this year, let alone the $4.5 billion in cuts over the four years to 2016-17.

As the UNAIDS Global report notes, 'Our ability to lay the foundation for an end to the AIDS epidemic continues to be undermined by a major resource gap.' As we look forward to hosting the 20th International AIDS Conference in Melbourne next year—the largest medical conference ever to be held in Australia—I look forward to hearing about how the government intends to maintain the absolutely critical growth path in Australia's contribution to the regional and global fight to defeat HIV/AIDS.

Debate adjourned.
Human Rights: Vietnam

Debate resumed on motion by Mr Hayes:

That this House:

(1) notes that:

(a) 10 December is International Human Rights Day and also marks the 20th anniversary of the establishment of the High Commissioner for Human Rights;

(b) on 12 November 2013, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam gained a seat on the United Nations Human Rights Council and also signed the United Nations Convention Against Torture; and

(c) despite Vietnam being a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, there remains a concerning number of human rights violations in that country including the:

(i) treatment of 14 Vietnamese Catholics who were arrested and sentenced to four to eight years imprisonment in January 2013 for protesting in support of land rights, freedom of religion and the release of previously convicted activists;

(ii) arrest in October 2012 of Nguyen Phuong Uyen and Dinh Nguyen Kha, charged under Article 88 of the Vietnamese Penal Code for distributing leaflets protesting against China’s claims to the Paracel and Spratly islands in the South China Sea; and

(iii) seven year imprisonment of trade union organiser Do Thi Minh Hanh, for national security charges relating to her involvement in organising workers at a shoes factory in October 2010; and

(2) calls on the Australian Government to:

(a) take all appropriate steps to encourage the Vietnamese Government to honour its obligations as a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;

(b) consider issues of human rights in Vietnam when assigning funding under Australia’s overseas development aid program; and

(c) continue Australia’s engagement in bilateral and multilateral contexts with Vietnam on human rights.

Mr HAYES (Fowler—Chief Opposition Whip) (12:37): International human rights has always been an issue for Australia, which is why we have played an active role in advocating for social justice and human rights, particularly within our sphere of influence. In 1948, Australia was one of the key architects in defining and drafting the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and I pay regard to the great work of Dr Herbert Vere Evatt in the development of this declaration.

Significantly, this year also marks the 20th anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. As the House is aware, I have spoken on many occasions about the issue of human rights in our region, drawing attention to human rights abuses, particularly as they occur in Vietnam. The majority of Vietnamese families in my electorate came to Australia as refugees following the fall of Saigon in 1975. They are model citizens in their adopted country, playing an active role in all areas of community life including charitable works. But what they have never done is turn their backs on their culture, their traditions and, importantly, their care for the wellbeing of the people of Vietnam. This is why the reported instances of human rights abuses in Vietnam so painfully impact on Vietnamese Australians. Clearly the people of Vietnam deserve better.

I make no apology for being critical of Vietnam over what I see to be a very poor record in respect of human rights. My position has never been based on malice or prejudice but, rather,
has been born out of a sense of frustration given Vietnam's extraordinary potential for substantial economic development as well as its ability to play a significant role in world affairs. However, these potentials cannot be properly attained without Vietnam first recognising the dignity of its own people.

As of 12 November this year, Vietnam realised one of its long-held ambitions when it gained a seat on the United Nations Human Rights Council. Being a member of the council should not be viewed as just a position of prestige but rather as a position which requires a country to make a significant contribution to the betterment of human rights across the globe. A government occupying such a position and not making adequate provision to ensure the adequate protection of human rights of its own people would be hypocritical in the extreme. In this motion I mention three cases: the arrest of the 14 Vietnamese Catholics, the incarceration of Nguyen Phuong Uyen and Dinh Nguyen Kha and the mistreatment of three trade union officials. All these people were treated unjustly. These activists did nothing wrong; they courageously stood up for the rights and liberties of Vietnamese people.

More recently, the enactment of decree 72 demonstrates the extreme lengths to which the regime is prepared to go to suppress freedom of speech. These cases are indicative of the approach of the Vietnamese government to human rights. They are indicative of the approach of a government more concerned about criticism than about advancing the true welfare of its own people. I consider the last Australian-Vietnamese human rights dialogue—which a friend, the federal member for Werriwa, who is present in the chamber now, attended and which was held in Canberra earlier this year—to be a positive advance in addressing the issue of human rights in Vietnam. It is just another step on a long road that we must commit to staying on for the long haul.

In moving this motion I call on the Australian government to continue pressing the Vietnamese regime to honour the international commitments which it so freely entered into when it became a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and a member of the United Nations. I also encourage the government to continue its bilateral and multilateral discussions with Vietnam, particularly on our concerns about human rights. In considering funding under Australia's overseas development aid program I honestly believe we should ensure that our assistance to Vietnam is directed to promoting human rights and advancing the rule of law. Our aid should have clear and measurable outcomes because, after all, we need to see progress. We owe it to the people of Vietnam to stay on the course of human rights reform.

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

Mr WYATT (Hasluck) (12:42): I second the motion. I thank the member for raising this issue. I have always respected the sovereign right of any country to govern itself and to administer its law. But there are fundamental things that apply to all people. They are based on human rights and the entitlements which should always be considered in the context of political structures. Particularly when you become a member of a significant organisation within the United Nations you are obliged, in deliberating on and debating human rights issues, not to seem at variance with international covenants and the commitment to human rights.

International Human Rights Day is on 10 December, which this year marks the 20th anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.
Rights. It is important that we use this time to celebrate how far we have travelled while considering the challenges that still lie before us. Just last month the Socialist Republic of Vietnam gained a seat on the United Nations Human Rights Council and signed the United Nations convention against torture. However, it is important that we draw the House's attention to a number of continuous violations in Vietnam.

In January this year, a group of Vietnamese Christians were arrested for protesting in support of land rights, freedom of religion and the release of previously convicted activists. One of those arrested was a Catholic online blogger, Paulus Le Son. He was accused of participating in training with Viet Tan, a U.S.-based pro-democracy organisation to establish democracy and reform in Vietnam through peaceful and political means. Within the construct of human rights it is important that there be a high degree of freedom of expression and speech which allows people to put forward their concerns when they feel that they may be repressed or that they are being denied their fundamental rights in key areas.

Le Son and others were also accused of circulating a petition to free prominent legal rights activist Cu Huy Ha Vu, a prominent human rights defender who was imprisoned for seven years in April 2011. All of the 14 accused denied these charges; however, the Vietnamese court found them guilty and now they are serving sentences varying in length between three and 13 years. Additionally, there are other activities occurring, because Nguyen Phuong Uyen and Dinh Nguyen Kha were charged under article 88 of the Vietnamese Penal Code for distributing leaflets protesting against China's claims to the Paracel and Spratly islands in the South China Sea. And finally, trade union organiser Do Thi Minh Hanh was imprisoned for national security charges relating to her involvement in organising workers at a shoe factory.

Many of those elements we take for granted and make assumptions that they are universally applied. But when you take responsibility of being involved in a significant human rights committee then there is a need to reflect inwardly on your own practices. As Australians we have a responsibility to encourage the Vietnamese government to honour its obligations as a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. We also have an obligation to encourage strong consideration of human rights in Vietnam when we fund overseas aid to various countries, in this instance Vietnam.

One of the issues that often surprises me when I look at sovereign nations who participate in United Nations forums is when they deviate from those very principles that were hard fought for, when UN conventions to which numerous countries are signatories are overlooked, where people's rights are denied and where citizens are imprisoned within their structures without due course to a fair trial or a fair hearing. I do acknowledge, as I said at the beginning, every sovereign nation having its own right to make those decisions. However, as a member of the United Nations we also have a responsibility to raise concerns in respect of the breach of human rights and it is important that we do so. I thank the member for Fowler for proposing today's private member's motion and I support it.

Mr BYRNE (Holt) (12:47): I too am pleased to speak on this private member's motion by the member for Fowler and endorse the member for Hasluck's comments with respect to us urging the Vietnamese government to honour its obligations as a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. In terms of the ongoing persecution of those that seek to exercise their rights in a democracy and being rightfully able to do so, the issue has been
raised quite powerfully in this place and in other places by the member during his period of
time as member for Fowler.

When one seeks to be recognised as a fully democratic nation, the actions of stymieing,
stifling or quashing protests about your government or system of government lead parliaments
from around the world to ask the question about that particular government. That is a very
serious charge to make, but, unfortunately, given the number of representations that we have
received collectively from all over Australia and particularly from the very large Vietnamese
diaspora that lives in our community, makes a life in our community and has contributed so
substantially to our community, it behoves us to continue to raise these ongoing abuses of
human rights and seek to pressure the Vietnamese government. We suggest that there is a
better way forward in managing protest than quashing it and dealing with it as they have been
doing, particularly with the celebrated cases that have been raised, and which I will re-
emphasise briefly here.

When you have 14 Vietnamese Catholics, who include the high-profile blogger Paulus Le
Son and are basically sentenced to prison terms ranging from three to 13 years in what is
called a 'subversion' case when they were merely protesting, then you have got to ask a
question about the government of the country. The defendants were arrested in 2011 as a
crackdown on Vietnamese youth activists who were accused of being critical of the
Vietnamese government in calling for greater democracy and human rights, and that does not
warrant jail sentences. A number of the defendants are members of Redemptorist group in the
Roman Catholic Church, which has been engaged in community service and lobbying, and
talking about land seizures and corruption. To see young Vietnamese being condemned and
sentenced to jail for carrying out protests is very troubling in terms of not only a human rights
trend but a trend that has been evident for some time in Vietnam.

One case that concerns many members of the local Vietnamese community in Holt—and
one that I have mentioned, along with the member for Fowler—is the case of Nguyen Phuong
Uyen and Dinh Nguyen Kha, who were charged under article 88. I have had representations
from Mr Tien Dung Kieu, the president of Vietnamese TV on Channel 31. He came to speak
to me and raised his concerns about human rights abuse and this one in particular. Whilst Mr
Tien welcomes the decision by the appeals court in August 2013 to free 21-year-old Nguyen
Phuong Uyen, who was serving a six-year jail term for alleged subversion, he is disappointed
that Uyen’s co-
defendant, 25-year-old computer technician Dinh Nguyen Kah, was not
released and has only had his eight-year sentence cut in half. Again, this is two young people
exercising their democratic right and they are in prison.

The other incident that has been discussed in this place is the incident that occurred in
February 2010 when labour activists Doan Huy Chuong, Do Thi Minh Hanh and Nguyen
Haong Quoc Hung were detained for organising workers at a shoe factory. This was basically
about circulating a demand for workers, who were on strike because of their company's
arbitrary payment policies and manager's abusive behaviour. These people were put in prison.
There are questions about the validity of the trial that was conducted because they were
denied a lawyer and the Vietnamese government prevented them from speaking in their own
defence during the proceedings. That is not a free and open court.

In the light of this particular hearing, Mr Doan and Ms Hanh were sentenced to seven years
prison. Mr Hung was sentenced to nine years. What we are hearing from various
representative organisations is that in prison they have been subjected to deplorable treatment. In addition to prolonged periods of solitary confinement they have each been repeatedly beaten. As a result, we understand that Ms Hahn is now deaf in one ear and Mr Doan has lost the use of one hand. All three suffer from rashes and liver problems, the result of poor food and sleeping conditions. That treatment is deplorable. No reasonable, responsible democratic government can undertake these actions. I again commend the member for Fowler for raising these issues of concern. We perhaps do have to look at the way in which our aid is provided if we are providing aid to a government that treats its citizens in such a deplorable manner.

Debate adjourned.

Australia Post

Ms KING (Ballarat) (12:52): I move:

That this House:

(1) notes that:

(a) Australia Post as per its Community Service Obligations, is required to achieve timely mail deliveries in all parts of Australia, not just the major capital cities;

(b) residents in regional towns and cities across Australia are not receiving mail for up to six days, with mail routes routinely left unprocessed due to insufficient staff at regional mail centres; and

(c) constituents have contacted the offices of regional Members, citing regular occurrences of late mail affecting people who depend on reliable mail services; and

(2) calls on the Minister for Communications to:

(a) ensure that the current cuts by attrition at regional mail centres are reversed, suspending moves by Australia Post and the Government to abandon regional Australia by transferring mail sorting services to capital cities;

(b) restore next day delivery services from regional centres; and

(c) ensure the security of jobs and safe working conditions for regional postal workers.

I want to highlight what is happening within Australia Post, particularly in Victoria and New South Wales at the moment, and some of the impact that that is having on regional communities such as the one I represent in the federal seat of Ballarat. Plans have been announced internally by Australia Post that they are to cut next-day delivery service for regional centres. That is leading to delays in the critical delivery of post within my own electorate but reports are coming in from other areas that that is the case as well. In a number of instances being reported in some of the smaller towns across my district it is taking up to six to seven days for them to receive their mail. That is not the service that they have been used to.

This is of deep concern to those of us who live in regional Australia, with Australia Post's decisions impacting directly on the services within my community. Australians should not be treated differently because they live outside metropolitan areas in regional centres nor should they be treated differently if they live in more isolated communities, particularly in some of our more dispersed states. I fear that what we are seeing, unfortunately, from Australia Post is just the tip of the iceberg for our communities.

There is no more important obligation for a national mail service than to ensure it supports and properly services those people in the more isolated and geographically disadvantaged regions of our nation. Regional residents should not lose a national service that the rest of
Australia receives. There are many residents who are reporting, as I said, that they are waiting up to six days for their mail.

The Communication Workers Union have written to me about their experiences of what is happening with staff within regional distribution centres. The decision by Australia Post, in essence, to close, almost, but certainly to see a substantial reduction in staff at, the regional distribution centre in Ballarat and have mail, instead of being sorted in Ballarat, done in Dandenong, several kilometres away, and then shipped back to Ballarat—including mail that needs to go to Melbourne—is causing significant delays. That is affecting residents in Morwell, Bendigo, Seymour and Geelong. In New South Wales, the impact is being felt in Tamworth, Bathurst, Wagga Wagga and Albury, and they are certainly being affected by the move away from next-day delivery.

I have received emails from our local U3A who, for 30 years, have been relying on the Australia Post service and are concerned about what has happened to their mail service. Individuals involved in U3A have found that their mail is not getting through, and that invitations to events are arriving after the event has occurred—and, unfortunately, in my own office, that is exactly the experience that I am having. In the 12 years since I became the member, that has not been the case; Australia Post has always delivered excellent service. But the latest instance was that an invitation to the birthday party of a good friend, a member of the Australian Labor Party who is incredibly unwell, was received in my office two days after the event occurred, despite it being posted seven days previously.

We have also had representations from constituents who have a particular arrangement with their pharmacist and their prescribing doctor to receive their prescriptions by mail. For example, a prescription that was franked and stamped at the time that it was dispatched from the GP’s surgery on its very short journey to the patient, only a kilometre away, was received seven days later.

As to what is happening in Australia Post at the moment: I understand the cost pressures that they are under; I also understand the growth in parcel delivery, and what is happening in that side of the business. But the core business of Australia Post is to deliver mail. There are many older people who do not use the internet and email and so rely on a mail service. The fact that Australia Post, at the moment, in many of our regions, thinks that it can deliver a service while slowly closing regional distribution centres, by walking away from next-day delivery, really is incredibly concerning. They need to look at what their delivery mechanisms are and why they are not able to meet the next-day delivery standards within regional communities. I certainly hope that the Minister for Communications, who I know does care deeply about the delivery in regional communities—at least, I hope very much that he does—has a good look at what is happening in Australia Post at the moment. I call on him to reverse what has occurred in the regional communities, certainly in Ballarat, and I know the member for Bendigo will be speaking on a similar matter.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Mitchell): I thank the member for Ballarat. Is the motion seconded?

Ms Chesters: I second the motion and reserve my right to speak.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I thank the member for Bendigo.
Mr WILLIAMS (Hindmarsh) (12:58): I am pleased to be able to address the matter of public importance today and show my support for the licensed post offices in my electorate and Australia more widely. Australia Post has a wonderful history in our country but, at a time when post offices around the globe are experiencing great hardship and our own post offices are losing large amounts of money on the letter component of their business, it is obvious to all that Australia Post is going to face challenges in the coming years.

I have met with some of the 22 local licensed post officers to try to help me understand the concerns of local businesses and have received a briefing from the Chief Executive Officer of Australia Post, arranged by the new Minister for Communications. I am happy to say that everyone I have met from Australia Post is looking for ways in which they can save money and work more productively. But this government, which is supportive of all businesses, is considering ways to ensure that they contribute in a self-sustainable way.

As a government business enterprise, Australia Post has a responsibility to manage its business in a commercially and socially sound way. I am told that Australia Post has not made any decisions about the possible changes and the impact any changes to processing and delivery of letters would have on staff. Australia Post is continuing to consult with staff and community stakeholders about how the possible changes may affect employees, local businesses and the community. While stakeholder engagement is always difficult when you have many thousands of agencies and innumerable other interested parties, I strongly encourage Australia Post to work with all stakeholders to take everyone with them on the journey, to ensure they are able to continue to be a great institution and not a drain on the public purse.

Australia Post has been working on ways to further develop its business. We would all have noticed the changes in our local post office. There is now a large retail focus and many more packages. This explosion in the number of packages being handled by Australia Post is largely due to the application programming interface, or API, that Australia Post has developed. Australia Post's great API is well regarded in the web industry as being the easiest to use and integrate, making it the first point of call for most of the new online shops that are being developed every day. We should not underestimate the power of online shopping services in this area, and this is where Australia Post and the post offices have a great deal of potential to grow and further develop by working together for a more sustainable future.

It is very interesting to note that Australia Post has been going through a process of regeneration for a number of years, looking to see how they can work most effectively in this online focused world. While the minister has the discretion to give written directions to Australia Post, this has never been used in our history. But now, less than three months out of office, the member for Ballarat, the shadow minister for health, has come in here demanding that the minister take the necessary actions which she and her colleagues failed to do for six years. The question has to be asked: what were they really doing for six years? Did they not receive the letter that said Australia Post needs some regeneration? Australia Post has a lot of challenges, and we in the coalition will work with Australia Post to try and deliver the best we can.

Mr MARLES (Corio) (13:01): Whatever we were doing in government over the last six years, one thing that the Rudd and Gillard governments did not face was an Australia Post which was seeking to cut next-day delivery to regional Australians. That is the situation we
are facing today. This is a fundamental service for people in regional Australia. I come from regional Australia myself. The idea that next-day delivery is being removed from postal services internal to Geelong is a disgrace. It represents an abandonment by the Abbott government of the people of Geelong within the first couple of months of taking office. This is a prime example of a government which said one thing before the election but has turned out to be a very different government upon being elected. This is one of the first issues which has raised itself within view of the people of Geelong, and there is enormous concern about the decisions and the review that is being put in place by Australia Post.

We now have a situation where the proposal, specifically as it relates to Geelong in terms of giving expression to Australia Post's desire to cut next-day delivery from regional Australia, is that most of the mail that is posted in Geelong will go to Dandenong to be sorted and distributed, even though that mail is going to people within Geelong—that is, a letter will go from Geelong across Port Phillip Bay to Dandenong and will be sorted there and then come back to Geelong. This is an extremely disturbing turn of events, for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is estimated by The Geelong Advertiser that something like 20 million of the 24 million letters that are posted in Geelong each and every year will go to Dandenong to be sorted before they go elsewhere. We are already in a situation where the commitment to next-day delivery for the people of Geelong is not being met. Again, in October The Geelong Advertiser did their own test by putting a number of letters around the Geelong region to see how long it took for them to be delivered. One in four letters in that test did not meet the obligation of next-day delivery, even though that is occurring within Geelong. On top of that, we are now seeing this proposal to have so much of Geelong's mail taken out of the city and its sorting and distribution being done on the other side of Port Phillip Bay.

What that ultimately means is a downgrading of the Geelong mail distribution centre. That is of enormous concern to me as the member for Corio, to the citizens of Geelong and to those people who work at the distribution centre. Jobs in Geelong have been a very important issue over the course of this year—as they always are, but particularly this year with announcements at Ford, Target and more recently Qantas's heavy maintenance at Avalon. So a proposal which will see further jobs cut is, in and of itself, concerning as well.

More fundamentally than that, there is the notion of trying to have a first-rate, productive economy in a regional city in Australia. To have that first-rate, productive economy, we need the same services in relation to our postal delivery that can be enjoyed in Melbourne and Sydney. Having next-day delivery is fundamental to the productivity of any place, and that is what is being sought to be removed from Geelong.

Finally, there is just an element of fairness here. We have a national postal service. We do not have a Melbourne-Sydney postal service; we have a national postal service which should apply in the same way in Geelong, Wollongong, Ballarat and Bendigo as it does in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane. What is being proposed by Australia Post now denies that national service being applied in the same way in regional centres such as Geelong. We are being placed in a second-class situation, and that is ultimately not good enough in this day and age. So, with the member for Ballarat, I call on the Minister for Communications to intervene in this matter and have this issue resolved immediately.

Mr BROUGH (Fisher) (13:06): It is my pleasure to speak on this motion before the House today. I just draw this place's attention to a couple of the comments from the member
for Ballarat. In her statement she said that Australia Post was 'planning' to cut jobs—I am sure I am quoting her accurately—and that this had resulted in reduced services. In other words, no jobs have been lost, and I have taken the time to ascertain whether jobs have been lost in Ballarat, and there have not been; there has been no cut to jobs. There is nothing wrong with any member in this House standing and being concerned about the potential loss of jobs. I support their right to do that. I have had my own issues with Australia Post in recent times, and we all have a big issue, which I will address in a moment. But it is in fact intellectually dishonest to come into this place and say that services have been reduced because of plans to cut; cuts have not occurred.

The member for Ballarat went on to say that this is the tip of the iceberg, and she is absolutely correct. For the humble piece of mail that has been delivered for over 200 years by Australian postal services, the number of letters that get put in our letterboxes every day peaked in 2008. Something else peaked in 2008, and that was the success of the Labor Party. Since then, both have been in incredible decline. In fact, Australia Post's letter volumes have gone down by 20 per cent, and I think the Labor Party would be delighted if their results had gone down by only 20 per cent, particularly in the Senate. But I leave that aside. What is occurring is just stark.

So let me take you to what is occurring. Digital interference in our daily lives is affecting something that we have all taken for granted: the 4,000-odd faces of Australia Post right around our communities, which we all respect and used to go into. I would say to those sitting in the chamber here today and those listening: when was the last time you went into an Australia Post service, and why? If you go back five or 10 years, it was probably to pay a registration bill or to pay your electricity bill. But more often than not you will be paying those online today; you will not be going there. So they have lost the foot traffic. What you will be going there to do is to pick up a parcel, and that is a fundamental shift in the business.

Australia Post is facing the same dilemma that the high street faced when we ended up with regional shopping centres and that so many other businesses are now grappling with, and that is the digital divide. We still want to be able to walk into our post office, we still want to have that daily service and we still want to have Ballarat, Bendigo, Geelong and everywhere else having mail sorted there.

But there is a cost. What I have not heard from the opposition today in putting forward this motion are solutions. Two-thirds of the income of licensed post offices comes from what they receive from the price of the stamp. We could be in here saying that we want to support Australia Post and underpin its primary objective and core business, which is, as was said here, to deliver mail. We can do that by calling on the minister to put up the price of standard delivery of a letter. Perhaps the speakers remaining in this debate would like to put their name to that and say, 'I'm calling on the minister to do that.' I am giving you that opportunity.

An opposition member interjecting—

Mr BROUGH: I take the interjection. What I am saying is that the model is broken. What has worked for 200 years is not going to work for the next 200 years; it is not going to work for the next 20 years. There are 4,000 outlets out there and it behoves us all to work together to come up with solutions. It does not help anyone to come into this place and start throwing bricks at the government and say, 'The Abbott government came to power and they want to get rid of next-day services.' This is just Australia Post having an honest dialogue with people
about the challenges of its business model. We all need to be part of that. It is no use just throwing stones. We need to be part of the solution.

If we are part of the solution, then Australia Post has a bright future. It does not have a bright future if we do more of the same. It does not have a bright future if it retains the same model, because the digital divide is going to destroy it. As soon as a business or a government agency can, it will not be delivering mail via your letterbox but doing it digitally because it is cheaper and more efficient. We do not have people walking into Australia Post as they used to and using the same services. We do not have the same letters being delivered.

Instead of moving a motion like this, which passes blame, let us have a motion that asks what we, the government and the opposition, can do together to make sure that Australia Post has a vibrant and viable future. That is what I stand here to be part of. I do not commend the motion to the House.

Ms CHESTERS (Bendigo) (13:11): I stand today to raise a few issues. I want to make a few comments about how this issue will affect my electorate of Bendigo. Right now, unlike the doom and gloom that we quite often hear in this chamber about other areas, Bendigo, which is in central Victoria, is booming. We have economic growth. It is a vibrant region with a proud history and an exciting future. However, this growth will be under threat if we continue to lose core services. I put Australia Post in the category of core services.

Changes to the current next-day delivery regime will see businesses and households in the Bendigo electorate get a lesser service—a second-rate service—than their city counterparts get from Australia Post. This will also result in job losses. It is fair to say that Australia Post is planning to cut jobs. In fact, in Bendigo they have put out a call for expressions of interest for 10 voluntary redundancies. It is on the cards that these jobs will be lost. Job losses affect the whole community. I strongly believe that we need to share our public sector jobs across the community, including regional Australia. These public sector jobs bring with them public sector wages. That is really important in any economy, just like in Canberra and in Melbourne. If you are going to have public services, the regions should get their fair share of those jobs. Those people can then spend their wages in businesses in the local community. They can share the wealth among different parts of the country.

Apart from the job losses and what they will do to the families concerned and to the community, I am also concerned about the second-rate postal service that the electorate of Bendigo will receive. This is not just about job losses. It is also about people in the country having a lesser service than those in the city. We have to note that the next-day delivery service has been available since 1977, so there is an expectation that it will continue. It is true to say that our standard is that Australia Post will deliver 94 per cent of domestic letters on time. But currently Australia Post is struggling to meet that standard in my electorate. Just like in Geelong and in Ballarat, trials have been done in Bendigo. My office and the Communication Workers Union sent 100 letters back and forth and we struggled to reach the 94 per cent benchmark that has been set by the government for Australia Post.

If services get worse, it will make it hard for local businesses. I want to quote a couple of comments from local businesses in Bendigo. Bendigo Business Council Executive Officer Patrick Falconer said that companies who rely on same day or next day delivery may need to seek alternatives like couriers. That is going to increase the cost of doing business in the
regions. We talk about wanting to see our regions grow, yet we keep changing the service delivery and making it harder for them to do business.

Bendigo Community Telco works with suppliers in Melbourne and Sydney and quite often needs paperwork and materials sent back and forth. Delays make it harder for them to do business. If Melbourne gets next day delivery then so should Bendigo. If Sydney gets next day delivery then so should other major regional cities around the country. In this place we talk a lot about productivity and how to improve productivity for businesses, but cutting back regional postal services will only lead to a decrease in productivity. If we are serious about productivity in the regions then we have to be serious about the services that we have.

The final point I really want to focus on today is regional disadvantage. For businesses to grow in rural and regional Australia we need to make sure that there are no disincentives to doing business. Perhaps we need to start talking about fair and equitable access to services and infrastructure for all Australians. Perhaps we need to start talking to Australia Post about a subsidised model for regional postal services. What I like so much about the NBN is the fact that there is a wholesale price so that people in business in regional Australia wanting access to broadband pay the same price as those in the city wanting access to broadband. Perhaps we need to start looking with Australia Post how we can subsidise regional services.

We should remember that Australia Post is 100 per cent owned by Australian taxpayers. It is our business that we own. One-third of taxpayers live in regional Australia. Do they not deserve the same postal service as taxpayers who live in the city? (Time expired)

Mr HAWKE (Mitchell) (13:17): I rise to address this motion on Australia Post. From listening to the member for Bendigo you do not get the sense that her understanding of economics would make it in the real world. That of course underscores what is going on here with this motion today from the member for Ballarat. Because of the economics, there are changes occurring with Australia Post. At the moment all of us know that there are severe challenges facing this business. Far from being some sort of utopian Communication Workers Union plaything, this is a business fundamentally.

With the volume of letters decreasing over time in Australia, the core model of business for Australia Post is diminishing. It is unsustainable. The member for Bendigo said we need to subsidise it. She should have said who should subsidise this service. The government? The taxpayer? Of course, the taxpayer. It is always someone else's money. It is easy to say but harder to do.

Times are changing. We as members of parliament can communicate with our electorates via email, no longer by letters. It is interesting to note that there have been only three price rises for stamps in about 20 years. The consumer price index will have risen many times more than the price of the stamp—the basic service delivery—yet we have members in this place trying to completely disconnect the cost of the service from the actual delivery of the service. That is something you cannot do when you are talking about running a business.

Of course the standards have to be met. The standards of course do not just include next day delivery; they go up to four business days in the service charter—and I refer members opposite to that part of the act. It is important to note that when certain conditions are not met it takes sometimes two days, three days or four days, as per the service charter. This motion says six days and I think it is quite deliberately worded, with six days being four business
days and two non-business days. I am not inspired by the examples that have been presented by those opposite. I am especially not inspired by the Communication Workers Union sending each other letters in the mail.

You get the sense that the members for Ballarat and Bendigo would have been amongst those 100 years ago lamenting blacksmithing going out of business with the advent of the motor car and saying: 'We need to do something to subsidise blacksmiths. Maybe we should provide horses to blacksmiths so they can still shoe them.' That is the sense you get from this motion. There is nothing realistic about it. Does it address price increases, needed by this business to survive? No. Does it address the fact that all other postal services around the world have diversified? Has that word come out of the mouths of members opposite? No. They have diversified into other services to enable themselves to be viable as businesses, to continue to function—into banking services, into all kinds of other services and business models, that have been working in other parts of the world. This is a service that needs a subsidy and always the members opposite say, 'We need a government subsidy first'.

The fact is that, in the history of this issue, not once has the minister written to the board saying that it should do something—not once: no Labor minister and no Liberal minister. The opposition has never written to the board to request them to do anything in this business for anybody in regional Australia or anywhere else—not once. So it is pretty odd that we find ourselves here today with a motion from the member for Ballarat saying that from 7 September suddenly mail was not being delivered—from cuts that have not occurred! There have been no cuts. There have been no regional postal centre closures.

Of course things are being flagged about viable models for the future. All businesses have to look at the future and what may happen. The member for Bendigo comes in here—I know she is new—to say we are flagging voluntary redundancies. What a terrible thing: voluntary redundancies. When businesses have to continue to operate under increasing cost pressures, with challenges to their viability, voluntary redundancies are the best way—much better than having to fire people.

An opposition member interjecting—

Mr HAWKE: Job losses are inevitable unless we have massive government subsidy. It is much better for this business to work out things through voluntary arrangements and natural attrition than have to retire people through forced redundancies. That is a much better system. Given that none of us are sending the mail volumes that we did in the past, including members of parliament—the member for Bendigo won't be sending so many letters through the mail—there has been a societal change; it is something to be expected, something we can anticipate, something we can manage. Just like the blacksmiths of 100 years ago: times change, things change and we must change with them, we must propose solutions for them. We cannot provide a blacksmith subsidy scheme for the 21st century.

Debate adjourned.

Proceedings suspended from 13:22 to 16:00
Cognate debate.
Debate resumed on the motion:
That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr BALDWIN (Paterson—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Industry) (16:01): I rise today to speak on the Grape and Wine Legislation Amendment (Australian Grape and Wine Authority) Bill 2013 and cognate bills. This is a truly great example of what can be achieved when governments work together with both industry and businesses to achieve better business outcomes. The wine industry is a great example of a progressive Australian agricultural industry. These amendment bills have come about at the request of industry and merge two of the country's peak wine bodies together. A newly named Australian Grape and Wine Authority will emerge and be responsible for the marketing, research and development of the country's $3.4 billion wine industry. The merger also brings together the research and development functions of the Grape and Wine Research and Development Corporation and Wine Australia Corporation marketing and export oversight functions.

Importantly, industry itself proposed no changes to the amounts of levies or the regulatory compliance role of the Wine Australia Corporation. A single wine industry body will support the industry by providing links between investment initiatives and functions of the Grape and Wine Research and Development Corporation and Wine Australia Corporation. There is no financial impact other than the Commonwealth entering into an agreement to match the Australian Grape and Wine Authority research and development funding. These amendment bills send a clear message to all Australian industry and business that this government is listening to the recommendations and taking on board all points of view before it makes decisions.

It is no secret that wineries located in the Hunter region are well known for their quality right around Australia and indeed the world. Some of Australia's largest exporters of wine, like McWilliam's, Drayton's, Tyrrell's and Brokenwood, reside within our Hunter region. They are representative of the great reds and whites that Australian wineries make and the popularity of our drops overseas. Hunter winemakers and grape growers are part of an industry that employs over 22,000 Australians nationally. They are part of an export industry that Wine Australia estimates to be worth $1.8 billion and that exported 698 million litres of wine to countries like the United Kingdom, the USA, Canada, China and New Zealand last financial year. Wine Australia's latest Wine export approval report says:

Australia ranks fourth among the world's 10 biggest wine exporters in the average value per litre of bottled wine exports …
But we are behind New Zealand, France and the US—but ahead of Argentina, Italy, South Africa, Germany and Chile.

The report also says that in total volume Australian wine is also now the No. 1 imported wine in the UK and New Zealand. It is second in the USA and fourth in Canada and China. Wine Australia saw some years ago a growing interest in Australian wines throughout Asia. We are now seeing exports of the premium, highly profitable segment of the wine market continuing to grow in East Asian markets just like China. The Chinese market has grown from S57 million in 2007 to in excess of S250 million today to be our third biggest in value. Australian bottled wine exports to the USA in the higher than S7.50 a litre segment grew by 16 per cent in the year ended 30 September 2013. I would like to see the industry grow further. I believe that these amendment bills are a good step in the right direction.

I would like to tell you a little more about the Grape and Wine Legislation Amendment (Australian Grape and Wine Authority) Bill that has been introduced by my colleague the Minister for Agriculture, Barnaby Joyce. This bill proposes amendments to the Wine Australia Corporation Act 1980 to establish a new authority. It renames the act as the Australian Grape and Wine Authority Act 2013. The bill makes significant amendments to the existing Wine Australia Corporation Act 1980. The merger is not a takeover of the Grape and Wine Research and Development Corporation by Wine Australia; it is a strategic merger of the two statutory corporations on an equal footing.

The bill is divided into schedules. Schedule 1 amends the Wine Australia Corporation Act to create the authority. Schedule 2 covers matters arising from the transition from two statutory corporations to the authority. It covers matters such as the transfer of staff to the authority. Schedule 1 is divided into two parts. Part 1 of the schedule amends the Wine Australia Corporation Act 1980 to establish a selection committee to select and nominate to the Minister for Agriculture possible directors of the board of the authority. The bill also gives the Minister for Agriculture an alternative option of appointing a first board of the authority for a 12-month period without reference to the selection committee.

Part 2 of schedule 1 commences on 1 July 2014. This part amends the Freedom of Information Act 1982 and the Wine Australia Corporation Act 1980. This part establishes the authority and provides the governance framework for its operations. Schedule 1 also provides the research and development functions, including provisions for the Commonwealth to match research and development levy funds dollar for dollar. The authority will be required to spend research and development levy money and government-matching funds on research and development activity only. Industry has highlighted the importance of this issue for the new authority and I want to make it clear to the industry that the R&D levies will be spent on R&D purposes only. It is also important to the government to ensure that Australian government money appropriated for research and development is actually used for this purpose.

The bill does not include any changes to the structure or the amounts of the levies that currently fund both statutory corporations or to the existing regulatory, marketing or compliance roles of the Wine Australia Corporation. The bill transfers definitions of research and development from the Primary Industries and Energy Research and Development Act 1989. It establishes an authority with a skills based board of five to seven directors selected
and nominated by a statutory selection committee and appointed by the minister. The board is led by a chair appointed by the minister following consultation with industry.

The authority is required to prepare a five-year corporate plan to outline the authority's strategies, policies and priorities to achieve the objective. The authority is also required to prepare an annual operation plan. Unlike those of the two statutory corporations, this plan is not required to have ministerial approval.

Schedule 2 provides for the transition of the Grape and Wine Research and Development Corporation and Wine Australia to the authority, including that the operations, assets, liabilities and staffing conditions are transferred to the authority. The bill allows the Minister for Agriculture to select the first board of directors. The board, as I said before, will commence on 1 July 2014. In between the date of appointment and 1 July 2014, the minister can engage the future board of directors as consultants to assist with the preparation of the authority's commencement, including making preparations to appoint the chief executive. The board's two statutory corporations will continue to exercise their individual powers and meet all statutory responsibilities until 30 June 2014. Before 1 July 2014 the future directors, in their role as consultants, cannot make decisions that would bind the authority; however, it can be expected that any recommendations they make would be considered for ratification by the board at its first meeting.

The costs of the consultants will be met by the Commonwealth through the Department of Agriculture. Once the authority commences, any and all Commonwealth funding provided for the purposes of engaging consultants will be refunded by the authority. As the consultants are the future board of directors acting in the interests of the authority, it is reasonable for the authority to reimburse the Commonwealth for the costs of these consultants.

The bill ensures that all employees of the Grape and Wine Research and Development Corporation and Wine Australia are transferred to the Australian Grape and Wine Authority along with all of their employee entitlements.

The bill provides for a number of amendments to be made to outdated sections of the Wine Australia Corporation Act 1980 and introduces modernised language to bring it up to date with current terms.

The wine industry has a unique regulatory structure, with the Wine Australia Corporation enforcing the label integrity program, licencing exporters and maintaining Australia's wine geographical indication systems. These important roles are not affected by the merger. The Australian Grape and Wine Authority will therefore have a strong focus on controlling exports, developing domestic and international markets for Australian grape product along with investigating, coordinating and funding grape and wine research and development. The authority will be responsible for reporting its progress on these matters to the parliament or the minister, and representative organisations.

The two companion bills that are being introduced alongside this bill propose minor amendments to the Primary Industries (Excise) Levies Act 1999 and Primary Industries (Customs) Charges Act 1999 to enable levies collected to be paid to the new authority.

In talking about the opportunities and growth in our wine industry, I would like to speak to recent cuts to cellar-door subsidy schemes by the New South Wales government. The federal government's wine equalisation tax is a tax on wine, levied at 29 per cent. The tax is paid on
the value of the wine at the last wholesale price or an equivalent value when there is no wholesale price. WET is adhered to by wine manufacturers, wholesalers and importers. Retailers do not have a WET liability unless they make their own wholesale wine. Generally, WET is included in the price that retailers such as bottle shops and restaurateurs pay when purchasing the wine. The retailer is not entitled to claim back the cost of the WET, as the WET is built into the price the retailer pays and passes on to the consumer. The government also provides wine producers with a wine equalisation tax rebate of up to $500,000 a year, which equates to approximately $1.7 million wholesale value of eligible sales.

The New South Wales government's cellar-door subsidy was an integral part of that mechanism, designed and agreed to by industry, the New South Wales government and the federal government. I have had winemakers from the Hunter, the Riverina and the Mudgee regions—New South Wales' three biggest wine regions—all complain to me how unhelpful the scrapping of this state subsidy has been. The termination of the cellar-door subsidy scheme, which I am told was worth about $3½ million a year to Hunter producers, was a big kick in the guts to most of them—especially since this subsidy was part of an agreement that was developed with industry to ensure that winemakers remain competitive.

In the late 1990s the High Court found that a state tax known as the business franchise fee was invalid. Because these licencing fees were not unique to wine the loss of state revenue would have been quite large, so the Howard government came to the rescue by agreeing to increase its tax, the wholesale sales tax, in order to raise what the states would have raised and hand it back to them. But Mr Howard's job did not end there, because by necessity the federal government's tax applied to all sales, including those at the cellar door, which had been exempt from the state imposed business franchise fee. So he asked the New South Wales government to agree to provide a rebate for cellar-door sales out of the wholesale sales tax that he handed back to them. That way, no-one was worse off as a result of the High Court's decision. Instead of limiting the industry, we should be supporting them. It is an ideal time for the regions like this to draw tourists, because our dollar is now back around 90c. I say that the states should reinstate this rebate.

In closing, I would like to re-emphasise why this amended legislation is a positive step forward. Firstly, the industry wanted it; secondly, because it will cut bureaucratic red tape; it will help grow the industry and, in growing the industry, it will help grow our economy. As we push for exports into markets particularly like China's, I am reminded of Tourism Australia's new marketing campaign. Built off the back of the campaign of There's Nothing Like Australia, it is the Restaurant Australia campaign. What they are promoting is our great food and our outstanding wines. By having overseas visitors—people coming into Australia—tasting our foods and exploring our wines, they then go back with a better appreciation and understanding of Australian wines and that will increase our export sales. I want to grow the market because I believe in the market and I believe in the growers. I think we have unique exceptional products in Australia and we are perfectly positioned now that the dollar is coming back to be able to penetrate some of those Asian markets. I support this bill because it is a bill driven by the industry itself.

Mr CHAMPION (Wakefield) (16:16): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I appreciate you being here to listen to me. I know that you would much prefer to be listening to the maiden speech of the member for Gellibrand, and it seems from Twitter that it is a very good maiden
speech indeed. So we are both missing out while we do this important work for the wine industry.

As the previous member said, the wine industry's future is very, very closely aligned with broader lifestyle economies. By that I mean an alignment with tourism and an alignment with the creative industries. That is where we are going to find great synergies in the wine industry. Only recently I was at Seppeltsfield, which is a great winery in my electorate and has been for many, many years. But now it is a winery in transition, because they are very, very closely aligning themselves with this type of creative economy. With the assistance of grants from the previous government, they have managed to reach an agreement with the JamFactory, a creative arts organisation in South Australia, to sell their products on site and, very shortly, another grant will help them completely transform their cellar-door area. It is an area currently covered in bitumen, built for the old days when you had large bus tours coming in. That area is now going to be opened up, beautified, and of course there will be a restaurant put in as well. So they are really building on what is a very, very beautiful and unique part of the world, and trying to make a unique experience for the people who go to that winery.

And it is not just about buying wine but maybe buying a good set of handcrafted knives—there is a knife-maker who is going to be a visiting artist—or a lovely piece of glass from these wonderful artists from the JamFactory. While they are there, of course, they will be having a meal as well. It is that sort of experience, I think, that is part of the wine industry weathering what is a difficult time in its history.

There are a couple of challenges. Obviously the high dollar is a huge challenge for exporters—and I know that the speaker to come knows something about that in her electorate. There is not a group of people in manufacturing—and wineries are included in that—who are not suffering not just from having a high dollar but also from having import competition from countries with artificially low currencies, often currencies that have been depreciated either because of the state of their economies or by deliberate government action. That is evident, I think, in the government of Japan and other economies around the world.

So we do have a very great challenge with the dollar and that does inhibit our ability to export. It is a bigger problem than is acknowledged by the political debate. I think we have been, to a certain extent, sidetracked away from a debate on the currency because there is no one to blame. It is a debate and an economic problem where we have to, largely, search for solutions together, rather than blame one another for it. It is the result of many of the economic difficulties that this country and its manufacturers face.

Fortunately, I think the wine industry has a way out of a high dollar—a sticky dollar—and that is to move up the price scale. For too long, our industry was built on very cheap—high quality, but nevertheless cheap—exports to places like the UK and America. We competed on quality, to be sure, but we also competed largely on price. If there is a challenge for the industry, I think it is not just selling a lot of wine but selling wine for a good price, because we know that the consumers, whether they be here or around the world, will pay higher prices for a premium product. That is a critical challenge for the industry. You see many wineries doing that and using that as a way of dealing with what is a difficult set of currency arrangements between us and the rest of the world. We really need to come to grips with the facts of our currency. There is no doubt that it is overvalued, and there is no doubt that some
of that is about other currencies, currency traders, reserve banks and the like investing in our currency because it has become a bit of a safe haven in the world.

The wine industry also has to deal with the issue of what is commonly called a glut. Of course the best way to resolve that is through greater sales, but it is continuing to cause some issues. Like I said, that last issue—that last piece of the puzzle—is a greater alignment with our food industries and our creative industries to create great synergies where people do not just come to visit a winery but come for a great meal, a great piece of art, a great bottle of wine and a great experience. That is invaluable, and that is why people are prepared to pay for it.

When I spoke on this bill when it came to the House in June of this year, I went through many of the framework issues of the bill. I do not think I will necessarily repeat all of those, but this was a bill that was the subject of industry and government collaboration. It is supported by both sides of parliament, so it is a happy piece of legislation. It is the sort of work that, I think, all of our constituents long for, even though it does not necessarily create as much attention as those things that we argue about.

The great virtue of this is in the peak bodies of the industry coming together and calling for reform and governments consulting with them—taking their interests into account, creating a proposal for a single new authority that takes on the functions and powers of the two previous authorities and creating a body that is better aligned with the future of the industry and a whole-of-industry strategy. Of course there are great benefits to aligning the strategy: better service delivery mechanisms and administrative efficiency gains. They are an important thing for any industry and, of course, they are an important thing for the wine industry.

The consultation process was pretty deliberate and pretty comprehensive. I have heard of no complaints about it in my electorate. I think it was comprehensive. That is reflected in the reintroduction of this bill by the current government. There are only a few bills that have survived the transition to government but this is one of them, and it is because of the important and noncontroversial functions of this bill.

The previous speaker said that the wine industry was one of Australia's progressive industries, and I actually agree with him. There is a great deal of creativity and earthy know-how in this industry. There are people in it who are really ingenious and have created an industry that combines our rural world with people who grow things and people who manufacture things. You see that in my electorate around the place. We have bottling plants and labelling plants in places like Freeling and Elizabeth. We have, obviously, small and large wineries in the area. They all provide employment and, I think, a great deal of passion and intellectual enjoyment—so not just pay cheques but creative and good jobs—for so many in my electorate.

So I am pleased to see that this bill is back. I look forward to its passage through the Senate and of course to the functions of this single authority for the wine industry being created. I also look forward to them providing a great strategy for the industry: prising open some of those export markets and making sure that high-value export markets are accessed by our wineries so that we might provide better jobs and better export income for Australia, even in what is a very difficult currency situation. I commend the bill to the House.
Dr STONE (Murray) (16:26): I, too, rise to support the Grape and Wine Legislation Amendment (Australian Grape and Wine Authority) Bill 2013, the Primary Industries (Customs) Charges Amendment (Australian Grape and Wine Authority) Bill 2013, and the Primary Industries (Excise) Levies Amendment (Australian Grape and Wine Authority) Bill 2013. You will note that there is no contention when we come to debate this cognate set of bills. All of us both in the opposition and the government are in agreement that the creation of a single authority is a great idea. It was carefully consulted on by the previous government. There were more than 16 public meetings, 23 letters of support and no formal letters of objection, I understand, during the consultation period. In fact, the idea of this single authority, through these bills, was working its way through the previous government without contention when time ran out.

So we stand today to put these bills through parliament. We are going to merge two existing statutory corporations: the Grape and Wine Research and Development Corporation and the Wine Australia Corporation. Out of that will come the Australian Grape and Wine Authority. The GWRDC, which was part of the previous landscape, focused very much on market development, compliance with the industry's regulations, trade knowledge, and development; it also looked at geographic indications, integrity and labelling. The new body will go on to do that important work, I am sure, but as well it will deal with the issues of levies, and it will reduce red tape, by having a single authority instead of two. It will also make sure that, if you want to take up any particular part of this industry, in terms of being licensed or understanding regulations, there will be fewer bureaucrats to deal with in the system. Certainly anything we can do to cut red tape in industry in Australia is to be welcomed; we are overburdened with red tape and compliance regulation in this country.

There should be no extra costs other than that already agreed to by the Grape and Wine Authority research and development funding. I am aware that the winemakers in Australia, their federation and the Wine Grape Growers Australia group welcome this merger. So this is all good news.

There are two schedules as part of this cognate bill. The first deals with amendments to the Wine Australia Corporation Act 1980 which will start on the day of the royal assent, and schedule 1 and 2 amendments to the Freedom of Information Act 1982. That is, in particular, to make sure that there is appropriate provision for the new governance arrangements. Schedule 2 of the principal bill contains the provisions governing the merger of the two corporations, and actually establishes the authority, including issues like the transferring of staff.

All around, the merger seems a far better idea than having two agencies. They are to be merged into one, and we would expect out of that merger greater efficiency and effectiveness and a single voice driving our great grape and wine industry forward. The industry is not small; it earns $3.4 billion annually. But as an agriculture based industry it faces the usual, very high risks of frosts, hail, drought, flood, smoke damage from fire, fire itself or disease. None of us in grape-growing areas will forget that we had a brilliant winegrowing industry in the 1800s in Australia and into the early 1900s, when phylloxera arrived. In my part of the world—in the Strathbogies and the Dookie area—very old vineyards, which ceased to be during the onslaught of that terrible disease, are now being re-established with disease-free...
stock, and once again their wines are delighting Australia with the very special flavours they have as a result of their great soils, great climate and very clever winemaking skills.

We do have a number of issues, though, with our wine industry. One of them has been touched on by two previous speakers. Globally we are about the fourth biggest exporter, and in the emerging market of China we are about the fourth biggest supplier of wines. There, our export industry has grown from $57 million in 2007 to $250 million in 2013. However, our near neighbour New Zealand is doing much better in the Chinese market—as it is in other markets, where you would expect the connoisseurs of wines to understand that Australia can more than compete with wines from across the ditch. The problem is that we do not have the free trade agreements in place that New Zealand or some of our other closest competitors do. So, in China, our wine is trying to compete with one hand tied behind its back.

When I was recently in China, people asked me about our wines. They said, 'Surely you must produce great wines.' I said, 'Of course we do.' They said, 'How come they are so much less accessible to us than those from New Zealand—and, of course, the price is very different?' That has everything to do with a free trade agreement, which is not yet in place between Australia and China. We know that the previous government had it in mind, but it will be our government which will have to deliver it—and urgently. I say: all strength to the arm of our DFAT officials who are pursuing the free trade agreements not only with China but also with Japan and South Korea. Without free trade agreements, our wine is made less competitive—not only because of the lack of agreements to bring down the tariffs but also because of the very highly valued dollar—with the dirt-cheap imported wines which look good in the bottle and which come in to flood the supermarkets, particularly the ALDI, Coles and Woolworths liquor outlets. It is very difficult for our own, home-grown wines to compete without a level playing field.

So I stress that we in Australia need to understand that it is not enough to simply produce the cleanest, most flavoursome and most superb wines of any in the world; we have to make it possible for our winemakers to compete on a more level playing field than that on which they currently do. It is not their fault that we do not have free trade agreements in place; it is the fault of laziness in the past. We have to get over that laziness and get ourselves into the 21st century so that the tariffs and duties we encounter look more like those of our neighbours.

We also have very difficult circumstances in the concentration of retail ownership. The big Woolworths-Coles duopoly owns a substantial proportion of the retail liquor outlets in Australia. They make it difficult for our winegrowers to put new products on the shelves, they make it difficult for smaller, boutique vineyards to break into the marketplace and they certainly expect to pay cutthroat prices for wine suppliers. It is the same for all agribusiness, of course—whether they are supplying vegetables, milk or fruit to the big duopoly. I am very pleased to say that the government is making a very serious effort to bring about less unconscionable practice in the concentrated buyer power we find in Australia's food and beverage retail markets. It is not fair, however, to expect our wine producers to do a brilliant job and produce some of the world’s greatest wines but then find that it is almost impossible to sell them beyond the internet or their winery gate because in our marketplace buyer power is concentrated.

Finally, I want to say in relation to labelling that it is amusing to see how carefully France guards its names and labels, like 'champagne', and how you have the sherries, the moselles
and so forth clutched very closely to the bosom of other nations, who say that they describe geographies rather than types of wine. That is okay; we can do just as well in Australia with our types and our geographic locations. So let me stress that in my part of the world we have brilliant wines from the Strathbogies, from the Dookie region and from the Goulburn and Murray valleys. We have wines near the Pyrenees, where our Mallee country comes close to where the wines are grown. So I think it is important that in Australia we do not feel that somehow we have a problem with not being able to call our magnificent sparkling wines 'champagne' anymore. Let us make sure they become internationally known for their own geographic derivation and have their own names proudly displayed on the bottle.

Having said that, I note that a lot of our wines are exported with labels which warn of less-than-responsible drinking. As we know, wine is a magnificent product, but like all good things it can be abused. We quite happily put those labels on the exported bottles as they go to California or parts of Canada. Already in Australia there has been much discussion, and notice has been given to the beer, wine and spirits industry that, in the first instance, we expect warning labels to be voluntarily placed on our alcohol containers but with a view to mandating labels in the future if the voluntary codes do not work. Perhaps with this single entity coming through in the future it will be easier for the grape and wine industry to be able to engage in the debate about what are the most appropriate labels to put on our wine bottles. Perhaps we should adopt the international labels and make sure that they are at the right place and are the right size so that they are meaningful and not just a joke when it comes to warning the drinker of abusing or overconsuming alcohol at the wrong time or in the wrong place. I also stress that it will be important that we have on those labels the warning, 'Do not drink alcohol when you're pregnant,' which is an important part of wine labelling in France, Canada and most parts of the United States.

So I very happily commend these various pieces of legislation in this cognate debate to the House. I think it is one of those cases where common sense is prevailing for an industry which has so many very small players—over 2,500 wine producers across Australia. There are over 6,000 wine grape growers. Many of them are now finding it extremely difficult to make ends meet as they compete with the high cost of labour; the high cost of any of their chemical inputs; the high cost of irrigation water; the very high dollar, which brings their competitors into the country at dirt-cheap prices; the concentrated ownership of a lot of the liquor outlets in Australia; and, of course, our lack of free trade agreements with some of the most important emerging markets globally. Put all of that together and our wine industry needs all the help it can get. I wish this single entity, the Australian Grape and Wine Authority, the greatest of fortune, and I am sure our government will make sure a lot of those barriers to future success and prosperity in the industry are removed.

Mr CRAIG KELLY (Hughes) (16:38): I rise to speak on the Grape and Wine Legislation Amendment (Australian Grape and Wine Authority) Bill 2013, the Primary Industries (Customs) Charges Amendment (Australian Grape and Wine Authority) Bill 2013 and the Primary Industries (Excise) Levies Amendment (Australian Grape and Wine Authority) Bill 2013. These bills have support from both sides of the House. This legislation will merge the existing statutory wine authority corporations that we have—the Grape and Wine Research and Development Corporation and the Wine Australia Corporation—into one entity, and that is good because it reduces red tape. It reduces a bureaucracy and makes it smaller. It is
interesting that this has strong support across the whole industry. Where consultation was done, there was not one single formal written objection to this proposal. So it is good to hear that the opposition is supporting us with these bills.

However, there are some concerns about the future viability of this most important industry that we have. To reflect its importance: this is an industry here in Australia that is the fourth largest exporter of wine in the world. That is a credit that we have. We are a small population but the fourth largest exporter. Something like 60 per cent of our production is actually exported overseas with only about 40 per cent consumed locally. In past years we have had export sales in wine of over $2.8 billion. That is the importance of this industry.

We look to the future and the challenges that this industry has. It has a wonderful future with growing prosperity in South-East Asia, in China and in India. The potential for this industry to grow, expand and create more wealth for our nation should make it one of our most important industries and one we need to look after.

However, there are some grey clouds on the horizon and there are some significant problems that this industry has. Of course the high dollar is an issue that many exporters have, but I say the real concern, the real challenge to the viability of an innovative, prosperous wine industry in Australia's future is the concentration of our own, home-grown retail market. For most companies, if they are to be successful exporters, they first must be successful and develop experience in their home market. Getting the grounding in their home market, getting their brands and production methods established is what gives them the ability to go out into that international field where competition is so much tougher, where they are competing in the global environment. That is why our local market is so important. But the concern we have is the absolute market concentration we see at the retail level in our wine and alcohol sector.

We have the supermarket duopoly currently controlling in the vicinity of 60 to 70 per cent of the retail wine sales in our nation. This has a very detrimental effect on producers. That was recently noted in a report put together by KPMG: the Australian Food and Grocery Council's State of the industry 2013: essential information: facts and figures. This report should send the alarm bells ringing through this place. The report notes significant problems that many of our food producers have and which I am also sure apply to our wine producers. It notes that across the industry there has been a significant increase in trade spend. Trade spend is what is paid by the supplier to the retailer for trade discounts and promotional allowances. That trade spend actually increased from an incredible 19.5 per cent of gross sales in 2008-2009. I have asked the Parliamentary Library to try to find me some data to see how that 19.5 per cent compares internationally. Unfortunately, they were unable to do so, but I believe there is no other nation in the world, there is no other food producing sector anywhere in the world that has such a high trade spend. This report noted that, between 2008-09 and 2011-12, that trade spend, the amount the producers are paying to the retailers, increased from 19.5 to 23.4 per cent. For food producers in this nation, for every dollar of sale they have, 23.4 per cent goes to the rebates and allowances they pay to our retailers. This is completely unsustainable. This report warns:

The increase in trade spend has come at the cost of suppliers' marketing and research and development spend which may have a long-term impact on growth, sustainability and innovation.
Those are the very three things we need to make sure we have viable food and wine producers. Growth, sustainability and innovation are jeopardised by this increase in trade spend.

To compare that 23 per cent trade spend: in our food industry salaries and on costs represent eight per cent. We are looking at close to three times the cost of wages and salary in the food producing industry going into trade spend. Former Treasury Wine Estates boss David Dearie recently commented on the effect of this massive increase that we have seen in the trade spend and also on the concentrated nature of the Australian retail market.

In an article published in *The Sydney Morning Herald* on 27 November, Mr Dearie said there are 2,500 wineries in Australia, each with multiple brands, which means tens of thousands of brands are competing for shelf space, 70 per cent of which is owned by just two companies. He said the supermarkets were using their relative strength and the wine sector's weakened, fragmented state to demand thicker margins compared to other beverage categories. Unfortunately, he recommends that a level of consolidation in the wine sector is inevitable and vital to boost their bargaining power with the supermarket chains.

But no matter how concentrated our wine producers become, they will not be able to have the bargaining power to offset the strength of the supermarket chains—and this is exactly the opposite of what we need. We need to have thousands of wine producers out there innovating and experimenting, coming up with new ideas and trying new methods. We need entrepreneurial drive in our wine sector. But this is all being threatened—it is all being compromised—by the concentration we have in our retail sector. This shows the importance of the coalition's commitment to have a complete review of the Trade Practices Act. Maybe what we need is the Standard Oil option, because the danger and threat to our wine producers of a concentrated retail market cannot be understated. This bill is a welcome move—it is a step in the right direction—but we really need to be very careful that our retail sector is not damaging the production sector. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr JOYCE (New England—Minister for Agriculture and Deputy Leader of The Nationals) (16:46): I rise to conclude the debate on the Grape and Wine Legislation Amendment (Australian Grape and Wine Authority) Bill 2013 and cognate legislation. The government is continuing to work to progress the merger of two statutory corporations—the Grape and Wine Research and Development Corporation and the Wine Australia Corporation. The merger of the two corporations will create a single whole of industry statutory authority—the Australian Grape and Wine Authority. The new authority will offer strategic benefits to the industry, such as improved leadership, service delivery and administrative efficiency. It will also enable a single board to make strategic links between research and development, investment initiatives and marketing. There will not be any changes made to the structure or amount of industry levies.

The legislation provides that all levies collected for a particular purpose, such as research and development, will only be used for that purpose by the new authority. There will also not be any changes to the existing regulatory, marketing and compliance roles of the Wine Australia Corporation under the new authority. The decision to implement the merger followed an industry proposal submitted in August 2012 by the two industry peak bodies: Wine Grape Growers Australia and the Winemakers Federation of Australia. The merger has widespread industry support and addresses discussions that have been raised over the last 20
years. Three bills have been presented for introduction—the Grape and Wine Legislation Amendment (Australian Grape and Wine Authority) Bill 2013, the Primary Industries (Customs) Charges Amendment (Australian Grape and Wine Authority) Bill 2013 and the Primary Industries (Excise) Levies Amendment (Australian Grape and Wine Authority) Bill 2013—and these bills provide the mechanism to create the Australian Grape and Wine Authority and implement the key elements of the reform.

I concur with the comments of my colleagues that what the wine industry does is allow those who have the work ethic to find themselves a small area of land and, if they work very hard, grow five or 10 acres of grapes—and, if they have a product that suits the palate, all other things being equal, it should sell and they should be able to make some money out of it. The only thing that can stand in their way is that they cannot market their product. If the marketplace has impediments, that means that, past the cellar door, the product has little hope of surviving.

I have been made aware of this by some colleagues in South Australia, who talk of excellent wines that one day they found were no longer on the shelves. The problem is that it is not the quality of the product that matters but the capacity to market the product. I am happy that the coalition has moved to a root and branch review of the Competition and Consumer Act, formerly known as the Trade Practices Act. There are a number of sections that are obviously very pertinent to this. One would have been—and I am sure that the members here are aware of it—what was otherwise known as section 51AC. It is now section 22 under the new Competition and Consumer Act. That section is about unconscionable conduct. We have to make sure that those in Australia who want to get ahead and who put their shoulder to the wheel and forfeit their role working for somebody else to set up their own business do not do so for no purpose such that there is no chance of ever receiving any benefit from what they do because they cannot sell the product.

An opposition member interjecting—

Mr Joyce: Is there a custom and practice that we try and act civilly here, or is that not part of it?

An opposition member interjecting—

Mr Joyce: No? Okay. Then you are right at home. It is good to see that on this side of the chamber people are looking after the people who want to participate in the commerce of our nation. We are making our best endeavours to try and make sure that the livelihoods of those in small business are looked after, while people on the other side mimic something from a zoo.

An opposition member interjecting—

Mr Joyce: Do you know what always amazes me? I was thinking about this today. One of the greatest representations of the other side is Mr Paul Howes. He is the person who picks the—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Mitchell): Please stick to the bill.

Mr Joyce: Mr Howes is very important, because he picks the prime ministers of our nation. He is the faceless man. He wrote a book about himself—in fact, he has written a few books about himself.
An opposition member interjecting—

Mr JOYCE: Don't you love the way they come out in chorus? One of the books that he wrote about himself was *Confessions of a faceless man*. He does not believe in 'ma and pa farms'. He said it. Why this is relevant is because these are predominantly ma and pa farms. Only Paul Howes and the AWU could turn farming into a pejorative; only they are capable of that. That should be known by the member for Blair, who would have a lot of ma and pa farms in his area. I expect him to stand up on behalf of those ma and pa farms in the Gatton valley and dismiss the comments of Paul Howes, because they are an absolute disgrace. Might I remind you that ABARES has said in excess of 95 per cent of farms in Australia are ma and pa farms, to use the Paul Howes pejorative. In fact, the Productivity Commission thinks it is more like 99 per cent. But those over there do not want ma and pa farms. They do not believe in the family business. They probably do not like ma and pa houses. They probably want to send us all back to the council flat in the midlands of England, because that is where it works best. The people from the Gatton valley will hold you to account for what you have said.

Mr Neumann: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order. He is supposed to be summing up the bill. He has confessed that this is his first speech in the Federation Chamber. But he has to be relevant to the bill in this summation and not go on with the ridiculous stuff that he is doing now.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I thank the member for Blair. The minister will continue on the summing up of the bill.

Mr JOYCE: Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker. I can understand the sensitivities of someone who lives in the Gatton valley with a lot of ma and pa farms. I am glad that this will be on the *Hansard* so that I can send it to your local paper and show what people on your side of the political fence believe about the farming community. It is very important that we stand on behalf of the farming community, which apparently others have grown too sophisticated to support these days. They do not want ma and pa farms, which means, I suppose, that they do not want ma and pa houses. They do not want ma and pa small businesses. They just want to run down the farming community. They want to run down those in small business.

Mr Neumann: I rise on a point of order. This is not relevant in any way, shape or form to the summation of this legislation, which is a bipartisan approach to this issue. This is simply a rant and a rave by the minister, irrelevant to the summation of the bill.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The minister will continue on the summing up of the bill.

Mr JOYCE: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and I shall do this because it is extremely relevant because, just like we are bringing greater efficiencies to the wine industry to reduce costs to try and keep family businesses on the family farm, it is very important that we note which side of the chamber does not believe in the family farm, does not believe in the right of a family enterprise to succeed—by their own statements. You know who else is in the AWU, the same union as Mr Paul Howes? It would have to be the Leader of the Opposition. That is who else is in it.

Ms Hall: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker. This is totally irrelevant.

Mr Joyce: You sound like you are about to cry! Come on, it's not that hard—it's all right.
Ms Hall: And the minister's behaviour is totally inappropriate. It is not an interjection; it is inappropriate behaviour.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Mitchell): I will ask the minister for the last time to sum up on the bill.

Mr JOYCE: I will come to a conclusion, because I know the sensitivities of what we have raised here today. It is always surprising when someone interjects how they don't like it when it comes back in the other direction. I commend the bill to the chamber.

Ms Hall interjecting—
Mr Joyce interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: You are skating close there, Minister, about disorderly conduct and also on reflecting on members in the chamber. The question is that the bill be now read a second time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Message from the Governor-General recommending appropriation announced.

Ordered that this bill be reported to the House without amendment.

Primary Industries (Customs) Charges Amendment (Australian Grape and Wine Authority) Bill 2013

Second Reading

Debate resumed on the motion:
That this bill be now read a second time.
Question agreed to.
Bill read a second time.
Ordered that this bill be reported to the House without amendment.

Primary Industries (Excise) Levies Amendment (Australian Grape and Wine Authority) Bill 2013

Second Reading

Debate resumed on the motion:
That this bill be now read a second time.
Question agreed to.
Bill read a second time.
Ordered that this bill be reported to the House without amendment.

GRIEVANCE DEBATE

Debate resumed.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Mitchell) (16:58): The question is:
That grievances be noted.
Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (16:58): I am very aggrieved by the attitude of the coalition to the Ipswich Motorway in South-East Queensland. Before the election the coalition said one thing to the people of the western corridor and after the election they said a very different thing indeed. In fact, the coalition took a policy to the 2004 election of opposing the upgrade of the Ipswich Motorway. We supported the upgrade of the Ipswich Motorway in 2004. In the 2007 election, again the coalition opposed the upgrade of the Ipswich Motorway and Labor took a policy to that election to upgrade the Ipswich Motorway. In the 2010 election, the coalition took a policy to the electors in the electorates of Blair and Oxley opposing the continuation of the upgrade of the Ipswich Motorway, and Labor supported the continuation of the upgrade to the Ipswich Motorway.

That upgrade from Dinmore through to Darra has been completed, affording thousands and thousands of jobs to the people who worked on it, including to Indigenous apprentices. Nothing has improved the lifestyle and lives of people in the western corridor more than that $2.8 billion commitment from the former federal Labor government. In March 2008, then federal infrastructure minister, the member for Grayndler, was there to do the first sod-turning on the Dinmore to Goodna stretch of the Ipswich Motorway, which was completed six months ahead of schedule and under budget. It was the largest federally-funded road project in the history of the state of Queensland. It was completed on 15 May 2012.

Ninety thousand vehicles a day use that section of the Ipswich Motorway between Ipswich and Brisbane. Motorists and truck drivers have noticed the difference. The upgrade improved safety and delivered quicker and less frustrating driving conditions for motorists. It was important for small business, for large businesses, for farmers and for residents across the western corridor. I am proud to say that it was a project which I supported and campaigned on for three federal elections along with my friend the member for Oxley.

The Queensland department of main roads has shown the number of crashes resulting in hospitalisation on the Ipswich Motorway has dropped. The upgrade has been a life saver for motorists, with the new stretch of highway from Dinmore to Goodna being fatality free since its opening last year, according to The Queensland Times on 2 August 2013. Last year, 10 people were hospitalised after crashes on the upgraded road; so far this year one person has been hospitalised as at August 2013. That continued the downward trend in serious traffic conditions on the motorway since 2007 when two people were killed and 33 were hospitalised. Nothing has driven economic development and improved the lifestyles of people in the western corridor between Ipswich and Brisbane, the rural areas outside in the Brisbane Valley, the Somerset region, the Lockyer Valley and the Scenic Rim more than the Ipswich Motorway upgrade, initiated and done by the federal Labor government.

There is a final section on that Ipswich Motorway not in my electorate—from Darra to Rocklea. We provided $40 million to the Queensland government to undertake a study. It came back and it was going to cost about $2.6 billion to do the final section. We said that we would kick-start the construction. So in the May budget this year, we announced for the section from the Oxley roundabout to Suscatand Street an injection of $279 million to get it started. We did that because we thought it was important. We delivered that and we said we would do it from 2014-15 to 2018-19 in the Nation Building Program, along with many other
projects to secure jobs growth and economic development not only in South-East Queensland but also across the whole of the state of Queensland. So this is a very important project.

What did the coalition do? Having opposed the upgrade of the Ipswich Motorway from Dinmore to Darra election after election, they said nothing about this until 21 August this year during the election campaign when they came out and said, ‘Coalition matches ALP on Ipswich Motorway’—for the first time, a Damascus road conversion experience, having voted against the upgrade again and again and again in federal parliament.

But it did not last long. It could not take, despite the flattering and favourable headlines that The Queensland Times gave the coalition about bringing forward funding. I had a look at the fiscal budget impact of coalition policies. We had put aside $279 million to kick-start the final stage. Have a look at the coalition’s infrastructure package. The Prime Minister says that he is going to be not just the Indigenous Prime Minister but also the infrastructure Prime Minister. There was $279 million. So I went looking for it and I could not find it. There at 4.15 was the Ipswich Motorway, Darra to Rocklea. I expected to see $279 million, but what did I find? Nothing in the first year, $20 million in the next year, $20 million in the next year and $25 million in the final year—$65 million.

Now, having gone to an election saying they are going to put $279 million towards the final section of the Ipswich Motorway, the coalition’s own fiscal budget impact of coalition policies says $65 million. Why should we be surprised? Having voted against Ipswich Motorway again and again and again—having campaigned against LNP and Liberal candidates who consistently oppose the Ipswich Motorway upgrade—I finally get one that says they will do it. And it did not last more than a few weeks, because this thing released just before the election shows $65 million, not $279 million. In May this year the Queensland LNP government said they would not come to the party to help with the construction of the Darra to Rocklea section of the Ipswich Motorway.

The Queensland Times, in the headline to an article on 30 November, said ‘Ipswich M-Way upgrade is going nowhere fast’. Well, it is certainly not going anywhere under this government, because this government has gone back to form: opposing the Ipswich Motorway upgrade, in effect. We saw, election after election after election, opposition. And when John Howard was the Prime Minister, for 11 long and dark years, they did nothing—ignorance, idleness, inertia; that is their attitude to the Ipswich Motorway upgrade. And it was not just Ipswich; it was other road funding across the region. They opposed the upgrade of the Blacksoil Interchange currently under construction on the Warrego Highway. Go along the Warrego Highway and you will see it. It was opposed by the coalition.

So I am thoroughly and utterly aggrieved at the duplicity of the coalition on the Ipswich Motorway. But why should I be surprised? I really should not, because no-one is more anti-jobs when it comes to road infrastructure and lifestyle improvement than the coalition in the South-East Queensland corridor. Ten thousand people across the life of that project worked on the Ipswich Motorway upgrade. It has improved massively what has happened in this corridor. There are bikeways. There are 26 new or rebuilt bridges in the Dinmore to Goodna section. We have seen seven kilometres of service roads taking 20 per cent of the traffic off the motorway, 24 kilometres of shared pedestrian bikeways and cycleways, upgrading the motorway from two lanes to three lanes each way. But they could not see the benefit for South-East Queensland.
What the coalition does not understand is that this is the fastest-growing region in South-East Queensland. Ipswich Mayor Paul Pisasale said it brilliantly when he asked: 'What is $65 million going to do? Pay for helicopters to fly over and see all the traffic jams.' And that is the attitude of the coalition on the Ipswich Motorway: opposition and inertia, and they will do nothing. I guarantee that when I go to the next election I will face a candidate from those opposite—it will be about my fourth candidate—who will say one thing and do something different. If the coalition wins the next election, because that is their attitude to this corridor: opposition, opposition, opposition. (Time expired)

**Australian Beef Industry**

*Mr O'DOWD* (Flynn) (17:08): Today I want to talk about the Australian beef industry. As you probably all would know, we have the world's most efficient producers here in Australia, and they are to be congratulated for their efforts in maintaining a very high standard of product that they produce. It is world renowned that our beef products are clean, green and quality food. Foot-and-mouth disease is a big thing that we have been kept free of in Australia, and the biosecurity must be maintained now and forever to ensure that our product is kept in the great healthy state that it is currently in.

We are the third-largest exporter of beef in the world. It accounts for about $12.3 billion of farm value into our national budgets. We have a national herd of 28.5 million and we have 77,164 properties producing beef. Our beef cows and heifers amount to about 13.6 million of that herd of 28.5 million. Of that, 2.6 million go through feedlots and they account for some 33 per cent of our national slaughter. Beef accounts for 16 per cent of the total farm value—three per cent of the world's cattle inventory. We are the seventh-largest producer in the world. Other large producers are the South American countries—Argentina and so on—Africa and China. They have large herds in China. Australians eat on average about 32.5 kilograms of beef per person—and, quite amazingly, 94 per cent of Australians do eat beef. I guess the other six per cent are vegetarians or people who just don't like beef.

There is a particularly bad scenario unfolding before our eyes in northern Australia, and I want to talk about the northern Australian beef producers. They have hit extremely bad times of late. It all started with the banning of live cattle exports. What happened then was that we had 300-kilogram beasts ready to go to feedlots in Indonesia that were stopped in their tracks. It did not only stop the movement of the cattle into those feedlots in Indonesia; it stopped the trucking companies, it stopped the people who shipped the cattle to Indonesia and it put a big stop to the whole northern Australian beef industry—and that affected, of course, the rural towns in the Gulf, north of Alice Springs and north of Mount Isa. Those particular areas have been very hard hit ever since.

Added to that we have had a major drought—they missed rain this year; a lot of places have not had rain since 2012. This has put the industry under a lot of pressure. The hump breed are the ones that do best in the northern regions of Australia, but they could not fit the markets in the south, not so much because of the quality of the beef but because it would cost $200 a head to transfer them down to the southern meatworks. As you probably know, Mr Deputy Speaker, meatworks do not really exist in the northern part of Australia because it is very hot, very wet and the meatworks have to stand down for up to three or four months in the wet season, so meatworks in the north are not very viable at all. In some places you cannot get trucks to the cattle yards to load because the roads are washed out, with heavy rains and...
cyclones being prominent in that particular area between the months of December and, say, March. So the cattlemen in the north were faced with drought conditions, they had no markets to sell their beef to, the prices came down because of the surplus of cattle and they were generally looking down the barrel at a very bad season ahead—and this continues. We are hoping that the monsoonal rains will soon come and give them some relief. However, their breeding stocks are down. They have no female cattle to breed up their herds again.

They also had a drop in the land valuations of their properties. It was not unusual for a property, say, two years ago to be worth $12 million with a $6 million debt—a ratio of 2 to 1. However, with the devaluation of their properties, their property now could be worth half of that $12 million, and their debt has gone from $5 million to $6 million. This puts them in a dilemma with their banks or their investors who supported them over the years. The banks are now saying to them, 'Sorry, guys, the value of your property is worth what your debt is, so, virtually, no have no asset at all; therefore, when the rain returns, there is no way that we can see us financing your herd.' So what are they to do?

There are many distressed families in the north, and my heart goes out to them. They have had to pull their kids out of boarding school, and it is a situation that you would not wish upon your worst enemy. They are in dire straits. The husband, or the male of the family, feels he has let his wife and kids down, and, really, it has been a lot of things that are out of his control. The Australian dollar has not helped our exports, and there are so many factors that hit the industry all together that it does not bode well for the future.

Trade tariffs are another thing. The United States and New Zealand have free trade agreements with countries like China, Japan and Korea, but we do not have them. America and China's 39 per cent trade tariffs are being whittled back by five per cent a year. So, if we do not soon get free trade agreements with China, Korea, Japan et cetera, we will be losing out at five per cent a year. Gradually, over 15 years, America will be down to zero tariffs, and we will still be sitting on 39 per cent. So it is important that we look at our trade agreements with those countries, and that may eventually save the cattle industry.

I know it is all doom and gloom at the moment, but I can really see a good future for the cattle industry across Australia if we can turn things around and if we can give these cattle producers a bit of a hand up and get them over the hump for the next couple of years. As Indonesia's, Korea's, China's et cetera standard of living increases, they will require more beef. They like what they get from Australia if they can afford it. That is our way out of this mess, but what do our farmers do in the meantime? We need help. I asked the banks to be lenient with our grazier friends up there because they do not control the dollar, they did not stop live exports and they did not bring on the drought. They were just victims of a series of events that have put their businesses in a very unviable position at the moment. (Time expired)

Charlton Electorate: Multiculturalism

Mr CONROY (Charlton) (17:19): There are many things that separate cities from regions, the most obvious being population density and the distance that separates where people live. This is especially evident for those people separated from their friends, their family or, indeed, members of their own cultural group. That is why those of us who live in regional areas value the many voluntary and fellowship support groups that play an important part in our community.
I wish to draw your attention to some of these groups in and around the electorate of Charlton. The Filipino Australian Society of the Hunter Valley is located in Boolaroo and is the primary cultural centre for around 500 of its members, who live across the Hunter region. Their hall is used to deliver the school of Philippine studies as well as welfare, health and social education. They also hold regular social activities, including traditional Filipino dancing. Other communities such as a regular sewing group I met there recently, a youth group and a choir use their facilities as well. It is great to see different cultures interacting in this one facility. A group predominantly of Anglo-Saxon retirees was doing a sewing group right next to a group of Filipino women doing a cooking class. It is a great on-the-ground example of cultures meshing and communicating with each other.

The Vedic Samiti Newcastle, whose hall at Cardiff South is used by the Indian community to teach and practise their Hindu faith as well as to provide a space to deliver language and cultural studies, philosophy programs and other social and celebratory activities, is another example of a cultural group in Charlton. This hall is used by around 300 members of the Hindu community each week, although I am told that a recent event had 500 people there in standing room only.

As well as these two groups, the Ethnic Communities Council of Newcastle and Hunter Region, which has been recognised as the umbrella organisation for multiculturalism in the Hunter region for more than 40 years, services the Charlton community. It has a large cultural centre in Waratah in the electorate of Newcastle that is used by its 120 member groups across the electorates of Newcastle, Charlton, Paterson, Hunter and Shortland. These groups promote awareness and understanding of their cultures in our area and encourage interaction with the local community, which builds a rich and multicultural fabric in our region.

It was with great excitement that these organisations received news in August that their applications for funding through the Building Multicultural Communities Program was successful. The Filipinos were to use their grant of more than $22,000 to build a brand new kitchen and install doors in their hall, which is located in an old church building. I was really pleased to visit their hall, and they were very excited by the opportunity to get a new kitchen for their community organisation and hall. Vedic Samiti was to receive around $100,000 in funding to extend the hall, including further car park provisions and an upgrade to their audio system. The ethnic communities council was to receive more than $150,000 through the program so build the first-ever multicultural men's shed and community gardens at their cultural centre. I know there are many members across all political parties who are supporters of men's sheds who would have been very excited by the concept of a multicultural men's shed.

The great part about these projects, of course, is the broader benefit to the community. Anyone can head to one of these places to take part in the activities held there. For example, I could hear from one of the many guest speakers such as doctors and ethicists who hold forums at the Vedic Samiti hall. I could learn about the traditional costumes of the Philippines from the ladies in the Filipino hall. I could attend one of the many health and wellness events at the ethnic communities council.

These much-needed grants were cause for great excitement, but I regret to inform you that this excitement was short lived. It has quickly transformed to frustration and application, with these organisations now hearing from departmental officials that the new coalition...
government is undertaking a review and that their funding is in limbo. This is despite these
grants being announced in August, prior to the caretaker period and the federal election. This
is despite the grants being fully funded in the 2012-13 budget and despite the fact that the
minister very clearly signed off on these grants before the caretaker period began. This is in
spite of the fact that the now current Minister for Immigration and Border Protection tabled
the approved grants in parliament last month.

So what is going on here? That is the question I asked the responsible minister, the member
for Menzies, and his parliamentary secretary, Senator Fierravanti-Wells, on behalf of these
organisations in my electorate. I have written to the minister and parliamentary secretary,
seeking their commitment to honour these funding agreements as a matter of urgency.
Unfortunately, I am yet to receive a response. It is worth noting that the funding agreements
for the Building Multicultural Communities Program stipulated that projects be completed by
30 June 2014—just over six months away. It is only natural, then, that these groups have
already entered into the preparatory stages of these projects and in some cases have already
outlaid money towards them. In the case of Vedic Samiti, they are currently out of pocket
more than $14,000 after undergoing a lengthy building design and development approval
process. The Ethnic Communities' Council has invested more than $30,000 in plans, DA
approvals, electrical work and site preparation, not to mention the untold hours of volunteer
and staff time invested in the project so far.

It is also worth noting that each of these groups receives some of their funding through
stream 1 of the grant program, which required non-fixed infrastructure and equipment to be
purchased first, before the application was made for reimbursement. So it was natural that
some of the moneys that they had planned to spend had to be spent before they received the
grant.

These groups acted in good faith, expecting the government to be true to its words. These
were not election promises, as Minister Andrews has tried to suggest; they were grants
awarded under proper process. We know that local community groups run on shoestring
budgets and simply cannot carry these expenses. At the very least, the government must
communicate with them and make their intentions clear. They cannot leave them in the dark
any longer.

This arrogant and mischievous act is just one of a series of worrying signs that the new
collection government is sending to multicultural organisations across Australia, including in
Charlton. In government, Labor worked hard to lift both the status and the substance of the
multicultural affairs portfolio, but this new government has abolished a cabinet minister and
two parliamentary secretary positions with multicultural responsibilities that we established,
and lumped the management of multicultural affairs and settlement services under the control
of the newly created Department of Social Services. Of course, their continuing stigmatisation
of people seeking asylum breeds a disturbing culture in which attitudes towards diversity
suffer. Perhaps this should come as no surprise. In opposition, the coalition failed to release a
multicultural policy and failed to use the word ‘multicultural’ in any of its front bench titles.

I represent an area built on coalmining and steel milling, which drew its labour force from
massive migration to the Hunter region in the early 1900s and then again post World War II.
Just last month, I joined the Mayor of Lake Macquarie to witness 113 people from 27
different countries take the pledge to become Australian citizens—the largest ceremony that
the City of Lake Macquarie has ever held. Multiculturalism is a fact of life in Australia and, indeed, in the electorate I represent. It adds enormous value to our community and needs to be acknowledged and celebrated as such. It goes without saying that social policy should be built around this principle. It is an absolute disgrace that this government is denying community organisations and not-for-profit groups in Charlton crucial funds—funds that were awarded under proper procedures and fully provided for in the budget. These are people who empower our community and create socially inclusive neighbourhoods. I call on the minister to release these funds without delay to the Filipino-Australian Society of the Hunter Valley, Vedic Samiti Newcastle, and the Ethnic Communities Council, Newcastle and Hunter Region, and stop playing politics with our multicultural organisations.

The Liberal Party and the coalition once had a proud record of support for multiculturalism. I particularly applaud the efforts of the Fraser government in accepting and welcoming thousands of Vietnamese refugees in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Unfortunately, this commitment, with a few honourable exceptions, was lost under Prime Minister Howard, and I fear that that trend is worsening under Prime Minister Abbott. I think it is time that they had a change of heart and honour commitments made by a previous government, not during an election period but fully funded in a budget process. They should give certainty to these community organisations who, throughout this entire country, and in my electorate in particular, do such sterling work. I call on them to do so. (Time expired)

Tumbarumba Shire Council

Mr McCORMACK (Riverina—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance) (17:28): I rise to pay tribute and compliments to Tumbarumba Shire Council in my Riverina electorate. It is in the Snowy Mountains. Today the council is celebrating its win in a highly prestigious award. It won for its financial management and has been recognised as the most progressive council in the state of New South Wales. That is a big award for a little council. According to the AR Bluett foundation, the annual award is the greatest accolade a council can achieve, and Tumbarumba Shire has won that award. The AR Bluett Memorial Award, named after Albert Robert Bluett, is an annual award in New South Wales local government which has been presented since 1945. Its namesake gave his life to local government in New South Wales.

According to the foundation formed in his name, Mr Bluett served as the secretary and solicitor to the Local Government and Shires Association of New South Wales for some 30 years. He was the authority on local government law and his opinion was respected by the legal profession and ministers of the Crown. He helped to write the Local Government Act of 1919. Following his death in 1944, an annual award was created in his name to acknowledge the best-performing councils in New South Wales.

I am delighted that the Tumbarumba Shire Council—under the absolutely wonderful guidance of Mayor Ian Chaffey, his very astute general manager, Kay Whitehead, and a fabulous team not just of councillors but also of dedicated staff—have won this most deserved award. They are a prudent and very progressive team. They have managed Tumbarumba’s rich tourist attractions and the natural beauty that surround the area whilst having strong economic management and carefully spending ratepayers’ money. According to the shire’s media release, Tumbarumba Shire Council, which is one of the smallest in the state, is one of only two councils in New South Wales—the other being the Sydney city council—that have a
strong financial sustainability rating. Let us think about that. Tumbarumba shire with 3,471 residents is considered and ranked right up there with Sydney city council, which has many tens of thousands of ratepayers—many tens of thousands of residents. Little Tumbarumba in the picturesque Snowy Mountains is right up there equal with the Sydney city council. That is tremendous.

The feature of the Tumbarumba council’s submission was its ability to work in partnership with state and federal governments, private enterprise and the community to deliver services to a small, rural community at a time when many other communities have suffered reduced services. I know the great work that Tumbarumba is doing, certainly in aged care. I know the work that it is doing to lobby for better mobile communications. I know the work it has done to help the little districts within the shire, which in recent years have suffered damage from fires and other weather calamities. Tumbarumba is doing its bit as a community, pitching in to help wherever and whenever possible. Certainly the shire is doing its bit not just to help those in need when disaster strikes but also to come together to unify as a community—as a shire—to do the very best to make sure the books are balanced, and the shire is as progressive as it can be. May it long continue to do that in the future.

At the start of each year, in late January or early February, Tumbarumba shire hosts the Tumbatrek. It has been a great feature. It was started by the former Nationals leader and Deputy Prime Minister Tim Fischer to promote the magic in the mountains that is Tumbarumba shire. Last year I had the opportunity to take with me Nigel Scullion, who of course is a National Party senator, as well as the New South Wales Premier, Barry O’Farrell. Not only did we walk the Tumbatrek but we attended the Tumbarumba Cup race meeting. The Tumbarumba Turf Club is unique. It is one of those great little country clubs where you can still get homemade lemonade. It is a great little country club where you have tremendous hospitality and fashions on the field. It has everything. If you ever want to go to a race meeting with a bush flavour, Tumbarumba is the place to go.

They had a course that went slightly out of sight—and it still does a bit—on the back straight. Whilst it is a very small course, in the past on the back straight the horses went out of sight. There was many a story that, when the horses came back into view, the horses had often changed leaders and sometimes even jockeys. I think that was a bit of a fallacy, but certainly it is a unique course. Then they come back for the short downhill home stretch at a fast and furious pace—quite frankly, at almost breakneck speed. I do not how the jockeys hang on, but they do.

Tumbarumba cup day is a tremendous day. It has been going since the 1880s. May it also long continue. It was great to have Premier O’Farrell and Senator Scullion there for the Tumbarumba cup race meeting. Daryl Maguire often comes up there, too. Greg Aplin, the member for Albury, is the local state member for Tumbarumba. He was there, too. He and Daryl have provided good service for Tumbarumba Shire over many years. Certainly it was one of the highlights of the year for Tumbarumba Shire.

Some of the highlights in winning the AR Bluett Award included stage 1 of the retirement village project; the upgrade of the central business district, The Parade, including free wi-fi; the library extensions; a new waste water treatment plant; extensive upgrades to reserves and recreation and camping facilities; stage 2 of a housing estate; a development of a new office and information centre in a joint project with the National Parks and Wildlife Service at
Khancoban. These were achieved against the background of four declared natural disasters that did more than $9 million damage to roads, bridges and other community facilities.

The fact that Mayor Chaffey have been able to balance the books, come out in the black and win an AR Bluett Award is tremendous. Fair dinkum, the bloke should be made Treasurer if not Prime Minister—just ask him; he would tell you that he should be, too! And he would get the approval of Labor. I can hear them calling for him. It would be great. He has a very candid way of speaking and a unique way of looking at the world. He is a man of common sense. He will often tell me how the country should be being run. I have not quite worked out Ian's politics. But I tell you that if more people listened to the likes of Councillor Chaffey and some of the councillors under him I think that we would all be in a better place. Be that as it may, I am proud to serve under the Prime Minister that we have in Tony Abbott, much to the member for Fraser's disappointment.

Tumbarumba Shire was announced as the AR Bluett Award at the Local Government New South Wales annual conference in October this year. The award was presented this morning. I am sorry that parliamentary sittings prevented me from being there, but I am certain that the state member, Greg Aplin, was delighted, as I am in being a member serving that wonderful shire, that this award has been conferred. The award was presented by the New South Wales Minister for Local Government and my state National Party colleague, the Hon. Don Page.

There are only 3,471 residents in Tumbarumba. The urban population is 1,981. The rural population is 1,490. Tumbarumba services an area of 4,392 square kilometres. A lot of that is very hilly countryside. There are a lot of dirt roads and a lot of upkeep. They have a very dedicated staff, well led by Kay Whitehead, the general manager. They are doing wonderful work in Tumbarumba Shire. Anybody who has nothing to do early next year should come along on the Tumbarumba trek. I recommend it. I am hoping to get a high profile politician, and maybe the member for Fraser might indeed turn up. It is not far from Canberra and he would do well to come and listen to these good country folk, because they have a story to tell. They are very proud of their region and they are very proud of what they have done in the past and are eagerly looking forward to the future. The difference in one sense between country people and city people is that they do not have this air of expectation or entitlement; they just get in and do it. They are very resilient people. They cop what comes to them and get in and support their communities and their councils. They have done a great job in supporting their local council. I am proud to say that I represent that area. I am proud to say that they have won the AR Bluett Award. They deserved to.

Dowrick, Professor Stephen
Miller, Dr Paul

Dr LEIGH (Fraser) (17:39): I rise this evening to speak about the passing of two great Australian economists, Steve Dowrick and Paul Miller. Steve Dowrick was born on 7 May 1953 in Dublin, Ireland, and passed away in August of this year. His life and his contributions to the economic profession have been beautifully laid out in an obituary for the Canberra Times by Bruce Chapman and Maria Racionero. I will draw on that obituary in some of my comments today.

Steve and his brothers, Christopher and Nicholas, attended a Quaker school in York that had a strong emphasis on practical social action, which reinforced his commitment to
collective action. When he finished high school Steve was offered a place at Cambridge in theoretical physics but spent a year undertaking volunteer work at Blackfriars Settlement, Southwark in London, driving a van for a project named Workshop for the Disabled. It was perhaps that year that he spent working for disabled communities that meant that, when he started at Cambridge, he chose quickly to move out of physics and into areas in the social sciences. He continued to be active on social issues, representing disadvantaged residents at public inquiries on town planning. Steve Clarke has written that Steve Dowrick's contact with the people of Newport, and in the workhouse in London, gave him some really important insights into the lives and the stress that the poor encounter dealing with the poverty not only in their own lives but also with bureaucracies. Those issues of equality continued to pervade Steve's work throughout his career.

Steve returned to Cambridge in 1982 to study economics and had the great fortune to meet Deborah Mitchell, another Australian social scientist. They married in York in 1984 and then moved to Canberra. Deborah is now a professor at the Australian National University in the Australian Democratic and Social Research Institute. Their two children, Helen and Lydia, were born in 1986 and 1987. Steve immersed himself in the life of his daughters. Deborah said he was the kind of dad who would rather spend time with Helen and Lydia at night and set the alarm for 4.30 the next morning to attend to unfinished academic business.

In 1996 Steve became the professor of economics and head of department in the Faculty of Economics and Commerce. He was at the peak of his academic leadership career but also his research career. He had worked with John Quiggin to develop a multilateral welfare index, to shed light on global income inequality, and was published in the *American Economic Review*—no more prestigious journal is there in the profession of economics. Steve also continued to champion and to work with women in the department and was recognised in March this year with a Gender Champion Award on International Women's Day.

There is a story which perhaps I should not tell but which is too good to hold back from this place. In the last few months of Steve's life, due to his neurological condition the nursing staff would often ask questions to check on his alertness. The usual question was: 'Who is the Prime Minister?' Apparently asked this in June 2013 Steve responded, 'It's Julia Gillard at the moment, but ask me again tomorrow and I will probably have a different answer—it will still be correct.'

I greatly enjoyed my interactions with Steve, who was always an insightful presence in academic seminars, coming forth with ideas and suggestions to improve work. He had that great spirit of the best economists of identifying flaws but also helping you to fix them. He was insightful but never cruel in the comments that he delivered. It was a privilege to work alongside him at the Australian National University.

Australian economics has also lost another great scholar in Paul Miller, who passed away in November this year. Deborah Cobb-Clarke and Chris Ryan, two of my colleagues when I was at ANU, and I have been reminiscing on what an extraordinary contribution Paul made to fields in Australian economics that are not overpopulated with scholars. The economics of education and the economics of immigration are fields that have probably lost a tenth of their productive research capacity as a result of Paul's passing. His 21-page CV attests to his huge intellectual contribution to these vital fields, with research published in the best journals including the *American Economic Review*.
Paul was also the editor of the *Economic Record* from 2006 and over-invested in that role. Economics does not always repay the time people give to collective works such as this, and with the devotion that Paul gave to papers, his comments were often more valuable than those of the referees—and I can certainly say this as somebody who had a number of papers published in the *Economic Record* under Paul's editorship. He was elected a fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences in 1997 and inducted into the ANU College of Business and Economics Distinguished Alumni Hall of Fame, and in 2011 he was awarded an honorary fellowship of the Economics Society of Australia. His work at the University of Western Australia and at Curtin University was first rate.

I want to acknowledge particularly his wife Tram Le and their two young children: Erin, aged 12, and Andrew, aged 11. I feel particularly for the family, with such young children, for having the loss of such an extraordinary man as Paul. Elisa Birch from the University of Western Australia recounts to me the story that Paul started dating Tram when she was his PhD. student. She says that while it may seem a little taboo, Paul did everything above board. And in fact Tram has said that the vice-chancellor at UWA at the time, Alan Robson, knew more about Paul's feelings towards her and their relationship than she did at the time.

He was a member of the Fremantle Dockers football club, and probably one of his most happy times in recent years was when he watched Fremantle win the preliminary final to make the grand final. He was able to cheer the Dockers on from the patients' TV room and even had a glass of wine and a pizza with him, along with his family.

Many scholars have told their stories about Paul Miller, and Elisa has been kind enough to pass some of those on to me. Charles Mulvey tells the story of when Paul and he submitted an article to the *American Economic Review*. After some suggestion that it might be accepted, Charles suggested that, if it was, they would drink a bottle of 1984 Henschke Hill of Grace. He said one of his most glorious pleasures was sitting on the top-floor balcony of the old economics and commerce building savouring the glorious wine and basking in the glow of the academic coup. Tim Villa, the IT and facilities manager at UWA Business School, talks about Paul as being a 'friendly chap clad in stubbies and a T-shirt, stalking the corridor barefoot while wearing an expression projecting something between severe purpose and utter bewilderment'. Daniel Kiely speaks about the quality of Paul's lecturing and quotes one student evaluation in which the student said that Paul was 'the best lecturer I've ever had; the way he did the lectures was amazing; the fact he wrote on each slide explaining everything was extremely helpful.' And Daniel says that this sort of review was the norm for Paul.

Michael McLure writes to Paul's children: 'My main memory of your father, Paul, is that he was a great juggler, not of balls or blades or things like that but of the many things he managed to get done at the same time. It was a wonder to me that any one person could do so much in so little time.' Mike Dockery speaks about their shared passion for the Freo Dockers and the family holidays in Dunsborough, leading to 'a valued but far-too-brief' friendship. Michael Kidd remembers Paul as being 'a bit gruff, but inherently a no-nonsense kind of guy; he was always very helpful, willing to provide comments on drafts and provide references and the like.' And Ingebjorg Kristoffersen writes about emails sent at 1.30 in the morning and replied to at 1.35, asking: 'Was that man ever off duty?'

In my own dealings with Paul as another scholar on the economics of education, he was always generous with his time. I enjoyed the opportunities to exchange ideas and I would...
have greatly appreciated the chance to collaborate with him. I expected that he would continue to enhance our knowledge, as Australians, of these vital issues. It is a loss to Australia's intellectual community that he has passed, but of course a great loss to his family as well. Rest in peace Steve Dowrick and Paul Miller.

Aquatic Centre for South Perth

Mr IRONS (Swan) (17:49): I rise to speak in this grievance debate, and the particular issue I want to talk about is the lack of an aquatic centre for the area of my electorate covered by the city of South Perth in Western Australia.

Swimming is probably one of the most popular sports in Australia and forms a part of Australia's culture, with millions of Australians swimming for fun and fitness every week, or every day. Our nation is surrounded by water, as are large sections of my electorate which takes its name from Perth's Swan River. As well as being fun, swimming is a great way to keep fit and stay healthy over a lifetime. It is a low-impact activity which has many physical as well as mental health benefits. As there is no ground impact when you swim, you protect your joints from stress and strain. Water aerobics classes are also desirable for this reason, because even if you jump and hit the bottom of the pool, you do so with less force because you are buoyant in the water. Not only that, but if you wear or hold a flotation device during a water aerobics class, the impact is even less.

I know that aquatic centres have hydrotherapy centres as well, which are used for rehabilitation of patients who have had surgery. Members of this place will also be aware of the aquatic centre I have spoken about before—and it is a continuing campaign. I am still getting plenty of inquiries from people particularly in the Karawara, Manning, Salter Point and Waterford areas, which are all within the South Perth Council. Aquatic centres are an important part of promoting healthy activity and, as I said before, particularly for the elderly needing to use hydrotherapy and young families teaching kids how to swim and save their own lives.

I touched on rehabilitation for surgery. I know that back in 2004 when I had extensive back surgery to have three artificial discs placed in my back, which was a seven-hour operation, the amount of time I spent in a hydrotherapy pool was part of the intense rehabilitation of that very invasive surgery where they actually come through your stomach to place the artificial discs. It was during that time that it would have been handy if there had been a hydrotherapy pool in the aquatic centre close to where I lived at the time, which is maybe the George Burnett Leisure Centre, which I will mention in the rest of my speech. But I had to get people to drive me through to the other side of the city, find parking, and use a hydrotherapy pool at the Mount Hospital in West Perth.

I have also noted previously in this place that most of the councils in my electorate currently provide their residents with public aquatic facilities. The City of Belmont Oasis Leisure Centre is one. The Aqualife Centre in Victoria Park is another, a particularly highly regarded centre. I attended a swimming competition there on the weekend and presented some trophies, as well as sponsoring the event.

I was very pleased in September last year to attend the opening of the City of Canning Recreation Centre in Queens Park, which was opened by Senator Wong. It is a centre that got bipartisan commitment towards its building costs, and a reason for that is because I reckon
that both sides of this House understand how important aquatic centres and healthy lifestyles are for people all over Australia. These facilities are greatly valued by the ratepayers in those respective councils. I know that even the suburbs of Langford and Beckenham, which are in my electorate, are serviced by the Gosnells Council in Hasluck, but the centre is closer for them so they generally attend there.

South Perth stands alone in its lack of a readily available aquatic facility. There is a facility at the Wesley College but unfortunately it is only partially available to the public. As good a facility as it is, it is shut for most of the day, obviously to meet the needs of the college sports and recreational teams that they have at Wesley as well. The South Perth City Council has plans for plenty of dry activities for the local area but there is currently a lack of wet activities planning and wet activities available to local residents, and that is why I am talking about this grievance motion today.

As part of my ongoing campaign for an aquatic centre for South Perth, I invited the member for Bennelong to my electorate to present his sports mall concept theories in July 2012. The forum was held at Curtin University and was well attended by local residents, who were overwhelmingly supportive of the concept. There was also attendance by some of the local councillors from the City of South Perth. I would like to enter into part of my speech a speech by the member for Bennelong, who mentions some of the reasons why sports malls and aquatic centres are so beneficial to local councils, local ratepayers and people. In a speech in this place on 18 November he said:

Illness resulting from lifestyle represents 60 per cent of our total health cost when the underlying condition is taken into account. Type 2 diabetes is our biggest killer and our children are now world leaders in obesity rankings, where once we led the world in sporting participation and performance. Australian culture once revolved around participation in sport. The celebration of our sporting heroes held second place only to the celebration of our real heroes. Various assaults on this lifestyle have combined to diminish the distinction that provided us with the physical, mental and social benefits of an active lifestyle.

... ... ...

As a member of federal parliament I find it hard to think of anything more related to electorate business than the promotion of good health for all Australians. In July last year I was invited to travel to Perth to deliver the keynote speech at a Curtin University forum relating to sporting-club development.

It was a pleasure to have the member for Bennelong there and to support the campaign for an aquatic centre in my electorate of Swan in the suburbs of South Perth. The reality is that many residents in South Perth see it as somewhat of an anomaly that they do not have a facility corresponding to those in other suburbs in my electorate. With 44,000 people residing within the South Perth area, one of the most densely populated areas in the state, an aquatic centre would be well utilised by the local community. To add to the potential usage is the fact that Curtin University is a kilometre away—probably less—from the George Burnett centre. It has 40,000 enrolled students, so there are more potential users of an aquatics centre. During the campaign I spoke to Curtin University Vice-Chancellor Jeanette Hacket, and Curtin University would be fully supportive of an aquatics centre in that location.

As part of my campaign I conducted a community survey of my electorate. The response was overwhelmingly supportive. People in the community have told me that they have been missing out on these benefits for years because there is no public aquatics centre in the City of South Perth and neighbouring facilities are too far away, particularly for the elderly and those
who are unable to catch transport. Water attracts people and aquatic centres are the heart of communities in many parts of Western Australia. Other councils have recognised this and have built or are building high-class facilities for their citizens and ratepayers. It is time that people in the City of South Perth had access to similar facilities. I have suggested the aquatics centre could be coupled with the George Burnett Leisure Centre in Karawara.

In addition to the aquatics centre and building on the member for Bennelong’s sports mall proposal, I met with Andrew Ross from the Wave Park Group on 28 November. Andrew is proposing a fantastic concept for Perth of a WA surfing park—no sharks and plenty of waves for professionals and beginners. I am hopeful a council in WA will have the vision to grab this concept and run with it. I am pleased to inform the House that the George Burnett Park in Karawara is one of five locations Wave Park is looking at. George Burnett Park is zoned 'district reserve', which is ideal for this type of development. It is state land so the WAPC would have to sign off on the development. The City of South Perth would make a recommendation to the WAPC. In my meeting Andrew pointed out the facility would be relevant to the wider district as a tourism destination as well. It is my view that we need a great tourist attraction like this sooner rather than later. If it were located in South Perth the proposed development would take up one-third of the site at George Burnett Park, with one-third remaining rugby pitches and the other one-third remaining as open space for people who like to walk their dogs and with potential to relocate the existing skate park and also incorporate a private-public partnership sports mall as well.

I will continue to fight for an aquatic centre for the people of South Perth.

Debate adjourned.

Federation Chamber adjourned at 18:00.